

HOME by Hazel Addis (nee Wilson)

THORPE has always been Home to me, or at least my Old Home. Actually I was born at Heathside in Thorpe Hamlet, as it was then known, until it merged with Thorpe St. Matthew; a thinly populated residential fringe to Norwich; and it was there that my two older brothers and I spent our very happy early childhood. Heathside is at the top of a hill and Nannies and Nursemaids must have had a hard time pushing prams and push-chairs up and down to Thorpe Road, for little but open Country with rough tracks lay to the North of us. But the effort was rewarding, for we emerged from Telegraph Lane almost opposite the tram terminus. Here the driver and conductor had to get out to manoeuvre the long arms of the trams to connect with the electric wires over-head, so that the one-line tram could return to Norwich with its rear-end now the front. This was fine entertainment for children, as often sparks would fly overhead until the connection was safely made. These tram-lines formed a close net-work all over the City, with double lines in the main streets. They presented a considerable hazard to cyclists, as the tyre of a bike could fit snugly into a tram-line and could not be extricated until the rider hurriedly dismounted or crashed. Some of you, perhaps most of you, will not remember the trams, then the only form of public transport in urban areas, but then I was born in 1900, which, as my son puts it, didn't happen to everybody. Most of my early memories are now history.

Heathside was not a very big house, but big enough in my Mother's eyes, to call for four servants: a cook, parlourmaid, housemaid and scullery maid, as well as her own lady's-maid and Nanny, who both came into a different category and both needed a certain amount of waiting on. The cook was always honoured with the title of 'Mrs.', whether she was or wasn't, as this apparently gave her the necessary status as head of the strict domestic hierarchy. Out of the kitchen, however, reigning in a small pantry of her own, the parlour-maid was on equal terms. The one I remember best was evidently born to be a butler, cast in solid starch. She was the only one who had to change her uniform in the afternoons, from the blue-grey cotton, with long skirts of course, beneath an enveloping apron and surmounted with an unbecoming cap, into a trim black with a discreetly frilly apron and cap.

The house maid had to have an identical outfit in order to play the butler's part on the parlour maid's half-day out. All uniforms, it was understood, were provided by the employer. One of our little pleasures as we grew older was to hide behind the long velvet curtains in the hall, directly we heard the front-door bell ring, in order to spring out and tweak the little tails of her starched cap as she glided past, knowing she would not have time to retaliate. Nevertheless she must have stayed with us a long time, for I remember her name was Mace.

All the staff, except for Mrs. Cook, were called by their surnames, even the lady's-maid, who was 'Miss' Something to the others. Our favourite was Bunting, the house-maid, who actually seemed to enjoy booby-traps, ambushes and other forms of childish 'mischief', as they indulgently called it. Later, I think - perhaps as we became more mischievous - she had an under-housemaid. Bunting only left us to become Mrs. Spooner, when she married our under-gardener/groom, but that was many, many years later.

The name Hubbard has forced itself to the surface of my muddy mind': another housemaid with a bright, jolly face, whom we loved. So I do hope I'm not marrying off the wrong woman to the right man. If so, may they both forgive me.

The youngest member of the staff was the 'Tweeny', a derisive name for the scullery-maid, who was usually a girl in her 'teens. She was everybody's dogsbody : bullied by the cook, snubbed by Mace, and worked to death for a very few shillings a month. For some reason we did not rag her, as we did the others, except for Mrs. Cook who was too formidable. Perhaps we realised, that Tweeny had enough on her plate.

The maids were mostly local girls, I think, certainly Norfolk born and bred, which was important as no-one would have put up with a 'foreigner' in the house. There were plenty of applicants from which to pick and choose, when my Mother had to go to the Registry Office on Riverside Road. It was no disgrace for a girl to be 'in service' and for the younger ones it was probably looked on as an apprenticeship. Their engagement was largely dependent on their references, or 'character', which the last employer was honour-bound to give truthfully to the prospective one; especially as the reasons for leaving were apt to differ considerably. These formal question-and answer letters were exchanged on a strictly confidential basis. Some girls might carry about with them a whole sheaf of 'open' references to present at an interview, but these were considered of little value compared to the exchange of letters.

