

Audrey Harvey



Childhood Memories

The idea for this book came from notes written down, many years previously, by Audrey especially for her grand-daughter Sarah Stuart.

The photographs in the book are copied from the family album. Other pictures from archives are used to illustrate the period.

With many thanks to Ann Holloway for her dedication and skilled help

Dedicated to a dear mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and friend, Audrey Harvey.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Audrey Harvey born 1915

This will be very awkward to begin, as it is difficult to know exactly what age you can start remembering. I know, as I was told, that I was born at Gate Cottage in Takeley, which was pulled down sometime ago. Really, I think the first thing which comes to mind is Teagles Farm, along Parsonage Road at Takeley. My paternal grandfather and grandmother lived there, and ran a chicken farm. They had a donkey which grazed in a triangular field, and always pulled a donkey cart, which is how we got to Dunmow. There was a pond with ducks on, and one day I was horrified to see Prior, who I called 'Pi', carrying two ducks by the necks, squawking horribly. Prior, by the way, worked for my grandfather, I don't know his other name. Anyway he wouldn't say what he was doing with the ducks, but I was even more horrified to see the ducks' heads lying on the draining board in the kitchen, and eventually the ducks appeared on the dining table, not for me though. I also dimly remember a commotion over my sister Marjorie being stung by a wasp. As she was only a baby then, that makes me between three and four years old.

I think we only lived at Teagles for a short while, and then moved into a house at Stansted, together with my grandmother, on my mother's side this time. It was a small house, with two bedrooms, a sitting room and kitchen-living room. There was a scullery (which was reached by going out of the back door) with a sink, a cold-water tap, a brick built copper, and a huge wooden roller mangle. On the end of this was what was called the workshop. This was quite a fair sized place: brick built, with a wooden floor and, as the garden ran uphill, three stone steps leading up to it. Sunny mornings I would sit on this step to eat my breakfast. We played in this workshop, and gradually it would get filled up with all kinds of things. Then my mother would have a big clear out, and all would be tidy again, with room to move. There was quite an empty space under the floorboards, and quite a lot of stuff was put under there. Some of it, these days would almost be museum exhibits. For instance, there were at least two phonographs, the sort that played cylindrical records. The first one

of those records were made of wax. Heaven help you if you dropped one - disaster!

As I have said, the garden sloped up hill. On the left side, it was bordered by a wall which was part of the outhouses of the public house next door, so it had a roof. The other side was a brick wall about four feet high, separating us from the next door garden. On the left hand side was a rockery surmounted by big clumps of tiger lilies - I haven't seen very many of those since - and then there were runner beans and any other sort of vegetable which could be persuaded to grow there. Right at the top of the garden was quite a sturdy shed, in which we kept chickens for quite a long while. Then, when they disappeared, Dad put a swing up in the doorway. We had a huge walnut tree in the garden at the rear, which overhung us quite considerably, giving a nice lot of shade in the summer and a plentiful supply of walnuts in the autumn. The wall that ran up the left side grew a lot of moss and lichen, and I used to spend hours picking moss out of the wall and arranging it on a board to make miniature gardens. The paths were made from a tuppenny bag of bird - sand, with Plasticine statues, and all sorts of ornaments. Farmyards were another thing we used to do, I never seem to have actually played with these creations, because I was always so busy adding to them.

My first day at school, I can remember quite vividly. It was a small church school at the end of our street, only a few minutes walk. It had a gravel playground which was murder on the knees when you fell down. As my mother took me to see the infant teacher, a little girl said "Hello Audrey," which absolutely amazed me, that she knew my name. The head infant teacher was a Miss Watson, and she had an assistant called Miss Crane, very appropriately really, as she was tall and slim, with very long legs. I was lucky, because living so near, I could go home to dinner. But some of the children had to come a very long way, and they used to bring bread and jam.

Not long after I started school, my Auntie Gracie came to stay. I did not attach much importance to it, as being single, she often came on a visit. But, when I found one morning she was getting my breakfast instead of my mother, I felt it was taking things a bit too far. However, I was informed that Mummy had

toothache and was staying in bed. So I went off to school. Back home at dinner time I was met by a beaming aunt who said "Don't make a noise, but go upstairs and you can see your new baby sister."

I can't remember what I actually said, but it made the beam vanish, and the reply came "Alright Miss Know-all, go up and see" which I did and met my sister Clara Marion Cornell. She absolutely refused to be called Clara, and was called Marion at school, but has been Babs otherwise to all friends and relations.



