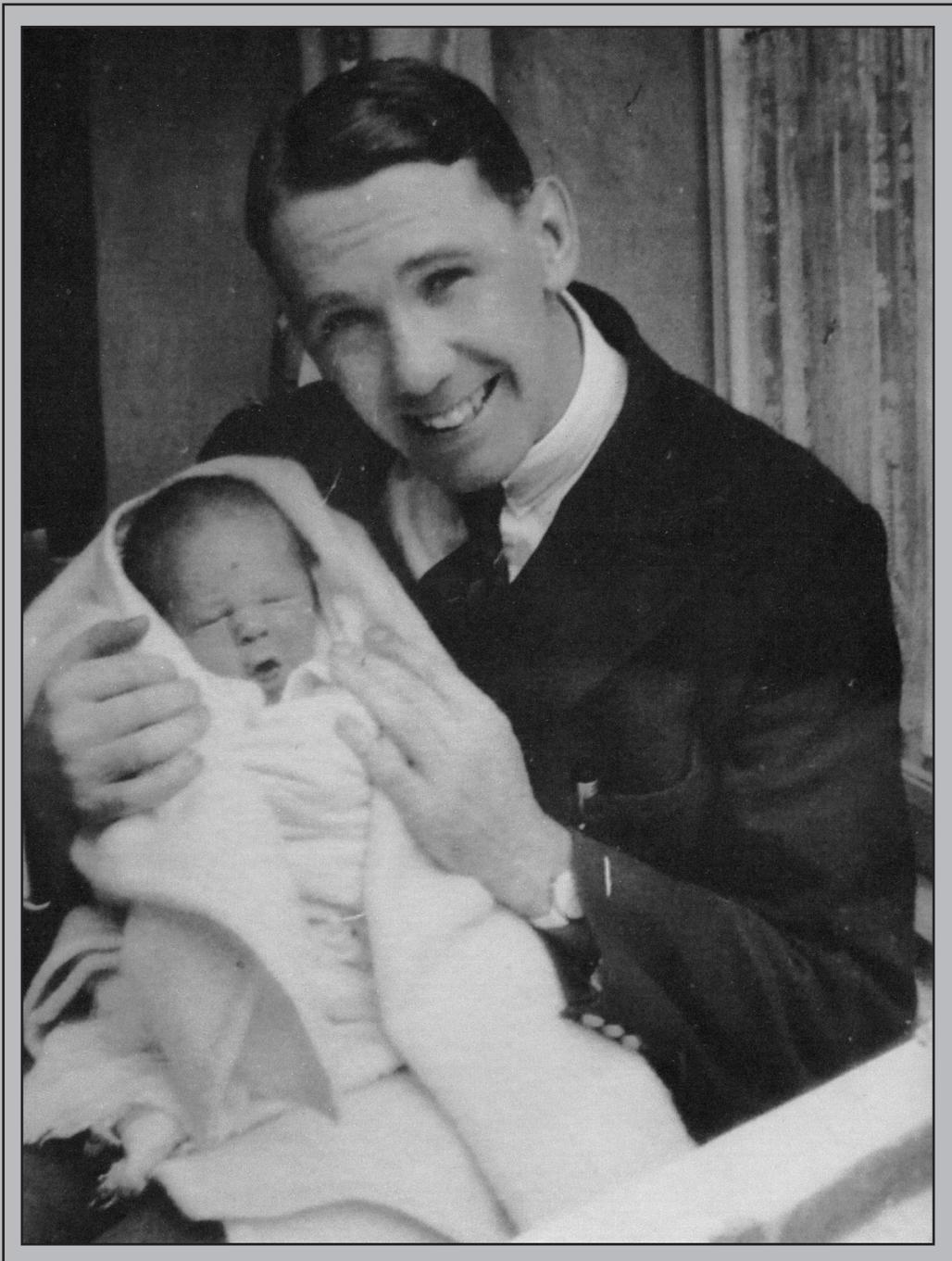


My Life Story

Mainly in Bampton

By Dr Alan Cole





My Life

Mainly in Bampton

By Dr Alan Cole

In 2010, around the time of my 80th birthday, I decided to write my life story intended mainly for my family and it was very clearly family oriented. Talking one day recently to Janet Rouse about the Bampton Archive, she said that the archive would like to have a copy, particularly if it contained some items that might be called 'social history'. I decided to set about writing a revised version that might be of more general interest. I will however start with some family details to show where I originally came from.

