

Veronica Watts

Born 16.7.1919. Died 7.5.1993.

Biographical life story by her four children.

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This life story was extracted in 2020, with permission, from The Watts Family Chronicle, a family history compiled by Veronica 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 Gordon Watts (their father), 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 Veronica, our mother, and therefore on the Wells and Griffiths families. The Watts and Goodliffe families are described in the parallel biography of our father, Gordon.

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 Wells Family

The family name of our maternal grandfather was Wells. Information on this side of the family is more limited, and less geographically concentrated. It is also sadder.

Our great-great grandparents were Samuel Wells, who was born around 1803 in Kent, and died in October 1878 in Kent; and Susannah Wells (née unknown), who was born around 1809 in Middlesex. Their son (our great-grandfather) was Joshua Frail Wells, who was born around 1846 in Kent, and died on 23 January 1921; he worked as a pianoforte porter. In 1873 or 1874 he married (in Middlesex) Emma Wells (née unknown) (our great-grandmother), who had been born around 1851 in Middlesex.

Samuel Percival Wells (our grandfather) was born in Walworth, Middlesex, around 1886. He had two older brothers, Joshua William and John, and a younger brother, George Henry. His name was given as Samuel Percival Wells on his marriage certificate (20 December 1918) and death certificate (9 December 1924), but as Montague Wells on the marriage certificates of Veronica (our mother) with Gordon (our father) (6 July 1940) and later with Patrick (our stepfather) (31 January 1976).

The 'Attestation of Militia' (Army Form E 504, No.5673, Kent Artillery, R.G.A. [Royal Garrison Artillery]) of Samuel Wells (no mention of Percival or Montague) gave his address as 20 Cumberland Road, Lower Edmonton, Middlesex, his age as 17 years 1 month, his 'trade or calling' as labourer, and his height as 5'6³/₄" (fair hair, blue eyes). He enlisted on 16 January 1902, initially for six years, and then joined the R.G.A. on 10 March 1902. Prior to this, he had worked at the Oriental Club in London in 1901.

Samuel married Violet Griffiths (our grandmother) on 20 December 1918 at the Register Office, Richmond, Yorkshire. He was then aged 32, and was listed as Sergeant R.G.A. (Storekeeper), resident at Scotton Camp in Richmond. Violet Griffiths was aged 21, and was listed as a shorthand typist, resident at Sunneyside House, Catterick, Yorkshire. They subsequently lived together at 417 Green Lane, Small Heath, Birmingham, definitely in 1919 and later in 1924.

Between these dates they lived at Troisdorf, Cologne, Germany, around 1922, when Samuel was stationed there. Anthony has a card dated September 1922 from Cologne, with a photo of Veronica and a large dolls' house (see p.4): it is addressed to 'my dear Alice' (Violet's sister), wishing her many happy returns of her birthday, and says 'What do you think of your big niece with her dollies house'; it is signed 'Vi, Monty and Vi' (Veronica had been christened Violet).

A family story was that Samuel was the brother of Bombardier Billy Wells, the famous boxer (British Heavyweight Champion, and the man seen striking the gong in the introduction to many J. Arthur Rank films). But sadly we have found no evidence to support this! Perhaps it was a story invented by Samuel to impress Violet?

In the Forces War Records, there seems to be no record of anyone named S.P. Wells around this time, nor any record of an S. Wells from the R.G.A. There is however a

record of one M. Wells who was appointed a Temporary Second Lieutenant in the Royal Garrison Artillery on 1 July 1918. Samuel was listed as ‘Sergeant, R.G.A.’ on his marriage certificate (20 December 1918) but as ‘Army officer’ on the marriage certificate of Veronica and Patrick (31 January 1976). The temporary status of the officer rank – if this M. Wells is indeed Veronica’s father – could account for the apparent discrepancy (though the dates do not quite fit). In Violet’s inquest statement (see below) she states that he finished the war as a Lance-Sergeant (a Corporal acting in the role of Sergeant), that he ‘was wounded in his foot, and has since had an operation on his nose, but he seemed to have quite recovered’, and that he had been ‘discharged from the Army (time expired)’ in 1923.



Veronica aged 3 with her dolls’ house in Cologne, 1922

After leaving the army, Samuel was verger at the Holy Trinity Church in Bordesley, Birmingham, but does not seem to have had any paid work.

Samuel committed suicide by jumping under a train in 1924 near Belchers Lane, Small Heath, Birmingham. After his death, two poignant notes written on cigarette wrappers were found. The first stated: ‘Will bearer forward same intact to Mrs V. Wells 417 Green Lane Small Heath also the keys & watch & chain.’ The second read: ‘My Darling Kiddie. I have left these things where they may be found. It is absolutely wrong that there is another woman as you are the only one & I wish my love had been strong enough for my master (drink). This is as true as my hope is to meet my Divine Master. Try & never let our little pet [Veronica] know what a sinner her Daddie was & try in your heart Sweetheart to convince yourself that what I am doing is no fault of yours as you have been the finest & best wife & mother that ever a fellow had & I am truly sorry that I have brought so much misery in your life. I am trusting that God may have mercy on my soul & thus we may meet in Heaven. Try & not grieve too much for me Kiddie darling. Yours for the last time. Y.E.D.L. & A. Monty.’

The papers from the inquest include a statement from Violet. She reported that although his general health had been good, 'he has been drinking very heavily during the last three years', and since his discharge from the Army in 1923 'he has, in my opinion, drunk more'. This 'caused a certain amount of friction between us, especially owing to the fact that we were living with my mother, and he could not provide a home for us'. She added: 'In June last my mother spoke to him about his habits, and he left me until Aug.', though 'during this time I saw him frequently'. Then: 'In Aug he promised to give up his drinking & came to live with me again. We were together until end of Sept., when he came home again under the influence of drink, & my mother & I spoke to him again. He left me, & we have not lived together since. I have seen him about twice a week since. He seemed rather worried at times.' The next time she saw him, 'he had given his notice to the authorities of the Church' [for his voluntary role as verger, presumably]. A few days later he arranged to meet up with her again at a picture house: 'He said "Did you miss me". I said "Yes". He said that some proceedings would be taken against him, over borrowing some money. He asked me if I would give him another chance when he got over it. I said "Yes"... I did not see him again alive.' She added: 'Several times he has said that life was not worth living. He made no definite threat... He had no trouble to my knowledge except his drinking. The financial difficulty was money borrowed from money lenders.'

The mix of alcoholism and financial difficulties leading to crisis was poignantly repeated by Gordon (our father) 34 years later, though with a less immediately tragic outcome (see separate biography of Gordon Watts). If Veronica knew the history of her father, this must have added to her woes at that time. But perhaps the strength she and her mother gained from surviving the first experience helped her to survive the second.

3. Maternal Ancestors: the Griffiths Family

The family name of our maternal grandmother was Griffiths. The Griffiths branch of the family was mobile, but always in the West Midlands. We have traced them back to Joseph Griffiths, who was born around 1791 in Shropshire/Worcestershire.

Joseph's son, Benjamin Griffiths (I), our great-great-great-grandfather, was born around 1818 in Kidderminster, Worcestershire. He was baptised on 4 August 1819 in Worcestershire, possibly at St Mary's Church, Kidderminster. On 28 December 1840, he married Mary Tustin at St Martin's Church, Birmingham. Mary was from Wythall, King's Norton, Worcestershire, and had been born in 1812. They had four children: Rebecca (born and died in 1841), Thomas (1842-81), Israel (1844-48) and Benjamin (1848-94). After the 1851 Census Benjamin and Mary changed their surname to Tonks – the name of Benjamin's mother from her second marriage to Thomas Tonks (at St Philip's Church, Birmingham, on 20 January 1845). They maintained this surname until their deaths. Benjamin died on 13 September 1877, aged around 59.