So now there were three of us, but I seemed to take it all in my stride. In the summer, mum would take us for picnics in the hayfields. At that time the farmer would cut the long grass and leave it in big swathes which we used to

build into houses and have fights throwing it at each other. It smelt glorious. Opposite where we lived there was a place called the Castle Hills, which was once the site of a castle (there was one wall left), and it was composed of various-sized hills, culminating in a long slope down to a small stream. In winter time this stream used to flood the low field it flowed through. When the snow came and it froze, we had an ideal winter sports place. Dad made us a lovely toboggan with metal runners, and we would drag it up to the top of one of those hills and toboggan down and right across the ice. In one place there was a drop of two feet, I wouldn't go down that particular slope, but my sister Marjorie would. She was so much more daring. The big boys would make huge slides which shone like glass. There again, Marjorie would go on them. Guess who didn't!

After an afternoon playing and tobogganing we would all go home, ravenous. Mum would have piles of dripping toast, real toast made in front of the Kitchener fire. I'm sure it tasted different to toast made in a toaster. Babs of course wasn't very old. When we came down on the toboggan, as it was large enough for the three of us, we could put her in the middle so she wouldn't fall off.

Dad always seemed to have some sort of conveyance to take us out in, even if it was a motorbike and sidecar.

Later on it was a car, so we used to go to London to the museums when the weather wasn't very good, but otherwise it would be picnics in Takeley Forest and days out at the seaside. Clacton, Southend, Maldon, Brightlingsea and Walton-on-the-Naze were the favourites. Dad's sister, Auntie Clara lived at Ramsgate, and we had holidays there, going down to Southend and across by paddle steamer. One of these boats was the 'Royal Sovereign' and another was called 'The Golden Eagle'. That was very exciting! We had the big front bedroom that had a balcony, which I thought was really marvellous. At that time, you could see the sea from there, but there are houses between now. The beach at Ramsgate is lovely, and we used to walk along the sands to a place called Dumpton Gap. There was quite a big headland there, and one day we timed it wrongly, and only just got round it before the tide



caught us. Poor Auntie was getting really worried. Of course there was Punch and Judy on the sands, and as a special treat, we would be taken to see the Pierrot show on the pier. Along the front were little carriages pulled by, I

think, Shetland ponies. They were all different. My favourite one was a golden coach like Cinderella went to the ball in. That was sixpence a ride.

When we went to Clacton or somewhere like that, it was a major undertaking really. As I seem to remember, it would take us nearly four hours to get there. Babs was invariably car-sick, and then sometimes it would rain. Dad would say "That's the last time," but off we would go again, a week or two after. There wasn't a bypass around Colchester then, so we had to go through the town, which has a level crossing in the middle. Even then, there used to be traffic hold-ups. I can't imagine what it would be

like now. The people who lived next door to us said they never liked to go to bed before they heard us come home safely.

Another of our favourite walks and also a place for picnics was called the trout stream. It was really pretty. First of all we would have to walk along a road beside the railway line, and we waved to all the steam trains that went along. If the engine driver didn't wave, the guard nearly always did, and sometimes we were lucky and they both did. Then there was the excitement of crossing the level crossing, and then there was a little train which took coal up to a big nursery. We didn't understand for a long while how they managed to move. Now we know it was done by pulleys. Eventually we arrived at our destination. The path ran alongside the stream. Sometimes and in some places, if you were daring enough, you could cross it by stepping stones. On the left, the ground sloped up to a wood with little glades in it, all covered with beautiful green grass with buttercups and daisies in the summer. The trains ran the other side of the trout stream so we could still wave to them. We spent some of our happiest hours there. It must have been peaceful for Mum as well.

There was a recreation ground in Stansted, that was not very interesting, it just had a few things, but we would take bats and balls up there quite often. There was a little sweet shop nearby and we used to buy sweets there, with strict injunction not to buy "Packers chocolate," as it was "cheap and nasty". Actually it was a bit gritty really, but we would buy it if we could get away with it. For one thing, you got a lot more for your money - a consideration when you rarely had more than one penny to spend.

Every Sunday morning, Dad would take us for a long walk for miles. He would end up by carrying Babs on his shoulders. There were some lovely walks around Stansted and the best part about them was the fact that you didn't have to retrace your footsteps, but could always make a round trip of it. About that time my Grandmother was living with us, and I did hear Dad say once that we got rid of extra steam that way. I think he did too, as he used to sleep on Sunday afternoons.

And then there was the day I came in to find Granny with a lapful of white needlework, which she attempted to camouflage.

I said "Are you making nappies?" I can't remember the answer I received, except I think you can say I was 'fobbed off'.