Family background

The Cole family were from Hampshire, at any rate since the last half of the 19th century. Grandfather Henry was employed in physical education. By the time I knew him in the 1930's he was the General Secretary of an organisation called 'The Central Council for Physical Recreation' and he was awarded an OBE for his efforts. My Father, Gilbert, was born in Winchester in 1904. At some time in the early 1900's they moved to Sheffield and occupied a house in Taptonville road close to the Sheffield Botanical Gardens. Father was the eldest of four. Two sisters got degrees at Sheffield University and became secondary school teachers in Sheffield. The youngest brother became a Doctor, qualifying just before world war two. He served in the RAMC all through the Malta siege and the Italian campaign, winning an MC for his efforts in the bloody Monte Casino battle. I understand that my Father was educated at King Edward's school in Sheffield, becoming eventually Head Boy and excelling in many sports. He went to Police College for training and entered the Indian Police when qualified. At that time India was still very much under the British Crown and many organisations like the Civil Service, Police, Railways, Canals, Etc. were run by British officers or managers.

My Mother came from a family called Taudevin. Grandfather Edwin was a Guernsey man, coming from a family that ran a ferry service between Guernsey and Weymouth back in the days of sail. He became an engineer and went off to Italy on a contract. There he attended the Waldesian Protestant Church in Milan where he met and married their pianist, Giusepina, who came originally from a very artistic family in Messina in Sicily. Mother, Helen, was born in 1904, the youngest of three children. Mary, the eldest, never married and remained with her parents. Osmund went into an engineering firm related to the steel industry, married the owner's only daughter and did very well! At some point before world war one the family returned to the UK. I remember my Mother saying she saw Zeppelins on raids over London when she was at school. After the war they moved to Sheffield and Grandpa started up a business that I believe became a casualty in the 1928 financial slump.

My early life

My parents met in Sheffield when Father was home on leave from India. In due course they married and went back to India together. I was born on 24th August 1930 at the Mission Hospital in Mussouri. This was a hill station in the foothills of the Himalays near to Simla. Father became the Superintendent of Police in a town called Fatehgarh in the Gangees plains. We lived in a big colonial style bungalow with many servants. My sister Susan was born in December 1931 when we were home in Sheffield on leave. Travel between Britain and India in the early 1930's was mostly by ship through the Suez canal. Flying was possible but very, very much more expensive relative to today. In 1936 Mother was suffering from some abdominal complaint for which non-urgent surgery was recommended. We were dispatched home on the P & O mail steamer 'Comorin' in early April, Father being due to join us on leave in the summer. We sailed from Bombay, through the Suez canal and across the Med. to Marseilles. We landed there, took a train via Paris to Calais and then the ferry over to Dover. It apparently saved quite a lot of time rather than sailing on to Gibraltar and round Spain, Portugal and the Bay of Biscay. Mother had her operation in Sheffield. In those days the patient was not mobilised quickly as now after surgery, and she was confined to bed for two weeks. Towards the middle of this time the terrible news came through that Father had been shot dead while leading his men to arrest a murderer. I was still only five at the time and have few memories of what went on – just a clear recollection of Mother weeping in her bed. Home now became the Taudevin home situated near to Broomhill in Sheffield. I started school at a little kindergarten in Broomhill before moving on to Westbourne School. Grandpa died a year or so later and we had to move to a smaller house.



On to Cheltenham

In 1939, near to the end of the school holidays, just after my 9th birthday, we were still away on holiday at a little hotel at Broadstairs in Kent, when the outbreak of war was declared. I remember the day well as it was spent outside, even by us children, filling sandbags to help protect buildings near the sea front. Old friends from India days had promised that in the event of war we should leave Sheffield immediately and join them in their big Georgian house in Cheltenham. We went there straight from Broadstairs while Aunt Mary went back to close down the old home in Sheffield. In Cheltenham the extensive top floor of their house became our flat for about a year until we rented a place of our own. School became the Cheltenham College Junior School as a day boy, and later on, the Senior School. One of the things that I never discovered was how this was managed on Mothers' widow's pension. Perhaps there was some contribution from a benevolent fund or from the Cole grandparents? My recollection is of a happy childhood in Cheltenham. The war did not impinge on us greatly, apart from rationing and restrictions on travel. We had few air raids. My lifelong interests in natural history and in fishing developed gradually. We frequently went out for walks on the nearby edge of the Cotswolds and I learned to recognise and name the butterflies, birds and wild flowers we saw. Many times I cycled over to Tewksbury with my fishing rod strapped to the cross bar. Occasionally I was able to bring home an edible fish that was much welcomed in the kitchen.

