

My Life

by

Charles George Edgar Purchase

1926-2015

Chapter 1

My name is Charles George Edgar Purchase and I was born on 2nd January 1926 at No.72 King Street, Portsmouth in Hampshire. This much I know. However, a lot of the history of my life is based on what I have learned very much later but I must proceed to tell the tale as I have become aware of it chronologically. I do not remember my mother, Lydia Purchase nee Kerridge as I and my oldest sister, Annie were put into the care of our Aunt Annie and Uncle Harry (Harper) when we were quite small. I was 18 months old; my sister probably about 3 years old. Our father was serving in the Royal Navy as a stoker and spent a lot of the time abroad. This becomes significant much later.



Our aunt and uncle became our virtual mum and dad and mum became Mum to us although uncle remained Uncle because our dad stayed with us while on leave and later when he left the navy. At this time we were not aware of any other brothers or sisters but a few years later we heard rumours of an older brother called John.

Mum never went out to work after their marriage and Uncle worked as a general labourer doing work for the Post Office. We lived in a two room flat with an outside toilet which you had to go down a flight of stairs for. Needless to say, chamber pots were in use. We had gas lighting and cooking but hot water had to be heated on the range where the baking was done. At bath time we had to all share in a large galvanised steel wash tub; my sister and I first, then Mum and finally Uncle by which time we were abed. In those days there were no pre-school arrangements so we did not go to school until we were five. However, Mum used to sit us down at night and read to us and she also taught us how to write. This gave us a good start when we went to school.



So we were not well off but we were brought up properly. We progressed through infant school (5-7), junior school (7-11) and primary school (11-14) and went to Sunday school. When Annie was ten years old, she was put into a Royal Naval Orphanage, a move I have never been able to understand and despite repeated questions, my aunt and uncle refused to offer any explanation. This was in 1935 and we would only see her on certain holidays until she was 16 and sent out to work at which point she came to stay with us at the early part of the Second World War.

Still in 1935, we moved from the two room rented flat into a three bedroom rented house complete with bathroom, conservatory and garden. Needless to say, the contrast was amazing; this was sheer luxury. Electric light, geyser supplied hot bath water; it was a whole new world. My uncle was in his element with the new garden, being born and bred in the country and he made it a labour of love and of horticultural art with flowers of all kinds and especially home grown vegetables. Unfortunately, this ideal state was not to last for long. In 1938, with the looming threat of war, Council workman came around and dug up his beautiful garden to plant a brand new Anderson air raid shelter. He compensated by hiring an allotment in ground just outside the city. He insisted on enlisting my help in the hard work of breaking the ground but he was somewhat of a slave driver with short temper and low on tolerance, as a result of which I have had great distaste for gardening ever since and continue to feel that way. In Portsmouth at the outbreak of war there was a great fear of massive air raids, especially after the examples of Warsaw and other Polish cities. All the schools closed and most children were evacuated. I was sent into the country to stay with Uncle's sister, Aunt Kate. However nothing much happened at this stage so I soon returned to Portsmouth.

Early in 1940 the schools were reopened but on a part time basis and with stand-in teachers as all the regular teachers were either held in the evacuated schools or had been called up for military service. The resulting teaching was very poor and lacked any encouragement so that as I was now 14, I left school to seek work which I found in an aircraft factory promising electrical experience. It started out using pliers to bend tiny nails to make staples to hold down wiring in the aeroplane wing. This was followed by a number of other mundane tasks. For this, I received nine shillings and sixpence per week of which I was allowed to keep the sixpence while the nine shillings went to Mum for my keep, and she needed it. So I left that job to look for something a bit more remunerative. In fact, until 1942, I had a number of different jobs because my uncle kept finding jobs for me for which I was totally unsuited and which I left to find something new. I must have been the total despair of my guardians at this time.

While all this was going on during 1940 - 42, Portsmouth in common with other South coast towns and cities, suffered from a number of heavy air raids. After one particularly savage raid on the night of 10th January 1941, my uncle took us into the country to stay with his sister Kate and her husband Bill. We commuted to work. My sister Annie was with us then. On the morning of 12th May 1941, we came home to find the whole of the front of our house blown in and the roof gone. All the surrounding houses had suffered similar damage; the result of a landmine. Where it had landed,

some 200 yards away there was nothing left; everything completely flattened. We moved house temporarily until my uncle found a house for rent in the district of Copnor, a safe distance from the city centre and luckily, near his allotment. The house in Dover Road was where my aunt and uncle lived out the rest of their lives.



In 1942, I joined the Air Training Corps and donned my Air Force Blue uniform. I also joined the Police Auxiliary Messenger Service, using my cycle to attend the police station during air raids ready to carry messages in the event of communication breakdown. At the time we all thought we should be doing something. Toward the autumn of 1942 I had been holding down a useful job with a small firm of plumbers and electricians where I had learned a lot and made myself useful; in fact I felt I was in my element. However, Uncle went and did it again. I wasn't earning enough money, and certainly it wasn't very much. Uncle had his ear to the ground when it came to looking for work and this time he found what seemed a good job for me. It was in the Royal Naval stores department as a trainee store man at the gunnery school on Whale Island near Portsmouth and with rather more money. What neither he nor I knew was that it would make for a dramatic change in my life.

Chapter 2

My father was born Charles William Purchase on 23rd April 1894 at Havant Street, Portsea, Hampshire. He had an older brother, George and two sisters, Annie and Elizabeth. There was also an older step brother (John) from their mother's previous marriage and he was said to have been a bully to the younger ones. Dad did a short term in the local militia from around 1910 and went on to join the Royal Navy in 1913.

He served as a stoker throughout the First World War and survived unharmed. What happened in 1919 was hidden from my sister and I and I only found out many years later. On 23rd February 1924 he married my mother, Lydia Kerridge. By this time he was a leading stoker. On 5th October 1924 their daughter, my sister Annie Elizabeth was born. In 1925, having served 12 years in the navy, Dad signed on to complete a 22 year engagement. I was born on 2nd January 1926 but from then on things become very hazy.



I have mentioned previously how my sister and I were taken into care by our guardians but they were always very button lipped concerning the reason and we never did find out the real truth.

From this time my memories of dad were more like that of an occasionally visiting uncle who, coming home on leave, brought us presents and took us to the pictures when we grew older. We were still too young to understand that he had left our mother; in any case we were not aware we had a mother other than the one we knew as Mum. We were that naive. This arrangement continued and in 1935 dad finished his 22 years service and left the navy to find work outside and stayed with us, all of us still in the two room flat. He slept on a sofa in the living room. Being an ex sailor, that was no hardship. I remember that he was an avid beer drinker and he also had a prodigious appetite. His life as a civilian did not suit him, and so in 1936 he signed on for another term in the navy.

He was now 42. He joined the battle-cruiser HMS Repulse on its three year commission to cruise the Mediterranean. They returned in the summer of 1939 and paid off just in time to enter the Second World War. He was not so lucky this time. His ship was sunk on channel convoy duty early on, and then in 1940 he was in the drink again at Narvik at the Norway fiasco. Then he was at Dunkirk. On the night of the big raid on Portsmouth in 1941, he was home on leave with us where together with my uncle and neighbours, he helped to put out incendiary bombs and he said, having been through all he had seen in the navy, that he had never been so scared in his life. He was drafted to the submarine depot ship, HMS Dunluce Castle at Scapa Flow where he remained until his medical discharge in 1944.

He came home to stay with us, now at Copnor, and worked as a boiler keeper in the Portsmouth Naval Dockyards. From his previous life style, he was not a healthy man and he continued to drink and smoke so that his health deteriorated and he died on 11th March 1953 just short of his 59th birthday. Although I was in the army by this time, my wife and I were living at Dover Road and were present to watch him pass away in his sleep.

My dad had an unhappy childhood with his bullying step brother and was glad to get into the navy where he enjoyed the life. He was not happy in civilian life and there were always certain tensions when he came home permanently to stay with my aunt and uncle so that his final days were not particularly happy. He was always generous to a fault which is why he never had any money. He was happiest in the navy.

Chapter 3

Back to autumn 1942 where I am employed in the naval stores department. I found the work quite varied and interesting and the pay was certainly a lot better. I and some equally newly joined companions soon learned what was meant by naval discipline. Even as civilians we were required to conform to the ideals of 'spit and polish' and had to stand by for the Captain's rounds every Saturday morning.

One day we were ordered to report to the main naval barracks at Portsmouth to draw naval uniform. Navy blue tunic and trousers with peaked cap, boots etc. About half a dozen of us there were and we were to be enlisted as junior store men. Nothing else happened then until the end of December when we were told to report to Chatham Naval barracks on new year's day 1943, so the crowd of us travelled up to London on December 31st, watched a show at the Windmill Theatre and then went on to Chatham to arrive as required. On this, the day before my 17th birthday, we were all enlisted in the Royal Navy and spent the next month undergoing initial naval training. We then returned to Whale Island and our normal routine. Shortly after we were all earmarked to be drafted abroad and were to report for inoculations, then given one week embarkation leave. There am I, just 17 going abroad and neither I nor my guardians know where. They weren't too upset even though this was wartime. We all had to get a train to London and then change for Devonport where after a lot of hassle we found ourselves on board our first Royal Naval Ship, the anti-aircraft cruiser HMS Kenya.

Then it was that we heard we were on passage to Bombay. We sailed in March, heading out into the Atlantic, stopping at Gibraltar. At this time you had to go round the Cape of Africa so we continued South crossing the line (equator) before stopping at Freetown then on to Simonstown and Capetown before arriving at Mombassa, Kenya where we changed ship to the armed merchant vessel HMS Rampura which took us on to Bombay. I stayed there until December 1943 when I was drafted aboard the armed and converted luxury cruiser, HMS Bull. She was converted to be a Headquarters Combined Operations ship and had already taken part in all the amphibious landings; North Africa, Sicily and Salerno in Italy. We sailed from Bombay just after Christmas and passed through the Suez Canal on my 18th birthday. We went on to cover the Anzio landings in January and then made our way back to Britain. After some leave, we overhauled and made ready for our last great landing, D-day 6th June. During this escapade we received a direct hit from a German dive bomber, sustaining some damage and some loss of life. We returned to Portsmouth where the ship was decommissioned and we were all sent off to different shore establishments.