My Mother and Auntie Gracie were very friendly with the two maiden ladies, who lived about ten minutes walk away. They had seen better days and they eked out a living by doing beautiful sewing and knitting. We called them Aunties Mae and Edith and their mother was Auntie Kohler - she was a typical Victorian, tall and stately and dressed in voluminous black clothes. It was Whit Sunday and we were told we were going to spend the day with these aunties, and that Auntie Gracie would come and fetch us when it was time to come home. And spend the day we did, which was alright until it started to get dark and I began to think "Enough is enough ". I was eleven years old then, and by nine o'clock was feeling distinctly uneasy. However Auntie Gracie arrived shortly after nine and, on the way home, told us we had a baby brother. This statement was received with complete equanimity by Babs and Marjorie, but I burst into tears. I think I must have had a presentiment, because much as we all loved David George Reginald, from then on, when I went out, David in his pram accompanied me, which rather cramped my comings and goings. For one thing, try taking a pram over a stile!

One of our favourite places was what we called the alley fields, as it was reached by an alley. It had a disused gravel pit in it, which of course added to its charms, and we made a sort of den in the hedge which was a thick one, but it was difficult to get the pram there. This place was also near to the Auntie Kohlers, so we could go there for a drink of water, and possibly some strawberries or raspberries if those were in season. They were very enthusiastic gardeners and we would be shown the roses, and how to nip a leaf of lemon verbena to enjoy the lovely lemony smell. They also kept quite a lot of rabbits. Looking back, I can see it was to add to their income. I thought the rabbits were pets, and was rather mystified at the way the numbers decreased sometimes - but I understood how they increased - I think!



All through my childhood, and indeed all my life, I have loved music. As I have mentioned earlier, my very first recollections are of a phonograph with wax cylinder records. It had a huge horn loudspeaker, and we learnt to know, and love, all sorts of music. Over and above this was the fact that my mother was a musician, playing both the piano and violin, as were also her two sisters. We always had a piano, and at one time we had two, and when my two aunts were there, there was my mother and Auntie Phillis on the piano, with Auntie Gracie playing the violin. They didn't need any music. One would say "What about this?" and would strike the first chords and off they would go. My grandfather was a church organist and also sang in amateur concerts, together with his daughters. He sang a lot of Negro plantation songs, some funny, some sad, but all, at least I thought, very wistful. They were sung to us as lullabies by my mother, and I have sung them to my children and grandchildren. I'm not quite sure of their opinion, as sometimes I've got a queer reaction.

When wireless started to appear, we would see Dad every evening fiddling with cats whiskers and various other mysterious bits. Then he would hold up an object and we were informed it was an earphone, and he would say "Listen, that's 2LO from London," and we would listen with eyes as big as tea-saucers and hear a lot of crackling and a tinny voice, miles and miles away. The crystal set, of course, was only a forerunner. After that it was valves and unwieldy sets that sat on top of the piano, with an accumulator behind the door, which sometimes leaked acid onto the carpet. By then, there were several sets of earphones attached to the set, so even upstairs we could lie in bed and listen. There was a special program for children, where they read out birthdays, and one day, perhaps my ninth or tenth birthday, my name was actually mentioned and I was told to look in the top drawer of the Davenport where I found a little doll. Great excitement!

Books were another thing that played a big part in my life. My grandmother, having been a school teacher, had accumulated quite a number. I read everything I could lay my hands on - Mrs Henry Wood's novels, which were typically Victorian (I wouldn't want to read them now) and Sir Walter Scott's. There was a complete set of Arthur Mee's Children's Encyclopaedia which I read from cover to cover, thus imbibing an enormous amount of facts and knowledge, some of which have stood me in good stead, I suppose.

We used to have musical evenings with Mum at the piano, and sing and dance. Our long suffering Auntie Kohlers were the audience. It was all great fun, but it seemed to die out after the advent of David. First of all we were told, we mustn't wake the baby, and then as we all got older, David wasn't keen on that sort of thing, but I can remember a lot of them.

At eleven years old, I was chosen to play the chief part in a nativity play put on by the church. I distinguished myself by catching measles just before the play was due to be produced, so it had to be postponed. But eventually it got off to a start. I had to be on view nearly all the time, and when I wasn't actually on stage, I was in a box at the side of the stage with the vicar, dressed at first as Santa Claus and then as a bishop. The idea was that I made a wish to see the actual nativity and so it was re-enacted with wondering comments from me. In the last Act, I was tucked up in bed again, and the Bishop, now Santa Claus again, had to kiss me good night. I wasn't having it though, and turned my face away. After the play, which ran several nights, all the cast had a party, during which the Vicar observed to everyone listening, that, as I had dodged him every time on stage, he was going to claim his kiss now, which he did to my great confusion.



With David now on the scene, complete with pram, our Sunday morning walks still continued, but were not so interesting, as we had to go where the pram could go, as I've mentioned before. Dad would push the pram, until he saw one of his friends approaching, at which

point I would have to take over, as it was definitely ‘not done’ for a man to push a pram then.

