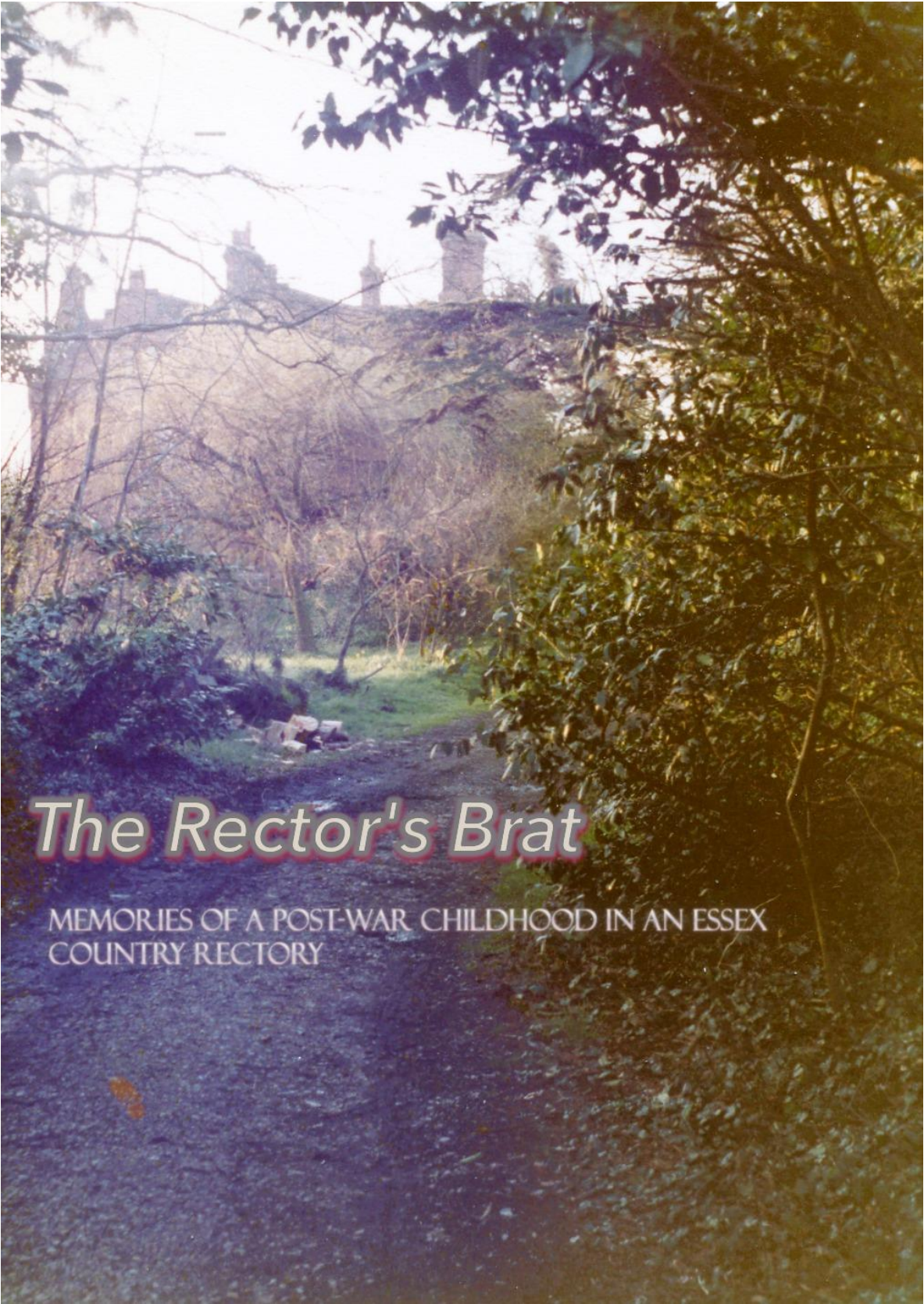




The Rector's Brat

MEMORIES OF A POST-WAR CHILDHOOD IN AN ESSEX
COUNTRY RECTORY



Pat Ost with Desmond Ost, Rector of All Saints East Hanningfield, 1982

THE RECTOR'S BRAT

(Memories of a postwar childhood in an Essex country rectory)

by

Pat Ost

Dedication

To the memory of **Dr James Alexander Ost**

Sometime Head of Department and Reader in Applied Cognitive Psychology, University of Portsmouth and
first editor of this book

1973 - 2019

Also, in fondest memory of my parents **Desmond** and **Dora**, and the very, very happy childhood that they gave me. Both Martin and I had support and endless love while growing up, and space, and huge tolerance, to make our many mistakes.

This “rambling and disjointed account” was written with love, for the amusement of my children James and Katharine, for the amusement and instruction of my grandchildren Joshua, Joseph and Samuel, (and for any friends or wider family members who might also be interested in my ramblings) in my attempt to get all this clutter of memories out of my head, and down onto paper. Please don't judge me too harshly for trying, but I am at this moment (2020) at the center of, and having personal knowledge of, five generations of our family, two in memory, three now living, and if *I* don't attempt to tell the story of those who have passed, who will? I hope some of it, at least, will inform and amuse the reader, but I'm sure there may be boring and repetitive bits too. You don't have to read it all, but I thank you for your interest so far!

One way to know a little of shared family history, of me, and of your grandparents, great grandparents and those older generations, may be through these stories I choose to tell you, but telling them could take some time! This way, you can choose what you wish to read about, and when to read it, and it saves me having to annoy you, by repeating myself!

This is for you all.

Pat

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The author asserts the moral right to be
identified as the author of this work

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Foreword

Sadly, the death of my mother, and more recently of her sisters Beth and Nancy, has forcefully reminded me that the details of the way I was brought up, and the world in which I grew, is now almost entirely inside my own head, while the busy world of the present has moved on. Only tokens remain of the world in which I grew up, and in which my parents lived and worked.

I'm aware of the photographic images of this vanished world I can still see in my head, but these are not well matched by real or tangible collections of photographs or descriptions. So many images and memories crowd in, but knowing what has been lost from this procession, with the passing of my parents, and the blurring of the memories themselves, I'm now prompted to try to record at least a shadow of these things.

In my conceit, I imagine that at some point in the future, my grandchildren or even my children may have the leisure to reflect on the lives of their forbears and may find that they have distressingly little with which to flesh out the bare skeleton of dates of births, marriages, and deaths, of those 'faces in those pictures'. What sort of lives did we live? What did we feel and wish for? I can't hope to do more than sketch out, while I can, a little slice of my boyhood, and what I remember, and more fleetingly, what my parents did and what they told me about their parents.

I hope to record some of those memories and a few of those family stories that will never appear in the 'official records' but may throw some gentle light on those members of our family, who lived their lives to the full, but who threw almost no shadow in the wider world.

Some religions talk of life after death, holding out promises for those who follow them. I know the form of such things but take no comfort in their dreams and mysteries. An older, wiser, tradition spoke of, and took comfort in, the memory of those who had gone before, and who made 'the now' possible. This work, with all its faults, is offered to my children in that spirit. I hope that they may be amused by my attempt to record events and people so that they come in time to know a little more about those who went before, who made their life, and mine, possible.

The views of events and the characters portrayed are my reflection on my own memories. I apologize to the reader if you find my account wanting – the faults and omissions are entirely my own.

Thomas Patrick Arthur Ost

Mary Anns Cottage, Newhaven, East Sussex

December 2020

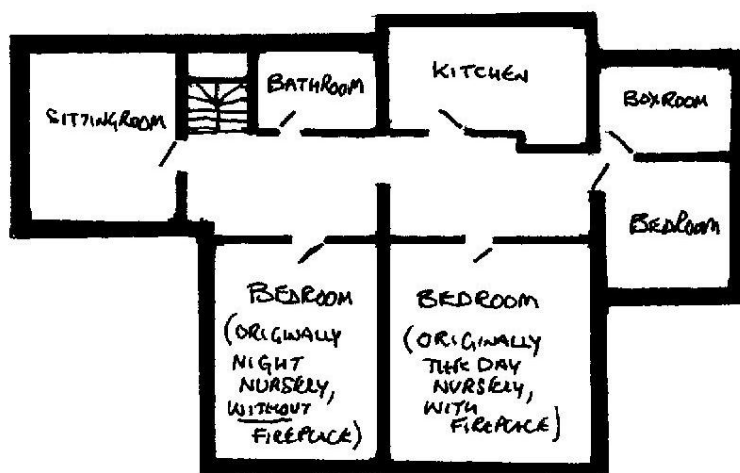


East Hanningfield Rectory on an afternoon in Spring 1976

TOP-FLOOR PLAN OF EAST HANNINGFIELD RECTORY (CIRCA 1950)

THIS THE TOP-FLOOR FLAT, ALWAYS IN MY TIME LET OUT TO ANOTHER FAMILY.

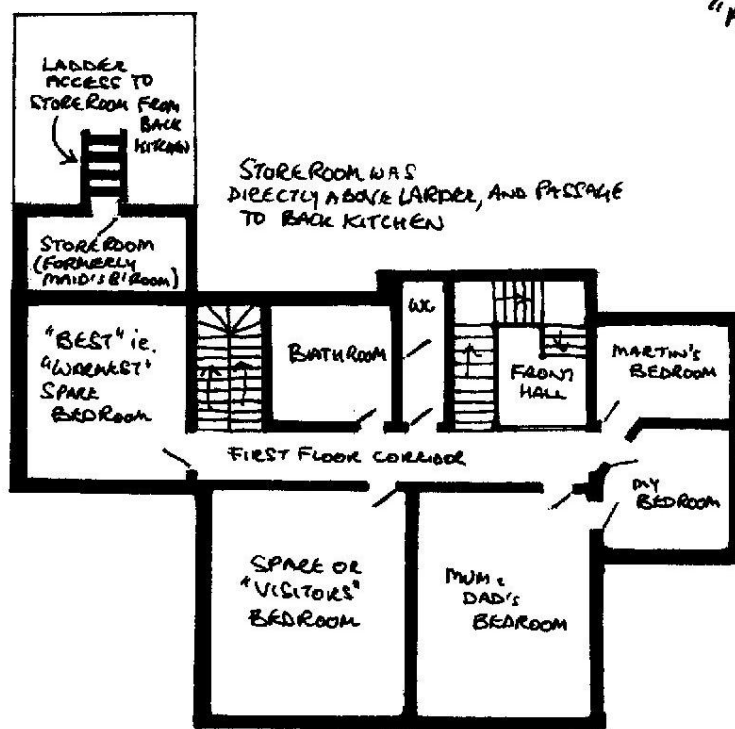
IN THE 1860'S REBUILD, IT WAS DESIGNED AS THE "NURSELY FLOOR," AND HAD THE ORIGINAL BATHROOM OF THE HOUSE.



THE CEILINGS OF THIS FLOOR WERE LOWER THAN ON THE GROUND FLOOR, OR ON THE FIRST FLOOR.

THE CEILINGS WERE FITTED INTO THE SLOPE OF THE ROOF, SO WERE 8' IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM, AND JUST UNDER 7' HIGH UNDER THE EDGES OF THE ROOF.

IN THE ORIGINAL PLAN, THIS FLOOR WAS DESCRIBED AS THE "ATTIC". IT FELT LIKE ONE!



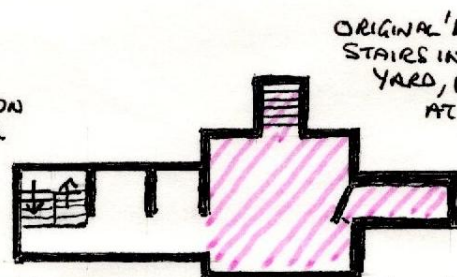
FIRST-FLOOR PLAN OF EAST HANNINGFIELD RECTORY (CIRCA 1950)

TPAD 18/12/2018

THE RECTORY - "BELOW GROUND"

NEW ACCESS TO
CELLAR - CONTINUATION
OF BACK STAIRS INTO CELLAR
BUT WITH STONE STEPS

PART OF
GROUND-FLOOR
WITH CELLAR
BENEATH

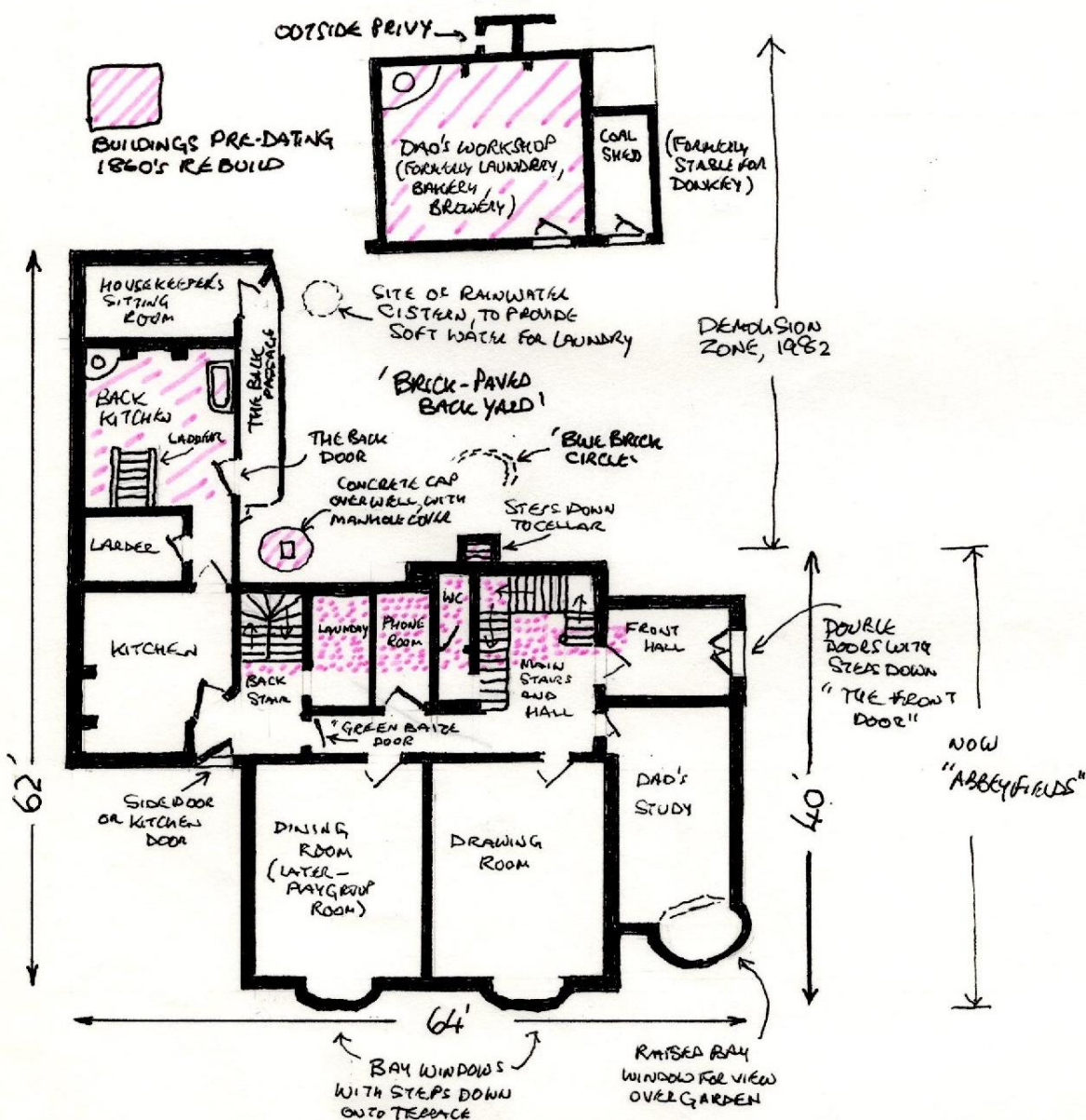


← WOODEN JOISTS → ← BRICK VAULT →
CELLAR UNDER RECTORY - PART
PRE-EXISTING REFECELLAR UNDER
OLD RECTORY, PART NEW-BUILT IN 1860's

