

BLEAN VIEW ROAD

Early in May 1971 I attended for interview at the Sir William Nottidge School in Whitstable. It was an adventure into unknown territory for I had never been to Kent before. Jenny and I travelled up the day before the interview to give us an opportunity to look around the area and assess the housing market. We stayed overnight at the Dolphin Hotel on the seafront in Herne Bay. At 10am the next morning I joined four or five other candidates in the entrance hall of the school. Interviews were held alphabetically so I was not seen until after lunch. After a short period of deliberation I was offered and accepted the post of Head of Geography and History Scale B with effect from September 1st. The dye was cast. What had previously been just a thought, a possibility, suddenly became a reality and we were given 16 weeks to relocate our family and all our belongings to an area we knew absolutely nothing about. With such a short time-span we immediately organised another two day stopover during the Whitsun half-term at a cheap B&B in Mortimer Street, Herne Bay, the sole purpose of which was to learn what we could and buy a house.

Selecting property was not difficult. There was little on the market and it actually came down to a choice of two, one in Seasalter and the other in Greenhill, Herne Bay. In our first sweep of the area we both agreed that we preferred the planned orderliness of Herne Bay to the unplanned sprawl of Whitstable. I also thought it unwise to live in the catchment area of the school in which I taught, so having picked up the details of 47, Blean View Road from almost every Estate Agent in the town we went to meet Pat and Jackie Gore, the owners, and to view



the property. We were sufficiently impressed and desperate to agree to meet the asking price of £5,250 on the spot. Since we were unable to nominate any one Estate Agent that had introduced us we also agreed to a 'private' sale and Pat Gore generously offered to rebate half the cost of the fees he would save. Consequently we agreed to use the same solicitor and we set up an immediate meeting to get the procedures in motion. We also visited the local branch of the Halifax Building Society who were the custodians of our meagre savings to arrange a mortgage. They offered us a 95% mortgage, subject to a survey, and we duly paid the survey fees to get that process underway. We returned to the house to take photographs and measurements before returning home. In a little over 24 hours we had settled our future and we did not return to Herne Bay until the day we moved in on August 27th. In the intervening weeks, as I completed my contract at Shirley Warren School, it all seemed like a dream and we had to keep glancing at the photographs to remind ourselves of what we were buying. Jenny corresponded with Jackie Gore to confirm measurements of windows etc. so she could make up curtains and we signed legal papers, but otherwise there was no contact. You can imagine how the anxiety built as we approached the moving date. As foreigners in a foreign land there were so many unanswered questions.

The move took place over two days. The removal men emptied our belongings from Spring Road on August 26th. We locked up and returned the keys to Mrs Lucas en-route to Chalk Hill to say our goodbyes to my Mum and Dad. We stayed the night at Desborough Road with Jenny's parents and, after an emotional farewell the next morning, we made the three and a half hour journey to Herne Bay. I remember it was not the most comfortable of journeys particularly as Timmy the cat, who Jenny nursed in a cat basket on her lap, cried incessantly and clawed in an effort to escape. We drove directly to the solicitor's office where we picked up the keys, and then on to Blean View Road where we opened the door on a new life in a new home.

The house was a vast improvement on what we were used to. To begin with it was only four years old and had all the attributes of contemporary style – large windows, a good kitchen and bathroom, 'Marley' tiled floors and an abundance of electrical points. It was light and airy giving an illusion of space. With only one careful owner it had not been abused by a succession of well-meaning DIY enthusiasts and, with the exception of the kitchen where the colour scheme of orange paintwork, lime green ceiling and navy blue floor tiles left a lot to be desired, the property retained the mostly magnolia colour schemes left by the builder. There was no wallpaper in sight. It was a pleasant change to occupy a house that needed such minimal redecoration and maintenance. The house seemed remarkably compact and it felt odd to us that we were never more than a few steps from the kitchen. With a lounge of about 15ft x 13ft, a small dining room of 10ft x 10ft, a porch, hall, bathroom, two good sized bedrooms and a smaller boxroom, it was an excellent family home and had the further advantage of being centrally heated by a solid fuel stove with a back boiler in the lounge. The living accommodation was also versatile. The lounge and dining room were separated by double glazed doors which, when removed, opened up a 25ft living area. Outside there was, by today's standards, a larger than average

garden, a garage with a workshop space at the rear and a carport providing shelter down the side of the house. We were delighted with it!

47, Blean View Road was one of a 'knot' of about a dozen semi-detached houses set in a sea of bungalows on the extreme south-west edge of the town overlooking open fields. Whilst most of the bungalows were occupied by elderly folk, more than half of the houses were occupied by families with young children of much the same age as Stephen and Kathryn. Not surprisingly, since everyone moved in when the houses were built, there was a real sense of community and neighbourliness. As we moved in just two days before Kathryn's second birthday the first thing Jenny did was to invite the local children to her birthday party and in that way we introduced ourselves to the neighbourhood and made known our eagerness to integrate and make friends. Our immediate neighbours were Jeff and Enid Bennett, a childless, career orientated couple who could not have been more welcoming and helpful. Jeff dabbled in car mechanics and spent virtually all his spare time under the bonnet! In the other half of our semi-detached house were the Steptoes – an elderly widow and her daughter Joyce. They were quiet and reserved, in the community but not really part of it. It took time to come to know them but we eventually became friendly, chatted over the garden fence and exchanged house visits at Christmas. Opposite, in the last house in the road, lived the Clarks. Alan was a car mechanic by profession and he too spent most of his spare time ferreting under bonnets. His wife, Valerie, and their three children were not the brightest stars in the firmament but they were all pleasant and well-meaning. Next to them Marjorie and Michael Corden and their two daughters, Katie and Jacqueline, became our closest friends and we shared good times together. Michael was a draughtsman, Marge an extrovert who, on a good day, could keep you laughing for hours. A few doors down were Pat and Jim, a self-employed plasterer and their two children; Robin and Pam White with Sarah and David; and Ken and Jean Baker and their boys Mark and Gary. Robin was a maintenance engineer on the cross-channel hovercrafts that flew out of Pegwell Bay, Ken a lorry driver delivering imported cars to garages across southern England. Together we enjoyed several parties. I recall that on one occasion when we hosted a party, Michael and I dressed as Doctor and Patient to mime to one of Peter Seller's classic tracks, 'Goodness Gracious Me!' as cabaret entertainment.