Thomas Griffiths, our great-great-grandfather, was born on 17 March 1842 in Solihull Lodge, Warwickshire. Solihull Lodge is on the outskirts of Birmingham, near Shirley. He was baptised on 15 May 1842 at Yardley Wood Chapel, Worcestershire. On 10 March 1863 he married Elizabeth Griffiths (née Musgrove) at St Peter and St Paul's Church, Aston, Birmingham. Veronica Mary has a copy of the marriage certificate. Elizabeth had been born in Aston, Birmingham, on 6 January 1842; her parents were John Musgrove (1812-71) and Mary Higham (1812-82). Thomas and Elizabeth had six children: Mary Jane (1864-76), Benjamin (1866-1939), Thomas (1869-1917), William (1871-1920), Arthur Edward (1874-1956) and Frank (1880-1937).

Thomas's marriage certificate records his profession as a tube drawer: he was probably involved in making shotgun barrels for the Birmingham gun-manufacturing industry, which specialised in the production of military firearms and sporting guns. Thomas died on 13 November 1881, aged 39 years, of acute bronchitis. His death certificate states that he was then living at the back of 140 Park Road, Hockley, working as a labourer. He was buried in Warstone Lane Cemetery, Birmingham (Grave R399). Elizabeth subsequently married John Whiston on 11 June 1901. She died in Hockley, Birmingham, on 2 December 1910, aged 68. She was buried with Thomas in Warstone Lane Cemetery, along with their daughter Mary Jane who had died in childhood.

Benjamin Griffiths (II), our great-grandfather, was born in Birmingham on 10 April 1866 (though Ancestry gives his date of birth as 4 October 1866). He was a policeman. He married Alice Griffiths (née Bevan) at the Parish Church in St George's, Birmingham, on 27 August 1889. Alice had been born in April 1867; her parents were Edward John Bevan (a gunmaker; born at New John Street, Aston, Birmingham, in 1833; died in Birmingham in March 1906) and Emma Cartwright (born in Warwickshire in 1833; died in Warwickshire in 1891). Edward John Bevan's parents were Edward Johnson Bevan (born on 17 September 1809 in Aston, Birmingham; died in June 1872 in Warwickshire) and Emma Matilda

Sherwood (born in 1807 in Birmingham; died in March 1882 in Birmingham); his paternal grandparents were Thomas Bevan (born in 1789 in Sutton Coldfield; died in June 1853 in Birmingham) and Temperance Johnson (born in 1787 in Drayton Bassett, Staffordshire; died in June 1852 in Birmingham); his paternal great-grandparents were Thomas Bevan (born about 1765 in Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire) and Maria Ireland (born in 1765; died in 1835).

At the marriage between Benjamin and Alice, the groom and bride gave the same address (47 Great Russell Street, Birmingham), to avoid the fees that would apparently have been involved if one of them had been recorded as living in another parish. They subsequently lived for many years at 417 Green Lane, Birmingham.

Eric Ravenhall, our second cousin (see below), mentioned in a letter to Jane and Paul (in 1998) that the parents of both Benjamin and Alice came from Wales in the 1880s. But as is evident above, our subsequent research has found no evidence of this, on either side.

Alice died in December 1935, aged 68; Benjamin on 20 October 1939, aged 73. They were both buried in Yardley Cemetery, Birmingham (Section 56, Grave 59845).

Alice Griffiths (born in 1893) married George Ravenhall and had four children – Evelyn (who was born around 1914 and subsequently lived in Canada), Gwen, George and Eric (born around 1930). Alice died in 1965.

Bertha Griffiths (born in 1895) became blind at the age of 17, as the result of an accident with a needle at the glove factory where she worked, and did not marry. She apparently never complained, and felt it was God's will: she had strong religious convictions. She sometimes sent presents for each of us. On one such occasion, the Family Chronicle (a family magazine edited by Anthony between 1954 and 1958) noted: 'It is particularly kind for her to choose presents for us individually as it is very difficult for her to go round the stores alone on account of her complete blindness' (11 January 1958). Bertha lived for most of her life in the family home at 417 Green Lane, Birmingham, before moving into a nursing home in Erdington, Birmingham, shortly before she died in 1979. She left her body to medical science at the University of Birmingham.

Benjamin Griffiths (III) was born on 5 June 1899. Veronica Mary has a postcard (postmarked Erdington, June 1914) from Ellen (identity unknown), with a photo of Hob Moor Lane, Yardley, addressed to Master B. Griffiths, 48 Blake Lane, Small Heath, Birmingham, saying: 'Dear Bennie, Do you know this place at all? You have been many times I know.' Benjamin married Edith Marian Minett on 26 December 1921 at St Oswald's Church, Small Heath, Birmingham. They had two children: Marion Edith Griffiths (born on 9 December 1923) and Stanley Minett Griffiths (born on 7 July 1928). Edith died on 13 April 1943 and is buried in Yardley Cemetery, Birmingham. Benjamin subsequently married Florence May Rogers (formerly Copson, née Farmer) on 8 July 1944 at Birmingham Register Office. He worked for Pearl Assurance from the 1920s until he retired, becoming Assistant District Manager in 1941. His marriage certificate in 1944 stated that he was District Manager and that Florence was an Assistant District Manager. He appears

to have gone back to being a collector in 1946. After his retirement they moved from Royston Road, Birmingham, to Bewley Down, Chard, Somerset. Florence's two brothers and their wives were involved in the botulism scare in the West Midlands (linked to tins of salmon) in 1978: Jessie (one of the brothers) and his wife Bessie died; Leonard (the other brother) and Clara survived. Benjamin died on 17 November 1990 in Chard, aged 91, and is buried in the cemetery there.

Violet Griffiths (our grandmother, Nanna Vi) was born in Birmingham on 16 June 1898. An early photo (below) shows her in a nurse's uniform, suggesting that she may have worked as a nurse for a while before moving into retail work. In 1918 she married Samuel Percival Wells, who committed suicide in 1924 (see Chapter 2).



Violet then married Albert Arthur Ade (known as Bert) at St Jude's Church, Portsea, Portsmouth, on 6 June 1931. Apparently Teddy Culliford (later her third husband) was already on the scene when the wedding to Albert Ade took place. Violet told her father on the wedding day that she did not want to go through with it, but he insisted that she could not back out at this late stage. Her sister Bertha disapproved of the contact with Teddy Culliford, and Violet's parents agreed with her, leading to a family rift which continued for several years.

Albert Ade was an electrical fitter. Veronica disliked him and the marriage did not last long.

Violet lived in Victoria Road, Southsea, around the mid-1930s until her divorce from Albert Ade. A visit to Southsea made by Veronica, Veronica Mary, Michael and Anthony in 1992 indicated that while Veronica was a small child Violet lived in No.5 (called April Cottage in 1992). This might have been Victoria Road, or possibly 5 Cecil Mansions, Western Parade. Violet and Veronica subsequently lived in a first-floor flat at 37 Nightingale Road, Southsea (they were certainly there in 1936-38) and then in a fifth-floor flat at 94 Palmerston Road, Southsea, on the corner of Osborne Road, over what Nesta Barton (Veronica's lifelong friend) referred to (in some notes later prepared for Veronica Mary) as 'a very high-class Sports shop', of which Violet was Manageress. The whole building was destroyed by a German bomb on 9 January 1941: Nesta noted that it 'was reduced to ashes together with all Vi's [Veronica's] possessions and wedding presents'. After the bombing Violet seems to have followed Veronica in some of her various wartime moves (see Chapter 5), ending up at 64 Campbell Road, Southsea (1944-46) where Violet had the top floor of the house, while Veronica had the ground and first floors, with her two babies (Anthony and Paul).

Meanwhile, Violet continued to see Teddy Culliford (his full name was Edwin Henry Culliford). Our first photo of Veronica with him is in 1935 (below). The three of them used to go for regular picnics and outings around this time.



Following the end of the Second World War, in 1946, Violet finally married Teddy Culliford. They went to live in Fareham, Hampshire, first at 110 Paxton Road (1946-48) and later at 59 Serpentine Road (1948-61), before moving to 25 Glyn Way, Stubbington, Hampshire (1961-69). Paul and Anthony used to stay with them periodically.