As children, our enjoyment of life was both limited and at the same time enhanced by the strict discipline of our parents, themselves Victorians, though they had gone a long way towards breaking down the old barriers between Nursery and Drawing-room, with a great deal more sharing, caring and loving than they had ever received in their own childhood. We were aware that we were important members of the family, although under the Rule of the Nursery and its daily routine, which was as narrow and rigid as those tram-lines.

Usually the mornings were our own, once we had completed the routine of breakfast with its porridge and boiled egg, with the inevitable slab of thinly-buttered bread, and the hand-washing that followed; to say nothing of "doing what one should" and another hand-washing. Then and only then were we free to go out and play in the garden - never beyond its boundaries. We played silly games to let off steam, as all children should, but these soon developed into more imaginative play, organised by big brother, like fire-engines of two-boy power, provided by my discarded pram, or building houses in trees or inventing perilous obstacle courses for bikes, in which my tricycle invariably came to disaster, or secret-mission warfare and catching spies, who, even in the first decade of the century, abounded in the shrubberies and undergrowth

For such activities we were positively swaddled in clothing. I remember the boys best when they wore long shorts and sweaters, but above this reasonable attire they were covered in blue holland smocks, in summer, which I suppose were looked on as overalls, suitable for the garden. They graduated slowly to breeches, buckled below the knee and so helping to hold in place the thick woollen stockings from which we all suffered, though mine began as white. For 'tidy' occasions they wore sailor suits, sometimes surmounted with heavy reefer coats, weighing them down. Meanwhile I was even more muffled with layer upon layer of clothing. Starting with combinations, I went through various stages of vests and shifts, drawers and bloomers, camisoles, bodices and cami-knickers. Probably these were not all worn at once, but I can only remember the innumerable buttons and hooks which trussed me up. Above these I finally graduated in turn to a below-the-knee heavy serge skirt with flannel blouses and 'woollies' galore, before I proudly achieved a sweater. We all wore hats, of course, usually 'tammies'. For 'tidies' I had to be clad in a velvet coat, trimmed with fur, an equally repulsive hat, and my white kid button boots were often surmounted by leggings, which called for long hours trying to learn the art of the button-hook.

Our indoor toys were a rocking horse, a dolls' house, a big box of bricks and there must have been a lot more, for I remember the toy cupboard in the Nursery was apt to explode once the catch was released; also the awkward business of fitting everything back again, which was a Nursery Rule. No doubt it was good discipline but it did not lead to any of my family being remotely tidy. The boys had tin soldiers to march and drill. Although many of them carried rifles or swords, they didn't seem to have to kill each other quite so freely as children do nowadays. I preferred my Animals, especially the lovely little models of Peter Rabbit, Benjamin Bunny and their kin. When I had grown out of rag-books and large picture books which had to be treated with more respect, Mother started her bed-time stories with Beatrix Potter and I have forever been a member of the Flopsy

Bunny clan

We also had a gramophone, which was hailed as a marvellous invention, especially as, before that, we had had a phonograph, which let out excruciating noises from a little round cylinder which slipped over a rotating arm, making occasional contact with a scratchy needle. The gramophone was a large wooden machine, wound up with a handle and sporting an enormous trumpet. The records were proper discs and would probably fetch hundreds of pounds nowadays. Then-a-day they cost several shillings, which meant a good deal of clubbing together of pocket money and arguing about the choice. But the unanimous favourites were "When Father papered the parlour, you couldn't see Pa for paint..." and a very popular song which began "Yip-i-addy-i-ay-i-ay, YIP-i-addy-i-ay."

I cannot remember anything much of our early education, except for the endless repetition of 'pothooks and hangers' which was intended to be the foundation for good hand-writing - and wasn't. Sums, too, had little impact on me, for I can only remember the nerve-tearing squeak of the slate pencil. I think the boys must have had a tutor from about six but I can't even remember who was meant to be in charge of my blissful ignorance. There was a much more effective grounding in arithmetic when we started being given pocket—money, for along with the cash we were issued with a small account book and credits and debits were clearly explained. Beginning at sixpence a week, every penny had to be accounted for, before the next allowance was handed out. The account read something like this, though the writing may not have been all that legible :

Choc bar - 1d.

Bulls eyes - tuppence

Acid drops - ha'penny

Choc with pimples - ha'penny

Hundreds and thousands - ha'penny

More acid drops - 1d.

Saved for fireworks - ha'penny.