School exams in those days were not called GCSE's as now, but were called School Certificate and Higher School Certificate. I managed to do well enough to be accepted for medical school when I was 18. University and after In 1948 military service was still very much in force. However, if you were accepted for university in a subject of use to the forces, it was deferred till after you were qualified.

I went off to Kings College on the Strand in London to learn anatomy, physiology and psychology for two years before the clinical part of my course. In 1950 I moved on to St Georges Hospital that was situated on Hyde Park Corner, now the site of a very expensive hotel. Contact with patients, assisting at operations etc. started. There was one very significant Saturday evening that the autumn. I was doing a week end on duty in the casualty department that was naturally very busy. When things settled down a bit towards midnight the Registrar (senior doctor on duty) was heard to say "Nurse Baker, I think we all now deserve a cup of coffee." When it arrived he said to me "Cole, have you met Nurse Baker before. She went to school in Cheltenham where you come from." I had not met her before, but instantly fell in love on the spot, and she became my wife when I qualified!

I passed my MB.BS. exams in 1953 and became a provisionally registered doctor. One then had to complete two six-month house appointments before full registration. I did a House Surgeon job at Whipps Cross Hospital in NE London that was headed up by an ex-St Georges surgeon and then a House Physician job back at St Georges. During the 2 weeks leave granted at the end of that job, Frances and I got married at Remenham Church near her home in Wargrave, Berks. We just managed 2 weeks honeymoon on Dartmoor before I had to report for army duty. Compulsory service was for 2 years, but I very quickly discovered that if I signed on as a short service regular for 3 years, my pay would be much better, I should be in line for married quarters, and I would get a substantial gratuity on leaving.



Being totally broke, this was very appealing. I took it up and enjoyed my time in the RAMC. A new recruit to the RAMC was given the rank of Lieutenant and promoted to Captain after a year. My first job in the RAMC was as an MO to the Guards Depot that was then situated at Caterham, near to Croydon.

Most of the work was checking and immunising the new recruits to the Guards. I was surprised and rather saddened to find that at least 10% of the lads could not either read or write. After some 20 months I was posted to 5 Infantry Division with the rather pompous title of 'Deputy assistant director of medical services.' This job normally went to a Major, and I was temporarily promoted to that rank. More pay! I actually moved to Colchester on the day that our first daughter, Jean, was born back at St Georges. My boss then decided that I would be more useful with one of the units at Dover, so I found a little house to rent in Canterbury. After about 6 months I was moved again as Second-in-Command of 5 Field Ambulance stationed at Storrington in Sussex. I retained my rank as Major and stayed with the unit till the end of my service.

Once more I was a civilian and I had decided that I would aim to become a country GP. First I took a 6 month resident post as House Surgeon to the Maternity and Gynaecology unit at Worcester. Frances was pregnant with our second child and went to live with my Mother in Cheltenham. It was an easy run in our little Austin A30 car to join her when off duty. Elizabeth Ann (always known as Biz) arrived safely. My next move was as a trainee GP in a practice at St Briavels in the Forest of Dean. My trainer was an absolutely brilliant rural GP and I really took to the job. Finding a suitable place to join a permanent practice proved difficult. On my very last day at St Briavels a drug company rep. called and in conversation asked if I knew about a Dr Bullen who was looking for a doctor to join his practice at Bampton. I moved to a temporary post in Somerset next day and made contact with Dr Bullen as soon as I could. We went for an interview, got on very well with the Bullens and liked the look of the village. So - 60 years later - I am still here.

The Bampton Practice

When I arrived in 1959, the medical practice in Bampton was based in a surgery at the end of Dr Bullen's house, Bushey House on the corner of New Road and New Inn Lane – now known as Bushey Row. He had a partner aged over 80 called Dr McCartney who was no longer able to do much work. I joined the practice as an 'Assistant with view to partnership' if all went well after a year. It was before we had any appointment system or any staff apart from our wives answering the phone. During surgery hours patients just walked into the waiting room, sat down, and waited their turn to go in to the consulting room. There was an alcove at one end of the consulting room, fitted out as a small dispensary, and we doctors made up the prescriptions while still talking to the patient. The range of effective medications available was very much smaller than today. Penicillin was available, but very few of the other antibiotics now used had been discovered. Blood pressure treatment was in its infancy and aspirin was about the only treatment for arthritis.

