

# Patrick Watts (formerly Thompson)

Born 24.12.1912. Died 19.7.2000.

Biographical life story by his four step-children.

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

Patrick came into our family life as Patrick Thompson, when we were in Germany in the mid-1950s and he was a Catholic army chaplain. Our parents were having difficulties at that time, and Patrick was a great support to our mother. They fell in love. When we returned to England and our parents split up, Patrick left the priesthood, changed his surname by deed poll, and moved in with us. He became a much-loved member of the family.

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.

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## 2. Early Life

Patrick Thompson was born in Ireland on 24 December 1912. When aged 17 he went to Mount St Bernard Abbey, Leicestershire, and was there until 1936, to become a monk.



*Patrick as a monk at Mount St Bernard Abbey around 1931*

In 1936 he left the monastic tradition and went to the Catholic seminary at St Edmund's College, Ware, Hertfordshire, to train for the priesthood. He worked for a while as a priest in the Westminster Diocese, at Finsbury Park in North London and later at Ogle Street in the West End.

In 1943 he joined the Army as a chaplain, including some postings in Egypt: we have seen photos of him dated 1946 (Garden of Gethsemane, Jerusalem), 1953 (Egypt) and 1954 (Tripoli). He left the Army in 1960: we have a letter dated 11 March 1960 from the Chaplains Department at the War Office thanking him for his service to the Army.



*Patrick as a priest at a retreat centre in Germany in 1957 (middle of front row)*

Patrick then returned to the Westminster Diocese, working as a priest first in Poplar, next in Soho, and subsequently in Croxley Green and Willesden.

Veronica first met Patrick in 1957 when he was a Catholic chaplain to the Army in Verden, and provided some help in Delmenhorst to fill the absence of his counterpart there. They became very close friends, and Patrick became a friend of the family.

Patrick liked to write verse. He wrote an ‘Ode to Clare’ dated 18 September 1958, ‘his car being in Workshops and he idle’, to be sung ‘to the tune of “Wearing of the Green”’. It is now in Clare’s possession. It ran:

When I was young I searched the world  
For something bright and fair;  
For something really wonderful,  
But I found it was not there  
In that world of yesterday,

When I was young.

I searched among the Saxons, I searched among the Celts,  
I peeped into Kings’ Parlours,  
I pulled off workers’ belts.  
All in search of a beautiful bot,  
For that – was wot – I searched for,  
When I was young,  
In that world of yesterday.

On the shores of lusty France  
Bikini'd beauts gyrated,  
I wandered and looked, I was not impressed,  
For their 'bots' were ubiquitous and much over-rated,  
And looked much better when dressed.

In later life, the quest forgot,  
I wandered 'mong the Latins;  
And travelled in the desert lands  
Where black 'bots' blistered on burning sands.

But I? I just recited Matins.  
But here is the end – a peculiar end;  
A beautiful globular 'end' I swear.  
The end of my search, the end of my care,  
The potted bot of little Clare.

They do the most wonderful things these days,  
They even bottle mayonnaise.  
But I'm sure even you have never heard  
Of a potted bot – it's quite absurd.  
But I tell you I saw it, and I'll tell you where,  
At Delmenhorst – Bachstrasse twenty six  
I saw that pot, and in it was fixed  
The potted bot of Clare.

It is addressed to Major and Mrs Watts and dedicated 'with the author's compliments to the fond parents'.

Patrick provided great support to Veronica, both emotionally and financially, in 1959 when she made the decision to leave Gordon and move to Southsea. He was by this time a priest in Croxley Green: Anthony stayed with him there during the summer holidays in 1959 or 1960, prior to going to Cambridge, when he had a holiday job at Harrods (and, on Sunday mornings, washing up in a kitchen in a London fish market, an extra job acquired through a friend of Patrick's).

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### 3. How Patrick Joined our Family

Like many couples during the War, Veronica (our mother) and Gordon (our father) 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 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 the 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.

Throughout the 1950s Veronica had severe financial worries. She kept detailed accounts of every transaction, and was always looking for ways to economise. A visit to a shop near our house in Frome to buy ice-creams was a great 'treat'. The worries continued when we reunited with Gordon in Germany. In addition to the school fees, Gordon's expenditure on drink and cigarettes was a significant drain on financial resources.