Our close relationship with Marge and Michael Corden began two or three months after we moved in when it emerged that Michael practiced Faith Healing. At that time I was still trying to recover from my breakdown in the spring and I was still taking valium tablets to calm my senses. With the stresses of my new job I was finding it very difficult to give them up. One evening Michael offered me a healing session. I had no knowledge of faith healing or what it entailed and I was extremely sceptical that any good could become of it. However, I was desperate to break my dependency on drugs and regain my self-confidence so I willingly submitted to a trial session. I was totally amazed. Michael sat me down, stood behind me and, starting with the head, moved his hands in a prescribed way across my shoulders and down my back. I could not believe the heat that emitted from his hands. It was like passing an electric element down the back. There was, of course, no miracle cure but I was

sufficiently impressed to try again and in subsequent weeks I attended healing sessions at the Herne Bay Spiritualist Church. Here I came under the healing hands of several healers and was totally astounded at the experience. I found that within a minute of establishing the first touch they were able to describe precisely the symptoms I suffered even though I had never met them before. My scepticism lessened but never completely left me because what happened was beyond my comprehension. During these sessions I witnessed mediums in trances and saw, first hand, the transfiguration of both face and voice. It was enough to make me realise that spiritualism was best left alone! Nevertheless, within a very short time I was off the tablets and was rapidly regaining the ebullient edge to my personality which had been missing for so many months. During these weeks we became increasingly friendly with Marge and Michael. Jenny hit it off with Marge and they cheered each other up during the long days when Michael and I were at work. As time went by we frequently shared supper parties. It was at these that we acquired the taste for sherry which we bought from the barrel at the local off-licence. Previously we had only ever drunk alcohol in very small quantities at Christmas, but it now became a more accepted part of our lives and we would often have a glass or two before Sunday lunch, in the absence of table wine, which was then only drunk on special occasions.

With the help of our neighbours we soon settled in. Stephen started school at Hampton Primary and seemed to enjoy the new challenges. There was certainly no histrionics. Unfortunately the school was some distance away and left Jenny with a substantial walk both morning and afternoon in all weathers. At Easter 1972 he transferred to a brand new school which had been built just around the corner and both he and Kathryn completed their Primary education there. The Briary School, as it was named, was built to serve the needs of Greenhill and we soon came to appreciate the diversity of the community. The catchment area included a large council estate as well as private housing in the lower end of the market. The social mix was such that the academic aspirations of the school were not high and it had more than its fair share of motivational and behavioural problems. Neither of the children were therefore pushed there and graphs of their development correlated closely to the quality of individual teachers. There were stagnant years as well as years of encouraging gain. I shall never forget being told at a parents' evening by one of Kathryn's teachers that she was so inconspicuous that he really didn't know her! Throughout we did all we could to support the school and encourage the children. Jenny not only did a short stint as a lunchtime supervisor but also volunteered to help in the classroom, listen to children read and accompany them on school trips. At one stage she even contemplated teaching as a career. There was also at least one occasion when we joined with operatic friends to entertain parents at fund-raising evenings. At the end of it all neither Stephen or Kathryn were bitten by any real success experience. Neither were singled out as having any special talent and neither showed sufficient academic prowess to be recommended for a Grammar School place. In the words of the Headteacher, they were good average children. As far as we were concerned they were happy, well behaved children and that was all that mattered.

During their primary years both Stephen and Kathryn were involved in activities outside of school. Stephen joined the Cub Scouts and worked hard to earn proficiency badges for a whole array of activities. He also tasted the joys of camping. Kathryn, from quite a young age, took up ballet and attended classes at the Hasland School of Dancing on Saturday mornings. I remember watching with pride as she performed on the stage of the King's Hall in their annual shows dressed as a little imp and as a bunny playing the part of Cotton Tail. There is something heart-rending and entrancing about watching little ones perform but behind the scene the atmosphere was quite different. The competitive bitchiness which existed between the mothers was something to be believed and I always dropped Kathryn at the stage door and ran! Although she did not stick to ballet she was there long enough to take the preliminary exams which she passed comfortably. At home, whilst there was some bickering, they played contentedly. With a large area of waste ground and a builder's compound opposite the house there was scope for adventure and Stephen in particular played happily and safely with his friends amongst the scrub. The road was also a safe haven since it too just petered out in the field and there was no through traffic. There he rode his bike, played knockabout football and careered up and down on a home made cart. They certainly had more freedom than would be allowed today, but still nothing like the freedom I enjoyed as a youngster.

Naturally both sets of parents missed us greatly. In an age when telephones were still a long way from being universal, communications were by letter. Contact was therefore infrequent and little of the minutiae of everyday life could be conveyed or discussed. We journeyed back to Hampshire for weekends when we could but, before the M25 was completed, it was a wearisome 3½ hour journey on the old A25 which passed through the centre of almost every town en-route. With two very young children and an aged car it was not a trip we made with much pleasure. By Christmas 1971, when Jenny's Mum and Dad came to stay, they had already decided that they would also move to Herne Bay. Jenny's Dad had reached the age of 60 that year and was eligible to retire on his Railway pension. In the following weeks whilst they negotiated the sale of 261 Desborough Road in Eastleigh, Jenny and I dealt with the purchase of a ground floor maisonette at 8 Arkley Road in Herne Bay. As far as I remember they moved in about April time. Subsequently Dad found employment as a funfair attendant on the seafront but that was not really his scene and it lasted only a week or two. He also tried factory work in a Pie Factory but that too did not suit his temperament so he settled to full retirement on a limited pension supported by invalidity benefit which he received on the basis of his serious blood pressure problems. My parents came to visit in the summer of 1972. I remember that Dad and I walked across the fields one evening for a drink in the 'Share and Coulter' Public House. He was then 69 and had been fully retired for about 4 years. It was the last outing we had together. Although I was not aware of it he was even then suffering the early symptoms of leukaemia. Unfortunately it was a particularly virulent strain of the disease and as the summer and autumn progressed he came to rely increasingly upon blood transfusions to maintain his bodily functions and contain the damage. In November he was admitted to hospital and the seriousness of his condition became

known. I visited him there the weekend after my debut performance with the Herne Bay Operatic Society in 'Kismet'. As ill as he was he was interested to know all about it. It was the last time I saw him. He died a few days later. For my mother one of the more tragic aspects of his untimely death was the fact that, since the spring, Alan had been building them a bungalow at South Wonston, near where they lived high on the Hampshire downs. It was a dream for Dad who had lived his entire life on Chalk Hill. He was excited at the prospect and avidly checked its development and watched it take shape. It was finally completed only days after he died so he was never to experience the luxury of a new home and Mum moved in alone. Although his funeral took place at West End Church his final resting place was in the little country churchyard at Wonston, so in a way he made the move too, though not in the way any of us would have wanted. I missed my Dad terribly. Although we were so far away it was sad to feel that he was no longer there and the void took some time to get over.