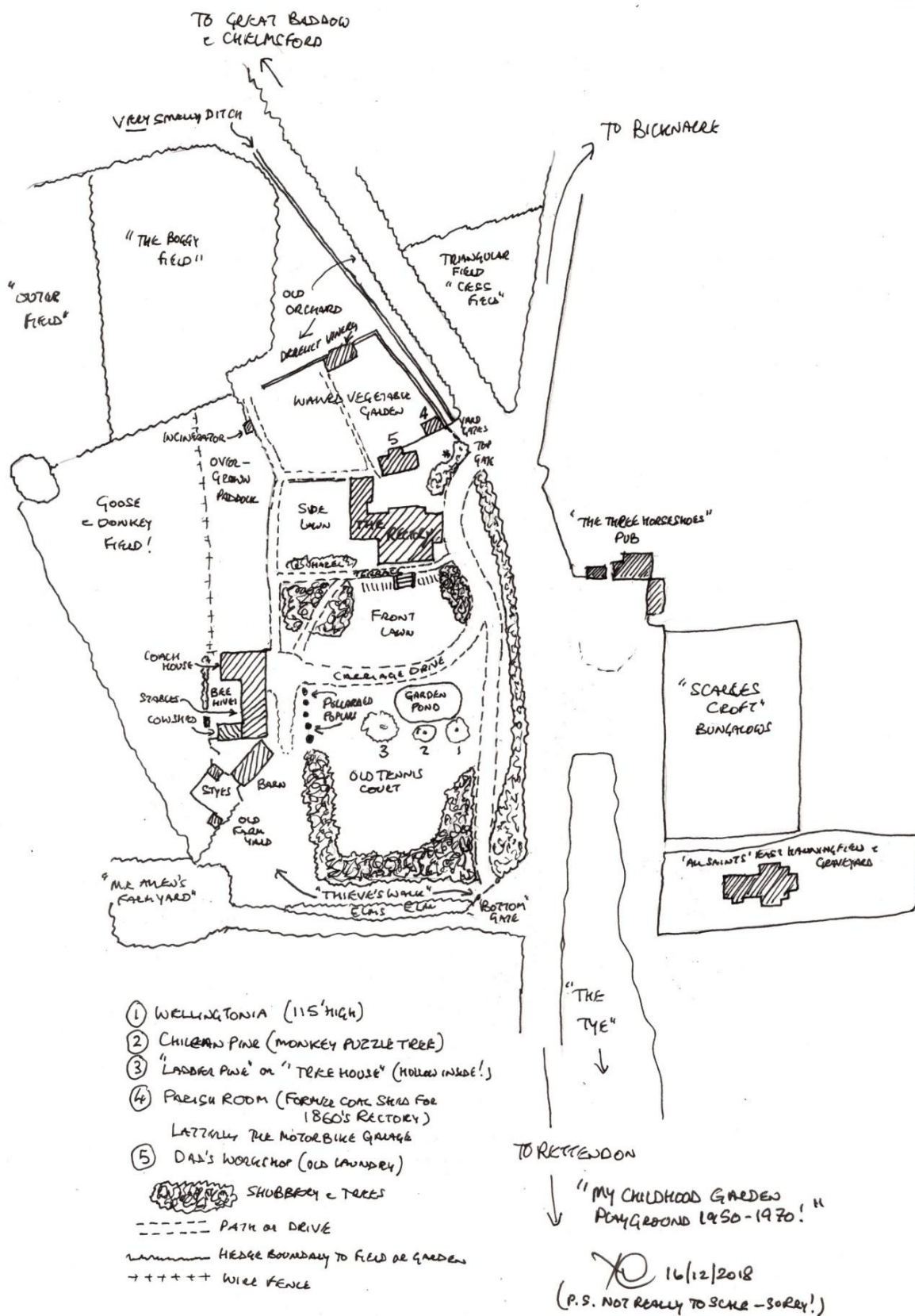
ORIGINAL 'BARREL-WIDTH'
STAIRS INTO CELLAR FROM
YARD, REDUCED IN WIDTH
AT 1860's REBUILD

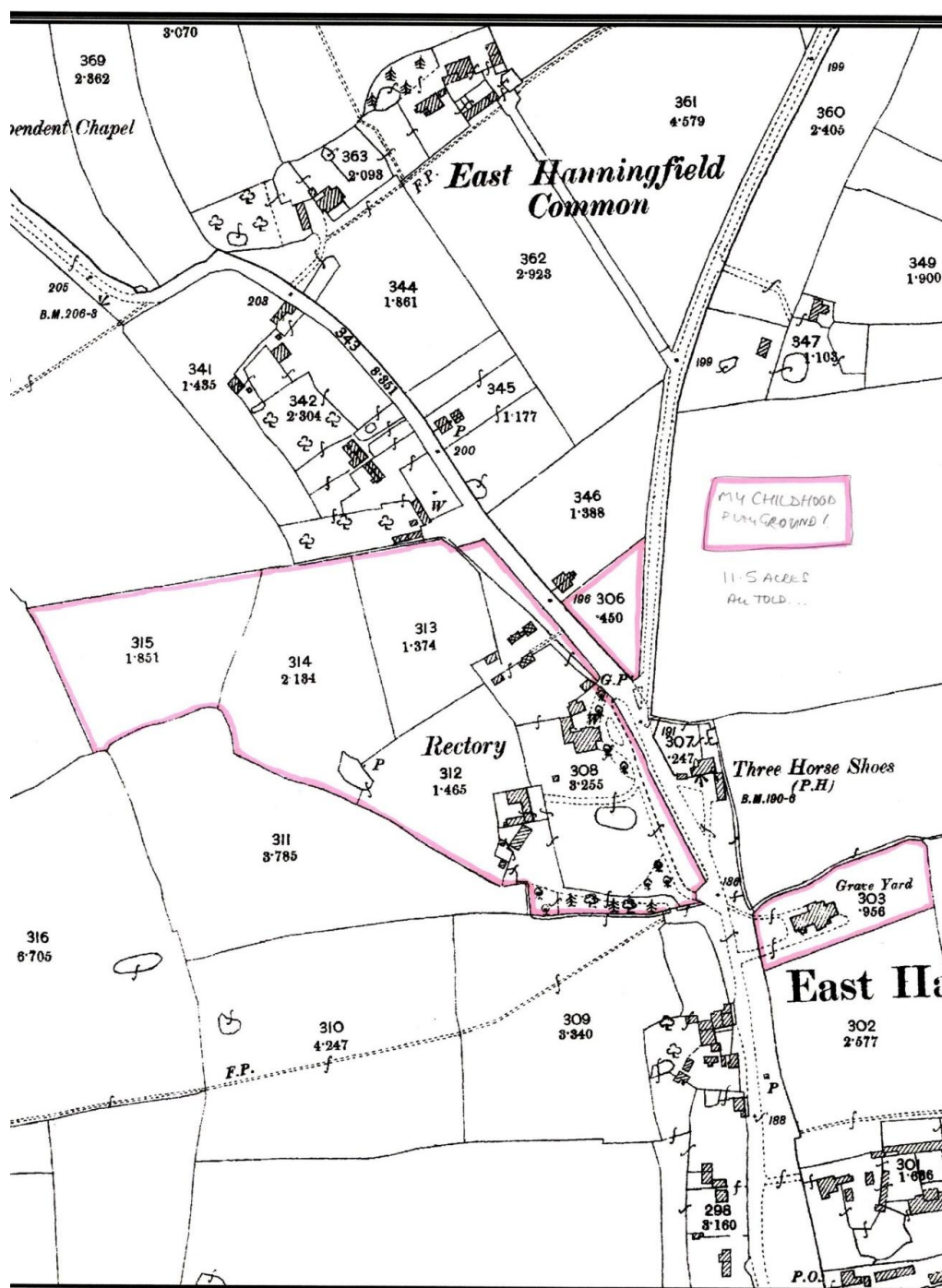
OLD, PRE-1860's
CELLAR BUILT
ENTIRELY IN BRICK,
WITH VAULTED ROOF

Two 16/12/2018

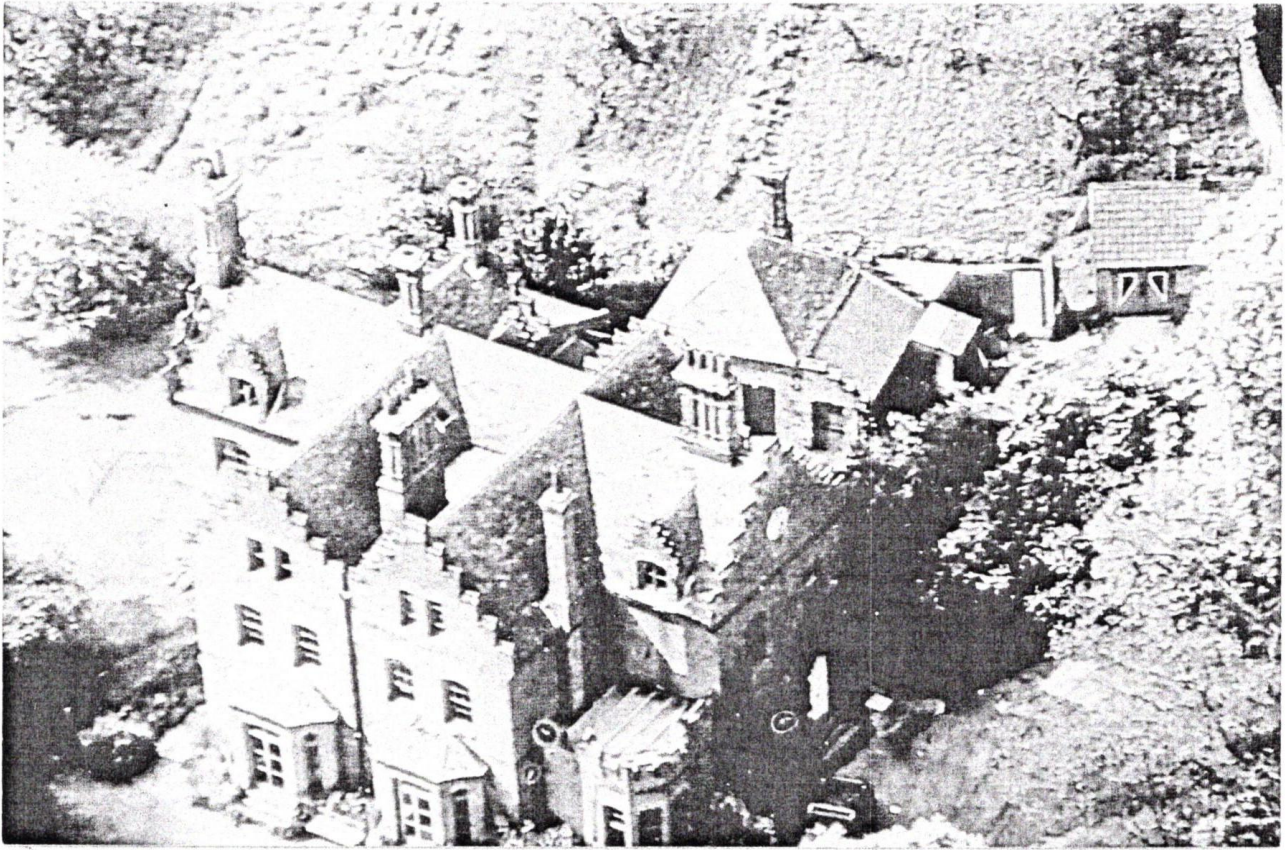


GROUND-FLOOR PLAN OF EAST HANNINGFIELD RECTORY
(CIRCA 1950)





My childhood playground – East Hanningfield Rectory – the extent of ‘my territory’ is outlined in purple; my playground covered 11.5 acres!



A rare aerial shot of the rectory in 1965. It shows the crownstepped roofs, and chimneys from almost every one of its 22 rooms. The original kitchen block is now a rear wing to the house, to the left of the brewhouse, at a slight angle to the main building. The building back right, with the slanting windows, is the old parish room which was our motorbike garage.

Chapter 1

Early Memories – what a place to grow up (every kid should have one)

I'm told that the reliability of our individual memories from very early years is somewhat controversial, but all I can say on that score is that one of mine is very clear, and that is of lying in my pram in warm shadow under a lilac bush in flower. 70 years later, that scent still recalls that particular memory, and since I was brought into this life in the month of November and the bush flowers in May / June, I must assume I was not more than six months old.



1949: In my pram, somewhere on the back lawn, near that lilac bush. My brother Martin is in close attendance.

I wouldn't claim this as unique, as my daughter Katharine has clear memories of seeing a woodland fire, on the 'Union' at Newhaven, when she was about the same age.

The bush was in what we later called the back garden, close to the kitchen door and tucked out of sight, away from visitors. It's where my mother hung out the washing, and I like to think of my mother, busy with domestic chores, (no home help or automatic washing machines then) parking me out of sight but within earshot, so that she had a chance to get on. No doubt my brother Martin was assisting her in the creative way only three-year boys can do.

Let me take this opportunity to introduce you to the place where I grew up. East Hanningfield, a large rural parish in the south of Essex, sits roughly midway between Chelmsford and Rayleigh. The parish

occupies the high ground above the A130 Chelmsford – Rayleigh road, on a slight plateau above the parishes of South Hanningfield and West Hanningfield (now divided by Hanningfield Water reservoir). The catchment of the Crouch between Wickford and Battlesbridge is separated from the parish by the higher ridge occupied by Rettendon and its church. East Hanningfield was then still very much a rural and farming community, with a population of around 600 -700, which as far as records show, it had been for some hundreds of years.

The village in my time there had two church buildings within the parish (not counting the non-denominational chapel two doors down from the village school or the chapel of the leper hospital / colony on the Bicknacre edge of the parish, as neither were establishments we knew much about), a much decayed Norman church, not in active use at that time, but still retaining some of its roof, and its walled graveyard, next to a manor house, and the present church, built in the 1880's nearer the centre of the village you see today. I'm told the reason for this was not the exceptional piety of the populace, nor the convenience of the then rector (although I have my doubts about the motives of the rector) but possibly just the consequence of the Black Death back in the middle years of the fourteenth century. I understand that there may be other explanations for the separation of the church and the present village, but this was the tale I grew up with!

The old church and manor house, (the present East Hanningfield Hall), solidly built in stone, were sited on a slight ridge above a stream, to the south of the present village, with the remains of fishponds in the valley of the stream; the original village was almost certainly on the slope between the church and the stream. It seems logical that the original houses, which were probably timber and thatch structures, were simply abandoned after the owners died and their homes were left to rot, while the survivors moved to slightly higher ground away from the scene of the disaster. As far as can be determined, the earliest buildings in the present village date from around 1380, and it is possible that the original rectory was built around that time. The earliest record I have is a drawing on a map of the village, which was at that time part of the estate holdings of the Petre family, based at Ingatestone. The map, dated 1615 and by John Walker, shows a small timber building (to judge from the little elevation that appears on the map) on the site of Hanningfield Rectory, surrounded by glebe land which exactly relates to my memories of the land where I grew up. Boundaries, famously, are static features of the landscape, and the ghost of the glebe around the rectory can still be seen in the aerial views of the village today.