It is clear from the many letters we have to Veronica from Patrick in the late 1950s that they had fallen deeply in love with one another and were beginning to plan a life together before the events that led to Gordon's court-martial for a small financial misdemeanour (see separate biography of Gordon Watts). They had even started to write some short stories together, to provide a possible future source of income. The court-martial was, in a sense, a final straw in the breakdown of the relationship between Veronica and Gordon, but it also provided a rationale for Veronica to commit herself to what she was already wanting to do.

When Veronica decided to leave Gordon in March 1959, she wrote a series of letters about the court-martial to which there were replies that she kept as mementos. Two were from Prior Park: one from Brother Dalton, the President, assuring her that 'Prior Park will not let you down'; the second from Brother Beattie, the Housemaster of St Paul's (the senior house), stating that 'We all sympathise with you in your great trouble' and making practical suggestions about approaching Somerset County Council for help with the school fees. Another was from her close friend Shabby, expressing her love for Veronica and her grief for her in her troubles; it also indicates that she was providing some financial support for her; there is, however, no mention of Patrick, suggesting that Veronica had not told her about him. The last was from Violet (Nanna Vi), which indicates that she already knew about Veronica's love for Patrick and totally accepted it. She had not yet told Teddy (her husband), but was planning to do so. She included a passage addressed directly to Patrick which included:

I love my dear one [Veronica] so much that secretly I felt she would never meet anyone really worthy of her, but now and for all time so far as you both are concerned, my heart is at rest.

It must have been of enormous importance to Veronica to read and know this. Her lifelong friend Nesta Barton later wrote to Veronica Mary along similar lines in a letter dated 20 April 2002:

With Patrick she met her great intellectual level and she was so very happy with him, which she greatly deserved.

Some time in March/April 1959 Veronica must have found the house at 53 Kimberley Road, Southsea, to which we then moved, with financial support from Poppa. Anthony left Prior Park in the summer and effectively became financially independent after that. Veronica Mary went to St Swithun's Catholic Primary School and later to the Convent of the Cross – Veronica's old school – which by now had moved out to Waterlooville. Veronica Mary writes:

My memories of life at Kimberley Road are of Mummy frequently using Cardinal Red polish on the tiles at the front of the house; of evenings listening to the radio while Mummy did the ironing; of making egg and bacon sandwiches to eat after church on the seafront; and reading Ian Fleming and girl comics under the bedclothes as Poppa disapproved of them!



*Veronica and Patrick with Clare at South Harting Hill, Sussex, in October 1959*

Patrick had for some time been experiencing doubts about his vocation as a priest, chiefly on the issue of contraception, on which he struggled to accept the Church's teaching. Eventually he decided to leave the priesthood and came to live with us, in Southsea. We all accepted him, without any question: we never doubted that our mother Veronica would do what was right and best for all of us. He changed his

surname by deed poll to Watts, to reduce the chances of scandal (this was still a morally repressive time in England). We thereafter always called him Poppa.

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## 4. Patrick's Life with Veronica

In 1962 the family moved to Miller's Cottage, Rustington, Sussex. It was here that Veronica and Patrick set up Arun Tutors, to provide individual tuition for a small number of students, often with personal as well as learning problems.

Veronica and Patrick soon decided that they needed a larger house to house the students as boarders, so we moved to Hurstbourne Tarrant: first to The Rookery (1964-66); and then to Doles Lodge at the entry to a manor estate, where the students were lodged at the manor (1966-67). Veronica Mary and Clare, who had been day pupils at the Convent of the Holy Family in Littlehampton, Sussex, remained there as boarders.

In 1967 Veronica and Patrick moved to The Manor in Linkenholt, to enable them to house more students. Linkenholt is a small village near Andover in Hampshire, with about 40 inhabitants. It was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as Linchehou, and is located in an area of outstanding natural beauty. The estate, which includes most of the village apart from the church, was purchased by Herbert Blagrove in 1964: Veronica and Patrick must have rented the Manor from him. On his death in 1981 the estate passed to the Herbert and Peter Blagrove Charitable Trust, who sold it in 2009 for an estimated £25 million to a Swedish businessman.



*Patrick in The Manor at Linkenholt*

The Manor was a substantial 12-bedroom Edwardian house (with a ballroom) on the edge of the village, with a beautiful view of the surrounding countryside. Here, Veronica and Patrick had up to 6-8 students. There was also an elderly Catholic priest (Father Walters), who used to say Mass in a room converted into a little chapel, and an elderly lady (Mrs Allen). In 1969-70, one of the students was

Frederic Wittib from Austria, who has remained a close friend of the family ever since; he shared a room with Anthony, who was writing up his MPhil thesis for the University of York (his Social Science Research Council grant having expired); Clare was also there, having run away from the Convent at Littlehampton (she went for a year as a day-girl to St Benedict's Convent School at Penton Mewsey). Patrick did most of the teaching, with some help from Veronica; they also did all the cooking, with a little domestic help.