Paul writes:

I remember Nanna [Violet] as loving and caring but not expressively emotional. She enjoyed smoking Bachelor filter-tip cigarettes and she collected the coupons from each packet rather like Green Shield stamps (to be cashed in). I have to admit to occasionally raiding her packet when she

wasn't looking and helping myself to one which I later smoked leaning out of the bedroom window. She knew, of course, but never said anything until years later! Nanna and I played endless card games: Bezique, Canasta. She loved playing them and was quite competitive.

Veronica Mary writes:

Nanna was the epitome of a grandmother. She had fine, golden curly hair and the softest skin. She was the sweetest, most gentle, kind, warm and loving person and I adored her. I stayed with Nanna and Uncle many, many times when I was young and my memories are of very happy times. Each stay would follow the same routine. After Uncle had gone to work we would have our breakfast and then Nanna would prepare lunch, always a casserole served with garden peas and baked beans (because she knew I loved them). We would then sit at the table and play Rummy or Canasta until lunch time, only stopping for 'elevenses' and a bourbon biscuit from the tin with a little girl and a budgerigar on it. After lunch Nanna had a rest and later we would play cards until Uncle returned from work; or, if she had jobs to do, I would play with my dolls and she would put Lucozade into my dolls' teapot for me to pour out into little china dolls cups. In the evening we would watch television, a real treat! Occasionally I would help Nanna and Uncle with the Monday washing. Uncle would feed the wet clothes through the wringer while I turned the handle: it was a hot, damp job that seemed to go on for hours! As the years went by, my visits stopped, but my special memories of Nanna are of shopping with Mummy at Knight & Lee in Southsea, picnics on Harting Hill in Hampshire and singing Christmas carols around the piano. She loved her family with all her heart and her memory is very dear to me.

Teddy's family came from St Helens, Lancashire. He served on the Russian convoys during the War. He was appointed Acting Commissioned Electrical Officer at HMS Collingwood (a training establishment) in Fareham on 6 December 1946, and was later appointed Electrical Lieutenant on 1 January 1957. Paul writes:

Uncle Teddy was a gentle, formal man, always polite. I never heard him raise his voice and he was always kind and attentive to Nanna's needs. I don't remember any signs of affection between them but that was the 1950s and holding hands was as intimate as was considered respectable when in front of the grandchildren. Uncle wasn't a great talker but I do remember he liked to reminisce about his Navy days. He had been on the Arctic convoys which must have been quite traumatic.

Veronica Mary writes:

As a child I knew that Uncle loved me, and Clare would agree that I was his favourite but this was because I was older and spent more time with him. My strongest memory is of Nanna making him a cooked breakfast. I can still remember the smell of the bacon, and no bacon has ever tasted so good! I would sit on the floor by his side and patiently wait for the delicious little bit of bacon and egg on a small piece of bread that he would give to me before he finished! He would then put on his sailor officer's hat and go to work on

Portsmouth Hill. Uncle made his own television long before we ever had one. He also bought me my first bicycle and would maintain it for me. He was not an outwardly demonstrative man but he loved the family and would show it in small ways. He was also very supportive, especially to Poppa in his later years.

Anthony adds:

I do remember the TV: a great treat! I was regularly told that I should not go near it, for fear of damaging it – which may explain why I've been so nervous of technology ever since!

In 1969 Violet and Teddy moved to 5 Haydown Lees, Hatchbury Lane, Vernham Dean, near Andover, Hampshire, to be nearer Veronica and Patrick (see Chapters 9-10). When Veronica and Patrick moved to Littlehampton, they moved too, first to Flat 8, Summerlea Gardens, Church Street (1971-72), then to 41 Norfolk Gardens (1972-75), and finally to 58B Norfolk Road (1975-76).

Clare writes:

When I was older and we were living in Norfolk Gardens, Nanna and Uncle would come over one evening every week. Poppa and Uncle would go to the pub and Nanna would play scrabble with Mummy and sometimes secretly have a cigarette. I do remember that Nanna absolutely adored Mummy, which is not surprising since she was her only child and had so nearly died at birth. They were both lovely grandparents, always very kind and loving.

Violet died peacefully at home in Littlehampton on 11 December 1976. When she was dying, she asked for Bach's St Matthew Passion to be played on her record-player: the annual family visits to the Bach Choir performance of this work at the Royal Festival Hall in London (see Chapter 11) had meant a great deal to her.

After Violet's death, Patrick used to visit Teddy twice a week to have a beer with him. Teddy enjoyed making beer. Indeed, Veronica Mary adds a note about her daughter Vicky's visits to see him in these later years (crossing three generations):

Uncle was always called Uncle Beer in our house! This name was given to him by Vicky when she was a very little girl. When she went to visit him, he would pour a tiny bit of the beer he brewed into a glass for her to drink.

4. Childhood

Our mother was born at Highfield Nursing Home in Darlington, County Durham, on 16 July 1919: Darlington is about 13 miles from Richmond, where her father was stationed in the Army at the time. She was christened Violet Alecia (Violet was her mother's name too). But she never liked being called Violet, and later changed it to Veronica, when she entered the Catholic Church and was re-christened in 1939 (see below). We initially called her Mummy, and Veronica Mary and Clare continued to do so. But from the 1950s most of the family began to call her Motti, which was an anglicisation of Mütti, the German word for mother. This was also the name by which her grandchildren knew her.

Veronica very nearly died in childbirth, and was born without a lining to her stomach. She had health problems throughout her life. But she was very strong as a person, and always overcame her physical frailties with great resilience and fortitude.



Veronica as a baby, with her mother Violet

When her father was in the army, Veronica spent some time at Troisdorf, around 15 miles from Cologne in Germany.

Veronica went to school at the Convent of the Cross, Grove Road North, Southsea. This was an independent Catholic school for girls and small boys which had been founded in 1902 by a group of nuns from Boscombe. On a DVD (of which we all have copies) of a visit made by Veronica, Veronica Mary, Michael and Anthony to Southsea, Gosport and Fareham in July/August 1992, Veronica told the story of how she came to go to the convent school.

She used to play a lot with her dolls; one day when she was 7 or 8 Violet asked her why she looked sad, and she responded that it was because 'they never answer'. Violet decided that Veronica needed to go to a boarding school; she did not have sufficient money, but a Catholic who worked with her at Spalding's sports shop put her in touch with the convent, who presumably offered a place for Veronica at a reduced fee. When the curate at the Anglican church heard about this, he came round hot-foot to protest, and Veronica went on the strict understanding that the nuns were not to interfere in any way with her religion. She may have been a weekly boarder there.



Veronica aged 17

Veronica's lifelong friend Nesta Barton wrote about Veronica's teenage years in a letter to Veronica Mary (dated 20 April 2002):

When we first met at College we were young teenagers, wearing our brown and pale blue uniforms with a certain pride, but when we left we were older teenagers, young women ready for the action! Your Mother had a model figure and golden, gleaming hair down to her shoulders which she wore in a pageboy bob, very attractive... She was never a robust type which added, in a way, to her attraction. I sometimes wonder how we became such friends because we were very different; I was a bit daring, very ambivalent in some ways, talkative and 'dreamy' whereas she was quiet, uncritical, gentle yet very strong in some ways.

We both had lost our fathers so perhaps we had that in common, and we could discuss deep subjects with ease, and she, Vi Senr. and I had a great sense of humour which is so very important in this life. Strange we each had four children which gave us a lot in common in our later years.

5. Second World War and Marriage

Veronica worked as a shorthand typist for the Armed Services in Southsea during the early part of the Second World War, before the birth of her first child, Anthony. In the 1992 DVD (see Chapter 4), she recalled that the building in which she worked (her reference to it on the DVD was indistinct, but something like ‘Raven House’, with ‘Raven’ pronounced as in ‘ravenous’) was the place where German airmen who had bailed out during the Battle of Britain in 1940 were brought for questioning. She recalled how on one occasion during an air-raid some of the staff were rebuked for leaving their revolvers on their desks: if there had been an invasion ‘they wouldn’t have had anything to defend us with’.

