

## Married life

I met Eva at the Oxted Young Farmers club. I was Chairman and she was Secretary. A classic case of chairman marrying secretary. When we started going out together she was 17 and I was 21. We got on well and had ideas for better farming. Over the years I realised what a gem I had had the good fortune to marry. She was accomplished in many things. She excelled in everything she tried, from public speaking to cooking.

We married on Feb 1st 1950. We took our honeymoon in Devon, where it rained every day except for one when it snowed. While there we visited a cousin who was delighted to show us his farm, and took us on a tour, which was memorable as we had absolutely no suitable clothing or gum boots! He was very proud of his engine, but struggled to start it and became so red in the face we feared he'd do himself an injury.



*Eva*

In 1952, twelve years after my mother died, my father married Grace Botley, who was a middle-aged spinster. He had met her at the shop her brother owned in Westram. We used to supply this shop with bunches of snowdrops.

Grace was not an easy person to get on with, and seemed to resent everything, including my relationship with my father. She



*New parents*

resented the fact that any money from the grandparents was to be divided between the grandchildren, and pressurised Grandmother to leave her the contents of her house, which were not rightly hers. It was a pity that many things which belonged to the family went elsewhere.

Our first son William was born in 1953. Grace resented us and made life as difficult for us as she could. She told my father I had been stealing grain for my chickens, and turned the tradesmen that visited the house against us. When I took Eva to hospital to have William she said to Mrs Kilna "There they go. Off again!" Because of

this atmosphere we had to find somewhere else to live. We were living in the back of the house, and had to go around three sides of the house to use the shared lavatory, so were unable to avoid Grace.

It was very difficult to find any houses to rent. We found a nine acre farm at Edenbridge that came with a reasonable house, that we rented for £80 a year.

In the last years of Father's life he hadn't been able to run the farm properly. Hedges were grown out and, in some cases, had been neglected for years. We had a meeting with Mr Hitch from the Estate, and Pattello & Vinson on our part. After much deliberation, an agreement was reached to balance the amount owing with the produce (hay and straw) left on the farm. This was probably quite generous on the Landlord's part as dilapidation could add up to a lot of money.

When Father died an estate manager was appointed by the Landlord to sort out the dilapidations. The landlord bought a bungalow for Grace to live in for the rest of her life. They offered me the farm, but Eva and I were doing quite well on our small farm, so I declined.

When Grace died her brother Reg met me at the bungalow where she lived. He said he realised that some of the things in the house really belonged to the Stone family. Anything I recognised I could have to share with my brother and sisters. The first thing I saw was the table, which used to stand in the hall at Norheads. I said "I recognise that" and he said "Ah, I promised that to my nephew." Nearly everything had been promised to someone else in the Botley clan. Eva particularly wanted a Wellington chest, which used to be in Grandmother's house. Reg said "There are things in there, have it another day." I visualised this disappearing so said, "That's all right Reg, we'll empty it now", which we did and I took it away. He fetched out some silver spoons, which I had never seen before, so I said "I recognised these" and got them. Altogether I did manage to get several things for our family, but wished afterwards that I had kept the key to the back door and gone back to sort out some more. William came down to go to the funeral and afterwards we went to Reg's house. Lo and behold, in pride of place on the sideboard was Grandmother's cut glass biscuit barrel!

After leaving Norheads Farm, Eva and I's adventures continued at Edenbridge and beyond, and my years at Biggin Hill offered me a good foundation for my future.