I remember one week of impending doom when I seemed to have spent seven pence when my allowance was only six-pence. It was explained to me in some detail how over-spending led to bankruptcy. Apart from the three Rs, the general attitude of our parents was that we should learn all we needed to know by precept and example. Certainly we acquired English and grammar, Religion, morality and some manners by this happy method. Also by the discipline of our parental and Nursery routine.

Following a compulsory rest after our mid-day dinner, came the afternoon-walk, weather permitting, and it always did seem to permit in those days. This was as fixed a part of our routine as the daily bath, the washing of hands before every meal, the saying of Grace before and after meals, however gabbled it might be, and the Morning Prayers for the whole household. After breakfast every day except Sundays, when it was hoped that everyone would find time to go to Church, chairs were drawn up in a semi-circle in the dining-room, the bacon and sausages having been whisked out of sight but the lovely smell lingering on to become part of the odour of sanctity. Then the staff would troop in, in strict order of precedence, the tail-end panting with its exertions to finish its work on time and to look as proper as Cook expected. There was a short Prayer and a brief Bible-reading, given by one of my parents, followed by a hushed 'Amen' and a burst of long-suppressed giggling from us. Then my Father pulled out the Albert watch and chain from his waistcoat pocket, snapping its cover open and shut again, before setting off to work in Norwich on an old boneshaker cycle, sitting bolt upright, with a grey Homburg hat set at a jaunty angle.

Although Mother did try to lighten the load of work a little - though I can remember only Sunday luncheon's cold beef and pickles - it was never known if the maids did get to Church or not. They

were only engaged if they were C. of E. and Church-going was mentioned, at the interview, as an addition to the half-day out, but after that my Mother left it to them. My parents always went to Matins at St. Matthews, where the Vicar was a Rev. Morgan. They usually walked and Nanny sometimes took us to meet them half-way home. There was a whoop of delight when we saw them, usually arm in arm; my Father in a top hat and frock coat, with a choker instead of a tie, and, very trendy, grey spats to match the pinstripe on his trousers. My Mother was equally dressy, in pastel-coloured furbelows, her long skirts often discreetly hooked up in one hand; a high collar, which was often 'boned', with a little frill at the top, like Princess Di doing a backward somersault; the whole outfit matched with a big be-feathered hat - not her best one, which she considered to be too saucy for Church. We children were not allowed to go to Church until we were old enough to know how to behave and to understand something of what was going on. With the result that we considered it a privilege and behaved impeccably, frozen statues, though our minds were equally benumbed by the solemnity of the occasion. Sundays therefore provided a small break in our routine, when we were expected to play quieter games and 'special' books were kept by my Mother for the evening reading-aloud session.

No doubt the household was run on equally strict lines under my Mother's careful supervision. She preferred to be her own house-keeper, in order to maintain closer touch with the maids for whom she felt responsible. Heathside was a typical example of its period, for people with our sort of life-style. There were two swing-doors of green baize : one upstairs, one down, opening on to the hall, to divide the back-quarters from the front of the house. These were intended to exclude the smells of cooking, the yells of children and the occasional screams of laughter from the kitchen.

The day and night nurseries were above the kitchen quarters, with the maids' bedrooms above them on the third floor. These were strictly out-of-bounds to us, because of the obvious attraction of apple-pie beds, so I have no knowledge of the conditions under which the maids were supposed to relax, but I imagine it was pretty spartan, and all ablutions had to be done at the kitchen sink before climbing the two staircases. Indeed the kitchen sink in the tiled scullery was rather like a large stone bath.

Unless we had colds or 'chills', which were Nanny's bug-bear, when we had to have a hip-bath in front of the Nursery fire, we used the bath-room on the holy side of the upstairs baize door, for in that 5-bedroomed house (not counting the third floor) there was only one bathroom and two W.Cs, one up, one down. As far as I remember the maids had to use an E.C. — which you may not even know stands for an earth-closet, across the back-yard. The bath was encased in a mahogany frame, wall to wall, as was the W.C. next door, in which one had to mount a step to the 'throne'. Hip-baths, of course, meant that hot water had to be brought up from the kitchen, where the massive iron range was always bristling with kettles, pots and pans of hot-water. Someone, too, had to carry up coals for all the up-stair fires, as well as cleaning the grates and polishing fenders and fire irons.