The time is August 1944 and the Germans have found a new weapon with which to scare us; the flying bomb or 'Doodlebug'; a rocket fuelled explosive missile, aimed in the general direction of the enemy and designed to run out of fuel and fall to earth at a totally arbitrary point causing a devastating explosion. It took us a while to get over that one.



When I left the Bulolo, I was sent on two weeks leave, following which I was directed to report to an army warehouse in Southampton. A few weeks later I was drafted to a small boats provisioning base at a lovely camp in the beautiful New Forest area, right on the coast at Beaulieu. There we supplied all the small boats with rations and fuel. I was there until April 1945 and enjoyed the place very much. I was then with a group of fellow store men to join a naval party at Brighton. We were given Khaki battledress, rifle and bayonet and steel helmet and a mini commando course. This was in preparation for us to cross to Belgium and proceed overland through Holland and Germany to take control of the docks at Kiel. As we arrived at Amsterdam on 8th May, the news came through that the Germans had surrendered. On arrival in Kiel, our naval party was designated HMS King Arthur and we were all put aboard a luxury liner of the Hamburg America Line. Our khaki kit, rifle etcetera was taken from us and we had the most glorious accommodation and food the like of which we had not tasted since before the war. A few weeks later we were moved inland to a German naval barracks. It was far superior to anything that our navy had ever provided and we were very comfortable. We settled down to work along with the Germans but with whom we were not allowed to fraternise. That rule lasted for about a year but was gradually relaxed. In June, a number of NAAFI girls arrived to take over the running of the canteen.



They each came round to our stores for certain essential supplies and among them was a cook who would one day become Mrs. Purchase. Her name was Georgina Reid Mitchell, known as Jean. For some time we were just friendly, and we were moved about to different naval establishments. We met up again in Hamburg in 1946 which is where we became rather more than friends and in our spare time went out a lot together. You could say that it was here that we 'became an item'.

Chapter 4

Georgina Reid Mitchell, Jean was born on 15th April 1912, the same date on which the SS Titanic was sunk. We always concluded that she must have had something to do with it. These conspiracy theories are ever with us. She was born at 19 French Street, Wishaw, Lanarkshire. She was the third child in a family of nine; six brothers and three sisters. Their home was a rented flat with bedroom, kitchen with built in beds and a scullery. The toilet was outside down a short flight of stairs. When I first saw it, I was reminded of our old flat in Portsmouth. Her father, William was a miner and winding engine mechanic. He had died in 1921. I don't know if her mother, Janet worked; she certainly had enough to do as her family grew.



After she left school, Jean went into domestic service and she often spoke of how badly she was treated, with low pay and long hours. She had to put up with this for some ten years or so until the Second World War came along when she gladly opted to go into industry. She worked in a local steelworks in Motherwell as a grinder, which was quite heavy work and a dramatic change from her former domestic duties. In 1944, she applied for the job of cook in the NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institute) and after a suitable length of training, she was sent with some other girls to Germany. Which is where she met me. She had become my girl friend. We applied for leave at the same time and I went with her to visit her family after which we travelled together to Portsmouth to visit mine. That worked out quite well. After, we returned to Hamburg. In April 1947, I was demobbed and worked as a civilian: a naval store man in Gosport, close to Portsmouth. Jean meanwhile had been sent home and then to Petersfield, Hampshire and close enough for me to go and visit. However, she soon finished with the NAAFI and went home to Wishaw to find work as a school cook.

In April 1948, having become totally unsettled with civilian life, I applied to join the army and train as an electrician. I enlisted with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) and for the next eight months I was posted to various training camps, military and technical.

Jean and I wrote to each other still. It is worth remembering that at this time it was only 'well to do' and professional people that had the telephone. Anyway, in one of my letters I suggested to Jean that we ought to think about getting married. In a hurried reply, she wrote with excitement that every thing was being arranged, the banns were being read and the date was to be Friday 10th December. That was unexpected and it was with great difficulty I obtained permission to be married and get leave to do so. In the army you have to apply for permission to do that. I had permission to travel from Blandford in Dorset to Wishaw leaving Thursday afternoon, travelling over night and arriving Friday morning, get married and then return overnight on Sunday. I arrived in Wishaw about 9 O'clock and had breakfast with Jean. We were about to get married.



Friday 10th December 1948 was a very hectic and memorable day; it was the day I arrived in Wishaw to be married. After first having a quick breakfast, the first thing I needed was a good bath and for that I had to go to the old Wishaw Public Baths. There are many things I remember that morning in preparation for the wedding, some of them quite humorous, but far too many to relate here.



The marriage ceremony took place in a Manse in Motherwell and from there we went to the photographers; then back to the flat for the reception. There were just Jean's family and a few friends. None of my family was there as they lived too far away. They were very disappointed that we had not given them sufficient time to make any arrangements but they sent us some money which was most welcome. For the honeymoon (ha! Ha!), Jean and I stayed overnight in a boarding house in Helensburgh, to where we had to travel, there and back by bus, changing at Glasgow each way. In December in Scotland it was cold and wet but never mind, we were on our honeymoon. It was ever so romantic, Ahh!

We returned on the Saturday to the flat and spent the day and the night there and on the Sunday I had to return overnight to Dorset. I was now a married man though some of my fellow trainees said that I didn't look married. We carried on as before; I at the camp while in training and Jean still working at her school dinners. We continued to write. Then came Christmas and New Year leave. I spent Christmas at Portsmouth with my Mum and Uncle and then travelled to Wishaw for the New Year with Jean. On 2nd January 1949 while I was still on leave, my brother in law, Angus rushed into the flat to announce the birth of a baby girl, Janette and sharing my birthday. On the 18th June this year (2011), Janette celebrated her 40th Wedding Anniversary. No wonder I feel old! Throughout the following year I was moved around quite a lot with different types of training interspersed with the occasional spell of leave. Then in early December, just before our first Wedding Anniversary, I was posted to Tripoli and on to Misurata. This was a beautiful city but I was only there for a short while when I went back to Tripoli.



After a year, I applied to have Jean come and join me and we had a lovely time. Jean really enjoyed Tripoli which was also a lovely city but while we were there she suffered two miscarriages. These were sad occasions but she rapidly recovered each time and we really had a most happy time there. It is where I became interested in photography and learned a lot about it. We also made a lot of good friends there among other married families. Unfortunately all good things come to an end but in December 1952 it was nice to be going back home.

Chapter 5

On 3rd December 1952 we flew from Castle Benito Airfield near Tripoli to Valetta in Malta. None of your luxury travel. It was an old Lockheed DC8 carrier plane, the common workhorse aircraft for all the allies during and just after the war. We stayed overnight in Valetta and on the 4th, took off for home. We were diverted to Nice in Southern France due to the whole of the London and South Eastern area being covered in a thick blanket of 'smog'. London up to that time had been well used to fogs but this was far worse than had ever been experienced. It resulted in a lot of deaths due both to accidents and to lung failures. It resulted in London being made a smokeless zone.

We spent the night in Nice in a very posh hotel, a singular event for us. We eventually flew back and landed at a military airport some distance from the capital and travelled the rest of the way by bus. In London, we located Jean's brother Sam and his wife Ada. They were living in temporary accommodation but they managed to put us up for the night.

We went on to Portsmouth and my Aunt and Uncle, and I was lucky enough to get a posting to a camp quite close, so I could travel to and from duty. I was there until August. In March my dad died, at home after a long illness. He was only 58. At about this time I was promoted to Corporal.

In June we had the Coronation and the Queen visited Portsmouth to review the fleet. There were all sorts of street parties. In August I was posted to Bordon in Hampshire. At first I used to travel by cycle and train morning and night between Portsmouth and Bordon. It was just about this time that Jean fell pregnant. We were very careful. I managed to find army quarters and so we moved to Bordon and a place on our own.



Aldershot was the nearest market town and was just a twenty minute bus ride from Bordon. It was the main Army centre in the South of England. We used to go there quite a lot as Bordon had very few shops. It was in Aldershot that Jean fell in love with and bought our first dog, a puppy, a Manchester terrier bitch. Outside our house in Bordon we had a patch of grass; the size of a postage stamp but when my Uncle and Aunt came to visit one time, he had to try out his gardening skills and do some planting. The winter 1953/54 was quite severe with a full fall of snow and very cold. In early January I was posted to Aldershot and we were found quarters there. From then on, Jean's

pregnancy came on a pace and I had never, nor ever since known her to look so well. Martin was born on 4th April 1954. Jean was just eleven days from her 44th birthday and we were both very relieved and happy.

When we moved to Aldershot we of course took Trixie with us. It took her a while to settle but there were some great open fields there where she could run around and of course we walked with her a lot. After Martin was born she was greatly interested in the new baby and so must have decided that she wanted one of her own. She had six. I was there to watch them being born. We had to get rid of all but one, which went to the next door neighbour's daughter.

In July, I applied to attend a specialised course on x-ray and electro-medical equipment. For this I had to travel to Woolwich, South-East London. I managed to commute daily using two trains. This was costly and the days were long but it was still very interesting. You could afford to travel then. I came out top of the course with a pass of 93%, so it was worth it

Soon after, I was posted to Kilburn, North London, and we moved to a first floor flat there. Trixie was not happy with this move and sadly one morning while Jean was busy, she ran away and we never saw her again. She had been such a lovable pet.