The purchase of 47 Blean View Road made little difference to our finances. The salary increase from my promoted post was swallowed up completely by the cost of mortgage repayments. My annual income rose to £1,963 which produced a monthly take-home pay packet of £139, £40.59 of which was repaid to the Halifax Building Society. Our standard of living therefore remained unchanged and whilst we managed to live comfortably, holidays and other luxuries remained out of the question and, with no capital behind us, we still had to cross our fingers that nothing major would go wrong. To provide extra income Jenny squeezed in some paid employment between her childcare responsibilities. In the summer of 1973, during my school holidays, she worked in a seafront café whilst I looked after the children and she subsequently took a job in a Nursing Home on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. When the children went to school, for a short while she became a lunchtime supervisor at the school before taking on responsibilities as a Home Help in the local community. She even tried the Pie Factory but only lasted there one morning! Her income took some of the pressure off, propped up birthdays and Christmases and allowed us to buy some luxury items. I recall we bought a portable tape recorder with some of the proceeds of her first job in the café.

During the 70's there were other fiscal changes we had to learn to accept and adjust to. Perhaps the biggest change was 'decimalisation' which was introduced in 1971. The old system of 12 pennies to the shilling and 20 shillings to the pound was consigned to history as were some of the old coins, the large penny piece and half-penny, the threepenny piece, sixpenny piece, the half a crown and the 10 shilling note. The one shilling piece was absorbed into the new system as a 5p piece, the two shilling piece became the 10p piece and new coins were minted and circulated for 20p and 50p. Soon after the £1 note was substituted for the £1 coin. Although there was plenty of warning, the changeover was swift and the old coinage ceased to be legal tender within weeks. Needless to say the changeover brought a slight but noticeable increase in prices as everybody took the opportunity to 'round up'. This price increase was, however, nothing in comparison with what lay ahead. Inflation during the 70's was rampant reaching a peak of 22% in 1975. The result was a great deal of industrial discontent. Pay bargaining became an annual struggle for the

A typical budget of the times can be exemplified by the accounts for 1976.

Annual Budget account Expenditure:

Gas	£ 20.32	Car: Tax	£28.90
Electricity	£151.39	Insurance	£15.00
Water rates	£ 24.13	Recovery.....	£ 9.00
Telephone	£ 57.71	Driving Lic.	£ 5.00
Coal	£130.25	Repairs	£28.00
T. V. License	£ 18.00		
Teachers Union.....	£ 12.00		
House Contents Ins.....	£ 7.00		
Mortgage Protection	£ 12.00		

Monthly Expenditure (Feb. 1976)

Mortgage	£58.00	Brian Mills Shopping	£24.00
Rates	£14.50	Freezer Food	£23.00
Insurance (Life).....	£ 7.58	Groceries etc	£40.00
Ballet fees (Term)	£10.25	Television Rental.....	£ 7.70
Cash Expenditure	£68.00		

Income for the month = £308.98

Expenditure = £304.96

Unions in their attempt to maintain the living standards of their members. Unfortunately public service pay settlements never matched inflation so, year by year, we became worse off. However, we were luckier than most. I was promoted twice whilst at the Sir William Nottidge School and, with annual increments on top of the annual pay settlement, we not only kept ahead but were able to improve our standard of living substantially. In 1975 there was a massive correction in teachers' salary under the Houghton Review which also gave us a good lift and back pay of around £350. Most of the lower paid suffered badly, particularly those in rented accommodation. For property owners inflation brought advantages as the proportion of mortgage to income dropped and the value of property seemed to soar. So, for example, we sold 47 Blean View Road in July 1978 for £14,950, almost three times the purchase price and throughout the 70's I consistently sold my second-hand cars for more than I paid for them!

The technological advances which seemed to have the most impact in the 70's were in the realm of electronics. The advent of 'printed circuitry' brought new products and a movement towards miniaturisation. Almost the entire range of household electrical goods was transformed, some, like the washing machine, almost beyond

recognition. With the new techniques it became possible to increase the function and sophistication of machines. More and more became automated. Washing, rinsing and spin drying became integrated in one machine, cookers were adorned with gadgetry to automatically turn them on and off, even the simple device like the vacuum cleaner became 'turbo charged'! New devices flooded the market. The pocket calculator quickly became a must have item. The 'liquid crystal' technology became the basis for digital clocks and watches which also became very popular. The ability to combine the functions of time, date, and even time zones and a stopwatch facility all within the slim case of a wristwatch with minute batteries that lasted for years amazed us all. Home entertainment systems also changed fundamentally. The most notable innovation was colour television which became affordable for the average family and largely replaced black and white television by the end of the decade. The first video cassette recorders also appeared on the scene, though it was not until the 80's that they became commonplace. There was also significant developments in radio and the pre-recorded music industry with the coming of VHF and stereo and quadraphonic sound systems. Home radios and record players became increasingly sophisticated with sleek, compact cases, remote speakers and vastly improved sound quality. By 1979 this too had become miniaturised into the 'Walkman' which, for the young, became the fashion item of the early 80's. There was hardly a facet of life which was not touched by the electronics revolution. Even home central heating systems could be controlled by the temperature of rooms!

Our increasing affluence allowed us to indulge in some of these innovations. Although we could not afford to buy a colour television, which were expensive by today's standards, we did rent one from Rediffusion. We also invested in a top of the range stereo system and started to build a record collection. We linked it with a cassette tape recorder and, for a short while, recorded collections of our favourite music from radio programmes. We also bought an electronic organ after the central heating had ruined two pianos. Both were rendered untuneable when the heat cracked the wooden frames. It was a pity for the second piano was a gift from Jenny's Dad and it cost a lot of money. Within two years at Blean View Road it became valueless and I chopped it up for firewood. The demise of the pianos might well have been hastened by the installation of double glazing. We made this investment on the promise of savings in fuel costs, part of the sales patter of a door-to-door salesman. The idea of double glazing was just beginning to catch on and it seemed a sensible proposition. Before the age of UPVC and sealed glazing units it involved constructing an aluminium draught-proof frame with sliding glass panels behind the actual window. We had the five main windows of the house done for a cost of around £250. In 1974 we finally went on the telephone. It was, of course, a phone with a dial, no digital keypads then! Like most household gadgets it quickly became indispensable, particularly since it allowed us to keep more frequent contact with family. So, for example, began a weekly phone call to my mother which lasted without interruption until two weeks before she died in 2001. Another acquisition which made a difference to our lives was a home freezer cabinet, in our case integrated with a refrigerator. During the 70's what started as a small scale industry supplying frozen goods