It might be of interest to detail how GP's were related to the NHS and remunerated. I don't think it has changed much since then. We were not actually NHS employees. We were self-employed contractors to the NHS and had to provide our own suitable premises and equipment. The practice was paid an annual 'capitation fee' by the NHS for each patient registered with it, and certain other fees such as maternity care. In a rural area with no local chemist you had to dispense and were paid accordingly, and mileage was paid for patients living over three miles from the surgery. In those days very few patients had access to cars and public transport was not very good, so we had to do much more home visiting.

Dr Bullen had arranged for us to rent a cottage during our probationary year. It was the little white-washed cottage in Cheapside known as Quebec Cottage.. At that time the area in front between the cottage and the tarmacked road was just compressed gravel. This applied to virtually all the roads in the village. Kerb stones and pavements are a more recent introduction. I had to keep my car on the gravel. One problem was that it was classed as part of the highway and after dark a parking light was compulsory. We always parked as close as possible to the cottage wall and dropped a little magnetic based light on a flex from an upstairs window on to the car roof. The battery would never have coped otherwise, and the car had to be instantly available. We were just able to fit into the little house, but before the year was up our third child was nearly due. Major Robert Colville of Weald Manor came to our rescue by renting us his Stable Cottage. Our 3rd daughter Patricia was born at home there. During 1962 we were able to buy a double plot of land in the new Glebelands Estate and to have a house built to our own specifications and using our own architect. Much of the building was done during the dreadful winter of '62-'63 and we moved in very happily. It gives some insight into how money has changed over the years since then if I tell you that we did the whole thing – land purchase, building, architect, etc. for approximately £7,000.

On October 1st 1960 I became a partner in the practice. Old Dr McCartney died very soon after that. As well as the main surgery at Bampton we held little branch surgeries at Aston, Carterton and Clanfield, in rooms that various patients lent us for an hour or two on a regular basis. We would arrive bearing a large wicker basket full of the most usually prescribed medicaments and our consulting bags of instruments and papers. It was all very informal, but did make life easier for some, particularly the elderly patients. We also had the contract to provide medical services to the military at the signal camp at Weald. This was a huge radio receiver unit with pylons spread over many acres, that received communications from all over the world and passed them on by land line to destinations in this country. The houses in Mercury Close were built as quarters for the Royal Signals staff.

The practice grew steadily, mainly due to much building in Carterton. By 1964 the list had grown enough to take on another partner and Bob Landray joined us. Soon after this it was decided by Dr Bullen that the practice had really got too big for the surgery at the end of his house. We bought Manor Cottage at the corner where Landells joins the main road and converted this as our surgery.



It gave us the space to be able to take on staff including a nurse. The top floor became a flat that was available for a member of staff. It was occupied for a time by ex-district nurse, Margaret Edwards, who was very popular with our patients. Near the end of the '60s we had grown even more and Ronald Mackenzie joined as 4th partner. In 1979 Dr Bullen decided it was time to retire, and Dr Matthew Perry joined us.

Social Life

The practice was hard work, but thankfully we were able to get a bit of leisure as well. To compensate for having to work many week ends and over-night duties we each had a day off during the week. My day off was always a Wednesday and it might be spent on a family outing, gardening or maybe a fishing trip. Soon after arriving in Bampton I was introduced to Witney Round Table by Neville Halford, one of our local police men – yes, we had two who lived and worked in the village. The Round Table is a National organisation with branches all over the country, and is a club for young men up to the age of 40. We met fortnightly in a pub in Witney to enjoy talks on many subjects and to organise some local charity work. I remember that one member was the son of a builder. He was able to gather up lots of waste wood that might have gone in a skip, and we cut it up into bits suitable for kindling fires and distributed bags of it to local pensioners. A more major project was to dig and build surrounds for a children's paddling pool. I did a stint as Chairman shortly before having to leave at 40. Frances became very involved with the WI and did her spell as President. About 1970 we bought a sailing dinghy and joined the West Oxfordshire Sailing Club with water in a gravel pit near Stanton Harcourt. We learned to sail and to race. I did 13 years on the Club committee, ending with a term as Commodore, and am still an honorary life member. Much later in the mid 80's we started to go on yacht cruising holidays in the Med. and later bought our own 35 foot Westerly yacht that we based at Plymouth. Frances kept herself very busy. She became a member of the British Red Cross Society. Having been a nurse she was useful to them. She organised the appointments and transport for a Red Cross chiropody clinic serving local pensioners. When the Bush Club was started she helped out with cooking and with transporting members. About 1970 our District Council member Margery Pollard (who lived at the Deanery) decided to retire from the Council and persuaded Frances to stand at the subsequent election. Frances stood as an Independent and was elected by a substantial majority. The Council was still the Witney Rural District Council, but soon it merged with the Witney Town Council to form the West Oxfordshire District Council. Much of her work for the council was on the planning committee.