Arun Tutors was a massive strain on Veronica and Patrick's health, and in 1970 they decided to wind it up and move to 27 Norfolk Gardens, Littlehampton, Sussex, where they lived from 1971 to 1982. Veronica taught German and Geography at the Convent of the Holy Family, where Veronica Mary and Clare were pupils; Patrick also taught there (the school closed in 1988). Though Veronica never undertook any formal teacher training, she was widely regarded as a wonderful teacher.



*Veronica and Patrick on their wedding day in 1976*

In January 1976, following Gordon's death in 1974, Veronica and Patrick were finally able to get married, at the University Chaplaincy in Cambridge. Paul was so overcome with emotion that he was unable to finish reading the lesson at the wedding Mass.

On 7 February 1976, Patrick wrote the following letter to Anthony and Gilly:

There are few occasions when I feel any desire to write, but this is one of them.

How Motti felt on Saturday 31st January was clear to all: my own poker face certainly showed less emotion! Normally, that is something on which I pride myself, but on that occasion I wished for once that I could be more demonstrative.

The things I wished to show were the love which I bear to you all, the joy of my heart in being married to Veronica and the gratitude for all you did for us – not only over the recent months or last week-end, but over the years when life for me especially could have been far from happy, had it not been for the tolerance and love with which you treated me. I thank you for all these things. I am thankful to God to be a member of the family.

In 1982 Veronica and Patrick decided to retire and to move near Cambridge, largely because, of the four of us, Anthony (with Gilly) seemed the most geographically stable at the time. They moved to Countryman, Cardinals Green, Horseheath, Cambridgeshire, where they lived for 7 years.



*Patrick and Veronica at Countryman in 1987*

Countryman had a large garden, and we had several family gatherings there, including Clare and Richard's wedding, which took place at the local church in Linton on 20 November 1982.



*Family gathering at Countryman, Cardinals Green, at Easter 1987*

In 1989 Veronica and Patrick made their last move, to a bungalow at 2 The Causeway, West Wrating, Cambridgeshire, where they spent their final years. For Veronica's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, she, Patrick and the four of us had dinner together at the Red Lion in Hinxton.

Veronica and Patrick both loved dogs. During their later years they had two boxers, Cilla and then Berry, who they adored.



*Veronica and Patrick with Berry at a local dog-show in 1989*

During the latter part of her life, Veronica had a lot of health problems, including gynaecological problems and terrible back pain, which blighted her final few years. She tried various forms of treatment for her back, including a spinal fusion carried out at Oswestry, Shropshire, in the 1970s, but none was really successful. She also later suffered from chronic fatigue, which her GP practice – to their shame – did not take seriously, causing her much distress in her final months. Patrick always looked after her with great care and attentiveness.

Following a massive brain haemorrhage, Veronica died in Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, on 7 May 1993. She was buried in the graveyard at St Andrew's Church, West Wrating, on the top right-hand corner of the hill. Patrick arranged for a bench to be erected next to her grave, with her name on it. He also prepared the inscription on her tombstone, which reads: 'Pulchra domina et in vita sua decora' ('A beautiful woman, lovely in all her ways').

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## 5. Final Years

Patrick continued to live at 2 The Causeway. In 1994 or 1995, he had a heart attack. After it he was not allowed to drive, so – following his return to West Wrating – one of us (often Gilly) used to visit him once a week to drive him to Sainsbury's in Haverhill. It was on one of these trips with Gilly that he had his first stroke, in the supermarket: this was probably in June/July 1996. He was taken to Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, and later went to Chesterton for rehabilitation; he returned home in November 1996.

Gilly set up various services to support him. Carers came in to help him get up in the morning and go to bed at night; he made his own lunch from frozen meals which he cooked in a steamer. His next-door neighbours, John and Brenda Gethin, also visited or telephoned him daily, and got books for him from the library bus. He was able to get around on a zimmer-frame. Initially he was visited by one or more members of the family several times a week, but later we arranged a rota to ensure that he was visited once a week by Gilly, Clare or Jane, or by Veronica Mary (who lived further away) in the holidays; Anthony went fortnightly, and Paul when he could. Before his stroke, Patrick particularly enjoyed being taken out for a pint of beer. He also enjoyed sharing his affectionate but acute observations on all members of the family, and having lively political discussions with Gilly.