The Blean View Road Years



1971



1973



1971



1975



1972



1975



1975

The Blean View Road Years



1976



1976



1976



1976



1977



1977

suitable for short-term storage in the ice boxes of fridges, escalated into big business. By the end of the decade specialist shops had come on the scene which supplied almost any kind of food in frozen form very cheaply and most people had freezers capable of keeping it indefinitely. The need for frequent daily or weekly visits to the local butcher or greengrocer disappeared overnight. We took to shopping once a month for meat, sausages and some vegetables and, of course, for the first time it was possible to buy and store things like ice-cream. It was not long before enterprising entrepreneurs recognised a niche for ready-made pies and tarts – the beginning of the consumer revolution towards ‘convenience foods’ and ready-made meals. For the rest of our provisions, like most people, we were increasingly attracted to the supermarket. Their popularity grew during the sixties but during the 70’s both their numbers and size exploded. Huge out-of-town hypermarkets began to appear. The ‘stack ‘em high, sell ‘em cheap’ philosophy was often complimented by a popular loyalty bonus scheme in the form of ‘Green Shield Stamps’. These were issued against the amount of money spent. They were stuck in savings books and could be redeemed for gifts. There was a whole catalogue of gifts available from special Green Shield Stamp outlets. Some shops raised their competitive edge by offering double, or even quadruple stamps. We took full advantage of the system and collected quite a few useful items as a result.

The Blean View Road years were characterised by a rapid exchange of cars. The 1961 Ford Anglia we arrived with began to show the signs of age and needed an increasing amount of attention. I never had the competence or aptitude to play with cars so we were lucky to live opposite Allan Clark, a garage mechanic, and he rescued us innumerable times from the traumas of mechanical unreliability. I remember him coming to check the brakes one evening and tutting at every part he removed! I also recall starting out for a weekend in Hampshire one Friday evening in the autumn of 1971 and of only reaching Faversham before the car started to lose power. An inspection by an AA technician revealed sparks dancing at the base of the carburettor. As a result we were towed to a nearby garage. The garage was in the process of closing and did not seem interested in helping us so we telephoned Allan for help and he came to rescue us. He towed us home and checked the car over but could find no fault. The next morning we drove to Hampshire with no problem. It was one of those weird and surreal experiences for which there was no logical explanation. For some reason we were prevented from travelling that night! In the summer of 1972 I traded painting the outside of Allan’s house for a respray of the car so my grey vehicle became dark blue. Upon the death of my Dad I inherited his 1963 Ford Anglia, his pride and joy, and the only new car he ever owned. It had a low mileage and was in far better condition than my own car which, of course, I sold. This ‘Anglia’ gave good service until 1974 when I was hit in the side by a car driven by an intoxicated solicitor in the High Street in Herne Bay. He was a member of an old established, wealthy landowning family – the Brealy family, and he was very concerned to keep the incident from the ears of the local police, so he settled the damages in cash very quickly. Once again Allan came to our rescue and completed repairs for a fraction of the price quoted by the garage and charged to Mr Brealy. However, somehow I felt the car was

tarnished and lost confidence in it – a common psychological reaction after an accident, so soon afterwards I sold it and bought another car. This was a dark green 1967 'E' registration Morris 1100 which I purchased from Allan opposite. It was a nice motor car, certainly the most refined of all the lowly second-hand cars I owned during the 70's. It had a sweet, smooth little engine which purred nicely and was exceptionally roomy inside. The only blemish was a slight leak in the hydro-elastic suspension which, over a period of months, caused it to tilt to starboard. Every now and then, therefore, I had to have it 'pumped' up. So pleased was I with the car that when, in 1976, Allan had another immaculate light-blue 1968 Austin 1100 for sale I did not hesitate to buy it. It was a mistake. Whilst the bodywork and upholstery were in far better condition the engine was not, and although it did not consume quite the quantity of engine oil, by comparison it was rough and ill at ease with itself. In 1977, therefore, I part-exchanged it for a silver grey Hillman Avenger at the County Garage, Herne Bay. This was the newest car I had ever owned, a 1975 model with an 'N' registration and about 27,000 miles on the clock. It was a clear signal that our financial circumstances were improving!

Another mark of our improving affluence started in 1975 when for the first time in our married lives, with the help of some back pay, we found we could afford a holiday. That year I received a lump sum of £350 as well as a substantial pay rise. As a result we followed up on an advert in the local press for the sale of camping equipment at a hall in Faversham. There we bought a one year old frame tent and most of the equipment necessary to sustain life under canvas – Lilos, a cooker, camp kitchen etc. So with everything neatly stowed on a rack on the roof of the car we set off on our first adventure – one week in Ashburton on the edge of Dartmoor where I did my first teaching practice and a further week at Weston-Super-Mare in Somerset. The journey to Devon was a journey through hell. Going across Dorset we hit a severe thunderstorm with torrential rain and skies as black as night. We wondered what on earth we were letting ourselves in for. By the time we reached the campsite, however, the skies had cleared and for a fortnight we enjoyed the most perfect weather. Indeed it was the start of a heatwave that was to last the rest of the summer. Jenny has always been a magnificent organiser and thanks to her talent we had a spectacular time. The site in Ashburton was a small family run site set in a cleavage of the moor with a babbling brook cascading down through the middle of it. We were made to feel welcome and loved every minute of it. At the end of the week we moved to a site adjacent to an airfield at Weston-Super-Mare. From there we toured Somerset and visited Cheddar Caves and Grandad and Auntie Rose in Bath. Unfortunately whilst we were there Kathryn suffered a bout of tonsillitis. I remember she grizzled and cried throughout one night and, aware of the disturbance to other campers, we tried desperately to settle her down. We ended our holiday with a visit to Jenny's school friend, Lorna, then living in Cheltenham. So successful was our first taste of camping that we had no hesitation in booking for the following year and, so taken were we with the site at Ashburton that we returned there. Once again it was an immaculate summer and we enjoyed perfect camping weather. This time with two weeks in the same location we toured more extensively seeking out some of the

more remote spots like Hope Cove and Burr Island as well as visiting the more usual places like Goodrington, Torquay, Totnes and Buckfastleigh. We also revisited St. Luke's College in Exeter and explored the City and Harbour Museum there. Back at the campsite we befriended a Dutch family who were camped next to us. Their English was excellent and we had a fascinating time comparing our lives over a bottle of wine beneath the stars after the children had gone to bed. We became sufficiently friendly by the end of our stay to invite them for a stopover en-route back to Holland. In return we received an invitation to visit them in Holland the following Easter (1977) and so we undertook our first excursion to the continent as a family. Will and Marianne lived in an old Dutch farmhouse near Nijmegen and they entertained us lavishly. Will even drove to Ostende to meet us from the ferry as well as chaperoning us around Amsterdam and the Kurkenhoff. He also took us to an outdoor museum of country life and a motorcycle scramble held near his home. On Easter day the children engaged in the traditional Easter egg hunt around the garden. Unfortunately the weekend was intensely cold and Kathryn and I suffered sea sickness and travel sickness which was something of a distraction from an otherwise exciting adventure. In the summer we reined in our aspirations and spent a week or so at Hastings. Neither the campsite or the weather came up to expectations and, whilst we enjoyed it, it was generally an unremarkable holiday.