Sam and Ada had settled in a flat in Southwark, and whenever we could we would meet. Hampstead was a great area for families and friends although they never had any family but Sam made a great fuss of Martin.

We could occasionally travel down to Portsmouth to see Mum and Uncle and we also got to Wishaw while we were there. In January I was posted to Singapore so after a rush round to see both our folks while on our embarkation leave, we flew to Singapore. I was supposed to join an army boat section as an electrician there but when I pointed out that I had been trained to work on X-ray and electro-medical equipment, I was posted to Kuala Lumpur and the REME Workshop there. Jean and Martin had to wait at Singapore until I could find suitable quarters. It took over six weeks. Kuala Lumpur was some 200miles up country and a long train journey so we couldn't see each other for all that time.



Having found a suitable form of accommodation, I travelled down to Singapore to take Jean and Martin back to Kuala Lumpur. The house was very grand looking (see photo) and we had just one small wing. Now although I had secured the hire of these rooms, I had not slept in them so that having arrived with Jean and Martin, we prepared to sleep there for the first time. But Malaya is a very warm country so that although it was already dark, the first thing we did was to open a window. This was a bad move. In a very short time the whole place was infested with an angry horde of hornets which was somewhat alarming, indeed frightening. I shut the window and we covered Martin with a sheet while Jean wrapped in a coat. I then proceeded to lure the beasts into another room and then another in series of turning on and off lights at which they were most obliging until I got them well out the way. It was a most exciting introduction to our new home. We got away from there very quickly. In fact we had several moves whilst in Kuala Lumpur.

Chapter 6

While I was in Malaya I was required to undertake inspection and maintenance of army hospitals and dental centres every six months, I had to make a tour for this purpose involving quite a lot of travel and leaving Jean on her own with Martin. It was a time when the communists were still causing trouble and we had to travel in convoy.

While we were there, Martin seemed to lose his appetite and we found it very difficult to get him to eat; meals were very slow. It may have been the heat. Also, we made a lot of good friends; other army families. We had parties and camp concerts and it was quite good from that point of view. I mentioned the heat before but it was also very humid and that could be very depressing. We had violent thunder storms and torrential rain, especially during the monsoon season.



In 1957, Mum wrote to tell us that Uncle Harry had died on December 3rd. He was 66. He had worked with his firm of contractors ever since the end of the first world war and in 1956 when he reached 65 he was just paid off; no warning, no pension, nothing. His health was not good and he had got a spare time job as a gardener, which suited him. But he had a short illness and then died.

At the start of 1959, our time to leave Malaya had come and we took the train down to Singapore and waited on a flight back to Britain. While we were in Malaya, my sister Annie had married an ex sailor, George Symonds and they had a daughter, Diane in March 1958.

We flew back from Singapore in early February 1959 and having arrived at London, we went first to visit Sam and Ada who put us up for the night and the following morning we took the train to Portsmouth to see Mum. She was getting over the loss of Uncle Harry and had tried her hand at some home decorating which was good.

One of the first things I did when we got home was to buy a car, our first, an Austin A30 two door saloon which I called the 'shoe box' on account of its size. I had learned to drive while I was in the navy but had never before had money to buy a car. It enabled us to drive up to Wishaw to visit Jean's family.



While we were in Malaya, a distant cousin of Mum's, known as Aunt Lill had had to sell up her home and move to a smaller place. She had had a lodger staying with her called Harold but now there was no place for him. He had become like one of the family and knew all of us so he came to Dover Road and pleaded with my aunt and uncle to give him a place, which they did. So Harold was there when we arrived home. Harold was not the brightest of fellows. He was born on the 5th April 1909 and spent all his working life as a general labourer in the Portsmouth dockyards. He was extremely naive and had an annoying habit of repeating other peoples' phrases over and over which could become tiresome. He could also be difficult and pig headed at times, otherwise he was helpful and could be generous to a fault. He treated Mum like he would his own mother, of whom we knew nothing.

I had to leave Jean and Martin with Mum while I went to my next posting which was at REME Electrical Training Battalion at Arborfield, near Reading in Berkshire. Meanwhile Martin started his first school at Westgate Primary School, Copnor, Portsmouth. However, this was not for long for in our search for suitable accommodation for us we had to move to three separate houses before we were finally settled which meant three more different schools for Martin; namely at Wokingham, Reading and finally at Arborfield.

My job here was as an instructor on X-ray and electro-medical equipment and it was a very interesting appointment. We had a nice army house, close to where I worked and it was a good posting.



Berkshire is a beautiful county and it was lovely to just cruise around the countryside in the car. Jean really loved that. Sam and Ada occasionally came by train to visit and stay for a weekend. One summer time, Jean, Sam, Ada and Martin went for a walk while I stayed in the house for some reason. Later, Sam came rushing in to say that Martin had been knocked down by a car. Ada had been showing him how to play 'Pooh Sticks' and in his excitement he had dashed across the road without looking. Sam and I rushed to the scene in the car and there was a crowd there. Martin was lying unconscious and Jean and Ada were still waiting for the ambulance. It was a fairly remote spot. When they arrived he was taken into the Reading Royal Infirmary and we followed in the car. Fortunately nothing was damaged but he was in a coma and was kept in overnight. When we collected him the next day he was all smiles and bright as a button.

By this time I had traded in the A30 for the larger Austin A40 which was more comfortable. However, as I knew our three year 'at home' period was near its end, I decided to sell it. In March 1962, I was warned of a posting to Hong Kong and was given embarkation leave during which I hired a car to take Jean up to Wishaw to say goodbye to her family. On return, we made all the necessary preparations and on 4th April 1962 (Martin's 8th birthday) we flew on our way to Hong Kong.

Hong Kong consists of the main Island containing the city of Victoria together with a number of smaller islands, and the adjacent mainland with the New Territories which include the port of Kowloon and a large farming community. Hong Kong Island could be compared in size to the Isle of Wight but is densely populated with most of that population in Victoria.

Our introduction to Hong Kong was tinged with an element of excitement. In 1962, Hong Kong's only international airport was Kai Tak Airport with its runway extending well out into the Harbour. In order to land, an aircraft had to fly between two large hills and drop down quite sharply over a densely populated area so that it could touch down close to the start of the runway. In our case the approach was shrouded in mist and as we came in it suddenly cleared to show that we were much

too low and a rapid climb ensued, whereupon we were diverted to Taiwan for three hours after which we returned for a successful landing. Fortunately, at the end I still had on clean underwear.

The REME Workshop was located in the main army camp in Kowloon and when we arrived, we were accommodated briefly in a hotel nearby until we were moved into one of the army quarters, a modern sixth story high rise flat. It was quite pleasant and airy and we knew we were going to enjoy living in Hong Kong. Kowloon has some marvellous shopping centres and the things you could buy were beyond anything we had seen by 1962; also the prices were unbelievable. A real temptation to Spend! Spend! Spend!



However, the two Military Hospitals were located on the Island and when they understood what I was there for we were moved to the REME Detachment there and were given army quarters nearby. The contrast was unbelievable. Our new quarters were built halfway up a steep hill and could only be reached by a long flight of stone steps which gave access to other similar blocks of quarters and which ended at another road, Bowen Road close by the Bowen Road Hospital where most surgical procedures were carried out. Anyway it took something like 120 steps to reach our block which was an old colonial style building. There was no other way but to carry or have carried everything you needed up these steps. Some tradesmen even carried their wares across their shoulders all the way up. And every time we went out we had to climb up and down these steps.

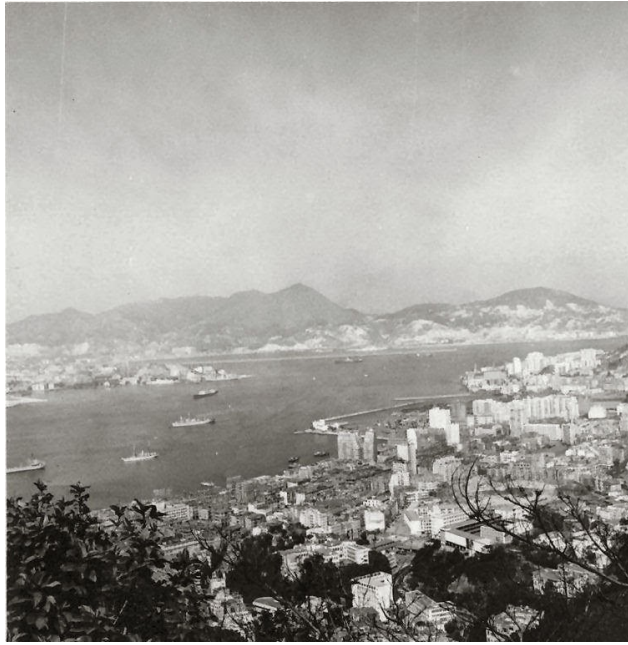


Where we were we had a glorious vista across the city and the Harbour. Victoria was a thriving city and was built at the foot of a big hill and it was expanding all the time. You could see nothing but huge cranes where new skyscrapers were being constructed and we watched the famous Hilton Hotel being built where we had a grandstand view. It was interesting to see that all the scaffolding used by the Chinese builders comprised robust bamboo rods lashed firmly together and it was fascinating to note that during the typhoons, these bamboo structures withstood the worst of the storms, whereas some of the steel scaffolding as erected by western firms collapsed.