There was no other form of heating in the house, nor, except for the bathroom, any upstairs taps. There were wash hand-stands in all the bedrooms, usually with marble tops, on which stood be-flowered china bowls with ewers of the same pattern standing in them, full of cold water, which often used to be frozen on top. A soap-box of matching design and a china tooth-brush holder completed the set, except for an 'article', now known as a jerry, equally ornate, discreetly concealing itself in the bed—side commode. That meant that someone had to make a second journey, after the initial early morning tea, with a brass jug of hot water covered with a towel to every inhabited bedroom. We took all this for granted, of course, as all children do, since they have no option about the circumstances of their birth. In spite of Nanny's frequent exhortations to eat up my cabbage because hundreds of starving children would have been thankful for it (and very welcome they would have been it was some time before I came to realise that this was true and, indeed, there was real poverty very close at hand. It was many, many years later before I learned that with

privilege goes an equal ratio of responsibility.

The servants never showed the smallest resentment and if they complained about the heavy load of work upon their shoulders it never reached our ears. Perhaps the sharing of duties or the clear definition of them was a help, and the general atmosphere of the house was a happy one, 'upstairs and down'. At any rate they continued moving smoothly about their work and the back-stairs was a much-used highway. The stairs had an added attraction to us, too, for parallel to them, the other side of a passage, hung the bells. About a dozen of them, they hung from a board high on the wall. They were real bell-shaped bells, of course, hanging from coiled springs like question marks, each clearly labelled with its source of origin : 'Front door', 'Drawing room', 'Best Spare room', etc. The downstairs rooms were all equipped with stout silken bell-ropes, while the bed-rooms had a brass handle which had to be tugged very hard in order to achieve the necessary jangle down-stairs. When a bell rang, one of the under servants had to drop everything to run out to the passage in time to see which bell was still swinging and then to hurry to find the appropriate maid to answer it.

Those bells remind me of one outstanding incident when I was very small. Some occasion of National importance was being celebrated all over the Country, so my Father suggested that we should all join in. He was always anxious that we should understand and remember occasions which would one day be history. So, to our delight, we were set to pealing all our bells all at once as hard as we could. Armed with broomsticks,*the boys were just able to reach, leaning over the bannisters of the back-stairs, and taking wild swipes at the bells. I must have been about 3 or 4, as the only way I could take part was from the safety of my Father's shoulders. Finally he disarmed us, saying : "Now, you'll always remember that, won't you?" I certainly have remembered, but have no idea what we were celebrating. It might have been the Coronation of Edward VII, for I did actually overlap with Queen Victoria.

Such incidents provided a welcome break in our routine, as did Christmas, birthdays and parties, though the dressing-up for the children's parties robbed them of much of the fun. Even grown-up parties were exciting, for we could always hide in the bushes when visitors came, and emerge to make friends with the horses or to make faces at the not-so-friendly coachmen, when the ladies had been ushered indoors. There was a Miss Bignold, I remember, resplendent in black jet, whom we often thought was Queen Victoria incognito. Or, during evening parties, we could stick our heads through the bannisters of the landing and try to smother our laughter as we watched Mace behaving like a court official.

Nevertheless the bed-time routine was always the same. My bed-time, as far as I can remember, was seven o'clock, when I was about six, and there was no arguing when the Grandfather clock sounded the curfew. Nanny was in charge of the physical work, until, clad in a thick woolly night-dress, I was ready for Mother, already changed for their dinner, to read me a story and supervise - and no doubt to prompt - my prayers. We all shared the night nursery, until the boys went to Prep. school at the obligatory age of 8, but when my elder brother, Jack, who was 4 years older than me, came home after his first term, he found the 'Pink room' had become the Boys' room. It soon lost its pristine pinkness and cold impersonal air of a spare-room.

We must have been keeping abreast of the times, for we actually had a telephone installed, though at what date I have no idea. It was a wall fixture, the small trumpet-shaped mouth-piece intended to be on a level with the average adult mouth; while the receiver hung on a stirrup-shaped hook beside it. One called the exchange by winding a little handle on the opposite side, when a girl would enquire "Number, please?". Then the caller would ask with due respect : "Could you get me Norwich 123, please?" My Father told us that this was probably the most wonderful invention we should ever see. We acquired our first car in about 1910, a Napier. This was by no means one of the earliest, and it was already funny to think of the pioneers which had to have a man with a red flag walking in front

of it. The number plate bore the simple figures 10. We already had a horse and carriage : a 'brougham', which had the same stuffy smell as the 'growlers', as the old cabs were called. Later we had an open Victoria carriage for summer days. These were really all we needed for my Mother's requirements of shopping in Norwich, and the social calls which were an important part of her life.