The old church on the original village site was finally demolished by the church authorities in the 1960's as the structure was thought to be dangerous and of no further use to the parish. I understand that no attempt was made to clear the graveyard and its memorials, which from my memory had a number of box tombs and a good number of headstones. I had seen the old church, and the very overgrown graveyard, a while before the demolition, but have never been back since.

I've described the new rectory site as 'glebe' (farmland directly belonging to the parish), but in my time this was in reality a very large house, in a mature (some would say overgrown), three acres of formal garden of about the 1860's -70's, surrounded by a derelict farm, complete with stables, coach house, a walled garden and overgrown orchard, (2 acres) with the odd paddock and field (a total of nearly 11 acres) thrown in. It was far too big for my parents to maintain in any meaningful way, but it was heaven

for small people! You could be out of sight and out of mind in seconds, yet never away from home. I was so used to it, as a massive wild playground, that I never thought that other people would see it in a slightly different way, but you can be sure that it was a bit of a magnet for our friends.

It was, of course, what is usually described as a 'tied house' (a house which went with a specific job) but on a vast scale. While jobs such as the police, army, and the fire services often, and until recently, were associated with their own dedicated housing stock, it was always understood that at retirement (usually at around 55 years of age) the worker would have arranged their own housing. For this reason, and for the onerous situation that ensues, should a worker lose their job at an earlier age, due to illness or unsatisfactory service, this option is very unusual in this day and age, and is probably now only associated with military service.

My grandfather died in post as the Rector of All Saints East Hanningfield, and my grandmother had to find alternative accommodation very quickly, at her own cost. (She bought houses in Chelmsford and Rayleigh post 1939) Although I think my father had similar plans, by the early 80's clergy retirement plans had come of age, and my parents were able to buy a retirement home, with a mortgage part-funded by the Diocese. However, having to leave house and gardens that he had known since early childhood did nothing for Desmond's mental health, exacerbated by undiagnosed Parkinson's. He didn't ever really recognize his house in Ingatestone as home, unfortunately.

This has always seemed to me to cast a shadow over what I otherwise think of as an idyllic childhood home.

Chapter 2

Your dad's not got a proper job.....but we like your house...

East Hanningfield Rectory, (for some reason best known to the 1980's developer, called 'Abbeyfields' rather than the 'Old Rectory', which would have been at least a nod towards its use since the fourteenth century), was rebuilt in the 1860's (the date on the east end of the house, with the rector's monogram SBS, is 1863) to match the fashionable taste of the time, for the Rev. Samuel Buxton-Smyth, who was connected to an Essex banking and land agent family, distantly connected with Strutt and Parker. Samuel and his wife Caroline have the first entry (March 24th 1840) in the archived marriage register for the parish of East Hanningfield (preserved in the Essex County Records). Describing herself as a 'clergyman's daughter', she and her husband were married by her father, John Nottidge, who remained rector until Samuel succeeded him about 20 years later, perhaps after coming into an inheritance. The new rector clearly didn't stint himself and built an imposing (some would say bizarre) mansion, in the typical Victorian manner of a pastiche of an earlier style, in this case 'Dutch Gothic', which accounted for the crow stepped gables and bloated chimney tops. He spent, according to Dad, the grand sum of £5000, and rebuilt all the accommodation and a grand stable and coach house next to the former farmyard. It was an outstanding statement of wealth and social status, and when built, must have been one of the grandest houses in the village.

As was appropriate for a wealthy rector, he was also concerned at the absence of a proper school for the many children of the parish, and at almost the same time as the new rectory was rising above the foundations of the old Jacobean rectory, a new school was built at the junction of Old Church Road and Back Lane. (My brother Martin and I both started our years of formal education there. The building remains but was converted many years ago into a private house, after the new village school was built on land adjoining the southern boundary of the old rectory garden).

It is rumored that at the new, rebuilt rectory, quite apart from the family, there would have been an establishment of 20 servants, indoor and outdoor, to support this wealthy rector. Caroline Buxton-Smyth had clearly come up in the world from being just a 'clergyman's daughter'.

The main kitchen wing, and an external brewery and bakery across the yard from the kitchen wing, (which from the design of the buildings and the size of the window panes were believed to date from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century), were retained, and incorporated into the new building, partly as a scullery for servants and 'outdoor staff', while the bake and brew house served as a laundry for the new house. The kitchen wing, according to the tithe map of 1840, was a free-standing building, separate from the earlier, timber, house, presumably to reduce the risk of fire. The original brick vaulted cellars of the timber building were incorporated and extended into the foundations of the new house.

There had clearly been a beer and wine cellar long before the rebuild, as there were 'barrel width' brick steps leading down into the cellar, shown by the remains of a wider arch at cellar level. Arch and steps had clearly been reduced in width, perhaps at the time of the rebuild, following a gradual change in the drinking habits of the workforce, meaning that brewing was no longer a domestic necessity. Under what was then the front hall of the house, there was an extension to the cellar built as a wine cellar, with stone

racks for bottles. During my childhood the door to this wine cellar could still be secured with an iron bar hinged to one door jamb, with a loop on the other door jamb so that the bar could be secured with a padlock. Just outside the stairs to the cellar, there was a large circle of hard blue brick in the yard, with no obvious function, which I was told was 'where the donkey walked to pump up water from the well' (of which feature, more later)

The kitchen wing, and the bakery / brew house, each had big fireplaces with back ranges, swing out hooks above the fireplace for a roasting jack, and a large copper with its own fire grate under it, to the left of each fireplace. Each also had a brick-built bread oven in the back of the fireplace with an iron door. The oven in the 'bake and brew house' was huge, about six feet in depth, and the great mass of brickwork protruded from the back of the building under its own tile roofed extension. I believe its main function in later years was the laundry for the significant establishment Samuel's new rectory had become. As the local water supply (of which more later) was very hard, the laundry had its own supply of soft water, held in an underground cistern in the back yard, which was fed by the water from the roofs, piped through a series of drains running around the house from front to back. On the right-hand side of laundry/bake/ brew house was a lean-to stable, which in my time we used as a coke shed, to fuel the Aga boiler in the kitchen, and the stoves in the main downstairs rooms.

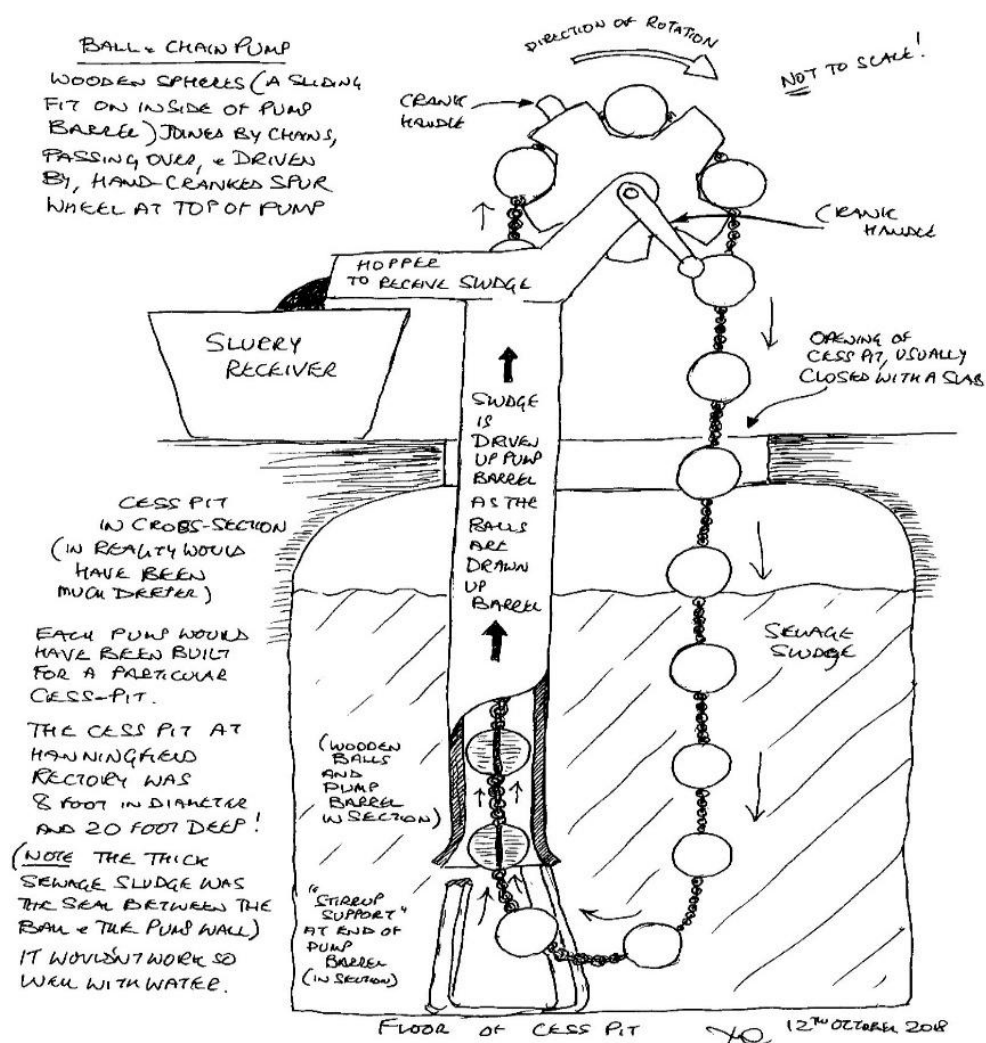
Inside the laundry, the height of water in the cistern was indicated by an indicator scale about eight feet high on the laundry wall, with a pointer operated by a float in the underground cistern. The connection between pointer and float was a long chain which disappeared into a gap at the bottom of the scale. Sadly, this had ceased to work long before my time. Next to the indicator scale was an old hand pump of the familiar type with a spout and buck hook. Despite various attempts, I could not persuade the pump to deliver water, so I cannot confirm that the arrangement really produced the promised soft water.

I'm sorry to have to record that this useful room, converted to be my father's workshop with a long bench under the window, was so stacked with various sorts of junk, mainly bottles, boxes and the like, that it was never possible to make good use of what was a fair-sized building. One day, whilst attempting to push my way through to the unexplored (and more interesting bits) at the back of the room, I felt something scuttle up my trouser leg, and I have never removed a pair of trousers more rapidly! I never found the mouse and I still don't know if the mouse was a figment of a guilty conscience, as I was not supposed to be 'poking about' in there.

The backyard had its own double gated entrance onto the road outside, with gates about nine feet high, beside which was a curious single-storey brick shed, about 20' by 10', which apparently had been built to serve the main house as a coal store.

(The family story was that its site had originally been a 'chapel of ease' for the village, close to the rectory and close to where most villagers lived. In support of this assertion was one remaining brick arch across the ditch which ran between the rectory and the road, which had apparently been the base of a footbridge to this structure. The only trace I have found of this structure is on the 1840 Tithe map of East Hanningfield, where there is a small square building shown, which predates the rebuilding of the rectory. The 'back kitchen', and the 'bake and brew house' are clearly shown as freestanding structures in the vicinity of a somewhat smaller rectory building)

The structure built on the site of the demolished chapel could hold two railway wagon loads of coal. Needless to say, when I knew it, that sort of consumption was no longer practical and it had been converted into a sort of 'parish room', which later became my bike garage. I discovered, quite late in the day, that the wooden floor was 'suspended' over quite a deep under floor space. The original concrete floor of the building was three feet below the ground level outside (to store all that coal), and with some rapid modification from my brother and my dad, the 'bike garage' acquired an extensive inspection pit, which was a godsend for the constant need for vehicle maintenance on all our old vehicles!



Across the small yard outside the motorbike garage, almost overgrown by bushes, was the cesspit for the house, which was presumably constructed as part of the Victorian 'new build'. It was in scale with the rest of the establishment, being (I was reliably informed) over 20 feet deep and 8 feet in diameter (holding over 6,500 gallons or nearly 30 metric tonnes when full, which is rather more shit than I like to think about) with an overflow drain emptying into the culvert that ran beside the road. Since all the other houses along the road to Chelmsford had similar arrangements, the local ditches were quite fruity, especially in warm weather, and we needed no encouragement not to play in them. On the plus side, this

was the ditch which ran through our orchard, and the upstream properties must have added significantly to the nutrients available to the trees. There was one tree (unfortunately on the far side of the ditch) which produced the largest cooking apples I have ever seen (1.5 kilos apiece) so it was not all bad.

My grandfather had to preside over the annual emptying of the pit, as in his time there were no vacuum suction tankers or anything clever of that sort. I believe the routine was to wait until a cold day in autumn when the little triangular field, dividing the road to Chelmsford and the road to Bicknacre, had been ploughed. The land belonged to the rectory and could be used as the final resting place for the 'solids' from the pit without challenge from anyone else. Granddad employed a number of local labourers who first lifted the large stone slab which sealed the access to the pit, and then lowered down a 'chain and ball' pump into the depths. This device, which presumably was custom made for the pit, consisted of a long pipe, through which ran a chain threaded with balls or bundles of rags, which were secured at regular intervals. The chain passed over a guide wheel at the top of the pipe, where it widened into a type of hopper with a drain spout, and then ran back down outside the pipe to another guide wheel (in a frame at the bottom of the pipe) which directed the chain and its discs back into the mouth of the pipe for the return journey. The labourers' next job was to rotate the chain drive wheel as rapidly as possible, by means of a crank, to circulate the chain and its 'pistons' up the pipe and draw the pit sludge up into the hopper at the top of the pipe and out into a waiting cart.

The cart was taken across the road to the triangular field, where the contents were spread on the ground and ploughed in by another team. Once this malodorous task was complete, all those involved were treated to a hearty supper, served in the adjacent parish room. Hand washing or changes of clothing and footwear didn't seem to be a requirement on this occasion. Dad told us that after one emptying, presumably *after* the hearty supper, one of the men decided to check that the stone had been replaced accurately and used an oil lantern to light the scene. In the act of illuminating the stone lid, he succeeded in igniting the large volume of methane left in the pit, which removed the stone again with a flash of flame and a satisfying bang. The language following this incident unfortunately has gone unrecorded.....

The cesspit, and the fun in emptying it, with more modern equipment, remained as an unloved feature of the property until the whole village was put onto mains drainage, sometime in the early nineteen seventies.

Dad became rector in 1944, when the role had changed in many ways from when the house was rebuilt, 80 years before. The rector may have technically been in receipt of the tithes of the living, but these were no longer raised as a tax on the local farming population. Since 'Rector' no longer had the power to make financial and legally binding demands on his flock, and since the majority of the population was totally indifferent to the 'spiritual' part of the role, Church of England vicars and rectors had become something of a joke unless their wealth or strength of personality marked them out in the community.

My father had neither wealth nor, frankly, a desire to shine. He wasn't afraid of hard work, and he was certainly determined to play a role, on his terms, in the community and to do what he wanted to do. The job gave him independence, and in the view of many of the less perceptive of his parishioners, he only worked one day per week, and for not very long on that day either. I don't think he was a particularly

organised, enthusiastic or evangelistic *rector* – the saving grace from his point of view was that appointment to a parish was **for life**.