Patrick had a second stroke in February 2000 and again was moved to Addenbrooke's, and then to rehabilitation at Brookfields Hospital in Mill Lane, Cambridge. Following a home visit and assessment, he went home on 10 July 2000, but returned to hospital with pneumonia on 18 July.

Patrick died around 3pm on 19 July 2000. He was buried alongside his beloved Veronica at St Andrew's Church, West Wrating. On his gravestone we inscribed: 'Pater sapiens et clemens' ('A wise and kind father').

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## 6. Remembering Patrick

Veronica Mary writes:

Most of my memories of Poppa are of the latter days at Countryman and West Wrattling. During those years he became increasingly mellow and, after Mummy died, he seemed more able to show his love and appreciation of all that we did for him. He was loving, wise, thoughtful, concerned for our welfare and had a wicked sense of humour! In those days he would love to go to the pub with John and come home for his favourite pork pie supper. He would always be interested in stories about the family, and Vicky and Michael (Veronica Mary's children) loved him very much. Every day he would complete the Telegraph crossword, garden until he became too frail to do so, read and watch television. I felt he was able to cope with the long days on his own because of his contemplative life as a monk when he was in his late teens and early twenties. He missed Mummy so much and would sometimes walk to her graveside and sit on the bench for long periods.

When Poppa first came into our lives he was very good to me. He sometimes took me to a large outdoor swimming pool in Germany and would buy me a huge bottle of Coca Cola which, in those days, was a sheer luxury! He took me to London on several occasions and we would have lunch, or supper, in a Lyons Corner House cafe, another real treat!! He also arranged for me to go on holiday and stay with some friends of his who had a son about my age but I cannot remember their names.

Poppa could also be very strict and quite fearsome at times. He idolised Mummy and was exceedingly protective of her, and if he felt we were doing something that would create more work for her or concern her then he would step in and discipline us verbally. In my teens this sometimes caused a problem between Mummy and Poppa because Mummy would see my point of view and want to agree to whatever it was but she couldn't once Poppa had laid down the law. I remember one incident at Miller's Cottage, Rustington, when the argument got so bad and Mummy was so upset that I thought she was going to drown herself in the pond in the garden. There was a huge ship's wheel by the side of this (actually small and shallow) pond and I imagined her using the wheel to weigh herself down in the water!! The other time I remember conflict was when I was going out with Rob (my future husband) so I must have been 18 years old. We had been asked to a party and Poppa said I had to be home by 9.30pm!!

Poppa loved to write, and wrote plays for me when I was a teacher. He wrote a play called Androcles and the Lion, and a book about a young monk that was never finished. Poppa also wrote a wonderful series of five stories about the adventures of Witchy Coo and Witchy Can based on Clare and myself! He loved to sing and would often suddenly burst into old Irish songs or ones he had learnt in the war. One of his favourites was Abdul Abulbul Ameer. I can also remember that he would morph into the character of Mrs Mopp which would get us all in stitches of laughter but I can't remember why!

Poppa adored his dogs! Both Cilla and then Berry were boxer dogs living to good ages and he could do anything with them. Poppa was so soft-hearted and supplemented their meals with gravy and vegetables. He would call them his Pooch and enjoyed walking and playing with them. When Mummy died, Berry very quickly went downhill. To lose both Mummy and Berry in such a short time was devastating for him.

I have found a card among his belongings that I sent him on his 80th birthday. I wrote: ‘...Thank you Poppa for all your love, care, support and wisdom over the years. Thank you for the cooked breakfasts, lunches, teas, suppers, G&T’s, washing up and the critical voice in my head that makes me do things “properly!!”’

I loved Poppa very much and I miss him as much today as ever. Thank you for being my ‘father’.

Clare writes:

I have no memories of my childhood without Poppa being there, although when I was very small I don't think he was very involved in day-to-day things. I think that as a little child I was a bit frightened of him. I remember calling him Father and always being desperate to call him Daddy. I was never told anything about our family history but I always sensed that my relationship with him wasn't the same as other children had with their fathers although I couldn't understand why.

This was a big problem for me. It was not until I was much older, probably about 12, that I was finally told the truth about what had happened. I am very aware that this was done to protect me but I feel very, very strongly that it was not the correct decision. It was not correct that all the family knew but not me as one of the children.