Veronica was received into the Catholic Church by Father Murphy in St Mary’s Church, High Street, Gosport, Hampshire, on 8 September 1939. During the early years of the war she typed for Father Murphy a book he was writing on metaphysics (she remained a very competent shorthand typist throughout her life). He was a Canon, and a learned man: he possessed a PhD as well as a DD (Doctor of Divinity). He remained a great support to her throughout his life. She always called him ‘Father’; in his letters to her, he referred to her as ‘my daughter’ and ‘my child in God’. In addition to his spiritual support for her, he was in many ways, perhaps, the father she never had.



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

Veronica married Gordon 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.

In 1941 Veronica and her mother Violet were bombed. Veronica later wrote an account of this for the Family Chronicle:

On the night of January 9th 1941, while I was visiting the doctor, at 6 o'clock the sirens began to wail, warning us that yet another air-raid was imminent. As we had become so used to these nightly warnings, nobody took very much notice of it.

I arrived back at our flat in Palmerston Road around 6.30, and started having the early supper we were accustomed to having. Before my mother and I had finished our meal, however, we could hear the drone of planes, and mother began to feel uneasy, so we decided to finish our meal in the air-raid shelter, which was in the cellar of the next building. At exactly 7 o'clock the first bomb fell, damaging the Electricity Supply, and so we were immediately plunged into darkness. Shortly after that an intensive bombardment with incendiaries began. We soon realised that tonight Portsmouth was on Hitler's list for a heavy attack.

By this time quite a number of people were in the shelter: the 'regulars', and several people who happened to be in the vicinity at the start of the bombing. There was the usual amount of speculation in a light-hearted manner as to what was happening, but by 9 o'clock we realised from the visits of various wardens that in many parts of Portsmouth and Southsea fierce fires were raging, and as the chief Water Main had already been bombed, it seemed that parts of the city were in imminent danger of being completely destroyed.

At 9 o'clock a policeman came into the shelter, and said that all those whose homes were in the adjoining buildings could have three minutes in which to collect their most valued belongings, and then the shelter and the whole area would have to be evacuated. As we arrived in the road from the shelter, I saw an unforgettable sight. To the right and left there seemed to be literally walls of flame and it seemed as if the town indeed was completely on fire. My mind was in a turmoil as I dashed up to the fifth floor, which was our flat, and I gripped the evening paper, a hat of no special value at all, and our cat!!

We left the building and hurried towards the sea front. It was amazing that although the air was full of sparks and part of the fabric of burning building, we were completely unhurt.

By 10 o'clock we were in a surface shelter on the sea front. This shelter had no seats, and we spent the next 9 hours lying on the wet stone floor. At the side of the shelter an attempt was made to lay pipes so that water could be pumped from the sea, and so help to stop the spread of the fire. During the

night various ARP workers were brought into the shelter. As it began to get light we crossed the Common rather tentatively, having been warned that there were several unexploded bombs. As the fire was still raging, many roads were sealed, and although we could see the remains of what had been our home we couldn't get very near. We tried to get to the home of my old school friend Nesta, but even that was impossible because of the road blocks.

Finally, we found a school which had been opened as a Relief Centre, and there we were able to have a cup of tea.

My mother and I felt quite lost and wondered where we would find a bed for the coming night, when we remembered some friends who lived just outside the town of Bedhampton. The question was how to get there, with all public transport at a complete standstill. We decided that the best thing would be to go to Garrison HQ where I was working. After an hour's walking through various tortuous routes we reached our destination, and my first aim was to have a wash. I remember well catching a glimpse of myself in a mirror, my face streaked with dirt and generally looking quite indescribable.

Brigadier Harper now kindly agreed to lend us his car and driver, and by late afternoon we finally reached our friends at Bedhampton, who made us very welcome, despite the fact that we had no money, no luggage – not even a toothbrush!

From January to June 1941, Veronica and Gordon lived at 17 City Road, Winchester, Hampshire (January-June 1941). They then moved successively to Gourock, Scotland (June-September 1941), to Oswestry, Shropshire (September 1941), and to Shrivenham, Berkshire (October 1941), in each case to be near Gordon's regiment. Veronica next moved to Farringdon, Berkshire (November 1941 to September 1942), while Gordon remained in Shrivenham. From there she moved successively to Fairbourne, North Wales (September 1942 to August 1943), to Winchester, Hampshire (August-September 1943), to Southampton, Hampshire (September-October 1943), to Glanton, Northumberland (November 1943 to October 1944) and to Alverstoke, Gosport, Hampshire (October 1944). Some of these moves may have been linked to seeking to retain proximity to Gordon, but others may have been for other reasons, including finding relative safety from bombing.

Anthony and Paul were both born during this time: Anthony at the Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford (probably the largest hospital near Farringdon) on 29 June 1942; Paul at Glanton on 6 March 1944. Veronica's mother, Violet (Nanna Vi), lived with us for some of this period, providing companionship and support for Veronica during Gordon's regular absences on military service. She shared a house with us when we moved to Swanston, 64 Campbell Road, Southsea, Hampshire, in November 1944. We stayed there until September 1946, when we moved to Lübbecke, Westphalia, Germany, to join Gordon who was now stationed there (see his biography for his movements during the War and his role in Lübbecke).

Around 1945-46, Veronica was a member of the Young Conservatives in Southsea. We have a letter dated 10 September 1946 from the Secretary of the Portsmouth

South Conservative and Unionist Association indicating that, since she was now joining her husband in Germany, he would take her name off the membership roll.



Veronica with Paul and Anthony in 1944

6. Germany after the War (1946-50)

In an article on 'Our First Arrival in Germany, 1946' published in August 1955 in the Family Chronicle, Veronica wrote:

The war had been over for just 16 months when Anthony, Paul and I first arrived in Germany where we were to spend the next 4 years. We crossed from Tilbury to Cuxhaven, leaving Southsea early on Tuesday, September 24 and finally arriving at our new home in Lübbecke at teatime on September 26. It was an amazing journey and well organised in every possible detail: comfortable cabins, special nursery meals for children and ample cigarettes, sweets and magazines on the train – all free. As we passed through northern Germany via Hanover, Bückeburg and Minden we realised, however, how devastated the large towns were, and when we passed groups of Germans staring hungrily at the sight of a train complete with restaurant car, and begging for bread, chocolate and even cigarette ends we remembered that it was to an unhappy war-shattered country we had come.

During her first period in Germany (1946-50), Veronica learned German, took piano lessons (with Herr Bökamper), and did some voluntary work in DP (displaced persons) camp.



Veronica and Gordon with Paul and Anthony in 1946

Anthony writes:

One of my strongest early memories is lying in bed listening to Motti [Veronica] playing Chopin, especially one of his Polonaises. It was always very comforting and reassuring. I think that my love of classical music started there.

I remember very vividly a visit to a DP camp. I hated schwarzbrot (black bread). Motti told me beforehand, in her gentle but firm way, that if I was offered schwarzbrot I must not only eat it but also look as though I was enjoying it, because it would be a great gift, from people who had almost nothing. I did as I was told! It was perhaps my first lesson in political education.

Anthony also recalls his schooling in Lübbecke:

I was initially sent to a German kindergarten, as one of two or three English children. This was only just over a year after the end of the War! I learned German very quickly, and became quite fluent. We also had a German maid and boilerman, who spoke very little English, so we communicated with them mainly in German. It wasn't until much later that I realised that what I always called ei im wasser was a boiled egg!

Soon a British Families Education Service (BFES) school was established. I had a wonderful teacher there, Jean Ormond. By the time we went to prep school in England, I was two years ahead of my age in maths, and was accordingly placed in a form of much older boys. This continued throughout my school career: I took my O-levels when I was just 14, and my A-levels when I was just 16. In retrospect I am not sure this was a good idea: being in a class where everyone is older physically can be quite difficult emotionally. But whatever benefits I derived, I owed chiefly to Miss Ormond.

Our relations with the German children were guarded, as I recall. I remember we used to have informal England v. Germany football matches in a field near the school, which sometimes degenerated into fights!