(By a roundabout series of events, I came into possession of my father's certificates of ordination, and the paperwork around his appointment to the parish, which Desmond had deposited in 1945, in the vault of Barclays Bank in Chelmsford, as security for his living. 'I'm here and I'm staying!' I read from that.)

He involved himself quietly in the wider community by a number of routes: as Rector, he was chair of the Parish Council (I'm not sure if this was by desire or default, as I have not determined if the chairing of this organization automatically went to the 'priest in charge', or whether it was in any way contested between the parish notables). Be that as it may, Desmond chaired the Parish Council, I understand, from his induction in 1944 to the reorganization of local government in 1974.

Apparently, the chair of the parish council was also expected to represent the parish as its Rural District councillor, which he willingly undertook, and which position he held until the reorganization of local government. This took Desmond into Chelmsford on regular council business, and gave him a broader insight into things happening, or being planned to happen, across the Rural District, and no doubt resulted in his having a much wider circle of contacts outside Hanningfield. It also gave him free parking close to the centre of Chelmsford, which was always useful...

Appointment to the living of East Hanningfield resulted in a stipend of around £600 per year, which even in the 1940's was not big money, particularly if you have to heat a Victorian church and rectory.

I know that he worked for a while at Marconi in Chelmsford, to bring a little more money into the family coffers while we boys were small, and Dora fully occupied in looking after us, while busy with all the things in the parish that the rector's wife was traditionally expected to organize and frequent.

When we were older, there were mutterings and comments in the family that Desmond was not really suited to factory work, and I imagine (from knowing both Dad and the typical factory environment) that shift work on a production line (always a shock for those gently raised) was liable to produce both unhelpful distractions and boredom. I'm not at all sure that Dora was happy with the idea of Desmond working alongside young women (the unhelpful distractions) when she wasn't there to keep an eye on him, and I suspect a combination of these factors helped to terminate the part-time factory work after the period of 'most need.' Thereafter I'm not aware of Dad working 'away from the parish' except as a Rural District councillor.

I was certainly aware in some quarters of the village, of a mixture of pity, and contempt, for someone who had the good fortune, through family connections, to acquire such a living, but who lacked the enterprise and drive to finance a lifestyle to match the grandeur of the house. Dad's longtime contemporaries, and his churchwardens, I think, held him in affection, for he had spent a good part of his childhood in the village, and his gentle good nature stood him in good stead. My age group was a different matter. Outside of our circle of close friends, and their parents, those whose parents had come into the village, were employed elsewhere, or were successful 'small business people' saw Dad differently, and although their parents largely kept their opinions to themselves, their children were less inhibited and exuded contempt.

Other 'children of the manse' have remarked on other people having an extremely stereotypical view of them, as pious, snobbish unworldly introverts or worse. From my particular point of view, my dad being the rector just meant that I got to see an awful lot of my dad, unlike most other folk my age, which suited me, just fine. In my defense, I can admit to some degree of introversion but otherwise (I felt) the stereotype was way off mark and unfair. I don't remember much social contact with 'junior school' contemporaries from the village in my last years at Hanningfield School. Martin, I remember, had a lively group of buddies, but my memories of the period before secondary school was one of relative isolation; rather a solitary small boy, in a huge house and bigger garden. Memories, are of course selective, and I suspect that there were probably always more folk about the Rectory than I remember now.

As I said, the house was something else, and I still have great affection for the old place I remember. The new development did not demolish the main block of the building, but the subdivision, and the destruction of the older parts of the complex, totally destroyed the building I knew (with all its faults) and loved. I was recently reminded by one of my brother's friends, (who I held in awesome affection as she was older than me) that 'we really liked your house, you had an inside loo on each floor'. I had forgotten that many of my brother's school friends had grown up in farm cottages in the village, before moving to more modern houses later on. These cottages were extremely basic for 1950, but were not, even then, untypical of rural housing. They were weather boarded, timber framed houses with two rooms on ground and first floor, entirely un-insulated and with perhaps a small fire in the front room. The facilities consisted of an earth closet or bucket closet in the garden; a shared cold water stand-pipe, a tin bath and big flat china sink with a bucket under the outlet, so that by comparison, the rector's family lived in a palace.

I was also reminded on this occasion of this conversation, of an incident where my father found that one of the lads (alleged to have been one Barry Leggett) in the village had climbed the Wellingtonia in our garden, which at that time was over 100 feet tall. I can't remember a time when Dad was so angry at someone else's stupidity, and fortunately I missed the interview between the young miscreant and my father after the descent. The problem was that Wellingtonia branches are angled downwards, and so any slip could mean the climber being thrown outwards to certain injury rather than being caught (however painfully) by a lower branch. What none of us knew at the time was the reason for his climb, which was not isolated bravado, but a pact between him and my brother's best friend, David Davis, that each of them would try to climb all highest trees in the parish. Many of those were in the Rectory garden, and he and David had already climbed a specimen Lime tree in the garden without anyone noticing. When David saw Dad's reaction (and as he was planning to climb the Wellingtonia in the next day or so) the pact suddenly went on hold, permanently! I did wonder if my brother Martin was in on the plot, but if so, he has never said.

I've included a plan of the Rectory based (but not slavishly) on the 1895 drawings, and it was pretty much unaltered over the next 90 years. I've also acquired photographs of the original Alexander Chancellor plans of the building, just to show that the architect simply had not drawn the rectory as built. The client, one suspects, or more probably his wife Caroline, must have insisted on altering the arrangements considerably once they were faced with the reality of living in the 'original concept'. Interestingly, the architect never altered the original plans, so when there was the need for a library

extension in 1895, the drawings for the rest of the house were incorrect in significant details, details which had been in existence for over 30 years. The original plan clearly had almost no windows in the attic bedrooms, and five dormers had to be added to add light to the nursery rooms in the attic, and to the servant's bedroom in the attic of the extension to the back kitchen. The architect had also failed to note the existence of a wine cellar at the end of the cellars. All in all, one is left with the sense that there may have been some disagreement between Rector Buxton-Smyth and his architect, which resulted in 'local solutions' by the builder 'on site' as it were, as all the dormers are in the original style and don't appear to be later insertions.

There were 22 rooms on three floors, not counting the cellars. Originally all windows at ground floor level (including the half lights in pits for the cellar windows) were protected by massive iron grills or steel reinforced folding shutters. Even the bay windows leading onto the front terrace had steel reinforced roller shutters over each glazed section, and all doors were seriously massive, and would have resisted a sledgehammer. All this was a polite reminder that when this idyllic country house was built, there were *no* police forces outside main urban areas, and houses such as the rectory were a target for gangs of burglars on horseback, with carts, secure in the knowledge that they would not be interrupted by the strong arm of the law. It was down to the individual householder to protect themselves – apparently it wasn't regarded as a criminal offence for servants in a house under attack, to shoot to kill in legitimate defense of their employer, the head of their household. Times have changed slightly in that respect, although some might say not entirely for the better.



1980: *Day nursery on top floor (the whole top floor was apparently for the children and nursemaids)*

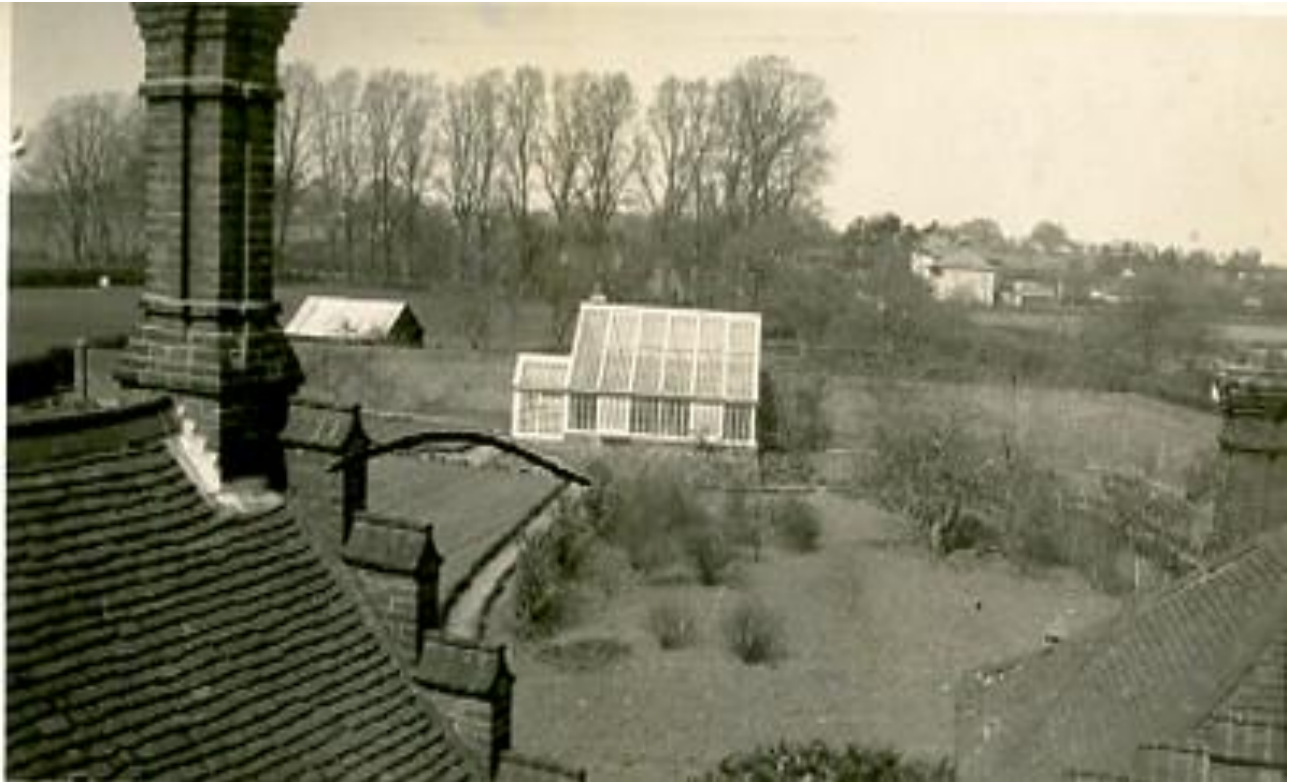


1980: *“Nurse’s sitting room” on top floor, looking out along the corridor. Back stairs immediately to the left of the door, with the bathroom and kitchen on that side of the corridor. The day and night nursery rooms were to the right of the corridor.*

The main reception rooms were 18’ by 30’, with an extension into bay windows on the ground floors. The two main bedrooms above were the same size, and on the top floor these became the day nursery and the night nursery, respectively (the night nursery, unusually for the house, did not have a fireplace, as this was considered dangerous in a child’s room.



1980: *Top of back stairs, the only access to the top floor, and lit only by the long window below the turn in the stairs. The nursery gate guarding the staircase is original, and still present in the converted building today*



A view from the kitchen of the nursery floor, taken in around 1925, possibly by my grandfather. The roof of the old kitchen block is on the right, as reworked by the Victorian conversion. Now a wing of the house, as built in the 17th century it would have been a separate building from the old rectory, as a fire precaution. The walled garden, with its heated vinehouse, fell apart in my childhood. There was an orchard beyond the vinehouse.



1980: *The public face of East Hanningfield Rectory. The main entrance, double doors at the top of a set of steps, were originally protected by a glass porch just below the two windows. Left window lit my bedroom, the right window was my brother Martin's room. Just above the reach of the ivy is the roundel containing the monogram of Samuel Buxton Smythe and the date 1863.*

Most of the other domestic areas, including the front hall, had fireplaces. As built, there was one bathroom, on the top floor, but each floor did have had a water closet. Our bathroom, in my time, had resulted from a later adaptation of one of the bedrooms on the first floor, and it housed a vast airing cupboard, seven foot long by three foot deep, with two doors reaching floor to ceiling. This housed a large hot water tank, heated by the kitchen Aga. Most rooms also had electric bells, for service, which sounded on a marvelous contraption above the kitchen door downstairs, where the bell rang and a little 'flag sign' waved in a window beside the name of the room. I'm assuming this feature was installed in the 1890's when Rev. Sacre introduced 50V electric lighting.

Rev. Sacre also introduced what I believe may have been East Hanningfield's first electric car, as he didn't want the bother and expense of keeping horses. As the son of an engineer, he was no doubt familiar with these radical technical advances of the day, but it would probably be similar in speed and performance to a 1950's electric milk float. The car gave him easy access to Chelmsford and Battlesbridge, the local rail stations. His driver / mechanic apparently lived in the coach house, in charge of the generator system and batteries (as well as the car) which had been installed in an extension to the back of the coach house.

This extension housed a substantial horizontal 'oil engine' running on paraffin, that drove the generator when the house lighting batteries, and the car batteries, required recharging. This arrangement still existed into the nineteen thirties, (minus the electric car) and one of my father's regular jobs was maintaining and operating the generator set. But times were changing, and these old DC lighting sets were old fashioned and laborious to operate, as well as being a frequent source of fires, due to poor insulation and other issues with a DC system, with no agreed standards of installation. East Hanningfield's generator / charging system had bare copper wires, operating at 50V plus and with very little in the way of fuses, or other protection for overheating, carried in grooves in wooden planks, for insulation.

Essex Records Office still has a copy of the hire purchase agreement taken out by my grandfather in 1936 to connect the Rectory onto the 230V AC National Grid (and presumably convert the lighting and electrical power from 50 V DC to the new standard), for the grand sum of £12 and 10 shillings; I suspect that was money very well spent!

So that Rev Sacre could call up driver and car when required, he installed a large electric bell (which would not have disgraced a fire station) high up on the west wall of the rector connected to a bell switch in the house.

The bell was still in place during my childhood. When I acquired my air rifle on my sixteenth birthday, the bell was of course a ready-made target, with no doubt when I managed to hit it!



1980: *Our children, James and Katharine, in the heart of the house, the kitchen. Two drying racks can be seen up near the ceiling, and the 'bell board', showing which room had called for service, above the open door. A cat often occupied the left-hand end of the central cupboard.*



Outside the kitchen, the kitchen door or side door to the Rectory. An espalier pear tree growing up the right wall extended above the gutter height of the third floor. Just visible to the right of the kitchen door is the drain pipe that an adventurous kitten had to be flushed out from!