Christmases have always been very special to us but none more so than during the Blean View Road years. Both Stephen and Kathryn were then of an age when the magic was truly alive and it was such a joy to play to the traditions and watch their eyes light up with the wonder of it all. Jenny always worked hard to provide the family with Christmases to remember and we all owe her a great deal for her foresight, imagination and flair for planning. She has always been the one to buy and wrap the presents, write the cards and undertake all the preparations for the big day. She really enters into the spirit of Christmas and always makes a special effort to please. She makes special crackers for each member of the family, usually makes and ices a cake and prepares special table centres to adorn the festive board. One year, I remember, she even made things suggested by the 'Blue Peter' programme on the television and converted a cardboard box into a Christmassy house large enough to hold some of the presents under the Christmas tree and also a festive box for Timmy the cat. She has also always excelled herself in providing the most delicious Christmas meals and ensured that there are always plentiful supplies of the family's favourite sweets and drinks. What more could anyone ask for? All I have ever had to do is buy her personal presents, something I have deservedly always taken great care over.

Our Christmases have always been intimate family affairs. Jenny's parents always joined us, and once, in 1976, so too did my mother. I am proud to say they have always been happy and harmonious occasions. I cannot recall crossed words or getting on each others nerves, which, if the media is to be believed, is the lot of the majority of families at this time of the year. Even though we were not then Church-goers we never lost the religious significance of the festival. In the lead up to Christmas I frequently sang carols with the children around the organ and we never missed the televised Church service on Christmas day, or the present giving



programme to the needy in hospital and elsewhere. After Christmas dinner we sat around the tree for our own present opening ritual. It was always the quickest washing-up session of the year! Afterwards whilst the children explored their new things, we would all generally relax in front of the television, pausing only for a cup of tea and a piece of 'Tunis' cake around 5pm. In the evening we often watched the festive editions of shows like 'Morecombe and Wise' and 'The Two Ronnies' and, perhaps, a blockbuster movie before returning to the table for Christmas supper. For me, this was the real festive meal. The array of cold meats, salads, pickles, crisps, nuts and freshly warmed bread was a combination uniquely reserved for this occasion and I came to savour it above all else. By this time roast chicken with all the trimmings,

once Christmas fare to look forward to, had become commonplace, and the substitution of turkey was not sufficiently different to mark it out as special.

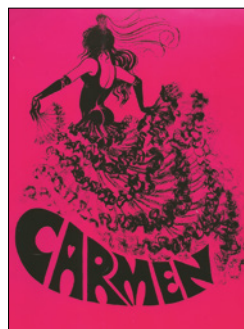
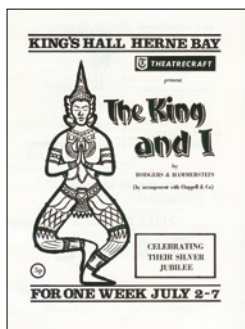
The majority of the children's playthings arrived with Santa on Christmas day. A small selection found their way into sacks they left at the foot of their beds, but the bulk were left under the Christmas tree to be opened in the afternoon. Once again, when compared with the extravagances of today where children seem to receive an obscene amount, Stephen and Kathryn were certainly not spoiled. Their toys were neither sophisticated nor over plentiful. The most technologically advanced toy we bought for Stephen around 1977 was a 'Scalextrics' layout complete with a couple of racing cars. Like the train set I had as a youngster, it was added to year on year and proved to be a worthwhile investment in terms of its play value. He also received an 'Action Man', then a popular toy of the period, along with some of its peripherals – an armoured car and different uniforms etc. over a couple of Christmases and birthdays. His other presents during the early 70's included the usual array of boyish gifts – Tonka cars and a tipper lorry, Dinky, Corgi and Matchbox model cars, tanks and toy soldiers and a kite, to name just a few. Kathryn, on the other hand, received correspondingly 'girlie' gifts – clothes, a dolls pram, Sindy Doll and all her accoutrements, including, I remember, a wardrobe. Both were given wristwatches, books and an abundance of board games and drawing equipment. I also recall a Pogo Stick, then also in fashion. There did not then seem to be the obsession with designer footwear and clothes or crazes for certain 'must have' toys and I cannot remember being swayed by peer pressure into purchasing anything we did not approve of. As for Jenny and myself, our presents tended to be orientated towards clothes, although I

remember buying her a hairdryer with a hood, silver charms for a bracelet, a cigarette lighter, toiletries and slippers. Apart from the almost annual donation of a zip-up cardigan and shirts, I enjoyed presents that gave me something to do over the Christmas break so I was given a marquetry kit, a kit to make a clock, executive toys and an oil painting kit. Besides this I remember receiving a cigarette lighter, a pipe with a stand, a large framed print of Constable's 'Haywain', slippers and dark chocolate, then a particular passion of mine. Everything seemed to be selected with loving care. Weren't we lucky!

In the quieter times of the year the television increasingly became the centre of home entertainment. The late 60's and early 70's seemed to be a time of real innovation for the small screen as colour, new techniques and sheer creative ingenuity brought new and better programmes. New techniques in animation encouraged the production of a crop of new children's programmes. I remember watching 'Camberwick Green' and 'Trumpton' when I returned home for lunch during 1971 and 1972, but there was also 'The Herbs', 'The Clangers', and the hugely successful 'Wombles' and 'The Magic Roundabout'. Following the success of 'Peyton Place' there was also an ever increasing number of American offerings appearing on our screens. 'Dr. Kildare' was very popular along with programmes like 'Charlie's Angels' and 'Starsky and Hutch'. Nothing, however could compete with our own home-grown drama and there were a number of ground breaking series – 'The Onedin Line', 'Poldark' and 'Upstairs and Downstairs' to name but three. Of course the good old faithfuls continued to hold audience share and we were among the millions who followed the ebb and flow of life on 'Coronation Street' and tuned in to see 'Dr. Who' who was still spinning around the galaxy after over ten years. Above all though this was the golden age of Situation Comedy and many of the shows introduced at this time have since become national institutions. 'Dad's Army', 'Fawlty Towers', 'Please Sir', 'On the Buses', 'The Army Game', 'Some Mothers do 'av 'em', were all ground breaking shows which appeared in the early 70's. So too did 'The Good Life', a comedy series which capitalised on the growing national mood of nostalgia for the old values at a time when working life was seen to be an ever frenetic rat race. It focused upon gardening for self-sufficiency, all be it in a light-hearted and highly romanticised way, but it captured our hearts and reawakened our interest in growing vegetables and using nature's bounty more fully. As a result we dug up half of the lawn and installed a greenhouse. Over time we became increasingly committed to the ideology to the extent that, realising the limitations of the smallish garden of Blean View Road, we went in search of property with more land. It certainly goes to show how influential television can be!