I think it must have been about that time, that Marjorie, Babs and I started to go to Bishop’s Stortford on the train. We used to go Saturday afternoons, on the four minutes past two, which took seven minutes to get to Stortford. Dad used to go off on his motor bike, to the swimming baths, opposite the Castle Gardens which was where we were bound for. We used to go to watch Dad swimming, at which he was very good. His star turn was to dive in at the deep end, and while we were expectantly waiting for him to appear where he went in, he would have swum under water to the other end, and was standing waving to us. I wonder if he knew how that used to worry me.

Actually these afternoons were all rather worrying to me. I don’t suppose I was much more than eleven years, which would make Marjorie eight, and Babs five. The train journey to Stortford wasn’t so bad, as I knew it would definitely stop there. The snag was, Marjorie would insist on going to the toilet, and I was worried that she would still be in there when we were ready to get off the train. Still she always emerged in time. The worrying time came when we got to the station to catch the train home. The slow train from London would draw in, discharge its passengers and then go into a siding to make way for the express from London. This would also stop and then it would be express to Cambridge. I was always terrified that we would get on the wrong train and be whisked off to Cambridge. I must have made a complete nuisance of myself to the porters, asking which was the train to Stansted. I’m still a little bit nervous of catching trains, and I really think those early train trips are to blame for it.

The Castle Gardens we used to visit were very pleasant.

The front part was set out as a park with flower beds, lawns and seats. Then there was the children’s playground, complete with swings, sandpits and a contrivance called a Maypole which were chains hung from a central pole with hand-holds.



You ran round at top speed and then launched yourself into the air, where you swung around. It sounds like hard work to me now, but we enjoyed it. What it did for our shoes, I don't like to think!

In the centre of the gardens was the Castle Mound, with a few walls on the top, which was all that was left of the origins of



the original castle. This was reached by quite a steep flight of steps. Sometimes the gate at the foot of the steps was left unlocked, so of course we would go, although, except for the view, once you got to the top, there wasn't anything to do

except to get your breath back.

Christmases were great fun. I think the first signs would start about six weeks before, when Mum would make the puddings. That entailed a great deal of preparation, very different to today's ready- packed ingredients. The raisins all had to be stoned - a very sticky and fiddling process, and I'm sure leading to a lesser amount going in the pudding, than we originally started with. They were sweet and juicy, and lovely to eat. The candied peel had sugar in the centre, and was also in demand. The lump of butcher's suet had to be chopped. No packet suet was used for Christmas puddings then. I don't think there was much about anyway.

We always had a Christmas tree, a real one of course, decorated with spun-glass balls and real wax candles, which were fixed by little springs. These candles were actually lit, and they never all stood up straight. It's a marvel we are all here to tell the tale. Chicken for Christmas dinner, our once-a-year treat. There would be a box of crackers, (we called them 'bon-bons'), and with twelve in a box, that meant we had six for dinner and six for tea. We were lucky children, I think. We hung a pillowcase up on Christmas Eve and it was always full. Auntie Clara, I know, contributed a lot for our Christmas. One year, we actually had a real hamper from her. It was lined with paper, and stored in the back bedroom. I used to go in and look at it, and managed to tear

the paper between the wicker, but all I could see was something made of striped tin, which didn't satisfy my curiosity one bit. On Christmas morning, I think Marjorie and I had (amongst other things) a toy bathing machine each (hence the stripes). These bathing machines were little huts on wheels for ladies to change in, and which were drawn down to the edge of the sea, so the occupants could step modestly into the water. No, they weren't wearing bikinis!

To return to our Christmas festivities, Christmas Day after tea was the highlight of the day. Dad played games with us, and he really played. We hadn't an awful lot of room, and he was quite a big man, so when we play Blind Man's Buff, it was very difficult to avoid him, and entailed a lot of shrieking. I remember quite clearly one time my Mother yelling "Mind the table, Reggie." He was crawling across the kitchen table, (which was protesting quite audibly) to avoid being caught. Family Coach was a riot as well, and he also did a couple of magician acts, which involved me being his assistant. Then Mum would play the piano for musical chairs and other games. I think the neighbours must have been quite long suffering. They were an elderly couple with a grown up daughter Ethel. We used to play games on Boxing Day as well, but they didn't come up to the Christmas Day ones.

At night in the cold weather we would go to bed with a hot brick. These were ordinary house bricks that we put in the oven of the Kitchener after it was finished with, heated right through and then each one wrapped in flannel and put in the beds. They were very effective in warming the beds and lovely to put cold feet on. The drawback was that when they cooled down, you would push them down to the bottom of the bed, and too energetic a push would end in a resounding bang as the brick hit the floor. The bang had to be heard to be believed. It also called forth some comments from downstairs occasionally.

Another bed time 'affliction' (it was really!) was having our hair done up on curling rags. We all three girls had straight hair, cut short with a fringe. Every night at bedtime, Mum would tie our hair up in long strips of rag, twisting the hair around each piece, and then tying a tight knot. Sometimes she would pull one strand of hair very tight, which could be agonising, and sometimes also,

the curling rag would break under the strain of the knot tying, which would result in the feeling that my head was being jerked off. Disconcerting, to say the least!