1990

By the beginning of 1990 both Frances and I were feeling pretty tired. We longed to have a decent break to explore the world a bit more than was possible during leave from work. The earliest that I could draw my pension was at age 60. Of course it would not be as good a pension as that paid if I worked on longer. We examined all the figures very carefully and came to the conclusion that we could manage if I retired early. It was a help that on her death, my Mother had left a modest legacy. It was not a vast sum, but enough to finance quite a bit of travel. I could also earn a little doing occasional surgeries to cover partners' holidays in the practice. The sensible time to make the change was at the end of a practice accounting year on September 30th, and this was due about 6 weeks after my 60th birthday in August. So all the required notice was given and we began to plan our travels. The remaining partners began to look for a replacement and found Dr John Uden. There were plans afoot to build a new surgery on a vacant plot of land just next to Manor Cottage, but I did not get involved myself. A week or so before my birthday we went off on a Wednesday to a motor caravan dealer near Bristol to exchange our rather old van for a new and better version. Frances was driving us home when she brushed the left side grassy roadside kerb a couple of times. No damage was done but she said that she was feeling rather tired and I took over the wheel. A few days later she was riding her bike in the village and bumped into a lamp post on her left. There was clearly a problem with her vision and we promptly saw the optician. She said there was no problem with the actual eyes but suspected some trouble in the area of the brain that dealt with vision. We went off as soon as possible to see a Neurologist and a cerebral tumour was diagnosed. Neurosurgery and radiotherapy were tried, but it was clearly a rather nasty malignant tumour that did not respond well to treatment. When Christmas came the girls organised a lovely family day that included our recently born first grandchild. After the party Frances gradually lapsed into a coma and died 2 days later.

1991-92

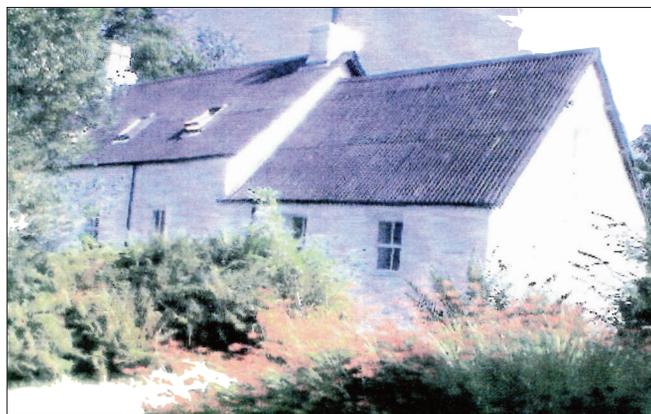
Clearly at the beginning of '91 I was very low, but had to manage and get on with the funeral and many other formalities. Just into February a letter arrived from a bird watching touring company called Sunbird that we had patronised several times in the recent past and whose leader I knew well. It gave the information that there was a vacancy, due to a client's illness, in a tour coming up shortly to Venezuela. This was a very popular tour that Frances and I had tried previously to get on without success. With some natural nervousness I took up the booking. It proved to be very therapeutic being with a group of enthusiasts with a common interest. I returned home after 3 weeks much more able to cope with the inevitable changes in my life