Paul's main memories are of spectacular accidents:

Ant and I had to return a dustbin lid to a house at the foot of the hill. We were running down the hill and I fell. It was a gravelled road and the stones tore open the skin on my right knee, with blood everywhere. I was taken to the RAF hospital in Rostrup where it was stitched. Unfortunately the stitches broke the next day and we had to go back to the hospital and they added 'clips' at each end of the stitches. I have the scar to this day!

The other memory is of falling into the sewer pit which was about 10 feet deep but with no steps to get out. I was fairly quickly rescued by the drain-clearing people putting down a suction pipe which had a little platform on which I stood and was then lifted up. I must have stank! I recall being bathed

in disinfectant by our maid. It took more than one bath to get me sweet-smelling again!

In Lübbecke we lived initially at 8 Wittekindstrasse, then in Hollensiek, and finally in Kampstrasse. Anthony recalls a return visit to Hollensiek made in 1988:

Gilly, David and I were on holiday in Germany, and we visited Lübbecke. I found the house straightaway, without needing to ask for directions. As we drove up to it, a woman was cleaning her car outside it. I asked her whether she lived there, and if so, for how long. She replied that her family had lived in the house since the 1920s, except for a short period after the War when it had been requisitioned by the British Army. I said: 'I don't know quite how to say this, but it was my family that lived here during that period.' She could not have been more hospitable: she invited us in for a coffee, and to look round the house if we wished. I remembered the cherry orchard in the garden, and how our dog Lindy Loo had hid behind the chair in the corner of the drawing room when we were about to leave. The sense of being caught up in the broad sweep of history was very powerful.

Veronica Mary was born on 22 May 1949 at the BAOR Hospital in Rinteln.



Veronica with Veronica Mary in 1949

7. England (1950-54)

In July 1950, Veronica returned to England while Gordon was moved to Bonn in Germany. The family went through a very turbulent period. Anthony initially went to Alverstoke to stay with Nellie and Norman (Nanna and Grandpa) for two months; while Veronica, Paul and Veronica Mary (only just over a year old) went to Fareham to stay with Violet and Teddy (Nanna and Uncle). In August, Veronica Mary stayed in Fareham with Violet and Teddy; Veronica and Paul went to Swindon, to hunt for a house. In September, Anthony and Paul were sent to La Sagesse Convent, a Catholic orphanage near Romsey, while Veronica continued house-hunting; they stayed there until November. It was a fairly traumatic period for both of them, as Anthony recalls:

There was a strong gang culture among the children, which – coming from a fairly protected background – bewildered and scared us. Because it was an orphanage, for children who had been abandoned by their parents or whose parents had died, the taunts from the other children led us to start wondering whether we had been abandoned too, despite all Motti's reassurances to us. It was a great relief when Motti returned to take us away!

In October 1950, Veronica collected Veronica Mary from Fareham, and both went back to Swindon. Then in November 1950, all the family except Gordon – who was still in Germany – were reunited in our new house in Princes Road (probably No.27), Petersfield, Hampshire. For a short period Anthony and Paul went by bus to St Margaret's Convent School in Midhurst, Sussex – a mixed primary and girls' secondary school – before being sent in January 1951 to Prior Park Preparatory School, Cricklade, Wiltshire, a school run by the Irish Christian Brothers. Of the period in Petersfield, Anthony recalls one incident:

Paul and I used to act as servers at the Catholic Church, on some weekdays as well as on Sundays. On one occasion, coming back from Mass, we found a shilling coin in the road. We bought some comics with it, but evidently felt rather guilty because we hid them when we got home. Motti [Veronica] somehow found out, and lectured us very sternly, mainly on trying to hide what we had done, but also indicating that we should have put the money in a charity box rather than using it for ourselves. I got most of the blame: because I was older, I should have set a better example. Motti was rarely stern with us, so when she was, it made a big impression.

In June 1952, we moved to Cairnsmore, Nunney Road, Frome, Somerset. Meanwhile, in July 1951, Gordon was moved by the army to Manchester.

We have no clear memories of visits from Gordon during all of this period: there may have been, but he certainly never lived with us. There was however a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace to which Veronica went, presumably with Gordon.

In retrospect, it seems possible that Veronica and Gordon had decided to split up, at least for a period, but then decided to try to get together again when we returned to Germany in 1954. So far as we can recall, we were never told anything about all this.



Veronica dressed up for her visit to Buckingham Palace in the early 1950s

Shammy came to live with us for some of this period – certainly in Frome, and possibly in Petersfield too. She was Irish, and a close friend of Veronica. We think they may have met in Lübbecke, and that Shammy may have worked there for SSAFA (a charity supporting Forces personnel and their families). In 1952, with our growing financial problems, Veronica decided to move to Ireland with Shammy and the children, and Anthony and Paul said their farewells at Cricklade. At this point Brother Robinson, the President of Prior Park, offered what were effectively very generous scholarships to enable them to return to Cricklade and later to move to the senior school: Prior Park College in Bath, Somerset. This helped to persuade Veronica to abandon her plans.

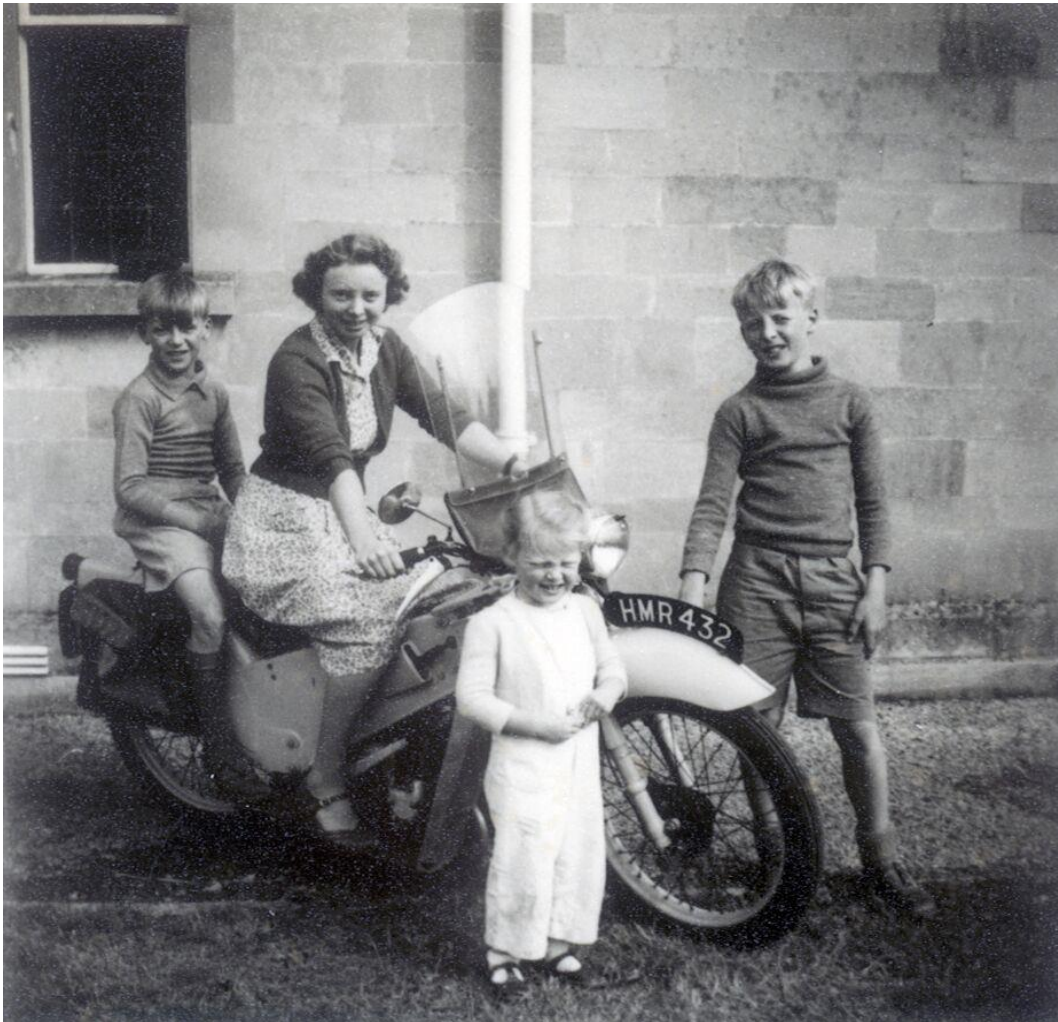
While in Frome (early 1950s), Veronica taught at St Louis Convent School. Founded in 1902 by French nuns from the Order of Sisters of Charity of St Louis, its school had been opened in 1926, with parents paying as much or as little as they could afford. In the early 1950s its headmistress was Sister Aimee, who taught shorthand among other subjects; Sister Winifred taught typing; there were five classrooms at this time. The convent closed in 1994.