1980: *What you saw when you turned left through the kitchen door. Dad's study at the far end, next to the clock, with the sitting room and dining room on the right of the corridor. The back stairs were on the immediate left. In the shadow on the left of the corridor is the green baize door; its handle is just visible.*

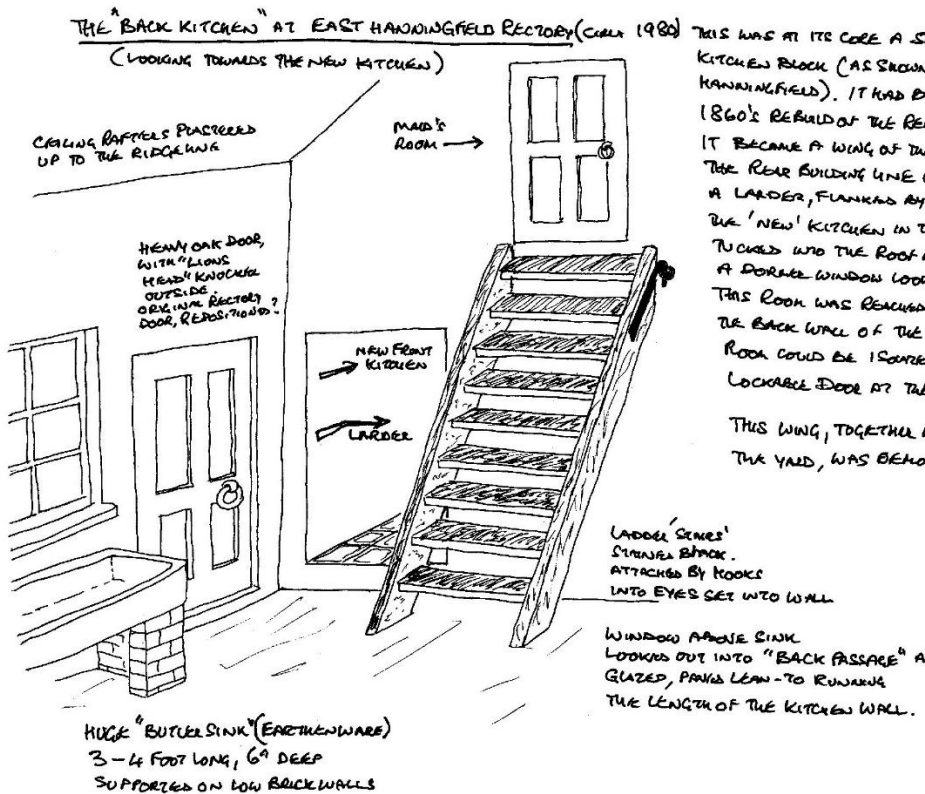


Dad's study in 1980, by which time he was ill, with no real interest in his parish role. However, organizing a work area was never his strong suite. I inherited the rolltop desk on the right (complete with a .38 Colt revolver concealed in a locked drawer) after his death.

From all of the above, you should be left in no doubt that this was a house designed to be run by a large staff of servants, and the 'social divide' was built into the fabric of the house.

A large spring-loaded door, covered with green baize, (of 'behind the green baize door' fame) at the end of the corridor on the ground floor, divided the 'family' side of the house from the servant's domain. The main staircase, 'crinoline width', went from ground floor to first floor only. The stairs wrapped themselves in a very grand manner around three sides of the main hall, (about 20' square) which rose to the height of the first-floor ceilings. On the fourth side at first floor level was a gallery with banisters, along one side of the corridor which ran between the main rooms at that level, connected to the back stairs at the other end of the corridor. Access to the top, attic floor was only via the 'back stairs', a slightly scary construction; a dogleg staircase which ran from outside the kitchen to the top floor, lit by a tall window running most of the height of the house. A doorway beside the bottom of the dogleg stairs revealed the stone staircase leading down to the cellar.

The stairs appeared to be unsupported on the turn in front of the window, and if you looked over at that point it seemed a very long way down! The entire top, attic, floor appears to have been designed as a nursery annex from the first, with a day nursery, night nursery, sitting rooms and bedrooms for nursemaids, possibly the earliest bathroom in the house, and what looked suspiciously like an original gate at the top of the stairs.



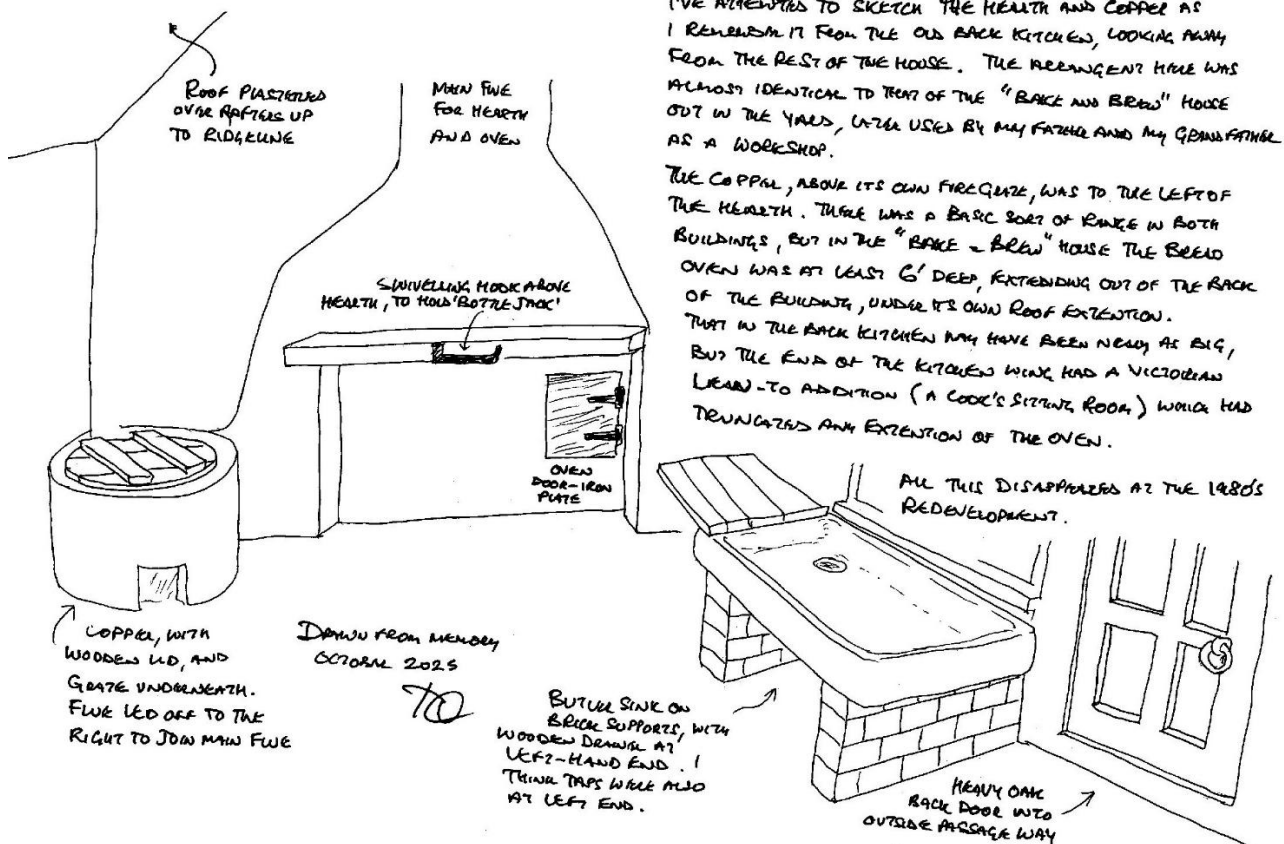
THIS WAS AT ITS CORE A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY FREE-STANDING KITCHEN BLOCK (AS SHOWN ON THE 1840'S TITLE MAP OF EAST HANNINGFIELD). IT HAD BEEN (1 TIME) RE-ROOFED IN THE 1860'S REBUILD OF THE RECTORY, WITH ADDED "CROW-STEPPED" EAVES. IT BECAME A WING OF THE NEW HOUSE, AND WAS EXTENDED TO THE REAR BUILDING LINE OF THE NEW 1860'S BUILDING BY ADDING A LARDER, FLANKED BY A CONVEYOR PASSAGEWAY AND STEPS TO THE 'NEW' KITCHEN IN THE REAR. A "MAID'S BEDROOM" WAS TUCKED INTO THE ROOF ABOVE THE PASSAGE AND LARDER, LIT BY A DORMER WINDOW LOOKING OUT ONTO THE BACK YARD. THIS ROOM WAS REACHED VIA A "LADDER STAIRCASE" HOOKED ONTO THE BACK WALL OF THE OLD KITCHEN. THIS MEANT THAT THE ROOM COULD BE ISOLATED FROM THE MAIN PART OF THE HOUSE BY A LOCKABLE DOOR AT THE KITCHEN END OF THE PASSAGE.

THIS WING, TOGETHER WITH THE "BAKE & BREW" HOUSE IN THE YARD, WAS DEMOLISHED IN THE 1980'S REDEVELOPMENT.

DRAWN FROM MEMORY

OCTOBER 2025

THE "BACK KITCHEN" AT EAST HANNINGFIELD RECTORY (CIRCA 1980)



I'VE ATTEMPTED TO SKETCH THE HEARTH AND COPPER AS I REMEMBER IT FROM THE OLD BACK KITCHEN, LOOKING AWAY FROM THE REST OF THE HOUSE. THE ARRANGEMENT HERE WAS ALMOST IDENTICAL TO THAT OF THE "BAKE AND BREW" HOUSE OUT IN THE YARD, LATER USED BY MY FATHER AND MY GRANDFATHER AS A WORKSHOP.

THE COPPER, ABOVE ITS OWN FIREGRATE, WAS TO THE LEFT OF THE HEARTH. THERE WAS A BASIC SORT OF RANGE IN BOTH BUILDINGS, BUT IN THE "BAKE & BREW" HOUSE THE BREED OVEN WAS AT LEAST 6' DEEP, EXTENDING OUT OF THE BACK OF THE BUILDING, UNDER ITS OWN ROOF EXTENSION. THAT IN THE BACK KITCHEN MAY HAVE BEEN NEARLY AS BIG, BUT THE END OF THE KITCHEN WING HAD A VICTORIAN LEAN-TO ADDITION (A COOK'S SITTING ROOM) WHICH HAD TRUNCATED ANY EXTENSION OF THE OVEN.

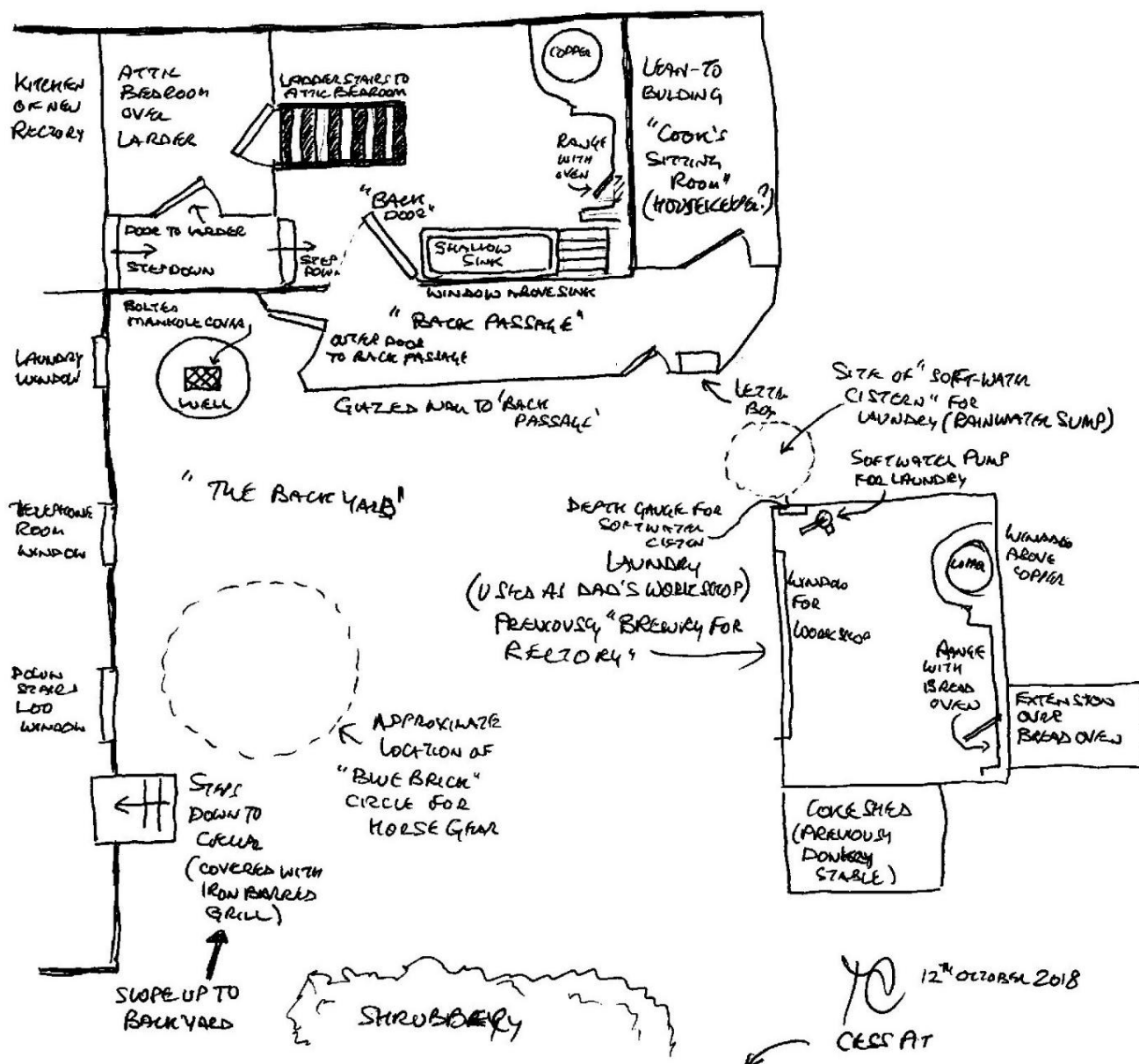
The wing connecting the new house to the old freestanding kitchen block was entered through a door leading to a passage into the old building. Off the passage and between the new kitchen and the old kitchen was a magnificent larder, with slate worktops on brick supports, with cupboards above and below the worktop. It had the only window on the north side of the house, and although that could not be opened, it had two panes of perforated zinc rather than glass, for insect-free ventilation. It was almost as good as a fridge, as that side of the house never really got direct sunlight. Above the larder was a servant's bedroom, reached by a ladder from the back kitchen, with a single dormer window. It seems the idea was that the kitchen maid or maids could be locked into the back kitchen, so that they were secure from intruders, but could not let anyone else into the rest of the house itself.



1980: *The 17th century brewhouse, converted to a laundry and bakehouse for the Victorian conversion, and latterly for our workshop, in 1980. To the right, with the stable door, is the coke/coal shed, originally the stable for the donkey who worked the well pumping gear. The site of the well shaft is out of shot, to the left.*

THE "BACK KITCHEN" AT HANNINGFIELD RECTORY

DEMOLISHED AROUND 1920. IT HAD BEEN A TOTALLY DETACHED KITCHEN BLOCK FOR THE ORIGINAL JACOBAN RECTORY. IT HAD A COPPER TO THE LEFT OF THE COOKING RANGE IN THE FIREPLACE; THIS HAD AN IRON DOOR AT THE RIGHT-HAND SIDE OF THE FIREPLACE, WHICH GAVE ACCESS TO THE BRICK OVENS. IN THE 1860'S REBUILD OF THE RECTORY, IT HAD BEEN JOINED TO THE NEW KITCHEN BY A PASSAGEWAY, BESIDE THE LADDER. A SERVANTS BED ROOM ABOVE THE LADDER WAS ACCESSSED VIA A LADDER FROM THE BACK KITCHEN.