We didn't have gas or electric light, but were very well lit by Aladdin lamps, that were a great improvement on the ordinary oil lamps, which we had up before Aladdin lamps were invented. They were oil lamps, but had a mantle over the flame, which gave a really bright light. Dad was agent for them (as a side line), so as they were improved upon, of course we would get the better model. However, they had to be treated with respect. When they were first lit, you couldn't turn them up to the full illumination until they had 'warmed up.' If there was a draught they also were apt to get right up, so the mantle blacked up and there were smuts everywhere, much to Mum's disgust. But they really gave a lovely light.



Dad and grandson Peter



A Kitchener Range

The one in the kitchen hung over the table, and on bath night, as we did not have a bathroom, a big round shallow hip bath was put on the table. It was really a luxurious way of bathing as, while you were in the bath, the heat from the lamp (which was considerable) could be felt very comfortably. Then there was a blazing fire in the Kitchener, with towels warming in front of it.

Mum was a firm believer in camphorated oil rubbed on the chest after a bath. It was really pungent, but not unpleasant. At one time, we had a ginger cat called Cammy, who was addicted to camphorated oil, and directly he smelt it, would appear from nowhere and energetically lick the bottle, cork or even us if he got the chance. It didn't seem to do him any harm and he lived to a ripe old age.

We always had a cat, and a little terrier dog called Midge, originally, but he ended up being called Budger - don't ask me

why. When David was a baby, some friends of Dad gave us a parrot, complete with a large cage. Dad thought it was most generous of them, as parrots were quite expensive, but we found out there was method in their madness. When Mum went upstairs to put David to bed, and the parrot discovered he was alone, he would get down the corner of his cage, and start to mutter “Shut Up. Shut Up!” gradually rising to a crescendo, by which time the dog would join in by howling. The noise was indescribable, no-one could sleep through it, let alone a baby. As Dad’s friends had four young children, all became clear. Polly used to like bread and milk in an egg cup. To encourage us to provide this delicacy, he would praise himself, saying “Good boy Polly!”, over and over again, so you had to give him his bread and milk for peace and quiet. He knew how to manage us, better than we knew how to manage him, I think. You would get a vicious peck if he felt like it. If you accepted his invitation to scratch his head, which he would offer by holding his head down to you, he would mutter away “Quite right Polly!” and then all of a sudden made a grab. To get him out of his cage, so you could clean it, we used to insert a broom handle on which he would perch. Then as we withdrew it, he would be sidling up it, no doubt thinking he was going to give us a nice jab. We used to foil that, waiting until he was nearly at the end of the broom handle, and then reversing it, much to his disgust. I think he died of old age - he always looked a bit moth eaten.

Motor delivery vans were almost unknown in those days - it was all horse and cart. We had a very jolly milkman called Mr Choppin. He had large churns of milk on his cart with various size cans to dip it out with, (no milk bottles), and real milk



with cream that formed on top. The drawback was that in the hot weather it was difficult to keep (no fridges) so it had to be scalded, which meant bringing it up to the boil. Mr Choppin was very keen on Harry Lauder, who was a Scottish singer, and would

stand at the front door and listen while Mum put on a record of 'Roaming in the Gloaming' or 'I love a Lassie'.

The baker was a very outgoing young chap, always whistling. He was a bit too outgoing for Mum, as he would knock on the door with such a resounding bang that it would wake David up, who would be having his afternoon nap on the sofa. As it seemed he couldn't or wouldn't knock on the door any other way, we got a different baker.

The coalman came with a dray (a flat cart) and a big horse. One day after a violent storm the whole street was flooded, and the children were brought home from school on the coal cart, much to their delight. There was the big horse walking majestically through the water, sending quite a wake behind him, and the children cheering and hanging off the sides of the cart.

Going back to our school, on the right hand side of our school playground the ground went up quite steeply, and was covered with grass and one or two small bushes. On summer afternoons, sometimes, a class would have its poetry or reading lesson out there. It was really pleasant. There was a scramble for the best positions, both from the point of comfort and shade, of the shade coming from the big trees at the top. I can remember,



quite clearly, learning Tennyson's *Morte d' Arthur* out there. It was more conducive to learning than in a stuffy classroom. I thought so, anyway. One thing that has seemed to die out completely is the seasonal games that we used to play. I suppose the traffic increase is the main reason. At that time there used to be hoops, big wooden ones with a stick for us girls, iron ones with a hook for the boys. Then all of a sudden, the hoops would disappear and it would be tops and whips of various shapes - the most popular ones were pear shaped, I think. You would see these tops being whipped down the middle of the street. No, it definitely wouldn't do now. Skipping ropes were mostly for girls. Single ones with handles, which you can still buy. But if you could beg an old clothes line from your mother, then you were really made, and had you own little skipping group.