Anthony writes:

Our house in Frome was rather lovely (though it was on a hill, and the garden was over the public lavatories!). Paul and I used to play cricket in the tarmac path leading to the garage – which was leased out (we had no car of our own) to a rare Terraplane (a favourite answer in future Paper Games!). We also used to go to the nearby park to play cricket and football, and come home for bread and dripping – a great treat! Father Buckley, our parish priest, was very kind to us and used to visit on his motorbike, which we found very exciting.

Veronica Mary remembers being able to ride her tricycle on a path all round the house. Paul recalls:

We used to make washing up more bearable (Ant was always in the loo when washing up time came!) by estimating the number of items we washed/dried. Motti would sometimes add clean pieces to help me 'win'. I never let on that I knew!



Paul, Veronica, Veronica Mary and Anthony in Frome (on Father Buckley's motorbike)

8. Back to Germany (1954-58)

In 1954, Veronica and Gordon decided to start living together again, and we moved to Oldenburg, near Bremen in north Germany. Whereas in our earlier stay in 1946-50 we had lived in requisitioned German houses, and (like other officers' families) had German maids and boilermen, by 1954 most British families lived in specially-built enclaves, with their own amenities (e.g. NAAFI shops), separate from the German population.

We lived at 33 Hindenburgstrasse, Oldenburg, from June 1954 to September 1955. We then moved a few miles to Delmenhorst, where we lived at 25 Franz-Schubert-Strasse from September 1955 to January 1958, and at 26 Bachstrasse from January to July 1958. We subsequently moved back to England, to 52 Lidgett Lane, Roundhay, Leeds, where lived from July 1958 to March 1959.



A family outing to Brake, Holland, in 1955

The Family Chronicle recorded that in 1954 Veronica established her own small school:

Mummy has decided to open her own school. On Friday the Brigadier gave her permission, so all is now ready. She has asked Mother Patricia of St Louis High School, Frome, Somerset for old books etc. A bus has been procured to bring the children and to take them home. School hours will be roughly 9.30 to 12.30. So far three children are certain and one possible. (4 September 1954)

At the end of the school year she had to withdraw:

Mummy is to continue her school up to the end of next week, as she won't be able to take a school next term because of the move to Delmenhorst which is now definitely 'coming off'. (23 July 1955)

But evidently the school continued:

Mummy's school ended on Thursday. The new teacher is to be Mrs Husband. Mummy is now able to get much more rest and more time for knitting, etc. (30 July 1955)

Veronica was by this time several months pregnant, so the knitting was presumably for the new baby (Clare) – who was referred to in the same issue:

It now seems fairly definite that the family will go to England over Christmas with the baby. (30 July 1955)



Veronica pregnant with Clare in 1955

A letter from Veronica later in January 1957 referred to a job application she had made:

I am feeling a bit deflated as I haven't got the Radio Bremen job. My voice wasn't any good because for one thing I had a sore throat and it came through the microphone very huskily. Secondly I was so terribly nervous that you could hear that too. It is a bit disappointing but there you are – you will never know your Mother now as a Radio Star! (13 April 1957)



Veronica with Clare in 1956

While in Delmenhorst Veronica pursued her love of music, particularly as a member of a group run by John Sanders that sang madrigals. Anthony has a programme of an evening of 'Songs and Sonnets', from the 16th and 17th centuries, which concludes with the statement: 'We wish to thank Mrs G.R. Watts for the use of her Drawing Room'. John Sanders had been organ scholar at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, and was doing his National Service in Daddy's regiment. He was later a distinguished organist, conductor, choir trainer and composer, including being organist of Gloucester Cathedral from 1967 to 1994, and director of the Three Choirs Festival from 1968 to 1994.

During this period Anthony and Paul continued as boarders at Prior Park, coming home by boat and train in the school holidays. Anthony's attitude to the Germans became rather negative and suspicious. He writes:

I read lots of books about the War, mainly prisoner-of-war escape stories, but also books like Scourge of the Swastika by Lord Russell of Liverpool, on the Holocaust. Walking down the road in Germany, I found it difficult to avoid

the thought that some of the people passing me would have been involved in these atrocities. I resisted Motti's efforts to maintain our German, in which I had been quite fluent, and refused to take German at school. Looking back, I strongly regret this: I have since had several close German friends and have become a fervent European. But the shadow of the War was still strong throughout our childhood.

Veronica remained quite fragile physically. She had had her kneecap removed following a tennis injury as a teenager, and was often tired. She always had a rest in the afternoon (after which she would sometimes share chocolates with us).

Despite this, Veronica was very strong-willed and tenacious. She was determined that we should all have a good Catholic education, and – as noted above – persuaded the Christian Brothers to accept Anthony and Paul to Prior Park with minimal fees (we had no spare money at all at that time). She could be very persuasive, disarming people with her integrity and directness.

Paul writes:

One day when I was in the Lower VI at Prior and had been caught smoking (again) and when I was summoned to Brother Beattie's study (he was the Head at that time), he said that I ought to be expelled but he couldn't do that as my mother was a Saint and none of us should do anything that hurt her!! I think that probably meant I got the 'strap' or something!! Anyway ...no expulsion!

During this period Veronica had fairly regular periods when she was unwell, but also some happy times – including some social occasions:

26th September... Even though yesterday was my first day up, I feel wonderfully better – perhaps because I had such a very happy day. For one thing the sun shone and it was as warm as summer and delicious outside. It was the famous 'Maude's Day'... I was able to go to the Parade, Cocktails, Buffet Lunch, etc., and I even went to the Ball in the evening, and instead of having an awful relapse, I feel wonderful, I enjoyed it all so much (28 December 1957).

There was some social contact with German people, especially the von Wallenburg family:

7th October... Last night Daddy and I went to Frau von Wallenburg's birthday party in Bremen. It was very interesting to go to a 100% German party. (28 December 1957)

On 23 December 1957, there is the first reference to Patrick:

Mummy and the children went to NAAFI in the morning, and were brought back by Father Thompson, the RC chaplain at Verden, who had come over to Delmenhorst to hear confessions as Father Callan, our own Chaplain, is away

on compassionate leave. He had coffee and heard confessions in the house before leaving. (28 December 1957)

This may have been the first time that Veronica met Patrick.



Veronica in 1958

By now the Army was beginning to reduce its presence in Germany, linked to the general defence cuts:

Delmenhorst Garrison is now diminishing rapidly, and soon only 35 Regt. at Adelheide will remain, as 77 Regt. and 30 Regt. are returning to England to disband. It appears probable that 35 Regt. will be doing likewise in October – we hope so – but this has not been officially confirmed yet. (28 December 1957)

The first issue of 1958 contained a plaintive and rather poignant editorial:

The family's life since its inception in 1940 has been unsettled, nomadic but happy. However, the lack of a settled home, of 'roots', has created in many of us a desire for these things. We want to settle down in England, to have a

real home, to have a stable environment. Let us hope that, through the grace of God, 1958 will see these hopes realised. (4 January 1958)

During the 1958 Easter holidays news arrived at last of a posting back to England:

At last Daddy has been posted – as adjutant to a TA regiment in Leeds. For over a year now we have been expecting a posting, and for much longer than that we have been longing to go back to England. From most points-of-view, Yorkshire is the worst possible county we could go to: it is at the opposite end of England to all our relatives and friends, the country is not so picturesque [sic!], and we will be a long way from the boys' school. But on the other hand, as Daddy points out, there will be much more likelihood of his getting a good job in the north than in the south after his probable 'retirement' from the army in 1961. (26 April 1958)

For the first time, a detailed diary was provided by Veronica, covering the period from 15 January 1958 to 23 April 1958, with almost daily entries. It includes eight references to visits from Patrick (Father Thompson), one adding 'talked for three hours'. It also covered lots of social engagements and family activities, including the following entries:

January 24th. First organ lesson with John (Sanders) – very confusing and complicated.