We had planned to travel in 1991, so I travelled. My first trip after Venezuela was a motor caravan tour all round Great Britain. I went all the way up the east side of England and then on to Cape Wrath at the very north of Scotland. Coming back down the west side I diverted to the ferry over to Northern Ireland to visit my eldest daughter Jean. Her husband was a banker and had just recently been posted to Ulster Bank. They have lived over there ever since. Returning to England I had a stop in the Lake District and then went all round the west side of Wales before getting home. In early autumn I bought a 'round the world' air ticket with a number of selected stops on the way. Singapore was the first. I did not find it very much to my liking, but did some useful duty free shopping for camera accessories. At Melbourne I was met by some very good friends introduced by my cousin, and was shown the city and area. I had arranged to join up with the Australia bird tour that was being run by my old friends in Sunbird. We did a big circuit all around Australia for about 3 weeks, ending up in Sydney. I re-joined my own air-line package and went on to New Zealand and hired a car. In North Island I visited a nephew who was living at Wanganui and practicing there as a Doctor. South Island gave the chance to go Whale Watching at Kaikoura and to visit the Albatross colony near Dunedin. A short ferry trip took me over to Stewart Island where I enjoyed a night outing to watch wild Kiwis feeding on a beach.

They are nocturnal in their feeding habits. From NZ I flew to the USA and made for the very south east corner of Texas to visit a number of really great Nature Reserves that I had read about. I was home again just in time for Christmas.

In January '92, I was contacted by a lady called Anne who was Frances' very best friend right from school days. She was God Mother to one of our girls and her husband, Jim, was the architect who had designed our house. Jim was ill and clearly dying, and he did die near the end of the month. Anne organised a memorial party on 1st February at a venue near their home at Blackheath in SE London. After the speeches and food she took me by the hand and led me across the room saying "I want you to meet my great friend Jean. She enjoys bird watching and I think you will get on well." She was quite right, because Jean was a widow and we fell in love and were married just three and a half months later. So began another 24 years of very happy marriage. Jean's home for many years had been at Witham in Essex. She and her late husband also had an old crofter's cottage near Inveraray in Argyll, Scotland. This was in the process of being made habitable again. A new roof had gone on, but the interior was still in a complete mess with no plumbing and no safe staircase to get upstairs, only a rickety ladder. We took the motor caravan up there for our honeymoon.

I spent much of my time remembering the woodwork lessons from my school days and constructed a new staircase from a pile of wood. I am quite proud to say that it is still intact and in regular use to this day. The old cottage is now the permanent home of Jean's son and family.



Moving around

Home from Scotland we moved house from Glebelands to a very pretty little cottage at Asthall Leigh. I was still doing the occasional surgery and Jean took on the job of Parish Clerk (Civil Parish.) We made many friends and joined the congregation at Asthal Church. Our cottage had a lovely view. Its only problem was that the garden was on a very steep slope and difficult to manage even by two keen gardeners. Both Jean and I were keen to do a lot more travelling. We went on a cruise in the Indian Ocean around the Seychell Islands and another cruise from Florida, through the Caribbean and Panama Canal to Los Angeles. We visited New Zealand together twice and Australia four times. There were several trips to different parts of Africa and also to Thailand. Our two very best trips were to The Galapagos and to Antarctica.

In '95 I took the yacht on a long cruise with friends all the way from Plymouth, up the Irish Sea and on to the Inner Hebridean Islands. Jean drove up to Top House, the cottage in Argyll, and we used that as a base for several weeks before sailing back. Very soon after our return, George, a beautiful British Blue kitten joined the household. In '97 we decided that the garden was too much of a problem for us and we found Mulberry Cottage at Grafton. There we had nearly an acre of absolutely flat garden, mostly grass. The previous owner had kept ducks and goats in the garden, so there was not an abundance of plants left. This was not a problem as we were both keen on gardening and we could plan it from scratch. We dug a good sized wildlife pond as well as a more formal lily pond. A vegetable garden and soft fruit cage were established, and a vine pergola was built and planted. We really enjoyed Grafton for nearly 10 years, but by then it became obvious that it was too isolated a place for a couple rapidly approaching the age of 80. At the right moment for us, the bungalow called Ashbywell came on the market and we snapped it up. It is situated in a sheltered location only a few yards from the centre of Bampton.

Back in Bampton we started to make more contacts with community happenings. Jean began to cook for the Bush Club and became a volunteer in the Community Shop. On the basis of an interesting trip we had done to Zimbabwe, Jean became a member of the Committee of the Bampton Zimbabwe Project. I was added to the rota for locking the Church, and I became a keen member of The Witney Windrush Probus Club.