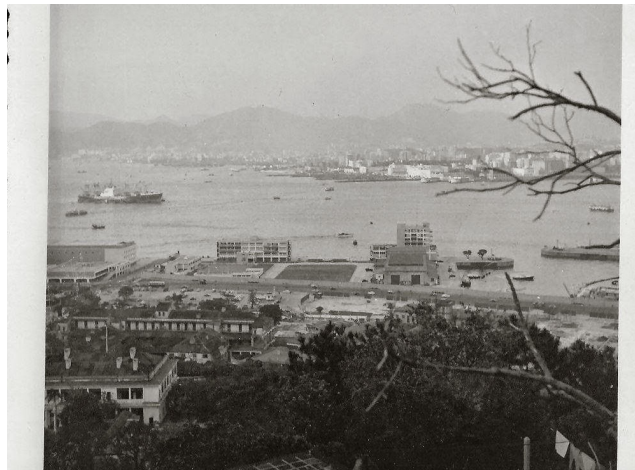


There was a very efficient storm warning system organised by the Harbour meteorological office. We had first hand experience of the typhoon; when one was forecast, the men had to report for duty leaving the poor wives to fend for themselves and try to secure the house against the massive blasts of wind and rain. It could be quite scary. While we were there, Jean started a small play group for pre-school toddlers whose mothers went out to work. Jean was rather older than most of the army wives. It helped her to pass the time.

Like Kowloon, Victoria was a marvellous place for shopping with some huge stores, Japanese being predominant. It was a good place to spend money you didn't have. Fortunately, we were not in possession of credit cards or a cheque book at that time so we could only spend accordingly.



Outside our quarter there was a concrete area with a railing from which you could get a marvellous view; a panorama of the whole Harbour area with Kowloon across the water and mountains in the back ground. On a clear day the scene was magnificent. And during the winter it was clear and dry nearly all the time. It felt cooler then although the temperature ranged from around 60-70F. You felt the need for something warmer. In the summer however it was not so pleasant, being hot and humid all the time and that of course was the typhoon season. I can imagine that in your part of the world, hot and humid may be the norm too. About that I really don't know, having never been there though I would have loved the opportunity. Despite the climate we all enjoyed Hong Kong immensely as there was so much to see and do. Jean loved to go round all the big shops and we made a lot of friends there. Martin really enjoyed his time there; he became a Cub Scout, went camping and looked quite smart in his uniform. Also, Hong Kong is where he learned to swim.

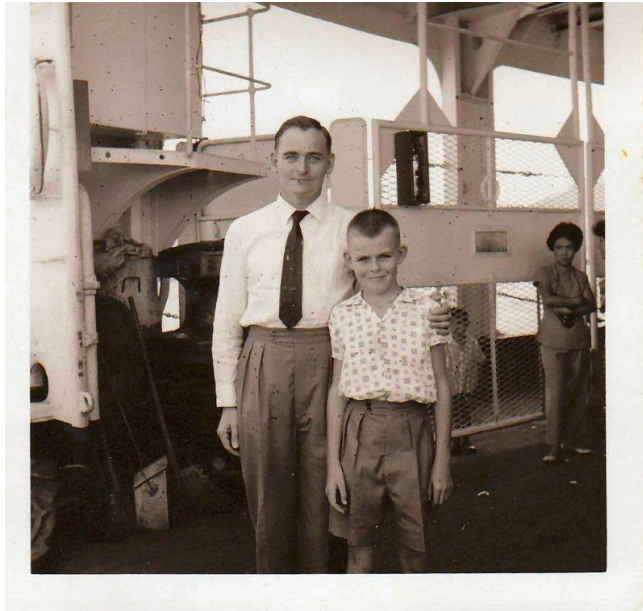


In 1963, Jean underwent a hysterectomy which set her back for a while but she soon recovered. The military hospitals were very good there and I was able to visit her quite often.

Coming toward the end of our tour there, in 1964 Harold Wilson became the leader of the first Labour Government since 1951 and great changes were to result. Our, (the army's) bet noir was one

Mr Dennis Healey, Secretary for Defence who set about cutting back savagely on the armed forces. In the corps of REME a lot of trades were either cut or grouped and my basic trade of electrician, vehicle and plant was scrapped. My additional skills were not taken into account so either I had to retrain as a vehicle mechanic and retain my present rank of sergeant or I could change my trade to that of telecommunications technician and revert to corporal. I had been a sergeant for 11 years. I had some time to make up my mind during which time we would return to Britain and after some leave be posted to Hanover in Germany. It was not a happy choice. Anyway, our time in Hong Kong ran out in April 1965 and we flew back to the UK on the 4th, Martin's 11th birthday and exactly 3 years to the day from our arrival there.

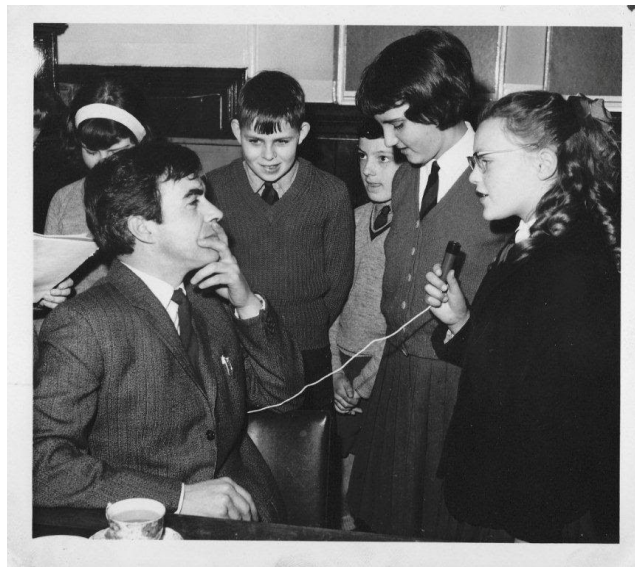




Chapter 7

On arrival back in Britain in April 1965 and having some leave, we first made our way to Portsmouth to see Mum and Harold and also Mum's sister, Aunt Lill who had retired. She had spent her life in domestic service but now moved in with Mum. This had always been her second home when on holidays. We spent about a week at Mum's before travelling by train to Wishaw to see all of Jean's family. Jean was from a large family and although 19 French Street was nothing more than a room and kitchen, it was at times a very crowded home. Jean's mother was still alive but was now in very poor health. Living with her were two of her sons, Alexander (Sanny) and Sam. Sam had lived in London with his wife Ada, but she had died suddenly in her sleep, so Sam had moved up to Wishaw. We were in Hong Kong at the time. The kitchen, so called was an all purpose room and contained two large built in double beds and many was the time that up to eight people would come and stay the night at Gran's. Jean had two sisters, Margaret (Meg) and Catherine (Kate) and four other brothers, William (Will), John (Jock), James (Jimmy) and Robert who had died while still young. Apart from Sanny and Sam, they all had families so you can imagine how busy that house was.

When my leave was finished I was due to report to the REME Corps Holding Battalion at Arborfield before being posted to Hanover. However, I had been doing some thinking and decided that as neither of the options that had been presented to me was reasonable, I would leave the Army on what is known as a free discharge. So I wrote my application, it was accepted and in June I left the army with a small gratuity but no pension.



I would have to find employment. Meanwhile, I had bought a car, a 1960 Austin A55 and we motored back to Portsmouth. We had to get Martin to school. Martin was 11 years old which meant that in England he was placed in the High School. My struggle to find employment however was solved by our having to return north to Wishaw where I had secured a job with AEI Ltd as quality control inspector of domestic electricity meters. We had to rely on the good graces of Margaret who let us stay with her until we could find a place of our own. Meanwhile we had again to find a school for Martin.

Now that we were in Scotland, he was not due to enrol for the high school until he was 12 so he was sent to the Wishaw Public School.



It was while he was there that he first became interested in music and started by learning to play the euphonium but shortly after, went on to play a trombone. He has continued to do so ever since. At one time, the Scottish actor John Cairney who played Robert Burns on TV visited the school and is shown in the press photo with Martin facing camera.

Because I had spent 21 years in the armed services, our application for housing received some priority and we were soon given the keys to a brand new flat on the sixth floor of a high rise block in Motherwell called Barons Tower. We felt that we were settled at last.

Going back to the time when we motored down to Portsmouth, while we were there Jean's mother became seriously ill and when we returned to Wishaw, was still confined to her bed. On 8th August 1965, she passed peacefully away. The two sons, Sanny and Sam had to give up tenure of the rented flat and were given a Council flat nearby.

Meanwhile, I had changed my job to work in a paper mill as an electrician, but what I had really been looking for was a job with an X-ray engineering firm and in December 1966 I was taken on by Sierex Ltd. in Glasgow, starting in January, 1967. This was a big improvement; I was on a salary rather than a wage, was earning quite a bit more and had the use of a company car. I was to carry out repairs to and installations of X-ray and other related units in hospitals all over the South West of Scotland. The hours were long and at times unpredictable but the job suited me.

Meanwhile, in 1966, Martin now 12 moved up to the High School at Coltness in Wishaw. Martin tells me that it was here that he had started to play music and learned the trombone and not earlier and he should know so I should apologise for that lapse.

Once again I was to be adversely affected by government policies. In 1968, with Harold Wilson once again in charge, the country was in a bad fix monetary wise and so it was decided to devalue

the pound (£). While this was to be a great boost for Britain's exports, it had a detrimental effect on all imports. Among those were X-ray and medical equipment and spares brought in from abroad, in our case Germany and Sweden. Sierex was about to take a loss and the obvious answer for a foreign owned firm in such a situation is to shed staff. Unfortunately, as I was one of the most recently recruited members they had to lose me. After less than two years, so no pension. I was out of work for two weeks but then I applied to the Medical Research Council (MRC) in Glasgow which had a Department of Radiological Protection, something of which I had experience. Shortly after, that department separated from the MRC to become the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), Glasgow and we eventually moved into new premises in the grounds of the Glasgow Southern General Hospital. At this work I was to travel to various industrial sites to check on the safety of radiation sources and some radioactive procedures. This was interesting work and of course I had to write reports and give lectures to groups of students from time to time. I was also responsible for the construction of some electronic test units.