There were old traditional games too, that we sang and played. I believe a lot of them have dropped out now, but at that time we had quite a repertoire. I think 'The Farmer's in his Den' is still about. Some others I remember are 'In and Out the Windows', and 'The Big Ship sailed on the Ally-ally o' and 'Poor Mary is a-weeping'. Some of them were quite complicated too.

Empire Day was always celebrated then - (May 24th). We had to write essays on the Empire. Marjorie and I won several medals between us for that. The Union Jack was flown from the school flag staff, and we also had a half-day holiday.

When the Oxford and Cambridge Boat race was imminent, the shops were full of little favours in dark blue and pale blue to wear for whichever team you backed, and some people got quite heated about it, with remarks like "Oxford the winner, Cambridge the sinner," or vice versa, being bandied about. On May 29th we all came to school wearing oak apples to celebrate Prince Charles hiding in the oak tree. I wonder why all these little customs have died out.



I belonged to a country dancing team when I was about nine years old. I enjoyed that very much. We used to go round fetes, and similar places giving displays. We also danced around the Maypole, which isn't so easy as it looks. I used to wear a long dress with a frill at the

bottom and a Kate Greenaway bonnet. Once we were taken to Shelford which was quite a long way to go in those days. We danced 'Gathering Peascods' and one in which we sang "If all the world was paper and all the seas were ink, and all the trees were bread and cheese, what would we have to drink?" There was a lot more, but those are the only two I remember now. I believe these dances were the really old traditional ones. Our teacher was very interested in them - possibly they could have been called folk dances. It used to be nice dancing on the lawns of these big houses. Of course, the weather was as capricious as it is now, and there were times when my frilled dress wasn't warm enough, and I

would have to hold my bonnet on against the breeze, (that's polite for a cold wind).

My father had an old bachelor uncle who lived by himself at a little place called Bambers Green. At the latter part of his life, and as Dad was his nearest relative, he used to go to see the old man and generally keep an eye on him. Sometimes he would take us children with him, which was a mixed pleasure as we had to kiss 'Uncle Percy', and as he had a very bristly beard, it was another case of dodging, but it didn't always come off. However, once we got the greeting over, then we were free to amuse ourselves - and that was lovely. Uncle Percy living in a little thatched cottage, which didn't interest us much, but the garden was lovely. It was full of fruit trees, and as he wasn't able to do much in the way of gardening, it had more or less grown very unkempt - a paradise for children to play in, hide, or to climb trees. Eventually, when Uncle Percy died, the cottage was left to Dad, and we used to spend whole days over there taking picnic meals, with Mum and Dad clearing the place up. There was an old range in the kitchen-living room which Mum had lit one day, probably to get rid of some rubbish, when there was quite an explosion which didn't do the kitchen range a lot of good at all. Dad thought there was probably a live cartridge in the rubbish which was put on the fire.

The cottage was called 'The Croft' and has changed hands several times since, and been built on so much, that it is probably twice the size. The trees which grew around the edge of the garden have grown so tall, it's impossible to see what it is like when I go past there, which is quite often. I wonder if any of the old trees are left. There were greengage trees, Victoria plums and damsons, not to mention gooseberry bushes and rhubarb. Emptying the cottage, there were all sorts of things, some rubbish (including piles of newspapers which went back years) and some things which were quite obviously antiques. Dad had a friend named Jo Matthews, who was quite knowledgeable about those sort of things, and when he found out what we were coming home with from 'The Croft', he really started to haunt us. You might think 'haunt' is a peculiar expression, but not in his case. He was quite an unusual man, tall, very quietly spoken and always dressed quite smartly in dark clothes, topped with a trilby hat. He had the

aggravating habit of knocking on our door and then walking several paces away, giving us the impression there was no-one there, until just as you closed the door, the tall form would materialise with an apologetic cough. One of the things he bought from us was a musical box. It was quite large, with big round metal discs which, while rotating, had little tabs which were plucked, giving a very pretty result. I have since seen one on TV and it was priced at quite a lot of money.

Every now and then we had a red letter day, when Auntie Phillis and Uncle Austin came to visit us for the day. Sometimes they would come on their own, and other times they would bring their children Greville and Joan. We would go to meet them at the station, which was only a few minutes walk away, and everyone would chatter away, nineteen to the dozen. Instead of a milk pudding, there would be rhubarb pie and custard and we would be sent off to buy tinned peaches and a tin of Libby's evaporated milk for tea, another great treat. As our visitors came from London, they always liked to go for a real country walk, of which we had plenty in Stansted. I seem to remember one of their favourite walks was up on the Castle Hills. I have mentioned what fun we had there when the snow was about. It was just as much fun in the summer, especially when the grass was dry, and then we could slide down the hills in a somewhat unconventional way.