'Calling' had very strict unwritten rules. It was always for an older-established resident to call on a new-comer, leaving a visiting card. In our early days at Heathside, these would be presented to my Mother by Mace on a silver salver. This call must then be returned by my Mother within a week or ten days. There was never any question of meeting before this preamble was completed, for the cards were usually handed in by the coachman; while the lady waited for Mace, in our case, to say on principle : "Mrs. Wilson is not at home." It had to be explained to me that this was not a lie, as it might appear to be to the simple-minded, but was called etiquette. Another small part of the 'Calling' ritual was that one corner of the visiting card might be turned down. This was a sign that the visitor had really called in person and was considered as an indication of promising friendship, just like the wagging of a tail after two dogs had done their preliminary circling and sniffing. A week or so later it was for the senior lady to decide if she would invite the newcomer to tea. My Father still called it a 'dish of tea', but I think he was only hanging on to a tradition which had been buried with the old Queen.

Once my Father had succumbed to a car, we were all very proud of it. It was more than a status symbol, for we felt the world was now our oyster. we could explore Norfolk, which had hitherto been limited to the orbit of a horse's hooves. How my Father learnt to drive so quickly I shall never know, though I suspect that the salesman at Mann and Egerton had simply explained to him the controls and left the rest to him. I doubt if the Authorities had got round to licences, either for car or driver. There was certainly no test of any sort; not even in 1917 when I 'qualified'. No Highway Code, no white or yellow lines and no restrictions about parking. We would drive up London Street without a qualm, stopping anywhere that my Mother wished to shop, without it occurring to anyone that we might be a nuisance. Our coachman, Matthews, who was deeply suspicious of all things mechanical had been sent away on a Course, I believe, which must have included some care and maintenance, for he came back as a fully-fledged Chauffeur. He was much embarrassed by his new uniform, where he had thought nothing of the long 'frogged' coat and top-hat with a cockade in it, when he was seated on the box of his carriage. We were sometimes allowed to ride on the box with him, sharing the waterproof knee rug, or even permitted to hold the long whip, with the strict injunction that it must never be used. Matthews was a horse-man, born and bred, and when he was washing the new car, which was usually a daily task, he hissed through his teeth as all stablemen do when grooming their charges.

We all adored Matthews, who had been in the family longer than I had and was a Nature's gentleman if ever there was one. He taught us all to ride bikes and ponies, as well as much of his innate country lore. His word was certainly our law and we spent a lot of time pestering him in the stables. The main things that I remember about the Napier were the lights, great brass side lanterns, much like those on carriages; the big, bulbous horn which had to be pooped at every corner, and the 'sprag'. This was a metal device which could be lowered from the back axle until it actually touched the surface of the road, at such an angle and edged with serrated teeth it could act as an emergency brake and prevent the car running backwards on a hill. Ne used it at first on the steep part of Cotman Road, but it made such an appalling noise that it was soon abandoned.

It was 1912 before we moved to High House in the village of Thorpe St. Andrews. Much as we had loved Heathside, we had out-grown Nursery customs. Children didn't mature so early in those days, and we were still young enough to be thrilled with the change and the sense of expansion and opportunity .we simply enlarged our activities and our circle of friends to a wider scale. Anyhow we continued to be extremely young and foolish. The house was on the same high level as Heathside,

but now the approach from Thorpe Road was all ours, beginning just beyond the narrow opening between high brick walls, one of which bounded 'Dunollie', where the Keppel family lived, with three children of about our own age.

The place was all one property in those days, a big house standing in quite a lot of land, out of sight of any neighbours. Only recently I learned that it cost £12,000, which is a very fair indication of the changes which have come about in something over 70 years. We began with the head gardener's lodge, on the left just inside the entrance, and beyond it stretched the long gravel drive, bounded with open fields on either side. The gardener's name, by the way, was Weeds, which was a source of great delight to us. Just above the lodge was an enormous and prolific walnut tree. After that there were only sporadic trees set in the wide grass verge, where pedestrians could sit and pant. The gradient increased slowly till it met strips of woodland on either side, then led round a curve encircling an enormous clump of rhododendrons, until one arrived on the flat in the courtyard in front of the house.