On the night of 28th January, 1968 there was a huge storm with hurricane force winds which did a lot of damage. We were on the sixth floor of our tower block and the whole building was trembling with the great gusts of wind so I don't know what it must have been like on the 18th floor. In the morning I found that the door of the garage that housed my company car had been blown off its fittings and had landed on the bonnet where it had been agitated by the wind for several hours causing considerable body damage and leaving me without a car for some time. After this, Jean was anxious to move and had been on the lookout for an exchange. She really wanted a garden and her own back door.



She eventually found what she wanted; a three room terrace house with garden and a cat called sweep. (Black of course).

It was in August of 1969 that we moved into this house, No.25 Greenfield Street, Wishaw and much nearer Jean's former home.



Soon after Martin acquired a dog, a Border collie called Laddie; that is until we found it should have been called Lassie. She was a lovely pet and it was Jean that had more to do with her as she grew, feeding her and taking her for walks.

Martin by this time had outgrown both Jean and me and in 1970 at the age of sixteen he left school and went to work for the Bank of Scotland. It was about this time that having attained some proficiency in playing the trombone, he joined Newmains band. We attended a number of their concerts and they were very successful.



Chapter 8

In this episode, I will deal with my side, the Purchase side of the family. There were not many of us left and by the end of the seventies apparently, only myself. Since we had settled in Wishaw, Martin, Jean and I had periodically travelled to Portsmouth to visit Mum, Aunt Lill and Harold. Usually it would be at Christmas or during the summer. It was a long drive; over 400 miles and I preferred to travel overnight. There was now no one else of our family to see. All my other uncles and aunts had died and cousins had gone. My sister, Annie had fallen out with Mum and had moved away to a new address with her husband, George; we knew not where.



Shortly after we had moved into Greenfield Street, Mum and Harold came to visit us travelling by train. Aunt Lill stayed at Portsmouth. They stayed for a week and I hired a car to take them round to see the sights. I did not have a car at this time. Mum and Uncle Harry had stayed at French Street for a holiday soon after we were married. Mum and Harold enjoyed their stay but I think Mum found the train journeys tiring. She was in her 80s by then.

I always think it is worth remembering how we were living at that time. The living room was designed for a coal fire but this was replaced by a two bar electric heater. There was no central heating and in winter the bedrooms were freezing cold. Individual heaters were inadequate. There was no wall to wall carpeting but lino and loose rugs. In the kitchen were two massive Butler sinks and clothes ringer provided to mount between them. We needed to buy a refrigerator and our first washing machine was an AEI top loading model that had to be wheeled into place and the hoses connected to the taps. A lot of DIY was needed to bring the place up to modern standards.

In 1973, Aunt Lill died and I travelled down to cover the funeral arrangements, following which I tried to persuade Mum to come and stay with us and in fact she and Harold did come back with me but she was not happy here so they returned to Copnor.

About this time we had to have our cat put down because of a severe tumour in her jaw which prevented him from eating and he was in a lot of pain. Lassie would miss him. By this time we had had three different cars. The first was an old Standard 10 estate which I bought for virtually nothing from one of the scientists at NRPB. It was alright if it didn't rain; then I traded that in for a Vauxhall Victor 101, a much more comfortable car and then a 1972 Mini.

Martin and I were still beavering away at the same jobs and I was struggling with my and the next door neighbour's gardens. She was a widow and had struggled to put her two children through University. She was and still is a very good neighbour; the salt of the earth.

In September 1976, we received a phone call to say that Mum was seriously ill and could I come at once. Jean and I travelled down to Portsmouth overnight but unfortunately we were too late. She had been taken into hospital but had died there. The cause was severe abdominal perforation probably due to an excess of patent medicines, which I know she used a lot. We stayed to arrange the funeral and dispose of the contents of the house. Harold was devastated and didn't know what to do or where to go so we offered for him to come back to Wishaw with us. If only we had known.

Coming back to Wishaw in the Mini we were loaded to the roof and on the roof rack too. Still the old mini was a good car and gave us no trouble at all. We tried to settle down to our normal way of life but found that Harold was a bit of a trial. He used to take Lassie out for longer and longer walks; hours at a time but what was worse he would buy big bags of toffees and feed them to her. He was secretive about it. As a consequence, the poor dog suffered from tumours and despite our telling him to stop, he persisted. He used to complain and say 'I'm going back to Portsmouth' and we would say 'And where would you go when you get there?' but he kept on so much that I told him to just go. That was May 1977. We never heard from him since. He would be 102 years old by now.

In 1977 Martin opted for a change of employment and joined Securicor. In 1978 Jean and I went on holiday to Great Yarmouth for two weeks. It was the first real holiday we had had for a long time. And so we finished out the seventies; as far as I was aware, I was the only member of the Purchase family, except for a sister who had left us years ago and whose whereabouts we did not know. That's how it seemed at that time.



Margaret Robinson/Mitchell was the first in a family of nine, three sisters and six brothers. She was born in the first decade of the 20th century and was brought up in French Street, Wishaw. I cannot tell you about her early life. Before the Second World War she married a sailor, Jack Robinson and they raised two girls, Janet and Helen. Jack became a Chief Petty Officer but lost his life aboard a destroyer at Dunkirk in 1940. After the war while Margaret moved around to several houses in Wishaw and Janet moved with her, Helen tended to stay with her granny in French Street. I don't know if Janet worked but Helen worked as a shop assistant in various establishments.

In 1958, Helen married George Watson and in 1959 they had their first child a son, Jim. He was followed fairly quickly by two more sons, Alec and Ian. Eventually all three married and had families but I have not kept up with their details.

Janet married Jim? Around 1960 and I believe they had a baby son. Unfortunately she did not have a happy life with Jim and she also spent some considerable time in Hospital. Margaret died in 1988.

Sadly, in 2006, the eldest son Jim died. George and Helen still live in Wishaw but Helen has been in poor health for some time. * (It should be remembered that George wrote his life story in 2011, and some family circumstances have changed since then).

Janet died in hospital in 2010

William Mitchell, known as 'Big Will' because of his height was the second born in the family of nine and was also born in the first decade of the twentieth century. Again I know nothing of his early life but in 1934 he married Janet Walker and they had the following family.

William was born in 1936, John was born in 1938 and Colin was born in 1941.

During the war, William Senior served in the Royal Artillery and was at Dunkirk after which he was posted to Burma where he fought in the famous Battle of Kohima. He returned home in 1945 and in 1946 a daughter, Marion was born. He worked in the steel works in Motherwell where he continued until his retirement in the seventies.

The family had moved into a three bedroom council house soon after he left the army and they all stayed there together until the sixties when John married Sheila and they moved into a council flat in Pather. William, Colin and Marion continued to stay with their parents. In 1970, Jean died and then in 1973, Colin was killed in an accident where he worked in the steel mills.

John meanwhile had become a proficient motor mechanic and secured a job with a dairy maintaining their transport. He and Sheila raised three sons; Brian, John and Paul. Unfortunately, they split up and Sheila took the boys to the South of England. I've no news of Sheila but the boys have grown up and all have apparently done well.

The two Williams, father and son and Marion continued their lives in the same house with very little change right up until 1997 when 'Big Will' died after a long illness in hospital. Brother and sister, William and Marion continue to live in the same house. William is 75 and Marion 65 and are both well.

The next member of the family was the brother, John (Jock). Unfortunately I can't tell you much about him as he did not seem to mix with the family so much. He was probably born about 1910 and I know nothing of his early life. When the Second World War started, all his brothers rushed to join the services or had already done so. John decided to wait and he was called up in 1940. Everybody said it was such a shame and felt sorry for him but I think it was probably more to do with the fact that he was the last of Janet's sons to go.

He married Rachel and they had a family of three sons; Alec, William and John and a daughter; Nancy. Nancy married in the early seventies. We lost contact with them in the seventies but I heard that Nancy had died from cancer recently.

The next to come was my wife, Georgina (Jean). I have written of her in previous episodes, the last time being when we came back from Portsmouth following my mum's death and when Harold finally went back there. That was in 1977.

It was at about this time that Martin left the Bank and joined Securicor as a guard/van driver. In 1980 he left the Newmains Band and joined the Cecilian Orchestra with whom he has played and arranged music ever since.

In 1982, I was once again presented with a Hobson's choice. I should either move to NRPB London, or take early retirement. There was no question of us moving to London, (Jean was now 70) and we did not have that sort of money anyway so I chose early retirement. At least I got a lump sum and a pension. In April 1982, just two weeks after I retired Jean suffered a serious heart attack. She came out of hospital after a week and it was fortunate that I was at home to take care of her. Happily she recovered fairly quickly.

In 1983 I started in a part time job as a van driver for a painting and decorating firm in Fauldhouse, Robert Miller & Co. However, Jean was having more health problems for which she needed frequent visits to the Law Hospital for specialist appointments.

Meanwhile Martin had secured for himself a studio flat and lived there alone but in easy reach of us. In 1984 I left the driving job and retired for good in order to look after Jean. Things continued so and in 1988 Jean and I celebrated our 40th Anniversary. In 1990, Martin left Securicor and helped in the preparations for the 1991 Census. Meanwhile he had become acquainted with Fiona Cameron, a violinist in the Cecilian Orchestra and they became friends. In the autumn of 1991, Martin and Fiona announced their engagement and they were married on 14th. February (St. Valentine's Day) 1992.



In April 1993 Fiona gave birth to their first child, a son called Euan.

Another pair of proud grandparents was Fiona's Mum and Dad, Grace and Angus. I have not referred to them before but they will be seen in the larger wedding photo on Fiona's right together with her sister and bridesmaid, Elspeth. Grace and Angus lived in Bishopbriggs, Glasgow.