Uncle Austin was a very nice kind uncle to have, always so interested in anything we were doing. He was very quietly spoken too. When we all went to see them off at the station, I can remember running down the platform to where the chocolate machine was, and saying "I wonder what this one has in it," and Uncle, putting his hand in his pocket, saying very mildly "Well, let's see dear, shall we?" and out would come the pennies to produce bars of Nestles milk chocolate, in their red wrappers. Terrible child, wasn't I?

Sometimes we would go up to visit them, and that was an occasion. Uncle would meet us at Liverpool Street, and as he worked in the City, he would be very smart in his black coat, striped trousers, umbrella and bowler. We would go on the Tube

to Chiswick High Road, where they lived four floors up at Prebend Mansions. There was a balcony to the flat and I thought it was wonderful to stand out there, rather nervously, and watch the trams go along, especially at night time, because then you could see the sparks in the overhead lines. Their milk and bread



deliveries used to come up on a little lift which came up on pulleys outside the kitchen window. They also had hot water taps, which were quite unusual those days. Even though most of the time they ran cold, I still considered it a great novelty. It seemed a

very different life, as indeed it was. In my mind's eye, I can still see the trams and hear the ting of their bells and the whining noise they made, which was quite peculiar to trams. Later on, the trams were changed to trolley buses, but they didn't hold the attraction that the trams did for me.

In those days, Easter seemed to rank only second to Christmas, or maybe we were extra lucky. Dad's brother Horace, had a grocer's shop in London and he could always be relied on to send something down for us, in the way of chocolate novelties. These were kept for Easter Sunday (which I suppose gave it a Christmas flavour) and we really looked forward to them. As well as all sorts of egg cups containing the chocolate eggs, I remember on Easter we had silver boxes of chocolate sardines, wrapped in silver foil, and very realistic.

Uncle Horace and Auntie Alice used to visit us at these times, quite often. They had one son named Harry, who later on used to visit us on his own, in a very racy sports car, a Wolsey Hornet, I think it was. He used to bring his girlfriends with him, two at a time. Dad used to say he was 'playing safe'. It's funny how remarks made years ago and remembered make sense now. Anyway, when he finally arrived with only Kathleen, we realised he had made his choice, and so he had.

Teagles Farm, which I mentioned earlier, was originally left to Uncle Horace, who died quite young, and so Harry inherited it.

He rented it for a time to some chicken farmers. They specialised in some wonderful White Wyandottes which were kept up in the top of a big barn. I used to love to get up there. There were nests all along the sides, with hay on the floor, and the hens sounded so contented, scratching and clucking about. This part of the barn was reached by a wooden staircase outside. One day they escaped and we looked out to see the magnificent white cockerel descending majestically down the stairs, with all his harem behind him. There was complete and utter consternation, as you can imagine. The hens much preferred their new freedom, however they were eventually rounded up. I believe that I got the blame for not shutting the door properly, though



I cannot remember. Anyway that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

When I was about twelve years old, which means David would be a year old, Mum decided she would like to play the organ again, and obtained the post of organist at Ugley Church about three miles away. Well, we always had the conventional Sunday lunch, a roast with Yorkshire pudding, so that became my job. At that time, we had an iron Kitchener, the oven of which had absolutely no controls of heat at all. You judged the heat of the oven by the amount of fire in the grate, and putting your hand in the oven to get the general idea. Compared with today's thermostats it was sheer guess work, but it worked. Anyway, I cooked the Sunday lunch, and although I must confess for the first few weeks, the Yorkshire pudding didn't turn out the same two weeks running, it was edible.

It was a very small church, placed about a mile away from the village, and sometimes, to say the congregation was sparse would be overstating the case. As David grew older, we all used to attend the service, especially when in the winter time, the evening service would be held in the afternoon.



Then, very often, except for about a couple of stalwarts, we would comprise the congregation. David and I, Dad the organ blower, Mum the organist and Marjorie and Babs the choir. As David grew still older, he was promoted to the choir, so I would be up there as well.

Auntie Gracie, who I mentioned earlier as being single, eventually married a very nice man - who became our Uncle Percy. Unfortunately he died after quite a short time, but I remember him as someone who was very fond of children, and not having a family of his own, he was only too pleased to make a fuss of newly acquired nieces and a nephew. He made me a really wonderful dolls' house, completely furnished with an upholstered three-piece suite included. I used to spend all my pocket money on little extras for it, and spent literally hours, rearranging the furniture. Then to make things complete, Dad wired it for electric light. He fixed a battery on the back, with wires from it to a bulb in each room, just a torch bulb and Mum made little shades for them. At that time, electric light was quite in its infancy for the general run of houses, so as you can imagine, I was really thrilled. I wish I knew what happened to that dolls' house, but cannot recall its fate at all. Mind you, with a very young brother, anything was likely to happen, and very often did!