Opposite was the cobbled stable-yard, complete with stone horse-trough. The stables, with two loose boxes, a harness room, a hayloft above and a wonderful smell throughout, was flanked with a double garage, and, behind them, a row of garden sheds and out-buildings. In front of these ran the back drive, comparatively short, which emerged at the top of Thunder Lane. There was not another house in view, except for Matthews' Lodge, mounted high above the great brick gate-posts and double wrought-iron gates. To the west of the courtyard was another small rise, which led to the tennis court and, beside its high wiring, a swing, see-saw and a 'Giants stride I seldom see these on a play-ground nowadays, but if anybody doesn't know what a Giants' stride is, I can only say they've missed a lot of fun. Beyond that lay another field, where I kept my pony, flanked on either side by the Rabbity wood and the Blue-bell wood. In the latter there was a sand-pit, for no apparent reason, and it was there I believe that gravel was found, for which a Contractor bought the place when my Mother decided to sell in the early '30s.

As to the house itself - if anybody is interested in an out-of-date map - (if not, please skip it) the entrance hall led to the 'long hall' which acted as a by-pass, circumnavigating the five living rooms, which all looked out to the South, over a terrace which ran the length of the house. But still there was only one cloak-room. Upstairs there were nine rooms, one of which was the school-room and one my Mother's 'boudoir'. But still only one bath and two lavatories, until my Father managed to insert a third, and a strictly Parents Only bathroom off his dressing room. There were no baize doors here, as the passages were longer and the kitchen quarters were isolated in the North wing. But the staff had risen to seven, and their accommodation was four pokey little bedrooms, tucked away at the head of the perilously dark and steep back staircase.

The garden to the South of the house was mostly one big stretch of grass, sweeping down from the terrace to the lower wood, and full of unexpected dips and humps which were great fun for the cyclist and must have been a nightmare for a mower-pusher. An enormous wellingtonia cedar tree topped the slope at one side, while a camelia tree at the other end of the course acted as an extra hazard. The kitchen garden ran parallel to Thunder Lane, with a tool-shed and green-house at the top; walled on one side and screened on the other by shrubberies and a big sweet chestnut, which rose up close to my Mother's bed-room window, so that she could watch the daily routine of a family of red squirrels, who seemed to appreciate the tree and its fruit as much as we did.

On the other side of the grass slope was the herbaceous border, and, beyond it, the ground rose to the 'Fairy Mount', dotted with daffodils, and leading on to wild, bracken-clad land, full of rabbits and adventure. More formally, at the west end of the terrace was a paved water-garden, later ornamented with bulbous stone pillars which my Father had managed to obtain when London Bridge was demolished and rebuilt.

Only two incidents, I feel, need to be recorded about my goings on during those very happy years, for both turned into serial stories which have lasted over 70 years. Out of the games of kids and 'teenagers' (suckers rather than sucklings) may spring a life-long career. For my sixteenth birthday I was given a small writing desk of my own for my bedroom. I remember sitting there, arranging the contents with pride, when on the spur of the moment I announced aloud: "This is where I shall write my first book!" I hadn't thought of it before. Of course it didn't happen like that; there just wasn't time even to think about it again, for I was leading a hectic life of hunting and dancing, hockey or tennis and war work. I didn't start writing with any serious intent until ten years later, when all these preoccupations had been swept away by my marriage into the Navy.

Suddenly I found myself all washed up at Portland with nothing to do except to wait for H.H.S. Tiger to come home. Now, I thought, is the moment to start that book. The first two went into the waste paper basket, but after that twenty-one got themselves published. But in 1916, I am ashamed to say, I used the flap of that desk, mercifully a cheap one, for cutting tiny niches to mark each week that my current boy-friend was away. He had been sent to Kenya for three years and I had sworn (only to myself, luckily) to wait for his return. Even more shamefully I have to admit that there were only about a dozen nicks in the desk-flap before I forgot all about it.