We took a holiday each summer in Switzerland. We would take the car over on the Dover to Calais ferry and have an unhurried trip through France. We would then stay in Switzerland for a couple of weeks or so usually visiting Lake Lucerne and the Bernese Oberland areas. Jean had been going to Switzerland very regularly ever since travel became possible again after the war. I was still very keen on fishing and had managed to get a 'rod' on the River Colne at Fairford. It is a lovely stretch of water, full of interesting wildlife, and the fishing was pretty good. We drove up to the Cottage in Scotland 5 or 6 times a year and made quite a few good friends there.

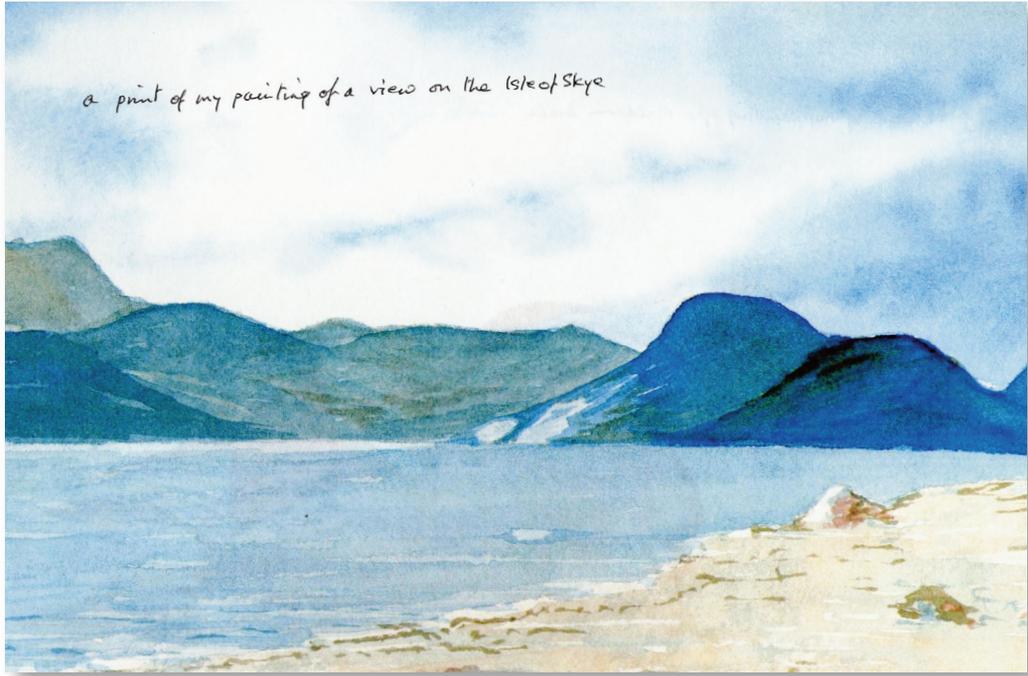
2015 onwards

All was going well and we were enjoying life in Bampton very much until sometime in 2015 a lump appeared in Jean's breast. It proved to be cancer as I immediately suspected and she had surgery and as much treatment as she could. Sadly there were some secondary growths in inaccessible places and she very gradually went downhill and died in December 2016. We were still members of Asthal church and used to drive over there on Sundays, so I arranged for her funeral service to be there. After all the business that had to be done, was done, I naturally felt very flat. I felt too old to take off round the world in the way that had helped me so much when Frances died. I decided that I would take on some of the community activities that Jean used to do. I joined the Zimbabwe Project committee and I became a regular volunteer in the Community Shop. I knew quite a lot about that as I had been helping

Jean regularly as she became so much weaker. After a while I joined the Church at Bampton and bade a fond farewell to Asthal Church. I have not given up travelling all together, but have taken the easy option of going cruising with Saga. I pick cruises that start and finish at British ports. This makes life very easy as the company send a car or mini bus to pick you up and return you home. This way I have seen the Baltic and visited Iceland. Currently I am booked to sail to Spitzbergen in July. I have with great regret decided that I must give up fishing as my old legs do not feel safe enough to be alone on a muddy river bank. I have fished since I was about 12, so it is a big wrench. As I look forward to my 90th birthday I am still doing a bit of water colour painting, can usually defeat a Sudoku labelled 'fiendish' and enjoy going to Probus Club meetings, so that lot and my Daughters keep me well out of mischief!

As a final note, I would like to record a very, very big thank-you to Bampton for giving me such a wonderful base for life for over 60 years.

a print of my painting of a view on the Islet of Skye



A print of my painting of a Mandarin Drake





A Bampton Community Archive publication.

October 2020

www.bamptonarchive.org