The other extremely worrying aspect of that end of the house, after the dogleg stairs and the cellars, was another underground feature that predated the Victorian new build. Right outside the back door of the old kitchen wing (what we called the 'back kitchen') there was a lean-to passageway (known, inevitably, and without a trace of innuendo, as the 'back passage') which had another door that led directly into the back yard and over **THE WELL**. Desmond told us that until 1944, this rather unwelcome property feature was delineated by a very low brick wall, with a lid of decaying oak boards. If anyone had tripped over the wall, there was nothing to stop them going down the shaft itself. One of his first actions on taking over the rectory was to get this well capped off in the manner which can still be seen today. At time of writing, the well is right outside the front door of the most westerly of the three flats that resulted from the conversion of the rectory but seems to have been concealed under the paths leading to the front door. It appears not to be quite the attraction that it became in my memory, although I suspect it probably still features in histories of the parish.

To the uninformed observer, during my childhood, the results of Desmond's work was just a circular patch of concrete in the brick paving of the back yard, sporting a manhole cover in its centre. The cover, unusually for most manhole covers, had two securing bolts, which was a slight giveaway that caution was required at this point. Lifting the cover, and standing over the open hole, was not for the faint hearted. All that you could see was an echoing damp brick lined shaft, six foot in diameter, with a couple of iron rods fastened to one side which disappeared down into the gloom. The one thing you couldn't see was water. In fact, despite many attempts, using powerful torches, airfield landing lights powered by car batteries and directed down into the gloom, or even paraffin-soaked rags wrapped around bricks, ignited and dropped into the darkness, I never saw any sign of reflection from the water below. The brick weighted flares added to the mystique as there was a musty updraft through the manhole as the flare dropped away, followed by a succession of echoing crashes as the brick bounced off the side of the shaft on its way down. Needless to say, this was '*public attraction Number 1*' for friends old and new when we showed them around. They never heard the splash or saw the water, either!

We suspected that the shaft itself twisted slightly as it went down, which probably didn't help. From time to time, water company officials made visits to measure the depth down to the water, as in fact this well tapped the chalk aquifer which lies under London – the well was literally 'sunk through the London clay' to the water bearing chalk beneath. We were told that there was in fact water in the well, 150' below us. That was bad enough (if you were standing right above the hole, looking down) but the real depth of the shaft was 475' to the chalk, so you were actually standing over 325' of water as well. What really made my blood run cold, (and still does) was that this well was dug by hand, 60 years before the Victorian house was built, and according to records kept by the then rector it took a year to dig (1790-91).

The village of East Hanningfield (and the parish in general) was very poorly served for clean drinking water; as shallow wells and ponds formed the only source of water, and the rector decided that he must provide a proper supply, for his household and for the rest of the community. A water diviner had assured the rector that water would be found if they dug in that spot, but there were no 'trades description regulations' in those days, and he omitted to say how deep the water was. One man, working by candlelight in a tiny, enclosed space at the bottom of the shaft, cut away the clay under the iron and

elm frame on which the brick shaft was built. His skill determined how evenly the shaft of the well (built up layer by layer, of tons of hand laid bricks) sank (hence the term 'well sinking') under its own weight. He was assisted by a bricklayer and a labourer, who together helped to remove over 280 cubic metres of clay from the excavation, laid bricks, (apparently no mortar was used to bed the bricks) and worked a windless or some form of pithead gear to raise spoil and move the well sinker and his tools.

All this work, without any powered mechanical aid whatsoever, leaves one in mute admiration for the sheer determination, bravery and hard work of any workman engaged on that job. It is not surprising that the first two firms engaged on the work gave up in frustration and exhaustion; how a third group of workmen was persuaded to pick up where the others had stopped, is not recorded.

The records indicate that the well was served by two iron buckets on a windlass, and villagers who came before 10 am could get their water for free – latecomers had to pay a fee. Whether this windless was animal powered, we don't know, but it is clear that at some stage after it was built, a three-stage pump system was installed, each pump on its own wooden platform down in the well itself, worked by horse gear in the yard. It is tempting to think that this could have been part of the upgrading at the rebuilding of the rectory, when we know that slate tanks were installed in the roof of the new building (and I believe they are still there, as there was no easy way to get them out....) These pumps were driven by rotating rods (which can still be seen attached to the wall of the well), rotated by the horse gear. As they would have required maintenance at intervals, there must also have been a ladder going down so that each stage could be accessed. Who did that, and how often they had to go down into that dark, dank shaft dripping with moisture is not something to think about for too long.

As I mentioned before, the position of the later horse gear mechanism in the back yard was visible from the remains of a circle of blue engineering brick in the yard's surface, still visible during my time in the rectory, laid so that the horse's hooves did not wear the yard surface away. This was the reason for adding a stable to the side of the bake and brew house. Although it probably housed a long-suffering donkey, this animal's 'sweated labour' pumped water to a large tank in the roof of the house, from which the family was supplied by the pipework to the kitchens and the one original bathroom on the top floor. The 1860's house also had water closets on each floor. Other local households could fill buckets for their own use, from an external tap. This arrangement lasted until about the last decade of the nineteenth century, when the first water main was installed, allegedly as part of the works associated with the new railway branch line in the Crouch valley.

The water, being sourced from the chalk, was very hard, and when the new rectory was built, the rainwater of the house roof was collected in the underground cistern next to the bake and brew house, to supply the laundry with soft water, (which wouldn't form 'scum' with the soap).

As regards the use of the well as a source of clean drinking water for the parish, I can only assume that it was always a resource won at the cost of a great deal of expense and labour. Raising the water was always an issue, and the final phase with pumps installed down on stagings in the well itself must have been an on-going cost, (and uncertainty of supply if not constantly maintained). The task of 'seeing to the pumps' would not, one imagines, pass any sort of present-day safety risk assessment, and could never

have been a popular job. I wonder how many spanners, screwdrivers, candle ends and personal item actually made the descent to the depths while working on the pumps.

Desmond said to me that once the new All Saints had been built, there were concerns about the 'proximity of a graveyard' to the well. I personally think that was short-sighted, and not really the full story, when you consider the proximity of the Rectory's potentially leaky cess-pit, not 60 feet away from the shaft, which might be considered a real 'clear and present danger' to the purity of the source, given that **faecal** contamination of drinking water was by then a pretty well-established cause of cholera outbreaks!

To return to the far-sighted and very decent rector who made the whole thing possible, demanded that the work be done and who finally brought his parish the possibility of clean drinking water. John Nottidge, the rector who commissioned the work, recorded the number of bricks used (over 40,000) and the length of the work. The rector couldn't bring himself to say how much his decision to dig the well finally cost him, (although a letter published in 1791 does give a formula for an estimation) but simply wrote at the end of his account 'I, John Nottidge, paid the piper'. It stands as a supreme understatement for his vision in commissioning the work and says nothing about the bravery and hard work of the teams who constructed it.

Without their skill, it could so easily have been the deepest grave ever dug in the parish.



In happier times! the rectory gardens as a 'community resource' – a village fete on the front lawn and gardens in 1968, taken from the 'spare front bedroom' window.

Chapter 3

Dora and Desmond – the centre of my world

My father, Audley Desmond Ost, was born with the burden of two stereotypes, in that he claimed that he was born within the sound of Bow Bells, (and thus technically a Cockney, of which he was proud), but was also an Irishman by upbringing. Now that I have a copy of his birth certificate, I can see that he was born at 9 Park Place Villas, Paddington, close to 'Little Venice' between what is now the A5 and the A40 in West London. I leave the reader to work out whether they can hear the sound of Bow Bells from there!

Leaving that aside, he was raised in the west of Ireland with such good effect that when he arrived in East Hanningfield in 1924, none of the local children could easily understand him. A broad Irish accent, and he and his sister Paddy going around the village, each riding a donkey, was a bit of a giveaway that they were not 'Essex born and bred'. The accident of birth arose from the circumstances that my grandmother lost her first baby, at birth, in Ireland, due to the incompetence of the local midwife, the midwife not noticing that the baby had arrived with the cord around its neck. I imagine that after that, good sense prevailed and not much persuasion was needed for the 'next time' to be in London, close to family and under more expert guidance. The family finally left Ireland for good, and settled permanently in England, under circumstances I will come to in a later stage in this tale.



1925: *Early years at East Hanningfield Rectory. My father on his donkey 'Bob', in the centre of the picture, and my aunt Paddy on 'Jack', together with grandad's Lanchester Model 1910.*

Despite the Irish accent, my father rejected both these attempts at early pigeon holing. On reflection, I have come to think that in a later incarnation Desmond had all the qualifications to be a hippy. He was interested in everything, surprisingly practical in building things, described (by my mother) as being disappointingly impractical at organizing anything else, and with an easy-going manner and a real delight in helping others when he could, he must have seriously annoyed my mother, most of the time.

Beekeeping, motorcycles, popular science, the company of friends and family and long discussions on every topic under the sun were his real loves. The doctrine and practice of the Church of England came a long way second.

I don't think Desmond was encouraged to seek a career outside the Church of England. I have heard a rumour, via my aunt Beth, that Desmond wanted to study medicine, but his father would only pay for his studies if he went into the church. For one thing, his father had made his life in spreading the Gospel to the good people of London, and then to the forest Indians in the depths of British Guyana, and clearly had strong opinions about the Christian message, and about the values and status of a life in the Church.

He may not have seen Desmond as one of life's 'high-flyers', but he wanted him around to support him as he got older and more infirm. With a major European war clearly in the offing, the priesthood was a 'reserved occupation' (however morally dubious that may seem now), and as Desmond was his only son, Audley Alfred would have been keen, especially after his experience in Ireland, to do all he could keep his family out of the military. As a clergyman, Desmond would have been protected against enlistment (or at least that was how it worked in 1914-18).

I have the impression, with hindsight (of course) that Audley Alfred, and the Dollar aunts, did all they could to ensure that Desmond would not need to enlist, and would encourage him not to waste his life, as so many men in *their* generation had done, lost in the mud of Flanders. It is almost certain that Audley Alfred was still grieving the loss of his valet and driver who was no longer at his side, as he had survived the war, but died in the influenza epidemic that followed.

Robinson Mackintyre, a.k.a 'Thiripu', who had fought on the Western Front, and had survived severe wounds (and the attentions of the military police, who were in position on the fire step to shoot men who turned back, as he had to, with a large shell splinter sticking out of his chest) must have been quite a character; Aged 22 when Desmond was born, Dad remembered him as the person who taught him to use a scythe. He was probably a 'big brother' figure to Dad, despite the 'family/ servant' relationship.

Despite the 'official' name, 'Theripu' started life as a forest Indian from British Guyana, who seems to have been adopted (possibly as an orphan) by Audley Alfred during his time as a missionary there, and who returned with Audley Alfred and sister Ellen, as a teenager, after the period of service in South America ended. It's tempting to think that he was almost a surrogate son for Audley Alfred (A.A. was 49 at the time of the 1911 census, Robinson Mackintyre was 20).

I don't know exactly when and where he died, but the timing of the flu epidemic suggested that he died at Achonry and may well be buried there. His life story requires, I believe, further research, if only to

explain (if one ever can) what motivated a South American forest Indian to enlist and fight in France, for his adopted country.

All this, I think, probably coloured the Dollar and Ost families wish to 'keep Desmond out of harm's way'. There was a strong prospect that if Desmond was ordained that the parish could be passed to him when his father died, or soon thereafter. The Dollar family held the 'right of presentment' to All Saints in any case and could control the appointment if they 'had a candidate'. His sister Patricia (my aunt Paddy), who was much more independent and self-motivated, would be expected to look after her mother, but in the event did that and carved out a career for herself as well, as a tax accountant for a number of charities. I suspect that in many ways Paddy had a lot of her father in her character, with the independent streak writ large. Having said all that, I have never been convinced that Dad was an enthusiastic Christian, at least, no more than he had to be to fulfill the role of parish clergyman. There were simply too many other interesting distractions, and too many signs that 'one god, one faith, one church' was an inadequate explanation for the world. Certainly, he raised eyebrows on one Sunday by giving a sermon on witchcraft which was not the rant a less liberally educated man might have delivered.

I wish to put on record that Desmond never wore a 'dog collar' in my presence, whether on 'official duty' or not. (We do have some early family photos, taken around 1946 / 47 where he still sported the dog collar, but his views of clergy attire certainly changed soon thereafter). We even had a group photograph taken at a clergy conference in Clacton, sometime in the late 50's, probably from the Essex Chronicle, where Desmond could be spotted as the only clergyman 'improperly dressed'. His explanation, when pressed about this eccentricity, was that he strongly objected to being 'typecast' by the uniform, especially in his role as Rural District councillor, which he occupied as 'the member for East Hanningfield' from 1944 until the reorganization of local government in 1974. He felt that ordinary members of the public, seeing the dog collar, would jump to extremely unhelpful assumptions about his attitude and motivation, whereas they could just as easily come to unbalanced conclusions about him in a more sedate manner, by having to deal with him in person, which gave *him* far more satisfaction, and put *them* on the back foot, so to speak.

This inclination to 'work under cover' sometimes succeeded beyond his expectations. At his memorial service in 1984, we came across friends who knew Dad as a beekeeper of some repute, but who had not made the connection with his life in the church, or indeed with his role as a rural district councillor. There were, apparently, former council colleagues who hadn't known about the bees and were surprised to find out that he was a clergyman on account of the lack of a dog collar (unfortunately, as an elected member of a local authority for many years myself, that doesn't surprise me one bit about some district and town councillors). Other clergymen, however, usually understood that beekeeping went with the territory of being a 'clerk in holy orders', especially out in the rural parishes, but found his enthusiasm for motorcycling totally bizarre.

Motorbikes were in Desmond's blood. He had a succession of bikes as a young man, including some real classics such as the water-cooled Scott Flying Squirrel and a scarily quick Vincent HRD. Although cars featured from time to time (I understand that he had a Riley Nine and a Lagonda at various points along the way) I think the war and the family economy, after his father's death in 1939, meant that bikes were

here to stay. Moving the family meant adding a sidecar to accommodate the growing tribe, and the first bike I remember was the single cylinder 600 cc Panther. Equipped with an open box sidecar, this doubled as family transport when the sidecar had a couple of old bus seat cushions added, or as an early form of pickup truck in which we used to collect bags of coke from the gasworks in Chelmsford, (now the site of the Essex County Records office). The routine was that I could ride in the sidecar on the way in and on the pillion seat on the way back. Details such as weather protection and fixed sidecar seats were for wimps!

Clearly, according to the Health and Safety manual we should all have died agonizing and messy deaths for going around in such a fashion (moving 'children' without them being in a proper child seat – I can well imagine a modern-day H&S officer soiling themselves at the thought of a eight year old riding on a pillion seat). (But for the sake of their underwear I can assure them that I did wear a crash helmet; but only when on the pillion.....in the sidecar I just hung onto the woodwork)

Desmond continued with the motorcycle and sidecar as principal mode of transport for many years but developed the theme somewhat. He moved from the 600cc single cylinder Panther motorcycle (a good bike in its way, as those long stroke singles were very forgiving to drive and had a lot of engine torque at low revs, which was very useful as a sidecar machine) to the ultimate in 'big bikes' of its day, the Aerial Square Four 'superbike'. This was a heavy but powerful 1000cc bike, (the biggest English motorcycle of its day. Dad adapted chassis and side chair to suit, so that he could carry Dora and one of us in the sidecar, and the other offspring on the pillion. Although 'double adult' sidecars were available, Desmond felt the existing designs to be inadequate, so he designed and built his own. I seem to remember that it went through a number of intermediate versions, but the final variant was a monster, with a side door for the front passengers, and a lifting hatch so that the rear sidecar passenger could pass things (sandwiches and the like) to the one on the pillion seat. You couldn't actually see anything of the bike itself from the roadside. The bike was the old pattern, with girder front forks and no rear suspension, while the sidecar wheel could rock slightly fore and aft on a flexibly mounted drop arm, which was alleged to be more forgiving for all concerned.