I think once I was told, it put things into place. As parents you love your children equally and share the enjoyment of their upbringing. For Poppa it was different. His first and I suppose in many ways his only consideration was Mummy. It was probably a bit annoying for him to have to bring up a little child as well. I finally realised why our relationship wasn't that of a normal father and daughter.

Poppa did his very best but his own upbringing wasn't conducive to understanding young children. He and Mummy were also very busy trying to establish Arun Tutors, so there was very little time available. I went to boarding school when I was seven. As I said in my memories of Mummy, I was very unhappy about this but looking back it was probably one less thing for them to worry about.

As I said before, my early memories of Poppa were of a very formal, respectful relationship. Then came the teenage years at Norfolk Gardens. These were not the best of times. Poppa was obviously trying his hardest to bring me up but he was very strict. I was not allowed to go out with friends even when I was 16, 17, 18. I would be invited to parties. I would then ask



Mummy if I could go and she would then pick her time to ask Poppa but the answer was always no. I am not sure why this was the case. This caused huge arguments and poor Mummy was stuck in the middle.

Poppa was very kind to me when I was studying for my A-levels. I think I was probably very conscientious and worked very hard. Poppa used to come into my bedroom with toast and tea as a treat, often late in the evening. Sometimes he used to tell me that I was working too hard and should stop. There was one occasion when he removed the light bulb from my bedside light to stop me revising. He always made breakfast for me. It would be a little pile of toast with the crusts cut off. I think there was a time when we were only allowed butter if we put nothing on the toast. If we put jam or marmite on we were only allowed margarine.

He taught me English for my A-levels. Funnily enough when I had a school reunion recently people were talking about him and how they used to try to distract him from Shakespeare or Keats. This was very easy. He would go off at a tangent and talk about all sorts of other things, politics etc. Sometimes we would have a lesson where we just did the crossword: this was great fun.

Life continued to be tricky until I left school and went to university. I can remember vividly Poppa changing from that day and becoming more relaxed. It was as if he felt his job was done. That is not to say that there weren't still problems. I remember wanting to learn to drive when I was about 20. A boyfriend had taught me but I needed to practise during the holidays. Poppa wouldn't let me. I think he was worried that I would crash the car. This caused huge arguments. Eventually Uncle spoke to him and somehow persuaded him to allow me to be insured on the car and Mummy was able to take me out for some extra practice.

Once I was in my twenties the relationship with Poppa improved hugely. He mellowed and I grew up, so it was much better all round. When I used to visit, he always sat quietly in the background letting me chatter away to Mummy. I think that we all found this. He would prepare the meals and all sorts of other things while we talked. He was totally and utterly in love with Mummy and she was at the forefront of his thoughts at all times. He would do anything and everything for her.

When Mummy died he was of course devastated and suddenly vulnerable. He had always been fit and healthy apart from having diabetes diagnosed. After Mummy died he began to have more health problems himself. It was almost as if he had kept himself going in order to look after Mummy. He suffered a heart attack while staying with us which was awful. He then spent time in Pembury Hospital. It was during this time that I became much closer to him. He had lost Mummy and suddenly the rest of the family became the focus of his life. When he came to stay he would always do all the ironing for me and lots of other little jobs. He became much gentler and easier to talk to.

I saw him the day before he died. He was so grateful that I was there. We had just returned to Stansted from a holiday and we popped in on the way back. I realised he wasn't well and said that I would take the children home and drive back immediately. Sadly by the time I got home the carer had telephoned to say he had been taken to hospital. I think Jane was with him just before he died. The nurse rang me straight after she left to say he was a bit better and then rang back five minutes later to say he had suddenly died. I was very sad not to have been with him.

To sum up, Poppa loved Mummy without any reserve. She was at the centre of his thoughts all day every day and he would have done anything for her. Theirs was a true love story. He had a brilliant mind and devoured knowledge. He was a massive help to me with all my work when I was at university. As a step-father he did his very best. It was probably not easy for him, especially as he had not had a normal childhood himself having been sent away to be educated in Belgium and not seeing his own family for seven years. He was probably over-zealous in his strictness but that was as a result of his own background. Though times were very difficult during the early years, we became much closer as time went on, especially after Mummy died. It is in the latter years that I have been able to appreciate what he did for us all. His judgements might not always have been right but no one can put a claim to that. He did his very best for all of us and loved us all very much.

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