Elspeth worked as a nurse and lived in Govan. She has since moved south to Wales. When Martin and Fiona married, they found a small three room house in the village of Braidwood near Carluke. After Euan was born they looked for a larger house and found a suitable place in Hamilton Street, central Carluke. At the time of their move Fiona was again expecting and on 2nd January, (my birthday) 1995 their daughter, Catriona was born. Meanwhile, Fiona's parents had moved to a house in Carluke to be near them.



It was just after this that I received word of my long lost sister, Annie. Her daughter, Diane was researching her family history and so found out about me and my whereabouts. So her husband Steve gave me a call and Annie's phone number. I had not seen Annie since 1959 so I was a bit nervous. However, I rang her and we got to know about each other. She was then 71 and I was 69. Anyway, we became friendly with her family and it was arranged that they would spend a holiday in Scotland during which time they would come and visit us. Steve hired a mini bus to hold all the family for the long journey. We gave him directions to get to Carluke (no SatNav then) and so we all met. I was surprised how small Annie was. Diane is much taller and bigger built. So too is Steve. They have three children, widely separated in years. Dan was 18, Alysha 11 and Bruce 2 years, the same as Euan. They spent a good day with us and came again before the end of their holiday, this time to Wishaw. Annie and I corresponded regularly thereafter but in 1998 she had to go into a nursing home for her poor state of health and while I continued to write, she was unable to reply so I kept in contact with Diane. Sadly, in early 2001 she died while still in the nursing home. She was 77. We still keep in contact with Diane and family. I believe that Diane's interest in family history was what caused Fiona to start the same hobby.



At the time that Martin had moved into his flat in the 80s, he became very interested in computers and over the years he has acquired a considerable knowledge of them. From this, Fiona learned how

to use her own computer and to follow Family History Programmes on the Internet and was able to glean a great deal of related information and share with others the histories of their families.

In 1998, Jean and I celebrated our Golden Anniversary and the whole family went for a meal, finishing up in Greenfield Street where we cut the cake. Shortly after, in 1999 Grace and Angus celebrated their Ruby Anniversary with family and friends at a well known restaurant in Carluke.

Later that year Grace suffered a serious problem with her throat, having great difficulty in trying to swallow. This became worse and was later diagnosed as cancer. Unfortunately she suffered for more than a year and finally succumbed on 12th January 2001. A humanist funeral service was held which was tastefully carried out and the eulogy was eloquently given by one of Grace's former colleagues. Grace had touched all our lives and is sorely missed. She loved her grandchildren dearly and they adored her in return.

Meanwhile, Jean continued to suffer frequent problems with her health and had repeatedly to attend for examinations by the doctors and specialists at the hospital. On one occasion following a scan she was warned that she had a seriously swollen blood vessel. This continued for the next two years and on Friday 11th July 2003 our doctor Dr. Susan Murray advised me to get Jean into the hospital again where a bed was waiting for her. There was a shortage of available beds at the time and the doctor wanted to carry out more tests. That Friday was the start of a holiday week end which meant that Jean would have to stay there until the following Tuesday before she would be examined. Martin and I went along in the evening and said goodnight and we would see her the next day, Saturday. Just after 11 that night I received a phone call from the hospital to say that Jean had taken a turn for the worse and would I please come at once. I immediately phoned Martin who came and collected me in his car when we went straight to the hospital. Sadly, when we arrived we were too late and Jean had died. She had suffered an aortic aneurism and her death had been almost instantaneous. Apart from the funeral directors' handling of Jean's body nothing could be done until after the week end. The funeral was held on the following Friday; it was just for the family.

Jean was the love and joy of my life. We had been married for over 54 years and been together almost all of that time. She had been a most supportive and loving wife and mother and she adored her grandchildren who loved her in return. I know that we all miss her and I think of her constantly.

Chapter 9

Catherine Shearer/Mitchell (Kate) is the next senior of the Mitchell family. Kate was born in 1916 and like many of the others; I know nothing of her early life. She probably started work in service in the early thirties and then in the Second World War, say 1940 she joined the Auxiliary Territorial Army (ATS) which later became the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) where she signed on as a cook.



Shortly after the war, she met Angus Shearer from Shotts, Lanarkshire. Angus was born in 1915 and very early in life became a miner which he remained until he retired in the 1970s. They were married in February 1947. In late 1947 a son, Robert was born. For a while they lived with Kate's brother Will and family in Newmains but eventually settled in Angus' mother's house in Shotts. On January 2nd, 1949 I was on leave and at Wishaw and was celebrating my birthday listening to football on the radio when Angus came rushing in all excited. He had just walked all the way from Shotts because there were no buses, it being a holiday to tell us that Kate had given birth to a baby girl. They called her Janette. So not only my granddaughter but also my nieces share my birthday. Shortly after, when Jean and I were in Tripoli in 1951, we were told that Janette's brother, Robert had died.

We were back home in England again when in August 1953, another boy, William was born. Later, as they were growing, William and Martin enjoyed each others' company when they had sleepovers and swapped stories by which time we had a car and could go about together. After Jeanette and William had reached their 'teens, Kate and Angus shared holidays with Jean and me occasionally.

In 1970 Jeanette met with Terry Donnachie and they married on 18th June 1971. Jeanette's Brother William met and married Lorraine. I hope you're taking notice; see the following :)

Births:

Sept. 1972, to Jeanette & Terry Donnachie - A Son, Stephen

Oct. 1972, to Lorraine & William Shearer - A Son, Marc

Nov. 1979, to Jeanette & Terry Donnachie - A Son, Terry

Oct. 1981, to Lorraine & William Shearer - A Daughter, Catriona.

In 1990, Angus died aged 75 and in 1996, Kate died aged 80.

Time passes!!!

In 2006, Stephen married Margaretanne; they have a daughter, Kyla

In 2010, Terry married Laura; they have a daughter, Mirren.

In June 2011, Jeanette and Terry celebrated their 40th (Ruby) anniversary. Also Stephen and Margaretanne now have a baby boy, Erin. We wish them all well.

The last siblings of this generation of the Mitchell family were the four remaining brothers: Alexander (Sanny), Samuel (Sam), James (Jimmy) and Robert. I believe that Robert was the youngest but he died very young, before the Second World War.

The remaining four were probably born in the early 1920s. Sanny, the eldest joined the army, The Royal Army Service Corp (RASC) at the start of the war; then in 1942 transferred to the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) when that corps was first formed. Soon after that, in the Western Desert he was assisting in the recovery of a tank when a steel cable sprung loose as a result of which he lost an eye. Following this he was sent home and finished his service in the UK. After the war he stayed with his mother and found work with the South of Scotland Electricity Board (SSEB). Sanny had a great sense of humour as did most of his brothers and like them he was partial to a drink or two. After his mother died he had to move into a council flat together with Sam, but soon after Sam moved out.

One night in 1974 he was walking home in an inebriated state when he was knocked down by a car and was taken to hospital unconscious. For some reason the police came to our door, Jean being his sister rather than to Big Will, his older brother and next of kin. I went along to the hospital with them to find that although there was no sign of serious injury he was in a deep coma and in fact he never came out of it and died soon after. He was buried in the same grave with his mum.

Sam was born in the early 1920s and at the start of the war together with his brother Jim, volunteered for the RAF. They served together in the Western Desert, Italy and then France and Germany where in 1945 they took the opportunity to visit Jean in Hamburg. Sam had married Ada during the war and soon after, they looked for accommodation in London but after several moves they found a flat in Southwark.

While we were in Hong Kong we heard that Ada had died in her sleep suddenly. Sam packed up and moved back home to stay with his mother. After that I'm sorry to say that Sam sort of went off the rails, turning to drink and making the lives of all around him a misery. He couldn't stay in one place for any length of time and quite frankly nobody wanted him which sounds rather unchristian. Eventually he found some friends in Newcastle and moved there which is where he died in the early eighties.

Jimmy left the RAF after the war and settled in with his mother and Sanny. He obtained work as a park keeper in Wishaw. His health was not good. He was the Best Man at our wedding. While Jean and I were in Tripoli, Jimmy married Helen McGee. They had four children; Jean, Jeanette, Jim and Margaret.

Jean married Jim Houston in 1972 after which they went to Australia. Jimmy died in his sleep in 1973 and after that we lost touch with his family. And that I'm afraid is the history of that generation of the Mitchell family.

When Jean died in July 2003, I felt that my life was empty; that my house was empty and I knew I was going to miss her most terribly. This was not because I felt helpless; I'm quite able to do for myself, housekeeping etc., but I found myself talking to Jean and waiting on her reply and I wondered what effect this would have on my mind. Martin and his family were my salvation. Their love and understanding, to say nothing of their kindness was what helped me most at this time. I still had a family and what is more I was able to contemplate the growth and development of my grandchildren, Euan and Catriona. At this time Euan was 10yrs old and Catriona 8. From this time on Martin and Fiona arranged for me to visit at Carluke every Sunday for lunch and at first this was held at Angus's house. Martin, or if he was working Fiona would drive over to Wishaw to take me over and after, bring me back. After a while, Fiona and Angus started to take turns to cook the meal but someone would fetch me and bring me back. More recently we would call at the supermarket to let me top up my supplies. That has been a great help.

In the spring of 2004, together with Fiona's aunt Barry, we all went on holiday to a caravan and camping site on the Solway Firth. Angus, Barry and I were all in our eighties so we shared one caravan and Martin and his family shared another. The same combinations were used to share the cars, Martin's and Angus's. It was quite a good arrangement and we had a nice time.

This was the year that Martin got me interested in computers. He chose one for me and being very proficient in their use he showed me how to use it. It is a hobby that has become a very absorbing pastime ever since. In October 2004, we same people took a holiday in the Lake District using much the same arrangement. There was more lovely countryside and this time we all shared a big country house.



You will remember that my sister, Annie had died in 2001 and that as far as I was aware I had no other living relative. Parents, aunts and uncles had all died and my only three cousins, children of my Uncle George had all died so that of the Purchase family, I believed myself to be the lone survivor.