In April 1972 there was a knock at the front door early one evening and there stood an envoy of the Herne Bay Operatic Society. The Society had been notified of our arrival and address through the N.O.D.A. network (National Organisation of Dramatic Art). Even at this distance Helen Dyer did what she could to ensure that her efforts and my talents would not go to waste, so she used the jungle telegraph to make certain that I was snapped up. It was the usual story. The Society were doing the opera 'Nabucco' in May and were desperately short of men, would I please come

Herne Bay Operatics



Herne Bay Operatics



Jenny's part in next Theatrecraft play

It is Theatrecraft's custom whenever possible to include at least one newcomer in the cast list of any production, especially a play and "Hay Fever" the local group's forthcoming presentation will be no exception. For it will introduce to the King's Hall audience Jenny Upson, who will be making her first appearance in a Theatrecraft play.

Despite this, Jenny is not without stage experience. Formerly from Southampton it was as a teenager that she made her debut in a musical and in the years that followed she performed regularly with Southern Theatre Productions, a company which presented shows at a variety of theatres around the south coast.

Following her recent move to Herne Bay, Jenny

before acted in a Noel Coward comedy.

Both he and Jenny, and the rest of the cast for that matter, are finding it an exhilarating and a welcome change from the diet of farcical comedy which Theatrecraft usually present and while the emphasis is more on what is said than "what's done" the lines are so beautifully and cleverly shaped that they can create every bit as much laughter as the most frantic piece of farcical business.

"Hay Fever" will be staged at the King's Hall from April 12-14 and tickets and advance information are available from Miss Daphne Twinge, 15 The Broadway (phone 4866).



A new partnership

The new comedy partnership for the Herne Bay Operatic Society's series of Old Time Music Hall productions, Dr Daphne Twinge (left) and Dame Helga Scratchet, alias Keith Upson and John McCrae. (See On Stage and Screen on page 3).



Jenny Upson

and her husband Keith joined first the Operatic Society and both appeared in "Kismet" in which Keith played a leading role.

Since then she has also appeared in the pantomime and "The Sound of Music." In "Hay Fever" Jenny is cast as Jackie Coryton, an unsuspecting weekend guest of the Bodenmans, Bliss family, who find her normality and lack of worldly wisdom an unsuitable obstacle in coping with the circumstances she encounters.

Appetite

Sandy Tyrell another weekend guest who finds himself enmeshed in unforeseen difficulties is played by the now familiar face of Tony George.

Tony's almost insatiable appetite for performing has meant that he has been involved in almost all Theatrecraft's productions over the last two or three years, although he has never



THEATRE CRAFT

In their Silver Jubilee Year
are pleased to present

Noel Coward's Comedy Classic

HAY FEVER

KING'S HALL APRIL
HERNE BAY 12th, 13th & 14th



and help out? I did not need to be asked twice so off I went to rehearsals at St. Mary's College by the station. There was no audition but immediate acceptance and a warm and generous welcome from, what seemed to be, a very nice group of people. I was impressed with what I found. There was talent, enthusiasm and a determination to succeed. They were every bit as good as Southern Theatre Productions even if the average age tended to be a little higher. The let-down, however, was the Theatre. After the Pavilion at Bournemouth the King's Hall was crude and tiny. The facilities were basic, the acoustics abysmal, and the view of the stage from the flat dance floor left people with stiff necks. But what it lacked in sophistication it made up for in atmosphere. During the following years it became home to a great deal of pleasure and success.

After Nabucco it so happened that the young leading tenor upped sticks and moved to America leaving the way clear for me to snap up the young romantic lead parts with little or no competition for at least six or seven years. The first was 'Kismet'. Auditions were held in June 1972 and the show was staged between November 6th–11th. The part of the Caliph suited me beautifully and gave me several of the most memorable melodies, including 'Stranger in Paradise'. It was a magnificent success and provided the springboard from which many shows were to follow. Some of these were with a different Company. There was another theatre group in Herne Bay called 'Theatrecraft' – a fairly recent offshoot of the Operatic Society, who annually undertook two plays, a pantomime and a musical. They were a little more modern and adventurous in their selection of shows and, over the years, offered me the most fulfilling parts. The two societies shared the available talent. Quite often they would use the same Director and Musical Director, the same dance troupe and many of the same principals. The significant difference was in the age of the membership. The tier of more elderly people brought up on Gilbert and Sullivan were not present in Theatrecraft and it made a difference, both in ethos, and in the way the business was managed. They were not nearly so efficient in the scenery department and there was more than one occasion when the set was being built around us during the dress rehearsal and we were told to avoid the wet paint on the opening night! That apart the friendly rivalry between the two groups was of benefit and the opportunities to become involved were greatly enhanced. For me the result was three or four shows a year, a workload that would often see me out rehearsing four nights a week and which laid claim to almost as much nervous energy as my full-time job.

My association with amateur operatics in Herne Bay lasted about 14 years, though towards the end it trailed off considerably because of the pressures of work. My involvement was as listed opposite.