This type of suspension was harsh and ultimately hard on the structure of the chassis, but handled predictably, which helped a lot. The real fly in the ointment was the reliability of the engine of the Square Four, which had a form of gear driven car distributor as part of the ignition system– unfortunately the gear was a fibre gear, and prone to strip at moments of stress. Replacing this was not straightforward, although Dad got used to doing it as this happened all too often (I seem to remember about four hours start to finish was pretty average) and I got pretty used to standing by the roadside in places all over Southern England while Dad dealt with the unplanned maintenance stops.

I did not appreciate the practical side of my father's 'motorbike thing' until I was older and riding bikes myself, and my schoolmates doing the same. Bikes then tended to be a touch unreliable, especially the older, cheaper efforts that our limited finances could stretch to. Dad had always been strong on 'make do and mend' when it came to bikes, and as a consequence, my mother would never travel with him if she could possibly avoid it, having (like Martin and I) spent too many hours stood on roadsides while Dad replaced some vital component on the bike.

However, breakdowns successfully repaired equaled great experience, and Dad was generous with his time to other bikers in distress. It was a point of honour with him, (and maybe today's bikers are the same) never to pass another biker stopped at the roadside without stopping to find out if they needed assistance. As a genuine 'knight of the road' this support extended to my friends also, who thought it was pretty cool that my old man could sort out their machines, discuss 'bike stuff' with them, show them ways of preventing silly breakdowns happening, and even from time to time producing spares as if out of a hat. The record was for one friend of mine who acquired a modern Scott motorbike in the late sixties and arrived at the rectory one evening with the bike blowing a head gasket. Desmond walked out to the shed and reappeared with a new Scott head gasket, which had been squirreled away sometime around 1932, when Dad had a Scott. Luckily the head design hadn't changed in thirty years. I don't know whether we were more surprised that it fitted or that Dad had been able to remember where he had put it!

I don't know if he was a really keen sports man, but in the thirties (before all the motor bikes) he joined a local cycling club in order to recuperate after a leg injury. We came across one of his cycling logs, and he had notched up 3000 miles in a year, so he was no slouch!

Cyclist and biker, Desmond still had to acquire 'a trade' and to take up his father's 'trade' he had to take a theology degree. He studied successfully at Kings Theological College in London and was ordained priest in the autumn of 1938. On the way, he had taken full part in the student life of London in the 1930's which included helping to cause organized chaos at Sir Oswald Mosley's fascist Black Shirt rallies then taking place in London. He claimed to have been part of the organized 'crowd' that disrupted one such meeting in the Albert Hall. All this was valuable training for the parish and his role within the Church of England – an enlightened, if not entirely liberal, political viewpoint, muscular Christianity, and the art of making knuckledusters out of tightly rolled newspapers so that you couldn't be charged with 'having an offensive weapon' when the inevitable happened! For a peaceful, gentle guy this was probably useful 'character building' stuff but I have to say that I never saw him raise his hand to anyone. If he did hit anyone in an outburst of youthful enthusiasm, I hope the fascists came off worst!

Desmond was also 'man about the house' as his father Alfred was now not only in his seventies but suffering from malaria acquired during his time in South America. He was heavily in demand to keep things running at home (as an example, the lighting at the rectory was run on a 50 volt DC system, powered by a bank of lead acid batteries, charged by a dynamo set with a hot-bulb oil engine at the back of the coach house. This system was over forty years old and Desmond was chief mechanic until it was replaced by mains electricity in 1936.) On one famous occasion the blowlamp (which was used to preheat the hot bulb) misbehaved and sprayed hot burning paraffin onto the dynamo drive belt, so that when Desmond returned to the engine room at the back of the coach house, he encountered a form of homemade Catherine wheel with a belt totally on fire and rotating at high speed! He managed to extinguish it before it set the rest of the building alight but given that all the wiring was supported on wooden cable trays it must have been a near run thing. Mains electricity was clearly easier to live with on a practical basis. As mentioned above, in a bizarre survival, the Essex County Record office still has the hire purchase agreement Audley Alfred took out to finance the conversion of the rectory to mains

electricity in the mid-thirties. He paid it off and presumably it then went into the 'official records' somewhere. The whole job cost the princely sum of five pounds and twelve shillings.

The family tradition is that Desmond was kept exceptionally busy on this and other duties by his father. One of his Dollar aunts who lived in Saffron Walden finally issued granddad with an ultimatum, that if Desmond was to study for his finals, he was to live with *her* in Saffron Walden, so that he could concentrate on the essential business of getting his degree. She was showing a good example of that firm and sensible organizing hand which has been a feature of Hewson, Ost and Dollar womenfolk over the years, to the great advantage of the rest of us. We remain in her (and their) debt. Desmond was ordained in 1938, and his father died but a few months later. Desmond served as curate in East Hanningfield during his father's final months.

I don't know exactly how Mum and Dad met except that Desmond was curate in charge at Acton during the latter part of the war, after serving for a while as curate near Thetford in the three parishes of Barnham, Euston and Elveden. He had been ordained as priest in the autumn of 1938, and while his father was seriously ill, in the last few months of his life, Desmond was 'curate in charge' at Hanningfield. When his father died, another rector was appointed, and Desmond had to seek work elsewhere. As an 'embryo vicar' he was exempt from regular military service but had to work his apprenticeship by helping out in the 'less popular' and less populated parishes of rural East Anglia. I don't think the army would have been his scene anyway, but I do think he found his feet in the Home Guard. Not long after ordination, he was directed to be curate in charge in the three parishes of Euston, Barnham and Elvedon, near Thetford, in Norfolk.

He owned up to us that for a lot of his time he had been heavily involved in the Home Guard in and around Thetford, as he had his own transport, a slightly unusual situation then for private individuals, as fuel was very hard to come by. His job (amongst other dodgy business, I suspect) was to drive around the local villages, rounding up old crown-stoppered bottles and, returning to base, to convert them into self-igniting Molotov cocktails. These the local Home Guard units used to fire (at great risk to life and limb – theirs of course, not the enemies) from a species of mortar known as a Northover Projector. I have not the slightest doubt that he was much more likely to be happily engaged in illegal and dangerous activities as an official or unofficial Home Guard 'armourer' than in pastoral duties in the parishes. It was wartime, after all, and 'make do and mend' in the UK armaments industry was all the rage. I know he had great fun with bakelite pattern 69 'so-called' practice grenades (jolly handy for fishing) and it was he who told me (why did he know?) that a Lee-Enfield rifle could also chamber and fire .410 shotgun cartridges which helped (apparently) to relieve boredom during those long hours on sentry duty, when wandering rabbits had forgotten the password.

Dad was also the ultimate squirrel, partially from not having the funds to easily replace things, partially from a lifelong conviction that you shouldn't throw half-used tins or old spare parts away as they 'might come in useful' (bit of a general family failing, that one), but really and truly because in a place as vast as the Rectory, there was always a spare corner to stack things away. Desmond was blessed with a retentive memory, and over the years many precious items were unearthed at moments of need. I recall odd things lying around in the workshop which may well have been hangovers from these war-time days – reels of blackened steel wire (which turned out to be trip wire for setting off mines and booby traps) various

calibers of used cartridge cases and suchlike novelties. I suspect Dad may have had other, more lethal curiosities had I but recognized what they were. He had certainly managed to hang onto his .38 service revolver and the service issue machete, so I'm quite sure there were other treasures tucked away, for that time when they 'might come in useful'!

Desmond, in his own quiet way, regarded himself, I think, as one of life's non-conformists, and his choice of career aided and abetted this preference. There were many small but significant indicators of this attitude that I fondly remember, such as his pride in describing an overheard conversation between councillors when he was first elected as a District councillor for East Hanningfield in or around 1944 (I'm not sure that 'election' was an accurate description – I suspect it came hand-in-hand with chairing the parish council...). According to Desmond, he overheard a whispered comment to the effect 'Watch out for this Ost character – he's clearly a Communist'. I have no idea what behavior gave rise to the warning, but Desmond was clearly amused by the thought and possibly by the stupidity of a member who could confuse 'Communism' with stubborn independence! His independence extended to ignoring, on a number of occasions, what he regarded rather pointless officer advice if he thought they were causing hardship or distress to folk in trouble.

He took that as far, in his ministry, as saying to me that if the occasion arose, he would quite happily baptize a dead child if in doing so he could reduce the distress of the parents. Infant mortality was rather higher then, and some parents were still disturbed by the idea of a child dying unbaptized. I'm not sure that his bishop would really have approved, but I never knew if he had ever had to do that. It was, however, absolutely typical of Desmond to put practical ministry and support for his parishioners, ahead of adherence to Church orthodoxy.

There was the tendency to build, with his own hands, what he felt he needed at any time, born partially from necessity, but also from a latent practical pleasure in what I believe is termed 'design realisation' or DIY from first principles. When faced with metal working projects, he happily commissioned his designs, for modifications to farm equipment and vehicles, and making 'special tools' to his own satisfaction, from the blacksmith and agricultural engineer who had an establishment in South Hanningfield, opposite the junction to the road to West Hanningfield that ran along the top of the dam of what is now Hanningfield Water.

None of this was officially encompassed in his role as Rector of All Saints East Hanningfield, but he was never really interested in other people's rules about 'appropriate conduct in holy office', unless these were rules that might threaten his remaining in post as Rector. Ignoring rules set by other people, is, I guess, a founding principle of independence, and I'm sure gave Desmond a certain degree of quiet pleasure. What was the use of being a 'beneficed clergyman', if you couldn't do, more or less, what you damn well pleased?

This was the period in which the 'beneficed clergy parishes' of the Church of England had a serious role as being among the last refuges of the great English eccentric, and in his own quiet way, Desmond was very happy to play his part! Apart from spending hours as a little boy in the blacksmith's yard, fascinated to see how Dad's projects were built, I was also introduced to one rector (in Acton, Suffolk) who collected barrel organs, and another who filled his rectory grounds with steam traction engines. There

was even one incumbent in a nearby parish, who had a liking for ale, and was reputed to celebrate Holy Communion at the bar of his local pub.

Building his own sidecar, (if existing designs weren't to his liking, which they weren't) or making most of his own bee-keeping equipment, was all part and parcel of that eccentricity. Amusingly, he also had his tweed jackets made with a 'poacher's pocket', which is a long pocket in the lining of the back of the jacket. Its particular feature were the long straps attached inside the shoulder lining to support the edge of the pocket when it was loaded with a rabbit, or hare, so that the way the pocket hung when loaded 'didn't give the game away'...As far as I'm aware, Desmond did not ever indulge in poaching, but the sense that he could, if he wished, somehow sums up that independent spirit, which I hope runs on down the generations.

I strongly suspect that his father, Audley Alfred, who repaired clocks and early motor cars, and mended other people's firearms as part of his ministry, would have recognized that as a family trait!

My mother Dora was born in Acton in 1924 at the Laurels. She was a bright girl, and had attended the Sudbury High School for Girls, at a time when secondary education was not automatic (it only became compulsory after the 1944 Education Act, and then only up to the age of 15). Her sister Beth followed her, but her youngest sister Nancy did not.



Dora about to cycle into Sudbury, to start her first day at Sudbury's 'High School for Girls'

After matriculation, she got a job as a shop girl in Cramphorns, the local agricultural merchants, but very soon got a job at the tax office in Sudbury where I think she was working until she met Desmond. I suspect that she may have found the likely prospects in wartime Sudbury quite limiting, or possibly she found life at home constricting with her two younger sisters. Desmond, not a local lad, but well educated and with the prospect of a permanent living in Essex about to materialize, may have seemed too good an opportunity to pass over. At any rate, it seems to have been a rapid romance. They married in January 1943 and lived in the gatehouse of Acton Place until the winter of 1944, when they moved to East Hanningfield. The war in Europe was going full swing, although in its last months, and V1's and V2's were still being fired at this country – two landed in the parish not long after Desmond and Dora arrived. There was also the unstated understanding in the Church of England that preferred clergy to be married, if they were to be appointed to a beneficed living, which at that time was for life. Unmarried clergy were seen as a potential 'reputational risk' in such an inflexible appointment.



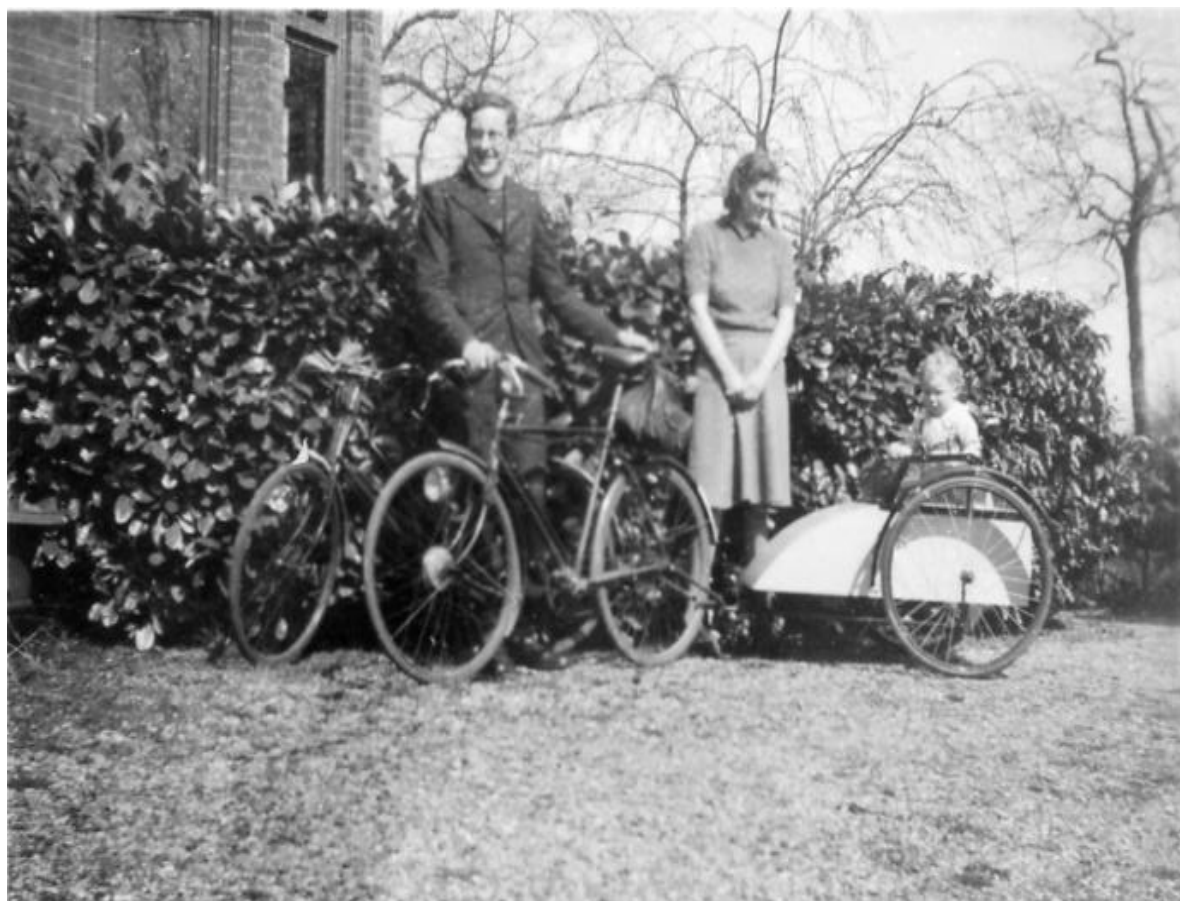
Dora aged eighteen, when she first met my father. She was married to Dad a year later, despite there being an age gap of 11 years between them.