February 16th. Went... in afternoon with John (Sanders) to Maria (Ahrens) for tea, and then to opera – *Tristan and Isolde* – which was wonderful. Back to Maria's for supper.

March 12th. Went to Colin's birthday party in Mess. Buffet supper. Great fun but another very late night.

March 26th. Gordon took children and I to Bremen for shopping and bought me new tweed suit – loose line – and a blue hat: both very nice indeed.

March 30th. Gave Veronica Mary first cookery lesson. David called, and then John, and then two other subalterns.

April 4th. In evening heard St Matthew Passion on radio. Magnificent. (26 April 1958)

The next issue of the Chronicle announced the family's arrival in Leeds:

At long last, after four long years, the family has returned permanently to England. Our enthusiasm at this long-looked-forward-to event was somewhat dampened when we saw the filthy conditions of our new house in Lidgett Lane, Leeds 8. But the whole family has set to work with a will, and now it is beginning to look clean, attractive and ours... It is furnished, but the junk left behind by the last occupants – and what a lot of it there was! – has been

thrown out, and the more hideous of the furnishings have been removed into the attic. (27 August 1958)

A couple of weeks later, the Chronicle reported:

The first few weeks of our stay in Leeds are over and we can be justly proud of our achievements. The house has been thoroughly cleaned and reorganised, our own belongings have been unpacked and put tidily away, the kitchen has been transformed by a few tins of red and white paint from the ugliest room in the house (always excluding the 'Black Hole of Calcutta' next to the dining room) to the prettiest, the garden has received a surprising amount of attention – the flower beds have been weeded and dug up, and the lawns mowed regularly – and supper times are now actually approaching the ever-elusive daily time of 7.30. Achievements indeed! (13 September 1958)

Veronica Mary's schooling was a matter of concern, but a solution was found:

A very fortunate solution to the problem – its difficulty aggravated by the fact that Shammy, Veronica Mary's godmother, has provided a considerable sum of money for her future education at a *Catholic* school – was provided by the offer by the nuns of St Gemma's to educate her on half-fees provided that Mummy is available to do occasional teaching in case of emergency. So once again, just as with Brother Robinson at Prior Park six years ago, our education problems have been almost miraculously solved. (7 September 1958)

We also had a new *au pair* girl:

At Easter we mentioned the possibility of Maria Holm, a young Greenland girl living in Copenhagen, coming to England with us to learn English and in return to help with housework. This finally materialised, and very fortunately so, for, as Mummy says, she doesn't know where she would have been without her. She has worked extremely hard and uncomplainingly, and with her unfailing good nature and humour has befriended us all. But we hope she is also learning some English! (7 September 1958)

In addition, there was an article about a visit to the Yorkshire countryside with Mr and Mrs Cribb, which removed some negative stereotypes:

What beautiful countryside it is: high hills, deep valleys, long views of rustic quiet and grandeur, wide expanses of cultivated fields, the harvest ruined but beautiful still. (13 September 1958)

9. A New Life with Patrick

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 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. Father Murphy commented on Veronica's financial concerns repeatedly during their correspondence between 1954 and 1958: he used to send gifts of money periodically, to help her.

Veronica's faith was an enormous support to her in all her struggles. Her belief in God was strong and deep. She prayed a great deal, and always tried to do what was right and good.

It is clear from the many letters we have to Veronica from Patrick 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 in June 1959 (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 Shammy, 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 (our grandmother), which indicates that she already knew about Veronica's love for Patrick and totally accepted it. She had not

yet told her husband (Uncle Teddy), 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 the letter dated 20 April 2002 quoted in Chapter 6):

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



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

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 Patrick. 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!

10. Arun Tutors (1962-82)

When Patrick left the priesthood in 1962 (see separate biography of Patrick Watts), he came to live full-time with us, and we 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.



Veronica 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, Motti and Poppa 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; Poppa also taught there (the school closed in 1988). Though Veronica never undertook any formal teacher training, she was widely regarded as a wonderful teacher.

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.



Veronica and Patrick on their wedding day in 1976

11. Retirement (1982-93)

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.

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 in Cardinals Green at Easter 1987

In 1989 Veronica and Patrick made their last move, to a bungalow at 2 The Causeway, West Wrattling, Cambridgeshire, where they spent their final years. For Veronica's 70th birthday, she, Patrick and the four of us had dinner together at the Red Lion in Hinxton. On the following day we had a party at Anthony and Gilly's house at 3 Summerfield, Cambridge, with a proper cricket match at Gonville & Caius College sports ground (overlooked by the house) at which a family cricket team containing seven members of the family (Anthony, Paul, Patrick, Piers, David, John and Richard) played and beat the 3rd XI of St Giles CC (Anthony and David's local club).

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

In 1992, a year before her death, Veronica made a last return visit to Gosport and Southsea, with Anthony, Veronica Mary and Michael, re-visiting some of the places of her childhood. We each have a DVD of the visit. Anthony writes:

It was a very special visit, for all of us. It included a visit to St Mary's Church in Gosport, where Motti [Veronica] had been received into the Catholic Church in 1939 [see Chapter 5]. I had just bought a video-camera, so we have a visual record of the visit (though my skills as a cameraman were rather rudimentary!). The final scene, poignantly, is of Motti looking out at the sea. Though none of us said so, we all realised that it was probably the last time she would see the sea, which had been an important feature for much of her life.

There were other family occasions during Veronica's last year, some in Cambridge because it was accessible for her.

Veronica ran a choir at West Wrating for the Catholic church at Linton. In addition to playing the piano very well (especially Chopin), she also played the organ for several churches during her life. Her love of the instrument came from listening when she was young to an organ being played in the Garrison church in Old Portsmouth, which was destroyed in the War.

Of Veronica's love of music, Anthony writes:

After Motti moved to Cambridge, we went to many lovely concerts together, in King's and elsewhere. But perhaps the two most memorable occurred earlier.

One was the all-day Bach Choir performance of the St Matthew Passion conducted by David Willcocks in 1964. Gradually other members of the family came, including Nanna Vi, who later asked for the St Matthew Passion to be played when she was dying in 1976. Motti often took my hand during the words 'Truly this was the Son of God'. We used to take scores with us. David Willcocks in his autobiography talked about the same people coming to these performances every year with their battered scores: he was obviously talking about us! We went every year until a year or two before Motti's death in 1993, when ill-health prevented her from doing so. After her death we couldn't bear to go for a few years, but then we resumed, and it continues to be a family gathering, in memory of Motti, always on Passion or Palm Sunday.

The other was a Prom which Motti, Clare and I went to at the Royal Albert Hall in 1968. It was the day that the Russian tanks rolled in to Prague to suppress the Czech attempt to break free from Russian rule. The Soviet State Symphony Orchestra was making its Proms debut, with the famous Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich scheduled to perform Dvorak's Cello Concerto – an iconic Czech work. As we arrived outside the Hall a group of people handed us notes requesting that, as a mark of respect for the Czech people, we should not applaud at the end of the performance. But the moment that Rostropovich started playing, it was utterly clear that he was totally expressing his sympathies with the Czechs. It was the most extraordinary performance, passionate and sublime (it can still be accessed on Google). At the end, the emotions we all felt were almost tangible. When there is such deeply shared feeling, applause provides catharsis. We all hesitated, and then

gradually, reluctantly, but then fervently, we started to clap, caught between feelings of betrayal but also of recognition for a sublime performance that had expressed our collective feelings more than any words could ever have done. It was so wonderful that we shared that experience with Motti.