With all this activity there were, of course, highs and lows. Some parts suited me better than others and some didn't suit me at all. For me the highlights were 'South Pacific' and 'West Side Stor'y. Both were Theatrecraft shows and both were staged at the King's Hall and the Marlow Theatre in Canterbury. These were the films that made such a deep impression in my formative years and I treasured the chance of playing the leading roles. They both lived up to expectation, even though the score

Show	Date	Part	Society
	1972		
Nabucco	May 22 – 27th	Chorus	Operatic
Kismet	No. 6 – 11th	Caliph	Operatic
	1973		
Sound of Music	Feb 12 – 17th	Chorus	Private
Birdseller	May 21 – 26th	Birdseller	Operatic
King and I	July 2 – 7th	Lun Tha	Theatrecraft
Tom Jones	Nov 5 – 10th	Tom Jones	Operatic
	1974		
Merry Widow	May 20 – 25th	Chorus	Operatic
South Pacific	July 2 – 6th		
	July 9 – 13th	Cable	Theatrecraft
	1975		
Encore	Jan 31 – Feb 2nd	Various	Operatic
Old Time Music Hall	Feb 7 – 8th	Various	Operatic
Carmen	May 6 – 10th	Remendato	Operatic
Perchance to Dream	Nov 10 – 15th	Director	Operatic
	1976		
An Evening with G & S	Jan 22 – 24th	Various	Operatic
West Side Story	April 1 – 3rd		
	April 6 – 10th	Tony	Theatrecraft
	1977		
Old Time Music hall	Feb 10 – 12th	Various	Operatic
Yeoman of the Guard	May 16 – 21st	Fairfax	Operatic
	1978		
Bitter Sweet	May 22 – 27th	Carl Linden	Operatic
	1979		
Old Time Music Hall	Feb 8 – 10th	Various	Operatic
Dancing Years	May 15 – 19th	Director/Rudi	Operatic
An Evening with Richard Rogers	Dec 4th	Soloist	Private
	1980		
Gypsy Baron	May 11 – 16th	Barinkay	Operatic
	1981		
Brigadoon	Nov 9 – 14th	Harry Ritchie	Operatic
	1986		
Kismet	Nov	Director	Operatic

of West Side was so difficult that the orchestra had great difficulty in coping with it and some of Bernstein's discords became even more discordant! Perhaps the worst was 'Tom Jones'. Although I made a passable attempt at it, playing the lascivious rustic was really not me. My voice was too high, my body too small and my roguish twinkle too innocent! All of the others produced their own peculiar challenges especially the 'Birdseller' where my entry was marked by a 10 minute aria, but they were all immensely enjoyable. At one stage it became a standing joke that I was becoming a professional 'dyer' in that during the 'King and I', 'South Pacific', and 'West Side Story' the characters I played were killed off during the course of the show.

In 1975 I made my first foray into production. Ever since my Southern Theatre Productions days I had developed a particular affinity for Ivor Novello shows. Somehow the melodies and the stories appealed to my deep sense of romanticism. When the possibility emerged of directing 'Perchance to Dream' I therefore grabbed at the opportunity. With Jenny as my assistant, a cast full of friends and the recent example of S.T.P. to provide ideas for technical effects, it was an amazing success. Although I remember living the director's nightmare and praying that nobody would fall ill during the week of the show, I also recall the sense of achievement and satisfaction as I sat in the back row and watched the performances. In 1979 I repeated the experience with 'The Dancing Years'. This show was our undoing. Unfortunately we upset a faction within the Society by refusing to cast the male lead from amongst the available men. For a while we searched East Kent for a suitable actor, but we failed to find one. In the end I took the part myself. All was well until the dress rehearsal when we discovered that the usual level of technical support was not there. With me fairly well occupied on stage, Jenny took the full force of the responsibility. On this occasion we felt that the support and co-operation of the company was not there when we needed it. We sensed a 'we told you so' attitude, which, in our exhaustion, left us feeling somewhat vulnerable. Happily the show was not unsuccessful, far from it, but it left a bit of a taste in the mouth and our association with the Society was never quite the same again. In my naivety it shook me to realise how the most honourable of intentions (in this case the good of the show) could be so hurtfully misinterpreted by others (being seen as self-promoting and conceited). Perhaps I was. I don't know, but I'm a sensitive soul and what other people think of me is important to me so the experience taught me a lesson. I learned never get involved in the politics of a leisure organisation again. I had been on the managing committee of the Operatic Society for some time and found that, in an organisation of some size, factionalism is inevitable. In the ebb and flow of factional interest there is a danger, for some, that the very essence of membership, pleasure and enjoyment, can be destroyed.

In the early years Jenny was almost as involved as I was although, to minimise the need for babysitters we were seldom in the same show together. The exceptions to this were 'Kismet', an Old Time Music Hall and the two Novello shows. On these occasions we depended on Mum and a pupil from School to look after the children whilst we went to rehearsals. After Kismet Jenny, joined Theatrecraft for a number of productions, making her debut in 'Hay Fever', a play by Noel Coward, for three nights in April 1973. The next outing was 'Jack in the Beanstalk' in January 1974



Publicity Photograph for 'Dancing Years' 1979

when she graced the stage as the back end on the pantomime cow! There followed 'The Murder of Maria Martin' in April 1974 – a much larger part which she pulled off with great success. However Jenny is a quiet, unassuming girl who, unlike me, has never felt the need to show off or to seek the limelight. She prefers to beaver away in the background and is more relaxed and at home as part of the chorus group than she is in taking a leading role. She therefore enjoyed herself far more thoroughly in the choreographed scenes of the Music hall. She was pretty, petite, and a 'good little mover' – a joy to watch and I was always very proud of her.

As with Southern Theatre Productions there were countless other concerts and cabarets performed for all manner of charities and causes. The most high profile of these were with Annie Harrison, the landlady of the Ship Inn on the seafront, an ex-professional entertainer of outstanding talent. In association with Dominic Adams and others she organised several shows. The first was 'An Evening with Richard Rogers' with just four or five soloists but later, after she had been diagnosed with cancer, she organised full-scale Music Halls at the Marlow Theatre in Canterbury. Tragically Annie died of her illness and the run ended with a tribute production which added several thousand pounds to the huge amount of money she had already raised for Cancer Care.

One year I also did a summer season of Old Time Music halls at the King's Hall, one evening per week. It was as a result of one of these that I had my closest brush with fame and fortune. At the interval during one show I received word that somebody in the audience would like to meet me in the bar after the final curtain. There I met a well-spoken, rotund little man with the flushed cheeks of somebody who liked a drink who introduced himself as Alan Reeve-Jones. He was an author and songwriter and was somewhat smitten with my singing voice. Within two weeks I found myself in a recording session at the Gulbenkian Theatre laying down a demo track for a song he had written with a hugely talented musician called Steve Cameron – a member of the 'Hot Chocolate' band. It was an awesome experience. I remember singing to the accompaniment of this maniac who was banging hell out of the piano, then of witnessing the electronic wizardry of dubbing an orchestral backing track using a synthesizer and of enhancing the singing voice. The song was called 'Everywhere' and I was dumbstruck when, after about 45 minutes, they played it back through the sound system of the theatre. It was amazing. I received a copy of the tape but I have no idea of where else it was sent. Wherever it was it failed to impress and I heard no more about it, but it is interesting to muse upon what might have been if the stars had had a different configuration that day!