Meanwhile, Fiona had become more and more interested in Family History and having obtained a computer and using the Internet, had amassed a lot of relevant information and contacted a wide circle of like interested persons. One of those persons was Mrs. Marie Carey whose father she believed to be my older brother John.

John and Marie Carey live in Caddington, Bedfordshire with their son Ben and daughter Emma as well as Marie's mother Dorothy (Dot). Marie and Ben are both interested in family history and it seems that Ben had found that Marie's paternal grandmother was Lydia Purchase (nee Kerridge) and so he entered this on Genes Reunited. Thus he made the contact with our family and in particular with Fiona following which she and Marie became Internet buddies and exchanged phone numbers and addresses.



Shortly after, I 'phoned Marie and we had quite a long conversation. The outcome of all this was that her father, John Purchase, was my older brother. He was born in 1920. He stayed with his mother in King Street, Portsmouth until 1925 when she placed him into a Children's home in Cosham, Portsmouth. Later he was fostered out to various homes until he was able to fend for himself. He had various jobs; on building sites and as a stoker. In his youth he joined the scout movement. In the late thirties he had settled in Cricklewood and during the war he was a member of the Air Raid Precautions (ARP), Salvage and Rescue and saw some horrific sights. He stayed in Cricklewood throughout and in 1952 it was there that he met Dot at a Dance. In 1953 they were married. In 1973 they were divorced but in 1990 after John had been diagnosed as suffering with cancer, Dot returned to help take care of him. Sadly, later the same year he died. He had been a very heavy smoker.



So I was no longer the sole survivor of the Purchase family. I did once have an older brother, I have a widowed sister in law, I have a niece, a great nephew and a great niece who incidentally wants to call me Grandad. How lucky is that? In October 2005, we were scheduled to go on holiday in the Lake District, using the same farmhouse as we had used the previous year; seven of us going as before. So it was arranged that our family and Marie's family would meet. John Carey arranged for us to meet at the Bull Hotel in Stoke on Trent, a sort of halfway point and near where brother John had lived. It was a good meeting and the hotel was very nice. John and Marie very kindly treated us to a nice meal and Marie gave me an album of photographs of John and Dot with their wedding and family events etc. Dot was not at this meeting. Meanwhile their daughter, Emma and our Catriona hit it off big style. Their main preoccupation was a toy dispensing machine which in the course of their stay probably swallowed up all the pound coins we and the hotel possessed. Ben and Euan got on quite well too. John and Marie drove us to where John had lived, where he was in a nursing home and finally where he was cremated. That was a very touching experience. All in all, it was a very nice visit.



The following year, 2006 John decided to bring his family North to Scotland and visit us here. He wanted to see Loch Lomond and Edinburgh. Unfortunately their stay was short but we did manage to fit them in and see both places. After visiting Carlisle and then Loch Lomond on the first day, we all went to Edinburgh and did a tour of the City on the second day after which we all finished up at my place in Wishaw. Here Emma entertained us on her recorder and John very kindly connected up my new washing machine which is still going strong. Thanks John! It was a pity their visit was so short but we're all hoping they'll be able to come up again soon.

Chapter 10

'Discovering my long lost siblings'

I have a confession to make! I have never been interested in family history or the searches relating thereto. (Gasps of Horror!!) Knowing what I do about my forebears, I have no incentive to go searching the past. My mother, as you will know by now was not a very nice person and one of whom I have no memory. My father was absent for most of the childhood of both my sister Annie and myself; he was more like a distant uncle. So my knowledge of those two has not given me any encouragement to look further. It is only comparatively recently that this hobby of tracing one's family history has gained such popularity, having been given impetus with the coming of the internet but only very few people thought about it before.

However, I have to admit that the endeavours of others along those lines have brought to light some remarkable truths. My niece, Diane located me to unite me once again with my sister, Annie; and my daughter in law, Fiona and my great nephew Ben with his mother Marie had already found that I had had an older brother, John. Sadly, both these siblings have died.

Meanwhile, Fiona, Ben and Marie had continued their search into my mother's history as a result of which, some remarkable facts have come to light. On tracing her family tree downwards, they have discovered that apart from my older brother John and my sister Annie, there were five other siblings. Three brothers and two sisters:



Edgar Ivan Thomas Purchase - Born June 1927



Horace Peter Purchase - Born August 1929



Margaret Rose Purchase - Born October 1930

Frances Purchase - Born Circa 1932

Edward Purchase - Born May 1934

The daughter of the above Edgar Ivan Thomas is Mrs. Hellen Moxley and she is also a keen researcher in her family history and I believe that she discovered Fiona's interest in our family having made contact through the Internet. Hellen was able to provide us with a lot of new information and also arranged for us remaining siblings to meet each other.



Hellen Moxley was able to tell us a lot about her father, my brother Edgar who preferred to be called George; (my preference also). Like the other four siblings previously mentioned, he was placed in an orphanage by his mother at an early age and when he was old enough to work he was sent to train for work on a farm.

In 1942 he joined the Royal Navy. As noted before, his proper name was Edgar Ivan Thomas Purchase but for some unknown reason he signed on in the navy as Charles George Edgar Purchase. Now my proper name is Charles George Edgar Purchase. Apparently he said he was told to use that name which was most mysterious. He went through the war as a naval diver using that name and I had joined the navy at the start of 1943 as a storeman and using the same name and I never knew about it. As a diver in Malta during the war he met his wife Connie. Shortly after he got demobbed following the end of the war, he joined the RAF, this time using his original name.

Hellen managed to locate the addresses of the remaining four siblings. Peter was living in Bristol as also was Frances, Margaret lives in Salisbury and Edward in Chippenham. So she arranged that we should all meet. This was organised to take place in October 2007. For this purpose she arranged for the hire of the local Parish Hall in Methal near Cambridge, close to where Edgar and his family lived.

So that we, Martin, Fiona and family and I could participate we arranged for just us five to take our usual autumn holiday in a rather nice country house that Fiona had located somewhat off the beaten track near Royston, Essex. It was within an hour's drive from Methal.



So on the appointed day we all met up and I saw my siblings for the first time. Unfortunately Frances (Eileen) was unwell and unable to come. So too was Edward (Ted) who had recently suffered one or two minor strokes. It was a large gathering as Marie and her family came together with my sister in law Dot and also Diane, Steve and Bruce.

Hellen had everything very well arranged. She and her daughter Angel met everyone as they arrived and handed them a label with their name on to attach to their chest so we would all know who was who. She had organised a nice buffet and earlier, she had sent round to everyone asking for photographs which she then displayed for everyone to see. A great deal of interest was taken in these and Martin had brought along his computer and printer and was able to provide copies for those who asked for them and there were plenty.

So I was able to meet Edgar, Peter and Margaret for the first time. At this time I was 81, Edgar 80 and the others were in their late 70s which was rather sad.



All in all it was a very good occasion and fulsome praise is due to Hellen for her organisation. I should also mention that she used her car to bring Peter and Margaret to Methal and then to drive them home after. Two days later, Peter, Margaret and Marie and her family visited us in our holiday home. On the last day we paid a visit to Edgar and Connie and finally to Marie and family at their home in Caddington so that altogether, it was a very memorable holiday.

Chapter 11

Some time before the 'Gathering', Hellen had given us the addresses and phone numbers of each of the siblings including that of my brother Edward (Ted) and I had contacted him. At that time his health was not good, which was why he could not attend. He had respiratory problems and had also had a stroke. However he told me he would like to visit Scotland and in November 2007 he phoned to say that he was coming to visit for a week, which took us by surprise. He was to travel by coach and he arrived late Saturday at Glasgow Coach Station where Martin, Catriona and I met him.



Not having a car, he and I were reliant on Martin and other family members as well as public transport to do our sight seeing. We spent a day at the Glasgow Kelvin Grove Museum, we did a tour of Edinburgh, Angus took us to visit the industrial museum at New Lanark, Martin took us to visit the market town of Biggar and on the final day Martin, Fiona and Catriona took us to Coatbridge for shopping and to see the Mining and Industrial Museum. We saw him off in the return coach on the Saturday night. That was a long journey for him both ways but he seemed none the worse for that and said that he'd enjoyed his stay.

In January 2008, we were told that my brother Peter had had a stroke, a fairly severe one and was in the hospital at Bath. Shortly after he was moved to Bristol but sadly he died. I had known him only briefly, when we met at the gathering the previous October. The long distance precluded my attending his funeral.

In May 2008 I decided to reciprocate Ted's visit and after checking with him I arranged to fly, rather than go by coach. An Easyjet flight took me to Bristol where Ted and his son Edward came to meet me. It was about a 45 minute drive to Chippenham where Ted and his family live. Everyone was very friendly and I was made most welcome. Edward is Ted's eldest son and is married to Paula who suffers from MS and has to be carried everywhere. They have four children, twins Ryan and Hughie, daughter Kerry and lastly Michael. Ted's second son is Robert, married to Julie with daughters Louise and Elenore and son Morgan. They all live in Ireland. Next comes Ted's daughter,

Alison, divorced but with two sons, Jamie who serves in the RAF and Sam. Finally Ted's third son is Andrew, married to Vanessa with two boys, Callum and Brendon.

Ted is divorced but his ex, Jennifer stays quite close and they still get on well together. She was remarried but lost her second husband David just recently. She also has a partner, Roy but apparently he's not too well at present. Ted has a large Mitsubishi four wheel drive vehicle and it was in this that he drove us all around the beautiful countryside of Wiltshire and we visited Bath, Bristol, Wells with its cathedral and we also went to Salisbury and visited our sister Margaret. Ted had a nice house at that time but he was finding the stairs a bit much so he has since changed to a ground floor flat which is also near where Alison stays. Altogether, I had a very enjoyable holiday at Chippenham with a lot of interesting sights and those of Ted's family whom I met could not have been kinder.