Life at Hanningfield, from 1944, must have been tough for Dora, and a very steep learning curve for both of them. I strongly suspect Dad would have expected the 'domestic stuff' of cooking, washing and the housekeeping side of looking after the vastness which was East Hanningfield Rectory, to be Dora's job, while he set about establishing himself as the new Rector. I know they shared activities like cutting firewood, and Dora helped to saw logs with Desmond using a huge double-handed saw, lumberjack-

style, so it helped that they were both reasonably young and fit. They could not afford to heat much of the house with coal, as there was also the church to heat, and coal was expensive, and probably in pretty short supply at the end of the war. Dad had been used to a household with some servants around (his sister Paddy had her own maid prewar), and now it was all to do themselves.

Dora would also have been expected to take on the traditional roles of a rector's wife – full involvement in parish social activities, such as they were in late wartime. Helping out with the Mother's Union and the Womens's Institute, going into the parish school, parish visits, hosting rectory tea parties for parish notables and churchwarden's wives. She must have wondered what she had let herself in for! And behind all that, money was desperate short – the parish was only worth £600 per year, which was little enough even then; and she was soon pregnant with my brother, with no real way to earn any extra cash. Dora rose above it all with a combination of sheer willpower and personal organisation, and my memories were of a very happy childhood. She had courage.

In March 1949, and not long after I was born, when the spire of 'All Saints' was needing to be re-shingled, Dora climbed to the top of the scaffold around the spire, to take a series of pictures of the village as it was then, with her Box Brownie, for posterity. (*Desmond had absolutely no head for heights, and would not climb ladders, or, oddly, spiral staircases*).



1946: *The reality of transport for young families, during petrol rationing post war, on a rector's wages! This is how Desmond, Dora and Martin travelled to see Dora's family back in Acton (about 35 miles away).*

No doubt most of the practical stuff fell to Dora, like the day-to-day discipline of two unruly small boys, and I know that she worked extremely hard throughout her life at Hanningfield. As soon as she could, she helped out with secretarial duties at Hanningfield School, as well as being Desmond's unpaid typist, filing clerk and office organiser. Her entries in the school pupil muster are preserved in the microfilm records of Hanningfield Primary School, still to be found in the Essex Records Office, with Martin's date of entry, and my date of entry, with those of our friends, and I found it quite emotional to see her handwriting preserved there, after all these years.

I have one very unhappy memory of early years at home, which must have been heartbreaking for Dora as well as the rest of the family. Martin's best friend, David Davies, had a younger sister Nina, who would have just started at Sandon Secondary Modern when I was still in primary school. She was the nearest thing that Martin and I had (or would ever have) to a sister, and Mum had to break it to me that she had been killed at Sandon, while lining up for the school bus. One of the boys in the line pushed her under the bus, which was reversing. It had run over her head and killed her instantly. My memory of being told is still with me – Mum and I were out in the back yard, and we were both in floods of tears, and I can still see the scene. How the Davies family took it I do not know, but I suspect Dora and Desmond helped as much as any outsider could in that horrific circumstance. Luckily, I was too young to attend the funeral – she was buried in the graveyard at All Saints, so Dad would have taken her funeral.

As a sort of postscript to the support for Mr and Mrs Davies, Martin told me that when he was helping Mum and Dad clear their belongings from the Rectory in the early eighties, he discovered Virginia's school satchel tucked away in a cupboard at the back of our parent's bedroom. I can only think that Mum and Dad collected Nina's things from the school, after the accident, to spare her parents more grief.

In happier times, after my return to the village school in Hanningfield, Dora was there as school secretary, dinner monitor, playground assistant and all those jobs that fell to a very few people in such a small school, so she was very much part of my life at that time. Desmond recognised that Dora was restricted in the sort of work she could find as she could not drive, and given the age difference between them, he thought that she shouldn't remain dependent on him, or on infrequent buses for transport. It would be helpful for her independence and employment prospects if she could drive.



Dora (school secretary) supervising dinnertime at East Hanningfield Church of England Primary School. The little girl on the front right, looking at the camera, is Jeanette Hooper, whose family rented the top floor of the Rectory for many years. Dora later stood as Jeanette's godmother, when she was baptized as a teenager.

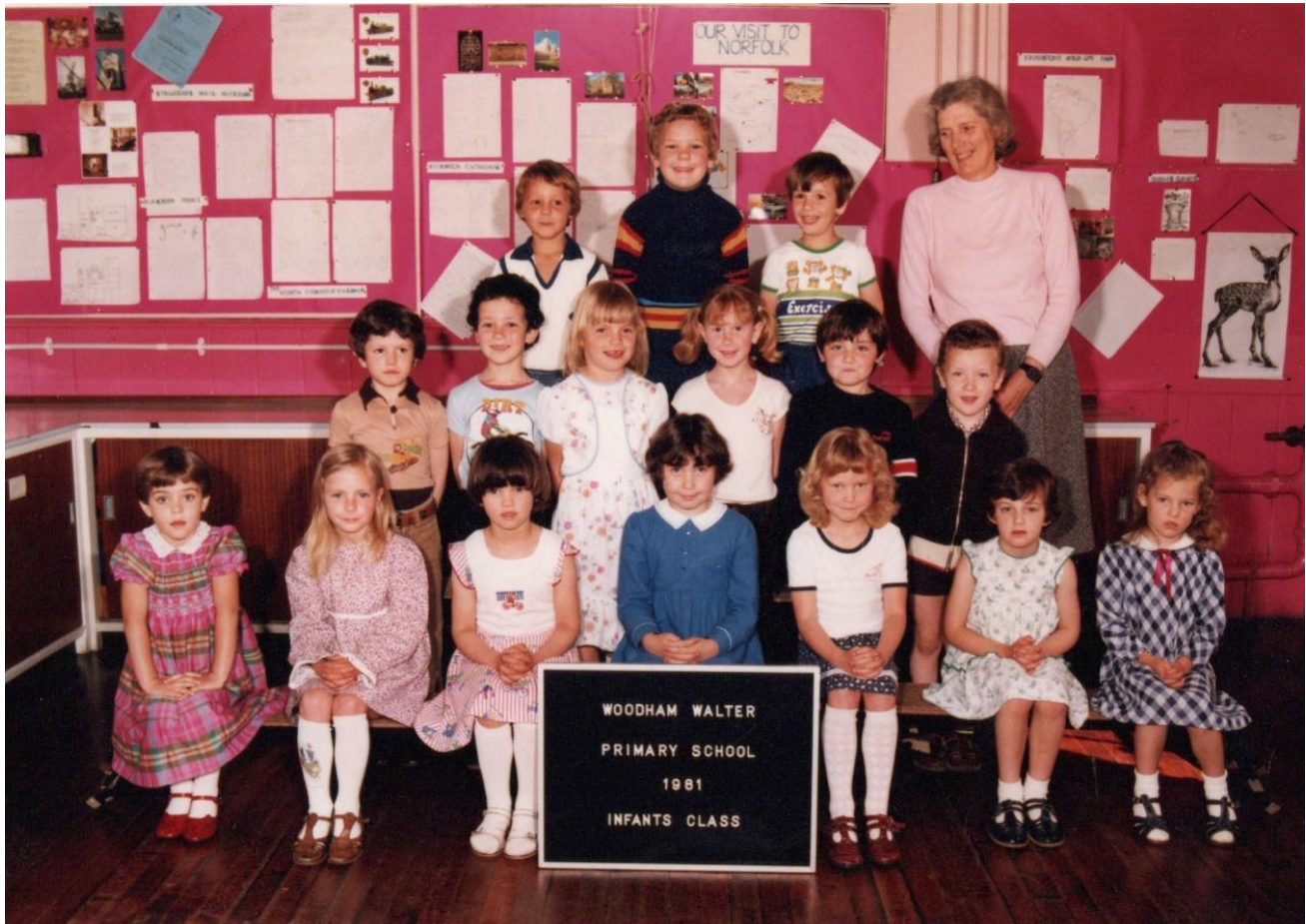


Dora supervising 'milk time' at East Hanningfield Primary School, another duty for her as the school secretary!

I think Dora was quite apprehensive but took lessons and possibly surprised herself by quickly mastering the art of driving. Desmond had never actually had to take a driving test (having driven all through the war) and Dora was actually the more reassuring driver, particularly as she didn't drift off into 'interesting conversation' while at the wheel!

Once she had the independence of being able to drive, and had her own car (a second-hand Ford Anglia, from memory) she did not look back. She enrolled at Brentwood Teachers Training College, and qualified as a primary teacher, at the age of 40, with flying colours. She made new friends, outside the parish, and quickly got herself a job as a teacher at Woodham Walter school, a few miles away. In retrospect, Dad's insistence that she should learn to drive changed the dynamic of their relationship for good. She was no longer 'trapped in the parish', she was no longer 'just the Rectors wife' and she was financially independent of Desmond. Dad's financial situation was always a closed book to Dora – she said to me after his death that she never actually knew if he had any money, or if he was up to his ears in debt. Mum had never liked traveling with Desmond, because his vehicles were always ancient and often unreliable, and she preferred (as do I) knowing that she had a fighting chance of arriving at an appointed place and time and knowing that you could get home again.

She seemed very happy teaching at Woodham Walter, and I have several photographs of her with her class which seem to confirm that. Dora now made a point of always buying new cars now she could afford to; Desmond stuck to his lifelong habit of acquiring second-hand, suspect vehicles almost to the end. He finally bought a new Chevan (it had to be a van, whatever) to everyone's great amazement, and finally, long after he could have easily afforded to, had a reliable car at long last.



1981: Dora with her infants class at Woodham Walter Primary School.

In a way, Dora's learning to drive simply underlined the fact that in many ways, she and Desmond had always led rather separate lives, with different interests, and different friends, but it balanced the score between them. Independent friends, living separate but co-ordinated lives in the same house, was the pattern of their later existence at Hanningfield. I suppose there are much worse situations to be in, in a long-term marriage.

This was as far as I'm aware a very happy time for Mum. She now had a close friend. Phyllis Harvey, that she met during her teacher training at Brentwood, that she remained close to for the remainder of Phyllis's life. She was financially independent (she and Desmond never had a joint bank account, so she never knew the state of Desmond's finances, which were one of life's mysteries). She could travel where and when she wanted (and did) and was no longer simply 'the rector's wife'. She was never as close to anyone in Hanningfield as she was to Phyllis, and between her teaching, her life in Hanningfield and her visits to Ingatestone (where Phyllis lived) she had a busy life. She even welcomed her friend's dog as part

of the scene at the Rectory, when I think we had all assumed that she detested dogs. It was about this time that Desmond acquired Brutus the donkey, perhaps as a gentle protest as much as nostalgia for the donkeys of his childhood.



1981: *Dora at Woodham Walter Primary School with more of the pupils*

That said, I'm afraid that some of *my* later memories of my mother are less comfortable than I would like and reveal a rift in the relationship with my mother. I left Hanningfield before the Hoopers, our final set of 'upstairs lodgers' moved out, but I discovered only recently in my conversation with Jeanette Hooper that she had decided to be baptised as a teenager, and Dora encouraged her in this, and stood as her godmother during the baptism.

All of which does make me suspect that Dora was slightly disappointed not to have daughters rather than sons – I certainly sensed that she thought I was pretty irresponsible in getting married to Judith when we did; despite the smiles in the wedding photographs, she had issued me with a stern and heartfelt warning, just before I left to get married (I had briefly returned home to get married in Hadleigh, at Judith's parents church) “not to think I could dump my children on her”, right out of the blue, having said nothing about her concerns at any time previously! She then left the wedding reception as quickly as she could, well ahead of us. It would be fair to say that that demonstration of 'fear and hostility' stayed with me for quite some time. I thought it was significant that while Desmond would come down to Sussex to stay with us and go on holiday with us and the children when they were small (as did Judith's mum and dad) I can't remember Dora ever doing so.

The final confirmation of her extreme disappointment with the '*hand biology and chance had served her*' was to discover, at a time when Judith and I were trying to support her during her descent into Alzheimers,

that she had written both Martin and I out of her will! That was a surprise rather than a problem, but on sober reflection it was only really a continuing part of the pattern. I'm afraid it sounds very harsh at this point in my story, but I found it difficult to be close to Dora, and my relationship with her in the latter years was dutiful rather than affectionate, unlike the close bond I felt to Desmond. The way she reacted (or rather her lack of reaction, and indifference) to my father's final illness hurt and surprised me, but I felt she wasn't sorry to be rid of him at last. I think the only conclusion I have come to is that she felt trapped by her marriage at nineteen, and while she was affectionate to us as children, she would have found daughters more companionable.

I felt she didn't much like the adults we became, possibly because she saw too much of Desmond in both of us. I just hope neither of my children will feel that way about me...

When we were sorting out Dora's bank details in Sudbury a few years ago, we were given a sealed envelope of papers with Desmond's signature on it from 1946, and among other stuff I found the insurance policy for the year they moved in. I find it touching that the hay in the barn at the Rectory was insured for the princely sum of £100, as the missiles and bombs of Nazi Germany continued to fall in the parish around them. It was wasted effort, really. Milking parlours were shaken, and one of the oldest timber houses in the village had a V1 land in soft ground a few hundred metres away. It was pushed noticeably sideways by the blast, but gradually creaked and groaned its way towards an upright position again over the next few days, thanks to its resilient oak frame. All that effort and expense by the dark forces of Nazi Germany, simply to terrorise one small East Anglian parish – all in vain.

In later years, Dad claimed he held the German armed forces in total contempt for their failure to blow out the late Victorian stained glass windows at the east end of the church (which were not to his taste – or to mine, I must add) despite dropping several thousand kilograms of high explosive in the parish (at least one massive parachute mine, one V1 and one V2, as far as I'm aware). It was a perfect opportunity to remove those creepy disciples and their suspiciously well-manicured Aryan Christ, and in Desmond's view a bit of plain window glass would have been preferable. How could you hold an organization committed to world domination in any respect if they couldn't do that one simple thing?

Desmond had a very narrow escape from the forces of nature towards the end of his time at the Rectory. (I'm hoping it wasn't a reminder that the Almighty took a dim view of his attitude towards stained glass images of the Crucifixion....)

In January 1978 he had set off to walk over to the church (possibly to light, or check on the state of the heating boiler under the church) and had noticed that the sky was getting very dark as he passed the 115 foot high Wellingtonia between the pond and the drive. Just as he reached the church there was an almighty clap of thunder, in the very close neighbourhood. Walking back to the house once the storm had passed over, he found that the Wellingtonia (the 'Giant Tree' of our childhood) had been struck and was now only about 60 foot high! Rather more worryingly, huge splinters of the trunk were stuck into the ground around the tree, several right by the drive he had walked along a few moments before the tree was hit. I was living in Sussex by that time, but the Essex Chronicle thought to make it a news item (hopefully without reference to divine displeasure...) and sent a photographer.



1978: Desmond with the shattered remains of our Wellingtonia (the 'Giant Tree', as we kids knew it) after the lightning strike. (I suspect he had already tidied up some of the shower of splinters!)