The other incident arose from the gang of girls who didn't go to boarding school and felt bereft of brothers. The Keppels, Harbords and Morses were near neighbours, all suffering from governesses. We all had ponies and got together every day for rather hare-brained riding on Mousehold Heath. (By the way, I do hope it's still called 'Mussell', as all natives did then.) It was 1910 when one of us came up with a book by Baden-Powell called 'Scouting for Boys' and we decided at once that we would form ourselves into a Troop of Girl Scouts. Scouting, with its tracking and trekking, camp fires on which to cook 'twists', its signalling, knotting, First Aid and, above all, its uniform, was just our cup of tea. News of the fun spread and friends came from further afield until there were 10 or 12 of us, mostly meeting at High House which was ideal for such pursuits.

We carried out B-P's suggestions to the letter - except for the little matter of being the wrong sex - even to the extent of punishing anyone who swore by pouring a cup of cold water down their sleeves. We devised our own uniform of shortish blue skirts, rather shorter than our parents liked, khaki jerseys and home-made scarves, shoulder tabs and badges. Boy Scouts were springing up like mushrooms all over the country and holding rallies, for which we knew we were not eligible. So our Leader, a Buxton from Dunston, wrote to B-P asking for official recognition. We were totally shattered when he wrote back telling us there were no such things as Girl Scouts and suggesting we should join the newly formed Girl Guides. For some reason we despised Girl Guides, sneering at the thought of being members of the Pansy Patrol and winning badges for knitting.

Our enterprise therefore died a bitter death, but, soon after, the Harbord girls rode over to tell me there was something called wolf Cubs, which sounded like fun. It was. This section of the Movement, which was intended for the boys who were too young to be Scouts, did not officially begin till much later, but many Troops had started 'Junior Scouts' or 'Cadets' with the sole object of preventing their Troops from being over-run by younger brothers, and B-P had approved the idea and suggested the name 'wolf Cubs'. It was 1916 before he published 'The Wolf Cub Handbook', with its unique scheme for training boys of 8 - 12. But I was already Cubmistress of the 1st Thorpe Pack at 15.

Even apart from that, it was very unlikely that B-P would have approved of us, as, lacking any tiresome rules and regulations, we just began. Mr. Parker of the village shop and Post Office, kindly put up a notice in his window which read:

ANY BOYS WHO UOULD LIKE TO BE WOLF CUBS CAN COME TO THE TOP FIELD
AT HIGH HOUSE AT TEN ON SATURDAY MORNING.

About seven boys of all sizes appeared on Saturday morning at the appointed place, an hour before the appointed time. Not having any idea what wolf Cubs were, they looked a bit awkward and sheepish and gawped at our uniforms and us inside them. With the briefest possible explanation of the scheme, we set about drilling them, marching and forming fours, as well as inspecting them and telling them what we expected next week. Then, I think, we had the sense to play a game of football and sent them home with a copy of the Promise which they would all be taking next week.

Twenty-two of them arrived the next Saturday and I began to realise that an age limit was necessary. Oddly enough we came up with the same age range that B-P had chosen. Below eight was too young to listen, let alone learn anything, while the twelve year olds were too big for us to eject if it became necessary. I'm afraid it was only the football that attracted them, but we put them through regular drill and saluting the Union Jack, before we started any test work. We had worked out our own programme of watered-down Scouting, which started with tying up their own bootlaces and telling the time, neither of which seemed to be included in the School curriculum.

Anyhow it worked, after a fashion, and we all enjoyed it. The boys taught me a lot more than I taught them. Prompted by a photograph of the Pack, dated about 1916, I can remember many of their names as well as their characters and it is possible that some of their Grandchildren are still living in Thorpe. There were two Leathers, living at the bottom of Thunder Lane, whose father was groom/chauffeur to the Keppels; two woodcocks, sons of the postman, who lived up Postwick way near the old Asylum; Frost of the bicycle shop, next to the P.O.; Girling, Thirkell, Hubbard (a cheeky chappie if ever there was one), Smy, Cheshire and Firmin, son of the caretaker of the Parish Hall, half way up Chapel Lane. Other names are just round the corner of my mind. We kept the Pack to an average of 24, which was quite enough for me, especially after my two assistants had had to give us up as a bad job. At 14 they were possibly a little too young for the job.

A Troop of Scouts started up in the Village after a while, but they were as irregular as we were, not being 'B-P' followers but 'Church Scouts', run by the Rev. Supple and limited to his choirboys. We took no more notice of them than we had of any other authority. At last, however, the Norwich Scout Association heard of our activities and a proper Troop was established with a Mr. Smith as Scoutmaster. A mild warfare broke out between the two factions, mostly throwing insults, though I think a few stones were also hurled across the Village street, if not the aisle. The 'Church Scouts' started turning their hats up on one side, like Australian soldiers, just to show their independence. However, outnumbered, Mr. Supple was wise enough to disband them before matters grew worse.