Another brush with the good and famous came when we were invited to take part as extras in the filming of an episode of the television drama series 'Upstairs, Downstairs'. Jenny and I spent the day clad in Edwardian swimming suits pacing the promenade, laying on the beach and swimming in the sea whilst Stephen, then aged six, was dressed as a little urchin. I remember that, at the time, they were building the tower block that is now St. Anne's Court and there was a lift which grated and screeched its way up and down carrying building materials. Before every 'take' the film crew had to stop the traffic and stop the lift. I admired their attention to detail

and their patience. On one occasion, after they had gone to all this trouble and the Director had ordered 'roll-over', little Stephen, who was in shot, put up his hand and said he wanted to go to the toilet. They smiled kindly and fumed. Nevertheless the day paid well and we bought Stephen his first bike with the proceeds.

The chief source of pleasure from all of this was, of course, the social contact. We met some wonderful characters and developed a circle of very close friends. Chief amongst these were Willie and Derek Cooper. Willie was my partner for a good many of the shows. She was a strapping, big-bosomed lass with a shrill, slightly hard edged soprano voice and a by no means inconsiderable acting ability. She was slightly taller than me which meant that I had to wear risers in my shoes to gain the necessary height – always the source of some amusement. From the beginning, however, we hit it off and we had a great deal of fun together at rehearsals. Derek was a talented actor with a suave, debonair presence. His singing voice was little better than ordinary but he won over audiences with impressive performances as Haj in *Kismet*, Von Trapp in *'The Sound of Music'* and Danillo in *'The Merry Widow'*. Professionally he was a partner in a London Insurance Company, a millionaire businessman who was meticulous in everything he did. To us he became a generous, warm hearted and dependable friend. The four of us partied together, frequently suppered lavishly together and, for some years, spent Christmas Eve together. Sadly in the early 80's their marriage broke down and, as we drew away from the Operatic Society, so too did our friendship.

Another close and valued friend was Vi Graham (Cole). She was the Musical Director for most Operatic and Theatrecraft shows during the 70's and she was a musician with a magnificent talent. She was a child protégée with a gift for the piano. Her youth was spent practicing and her education was conducted by a private tutor, which says something of her social roots, though nobody would ever have known it. She rose to national fame during her twenties and even played at the Proms. When we met her she was a widow in her early fifties and had settled with her daughter, Sarah, to a quieter life teaching piano at the King's School in Canterbury by day, and teaching us and conducting our efforts by night. The only sign of her more stressful past was her excessive smoking. She smoked like a chimney even resorting to smoking a pipe in the privacy of her home. But she was a kind and generous soul and much fun to be with. She rather adopted us for some years and we too exchanged house visits, played lots of hilarious games and even went on a camping weekend at Folkestone. The most memorable occasions, however, were the parties she used to throw for all our operatic friends at her home in Eddington Lane, especially the after-show parties. These were riotous times, enhanced by more than a little alcohol and capped by a sing-song around her grand piano. Vi had the ability to play anything by ear to perfection so she would roll out all the old favourite tunes and choruses from the shows and the assembled throng would sing their heads off – wonderful! What her eight or nine beloved cats thought about it I don't know, but none of them left home!

Many of us owed a debt of gratitude to Dominic Adams who also became a good friend. Dominic directed a large number of shows. He was a busy and efficient little

person of much the same age as me. He had a penchant for production and his shows were well crafted and animated. They were never hackneyed or samey and always imaginative and technically proficient. Dominic recognised talent and nurtured it and many owe their local stardom to him, including me. Unfortunately he was a little highly strung and tended to lose his cool in rehearsals and would often descend into abusive rages. After a while I wearied of his scenes and avoided his shows. A shame really, but I found it all so unnecessary. Admittedly it was sometimes necessary to lower the temperature during rehearsals. People liked to have a good time, that's what it was all about. But there was a balance to achieve between work and pleasure and it took real skill to maintain both and make progress without upsetting people. He just went a little over-the-top.

There were several members of the society with wonderful singing voices who shared the stage with me on many occasions. Anita Sargent, with a gorgeously mellow mezzo-soprano voice, and Les Booth, a magnificent bass, added a touch of class to many productions. Duncan McCrae was also a fine tenor with a real command of the technicalities of music. Fortunately or unfortunately he was smaller than me, warbled a little too much and had an uncontrollable vibrato movement of the head when he sang. He therefore tended towards the comedy roles, and a fine job he made of them too. I went through a good few leading ladies but only one came near to Eileen Walker of Southampton. That was Bunny Judges who played Maria in 'West Side Story'. She was a fine actress who immersed herself in the powerful emotions of the part and was a marvellous partner. There were many other gifted people, too many to mention that it was an honour to work with. We shared a common purpose and relied upon each others talents. It's where all good friendships begin. As time went on the circle of operatic friends and acquaintances broadened and we became quite well known in Herne Bay. We came to know many civic dignitaries, members of the Rotary Club and the press. One acquaintance made at this time was Tony Coburn, a brash Australian, who was the originator of Dr. Who and was heavily involved in the production of television drama. At the time I was writing educational materials for publication and I remember him sharing his own experience as an author. He spoke of 'shovelling shit for inspiration', something that rang a bell with me as I struggled, and still struggle, to put words together!

During 1978 the pleasant equilibrium of life began to be disturbed by the growing agitations of the seven year itch. The challenges of school, the operatic and the house and home had all been conquered and life was becoming more mundane and less exciting. Some yearn for routine and predictability in life but I was becoming bored by it and began to search for new opportunities and new challenges in all three areas of my life. I was particularly keen to move from the Sir William Nottidge School. I was ready for promotion and began to look for openings for Deputy Headships. At the same time we were gripped by the self-sufficiency fever and began to feel the need to move to a larger house with more land. With the children aged 12 and 9 there was no latitude for delay without disrupting their schooling. Our plans were hampered by the difficulty in finding a job. My non-graduate status, the type of school I was working in and the dubious support of the Headteacher all weighed

against success. In the end I felt that my only way forward was to improve my qualifications and I enrolled to take a Dip. Education at Christchurch College in Canterbury – a three year part-time course held in the evenings. That decision bound us to East Kent for the foreseeable future so we seriously went in search of a house in the local area. We wanted to move further into the country and when we saw an advertisement for a detached, three bedroomed house with a third acre garden 10 minutes from Canterbury we followed it up immediately. We were astonished to find that it was just round the corner in Greenhill Road, if anything a little closer to town. We decided to give it a look over. One step over the doorstep was enough to convince Jenny that it was what she wanted and a glance at the back garden settled it. We entered negotiations to buy and crossed our fingers!