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. Clare writes:

Mummy's health was generally very bad and she was becoming increasingly desperate to find someone who would help her. Her own doctors were useless and unwilling to help in any way. I think they didn't really know what to do and ended up classifying her as a nuisance.

Mummy remembered that our cleaner in Littlehampton, Heather, had later married an ex-Royal Navy surgeon who had set up a practice in Harley Street, possibly specialising in people with chronic fatigue although I am not sure about that. Mummy contacted him and went for an appointment. Gilly took Mummy in the car – she wasn't well enough to travel on public transport – and I went with her to the appointment. He said he felt she was on too many drugs, that they were having an adverse effect on her health and that she should come off as many as possible. This she did.

Gilly (Anthony's wife) and I then returned with her to London two weeks later for a follow-up appointment. Mummy was very tired afterwards but the thought of going to John Lewis for a bit of retail therapy cheered her up immensely. We all went for a quick shop: very quick because of her limited stamina. Before we left, we all went to the coffee shop for a cup of tea. Mummy was happy and optimistic because she finally thought someone might help her. We had a lovely cup of tea and then I had to leave to catch the train and collect the children. I remember very vividly getting up from the table and walking away to the entrance. I then turned back to wave to her and blow her a kiss, and she did the same to me. That was the last time I saw Mummy conscious. That night she had a massive brain haemorrhage, and she died two days later. I have always felt that the advice to stop several drugs so quickly may have contributed to her brain haemorrhage. This might be my imagination: we will never know for certain.

Veronica died in Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, on 7 May 1993. She was buried in the graveyard at St Andrew's Church, West Wrating, in the top right-hand corner. 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').

12. Reflections

Veronica Mary writes:

The most amazing gift that our mother had was her warmth and empathy towards all. She was a beautiful, radiant spirit, strong, non-judgemental, ever patient and understanding, a wonderful mother and steadfast friend. Mummy's love for her children was passionate, fiercely protective and selfless. She weaved a web of love around us that has remained unbroken throughout our lifetimes and has sustained us and given us strength when the going has been tough.

Paul writes:

I always had a deep and profound love for Motti and respected the way she protected and cared for her family. She could make the most humdrum thing fun. For instance when we were in Frome we would always do the washing up with us having to guess how many items needed washing. Sometimes with my pocket money I would go to Woolworth's and buy some 'perfume' for her which I think cost 6d!! Motti always accepted it as though it was Rive Gauche! I also remember sitting at the table by the window in Frome. It was evening and we were playing a card game listening to a concert, I think it was The Dream of Gerontius. Anyway Motti started crying, so I did too, and we had to abandon the game. I recall this happening more than once!!

Anthony adds:

With Motti there was quite a lot of crying (as well as laughing), but healthily so. A family that cries together, grows closer together!

Not the least of the many gifts she gave to us as our mother was that, while understanding and valuing our distinctive characters and temperaments, she always made each of us feel that she loved us equally.

Clare writes:

In many ways I was brought up as an only child although I had three wonderful grown-up siblings who I used to see during the holidays. I do have some memories of growing up with Veronica but even those are few. Because of this I felt very close to Mummy and I would describe her as my very best friend. Poppa and I didn't always have an easy relationship, I was probably very annoying but I adored Mummy as did all of us. We used to have such a lot of fun together and I could always talk to her about anything.

I used to get up in the morning and immediately climb into bed with her and we would just talk for ages. I still did this in my thirties, the only difference was that my children would climb in too!!

My most vivid memories are of Norfolk Gardens. We used to watch a television programme, I think it was called Face the Music, a panel game

about classical music. Afterwards Mummy and I would dance and sing round the house together, although she had to be careful because of her back.

Mummy occasionally played the organ at St Catherine's Church in Littlehampton. At the time in question she was rather out of practice. I think it was Midnight Mass and the normal organist was ill. Mummy was asked to stand in but she wasn't very confident. I went up with her to the organ loft to help. Mass started and she asked me to pull out some stops. Unfortunately every time I pulled out a stop it came away in my hand. Mummy and I started to giggle. This got worse and worse as the pile of stops on the floor got bigger and bigger. By the end we were quite hysterical. The organ playing wasn't the best and I remember us making a hasty retreat after mass before anyone could find out who had been playing.

I also remember summer evenings. We would occasionally have a bottle of wine. This was very rare as it was too expensive but sometimes Poppa would buy a bottle of Niersteiner Gutes Domtal, I think it was a Liebfraumilch. We would sit in the garden and listen to Albinoni.

She taught at the convent and was my German teacher. She examined me for my German oral. It was very funny because she asked me how many brothers and sisters I had and whether I had any pets and where I lived. Unlike other people I couldn't make up the answers as she knew the truth! Luckily she gave me an A!

I remember one outing to Portsmouth when I was about 15 and about to do my O-levels. She made me speak German all the way in the car, which was a long journey, to practise for my oral. I don't think I really wanted to but she was insistent. Actually it was hilarious. Somehow she always made everything enjoyable.

The best times were when we used to go shopping together. We would go for the day either to Portsmouth, Southampton or latterly Cambridge. Poppa would pack us off after breakfast for the day and we would have a wonderful time meandering through John Lewis persuading each other to buy things. When I was grown up she was always saying 'Darling you must buy that, you might not find anything so nice again' and so I would. It used to cost a fortune and we would arrive home laden with bags. Poppa would then make a cup of tea and would have to endure us trying everything on for him to see. I think it must have been very boring for him but he always appeared to enjoy it and say how nice it all was. Funnily enough I think Veronica has the same outings with Vicky and I do with Lissie.

I have absolutely no memories whatsoever of Mummy ever getting cross with me. We would talk about anything and everything and we always had lots of fun. I think I would probably describe myself as a Mummy's girl. Even when I was little I used to cry when I went to stay with Nanna and Uncle which probably wasn't very nice for them and may account for the fact that I was the least close to them of the four of us. It must have been very annoying. I think being sent off to boarding school when I was seven

was pretty devastating for that reason but I never, ever, blamed Mummy in any way. I suppose as a child you just accept it.

Then there was the time I ran away from school. I was extremely unhappy for various reasons and eventually couldn't stand it any more and ran away at break time. I had no money with me and went into town to the arcade and found a telephone box to make a reverse charge call to the Manor. Mummy picked up the phone and immediately knew something was wrong. We weren't allowed to make phone calls home. She said she would come down immediately. I returned to school; I don't think anyone knew I had run away. She telephoned Paul and they both came down that afternoon. Mummy talked to Reverend Mother and Paul helped me to pack. He was looking very handsome in his Army uniform, and as we passed some of the girls he said: 'Are you the ones who have been horrible to my sister?' We went home and I then lived at home for a year going to a local convent (before going back to boarding school). Incidentally that was an occasion when Poppa was amazing. I walked in through the door and he asked what I would like for supper. I don't think there was ever any discussion about it again.

One or two memories about James and Lissie with Mummy. Obviously they were very young when she died and she was really not very well for several years beforehand but two memories stand out very clearly. When they were very little I always used to go up and stay with Motti and Poppa when Richard went off on a trip. This was obviously very often, so I suppose I went once or twice a month for a few days at a time. James made up some game where Mummy had to be his prisoner for some reason. They were living in Countryman at the time. He locked her in the bathroom for hours. She stayed there quite happily while he passed food and drinks through the door. Strange boy! She always loved playing make-believe games.

The other thing she did was to play schools with them in bed. By this time Mummy was in bed quite a lot. The children used to go in with all their dolls and teddy bears and they would all be on the bed. They would then spend hours playing schools. I think Mummy was always the headmistress in order to keep some control!

I could go on and on about various memories although some of them have obviously faded over the years. As I said earlier, Mummy wasn't just my mother: she was my very best friend. She was always so kind, loving, interested, fun, I could go on and on with superlatives. We were all so lucky to have such a wonderful person as our mother: no family could have had anyone better. I still miss her enormously.