Still in 2008, in October the whole family took our holiday in the Lake District. It is very much a favourite spot and there were seven of us: Martin, Fiona, Euan and Catriona; then there was Fiona's Dad, Angus and one of Fiona's aunties, Barry. Finally myself. We had two cars, Martin's and Angus's so that we were able to divide into two groups, the young ones and the 'auld'ns. This allowed the young ones their more active pursuits while we others could just take our time. We had used this system on previous holidays. During the day we satisfied our inner selves with coffee and the odd cake and each of us took our turn to provide a substantial evening meal. There is always plenty of fine scenery around with a chance to capture some nice photos and there are lots of small but busy towns with plenty to shop for. It was only for a week but made a pleasant break. After the gathering in 2007, Fiona continued to maintain her interest in Family History and in September 2009 she asked me as the senior sibling (and handiest) to write to the Director of Social Services, Portsmouth City Council requesting any information that they may be able to provide for us concerning my mother and all my brothers and sisters. Also sending them such information as we had.

Director of Social Services September 2009

Portsmouth City Council

Civic Offices

Guildhall Square

Portsmouth

PO1 2EP

Dear Sir/Madam,

Can you please help me with information concerning my mother and my family circumstances? The known details of my family are as follows.

My mother was Elizabeth Lydia Kerridge, born 7th Jan 1901. She had her first child, John William Kerridge in Sep 1920 in Portsmouth at which time she was employed as a charwoman in Southsea. John was brought up in an orphanage and never knew about his later siblings. He died in 1990. I was unaware of my older brother until recently.

My mother married my father, Charles William Purchase in Feb 1924. He was born in April 1894 and at the time of his marriage was a stoker in the Royal Navy. They had two children; Annie Elizabeth Purchase, born Oct 1924 and me, Charles George Edgar Purchase Jan 1926

My sister and I were brought up by my aunt and uncle, Annie and Henry Harper, Annie being my father's sister. I had no idea of the reason for this at the time. My father was away at sea for much of the time during our childhood but made his home with my aunt and uncle whenever on leave and during a break in service.

In 1935 my sister, Annie was placed by my guardians in a Naval Orphanage for the daughters of naval servicemen. We never knew the reason for this or why I remained with my guardians. I was reunited with Annie in 1995 but she died in 2001.

Neither my father nor my guardians would discuss my mother with me. As far as they were concerned she was 'no good' and nothing more would be said.

As a result of research carried out by my daughter in law and other family members, we have found that I have or have had five siblings of whom I had been unaware. This at a time when I was eighty and they were all in their seventies. Two have died since. The five siblings are as follows:

Edgar Ivan Thomas Purchase Born Jun 1927 29 First Ave. Cosham, Portsmouth

Father, Charles William Purchase

Horace Peter Purchase Born Aug 1929 29 First Ave. Cosham, Portsmouth

Father, Edgar Thomas Guy

Asst. hairdresser

Margaret Rose Purchase Born Oct 1930 St.Mary's Hospital, Portsmouth

Father, not recorded

Frances Purchase Born Circa 1932

Father, not recorded

Edward Purchase Born May 1934

Father not recorded

These five brothers and sisters were all brought up in the Children's Cottage Home, Cosham for most of their childhood. Horace died in 2007 and Frances died in 2009.

I, my brothers and sisters and indeed all my family are anxious to learn all we can concerning my mother's circumstances and why she felt unable to care for us. We would be interested in any aspect of her history and in particular, did she bring any more brothers or sisters into the world.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours sincerely

Charles Purchase

The holiday we all took in October 2009 was in the opposite direction from the usual and we all went to Invernesshire. Our holiday home was a somewhat remote cottage near Loch Ness and not far from Inverness. This time we had an additional member in our party; Fiona's aunt Margaret and dare I say it, the senior member. She lives in Dundee. Barry by the way lives in Aberdeen. This meant that on this occasion Angus and I had to travel to Dundee to pick up Margaret and also Barry who had travelled from Aberdeen and then drive across country to Inverness and the holiday home. Quite a journey and a similar arrangement was made for the return trip.

So this time there were four of us in Angus's car; plenty of room. The usual arrangements were made and for the catering as well. As usual there were lots of interesting wee places to visit including Urquart Castle, a rare old military relic. There was some lovely scenery there where we took some great photos. Also Inverness was a fine city to visit. There was plenty to see and do but

one thing we did not see was 'Nessie'. Perhaps she was shy. Euan and Martin also took the opportunity to attend part of the SNP Conference which was taking place in Inverness at this time. All in all, it was a very enjoyable holiday.

Shortly after we returned from the holiday I received a reply to our letter to Portsmouth. First there is a good report on the RN and RM orphanage. In it however they mention that Annie was placed there because the aunt had a family of her own and could no longer look after her. This was untrue. Aunt Annie and Uncle Harry had no family of their own and as I have stated before, I never understood why only Annie was placed in the orphanage and not me.

The sister referred to as Frances but was known as Eileen matches closely that of that of Ellen mentioned in the letter. She it was who was unable to attend the gathering and who died shortly after. I spoke by telephone to her daughter, also named Eileen shortly after her death.

The details of the remaining siblings are much as expected from what Fiona had gleaned from Family History etc. We have the full details of my older brother John from his own family including his widow, Dot.

My mother however still remains an enigma and is likely to remain that way. Fiona is still busy ferreting away for more clues but the chances are pretty slim. So to sum up, at the age of 69 I was made aware of the whereabouts of my sister Annie, who has since died. We still keep in touch with her daughter Diane and family. At 79 I learn of my older brother, John who died in 1990 and whose family I have met and with whom we still communicate. The two brothers who were at the gathering, Edgar and Peter have since died. The only siblings remaining now are my sister, Margaret whom I met at the gathering and I met again at Salisbury when taken there by my brother Edward known as Ted. We three are the only remaining survivors of our generation and so the story has gone full circle.

MUSEUMS AND RECORDS SERVICE Portsmouth

City Council

City Museum & Records Office Our Ref: RMR09/576

Museum Road, Portsmouth, PO1 2LJ

Date: 16th October 2009

Mr Charles Purchase,

25 Greenfield St,

Cambusnethan,

Wishaw

ML2 8NY

Dear Mr Purchase,

Your letter to the Director of Social Services has been passed to this office as we hold the surviving records for both the Children's homes and the Royal Naval and Royal Marine orphanage.

The RN and RM orphanage had a very good name and would train girls ready to go into service. This seems to have been the case with your sister Annie. The annual reports show that she entered the home in October 1935, the daughter of a Leading Stoker with 22 years of service. The admission register shows that she was admitted from 9 Railway Flats, Fratton. It states that the mother had deserted the family about 7 years ago. It then goes on to say that a boy and a girl had been living with an Aunt 'who has a family of her own and can no longer look after them'. Annie left the orphanage in 1940 to go into service.

I have found details of your half brothers and sisters but found nothing for a Frances Purchase/Guy Kerridge. There is no birth registration for Frances under any of those names, nor does she enter the Children's Home in Portsmouth with her siblings.

I have however, found details of an Ellen Purchase who was born 1st July 1928 and was admitted to the Workhouse in January 1930 with Edgar and Horace. The three children had been abandoned by their mother in the Receiving ward in January 1930; she said she had been abandoned by her husband. Elizabeth Lydia Purchase nee Kerridge is sometimes shown as Ellen and sometimes as Lydia.

The children were finally admitted to the Children's Home in 1932. At this point Elizabeth was initially advised to enter the Workhouse and take court action against Edgar Guy who was the putative father of the three children. Before this could happen she was certified under the Mental Deficiency Act. She appears to have been kept in hospital but absconded in July 1935, whereabouts unknown. I have checked for a burial in Portsmouth but have found nothing.

The younger children, Margaret Rose and Edward joined their siblings in the Children's Home when they were 3 years old; before that age children were looked after in a nursery.

In 1939 Horace was sent to a school in Lichfield. Edgar was initially trained for farm work but in 1943 enlisted in the navy. Ellen entered service with a local household in the north of the city in 1945 and Margaret is shown to have gone into service in Bristol. Edward like Edgar was trained for farm work and went to work in Somerset.

John Kerridge who was born in 1921 did not go into the Children's Home until 1925; his admittance details were given by your mother whose name and address are shown as Mrs. Purchase of King St Southsea.

I am sorry that I was unable to find any details of your mother after 1935 but hope that this research helps to fill in any gaps.

Yours sincerely

Diana M Gregg (Mrs)

(Senior Searchroom Assistant)

Email; searchroom@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Chapter 12

Conclusion

Well! This is it. My final episode. I have enjoyed reminiscing over my past life. Everything I have written has been purely from memory; I have kept no diary and have had nothing from which to make any references.

In my previous two episodes I was unable to include photographs along with the attachments of letters. In episode 28 I mentioned our holiday in the Lake District in 2008 and my first three photos were taken from this time while in episode 29 I wrote about our holiday in Inverness in 2009. The next three photos were taken during that holiday.

In 2010 our holiday was taken a bit further afield; Ireland in fact and on this occasion we had yet another member added to our party. This was Fiona's sister Elspeth who travelled with us auldys and took turns at driving to help Angus. Our holiday home was right over near the West coast of Ireland which meant a long journey each way, including the ferry crossing. Nevertheless, it was a most enjoyable time during which we were able to see some very nice scenery and a lot of places of interest. I was able to take a large number of pictures, three of which are shown here. We were also housed in a very comfortable and spacious holiday home.

This has brought us right up to date and is the end of my story. I hope you have found it interesting. In turn I would like to read similar stories from any member of the family who cares to shed light on their history.

But from me it's farewell and best wishes to all.

George