When I was eleven and Marjorie was eight, Dad bought us a bicycle between us. That made life rather difficult, to say the least. We were supposed to take it in turns to ride it, but the question is what constitutes a 'turn'. Marjorie had been known to ride across the road to Buntings, the greengrocers and walk back, completely forgetting the bicycle, so when it came for my 'turn' the bicycle was nowhere to be found until it was spotted across the road!!

Around the corner from us was quite a steep hill known as Chapel Hill. This came down to a cross roads, of which Lower Street where we lived, was a turning off. As it was so steep, we were not supposed to ride down it, until one day Marjorie was feeling



adventurous. She took the bike up the hill and started off on what she thought would be a nice free wheel downhill. Somehow or other she lost control of it, but managed to turn the corner into Lower Street, passing a startled police sergeant sitting on his motor cycle, she proceeded down the street without, as she said afterwards “not having to pedal once.” The afore-mentioned police sergeant after recovering from the shock, knocked on our front door and told my granny, when she came to it, that her grand-daughter had just passed him at twenty five miles an hour. I do not supposed that would have meant an awful lot to Granny. She probably said “Dear me!” being quite a placid sort of person. Marjorie did not return for some time, so I’m afraid I didn’t get to know the general reaction to her exploit.

My grandmother, as I have said before, spent quite a lot of time with us. I remember her as a small lady, smelling of lavender water, with lace collars and a black velvet ribbon around her throat. I never remember her losing her temper. Her strongest term of disapproval was to call us a ‘little toad’ or ‘ape’. Although she had been a school mistress all her life, and consequently very well read, she was completely unpractical when it came to modern inventions. An example of this was when one of us was found playing with Dad’s electric torch, switching it on and off, and she said she was going to leave it switched on, so he would know exactly what we had been doing! She was very sweet though. Eventually she and Auntie Gracie set up home in Bishop’s Stortford, where she died when I was fifteen. I used to spend weekends there, which was always considered a treat. You could buy gramophone records from Woolworths then for sixpence, and Auntie and I would go out and buy a new record to play on her very smart gramophone. One day she also brought two little dolls, a boy and a girl who, when placed in the centre of the record, would waltz to the music. Auntie also had a lot of records, so I still had my music and she would accompany the record on her violin, if I persuaded her enough.

The drawback of staying with Auntie Gracie and Granny was called ‘Tiny’. He was a Pekinese of uncertain age, and very uncertain temper, thoroughly spoilt and with a definite grudge against anyone except for his own mistresses. I came in that

category. It didn't matter how much I buttered him up, I would still get the odd nip. Also he would race up and down my bed, defying me to get in until Auntie would pick him up, saying "Does he like his little game then?" No comment.

I was staying with them when Sparrows, a big shop not far from them, was burnt down. We were awakened by a lot of noise, and small explosions caused by petrol cans exploding. When we pulled the curtains back, it was really frightening to see the flames which reached a great height. It did a great deal of damage, and all the back of the shop, together with their garage, had to be rebuilt.

It used to be one of my jobs to get David off to sleep by pushing him along the road in his pram. I suppose he would be about twelve or eighteen months old. A popular song* at that time was 'I'm wandering on to Avalon' I would be singing this to David "as I'm wandering on to Avalon" and a little voice would add an accompaniment "Dada Dada" which was hardly the result I was looking for! How can you get someone to sleep when they insist on joining in?

*I'm wandering on to Avalon,
And whistling as I go along.
There is nothing like a happy song,
To help you on your way.
I'm going home that's my affair,
I only hope (that?) I'll find a pair
Of carpet slippers waiting there,
At home in dear old Avalon.*

*(88 years later, in May 2014, Audrey remembered the song so clearly that she sang the song so that the words could be included in this book).

PHOTOGRAPHS from Family Album

On front cover - Audrey holding David, Babs and Marjorie behind

Page 12 - Dad with grandson Peter

Page 19 - The cockerel which escaped

Page 20 - Babs and David with the bicycle,
in Lower Street, Stansted

Pictures from the Internet:

Page 3 - Making hay in the 1920s

Page 4 - Old postcard of Clacton-on-Sea

Page 7 - Phonograph and wax cylinders

Page 8 - A 1920-30s perambulator

Page 9 - Children's playground 'Maypole'

Page 10 - Postcard of Castle Mound, Bishop's Stortford

Page 12 - Kitchener Range from Kitchener's web-site

Page 13 - Milkcart c 1930s

Page 14 - Clip art pictures

Page 16 - Children Maypole Dancing

Page 18 - London Tram 1920/30s

Page 19 - Ugley Church from local web-site

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