We were more than willing to become the junior section of the B-P Scouts, if only to be able to be quit of our older boys, and so found ourselves for the first time under the rule of Authority. Edward Coe was then District Commissioner in Norwich, I believe, with his younger brother, Neville, an ardent Scouter. They wisely turned a blind eye on our early misdemeanours and were far too courteous to enquire my age; also ignoring the fact that B-P was still reluctant to admit women into Scouting, in spite of the shortage of man-power. But they saw to it that we were now properly registered and enrolled. I took the Solemn Promise for the first time at the Jarrolds' house, for he was Chairman of the local Committee, while a Mr. Stratford, a solicitor in Norwich, was Chairman for the Norwich District Association to which we now belonged. ‘

These two incidents in my career are only linked by the fact that, long afterwards and for a long time, I wrote a great many articles and books on Scouting and, above all, stories for Cubs. My last commissioned story for Beavers, an even younger Section, appeared in the 'Scouting' magazine in their January 1988 issue. With two hobbies combined into one, so long-lasting, I reckon myself a very lucky person. The militaristic tendency with which we began Cubbing, and which has nothing whatever to do with Scouting, was no doubt due to the war (the 1st world war, though, thank God, we didn't know that at the time).'

The whole Country was bursting with patriotic fervour and everybody was longing to get into uniform and be of some service. Perhaps that is why my Cubs were so proud of their uniform and really were uncharacteristically smart. For the War had broken out when I was only 14. My age is easy to remember, since I march with the years. At first it made little difference to me, except for the realization that my brothers would have to go and do something about it. They did, leaving school direct for the Forces. 'The only consolation is that Jack, who joined the Norfolk Regiment immediately, went to Flanders in '15 with a sense of Schoolboy adventure which made of it all a vast game. He was fatally wounded within a few days of arriving in the trenches. It is now rather incredible to think that my Father went to fetch him home, just as he would have done if his boy had met with a bad accident at School. I have no idea how he 'wangled' it, but he did; managing to get a passage on a troop-ship and transport to Bayeux. within a week they were back, with my brother installed in a Nursing Home, although the Doctors in France must have known"very well that there was no chance of recovery.

Soon after Gerald left school early, in order to catch a 'special entry' for the Navy, which meant finishing his education at Falmouth, a war-time off-shoot of Dartmouth, at the same time as starting his training in seamanship. He was furious - and the family were not - that when he finally got to sea it was too late for him to have a go at the Hun. Women were already starting to do war work, many making munitions, for Laurence and Scott, which was my Father's business, had at once been taken over for the purpose; others joined the Land Army or replaced men at many jobs, including driving trams. I rather fancied the idea of being a tram driver especially as they played their own part in the war effort. They acted as air-raid warnings. I remember being in Norwich one day when I heard a tram coming up Princes Street from the Station with its clanger clanging continuously. It bore a large notice on its bow-shaped front saying :

TAKE COVER - ZEEPPELIN APPROACHING, whereupon everybody rushed out of shops and houses to stare upwards, hoping to catch a glimpse of the fabulous monster. I saw one only once and that was from the terrace at High House.. There must by then have been some system of warning, for the local Police telephoned us and we,too, turned out to look for it. This was after dark but the sky was alive with search-lights. To our amazement one of them picked up the shape of the long silverish cylinder in the sky, far far above our heads and apparently almost stationary. The other search-lights homed in on it instantly and there it seemed to hang for quite a long time, helpless and probably horribly embarrassed, although there was no anti-aircraft fire. It was difficult to believe that that rather beautiful thing had come a long way, carrying men and bombs for the sole purpose of killing us.

Whilst still on that terrace, I am reminded of another odd event. My Father, Mother and I were having tea on the verandah one afternoon when we thought we heard distant thunder. But it was strangely continuous and never seemed to grow any closer. My Mother was very deaf but presently asked why we were listening. My Father said he had thought it was thunder but was now wondering if it could be the guns in France. Of course High House was high up, so it was remotely possible that we should be within wave-length. But it was not only the sound but also the vibrations, for my Mother 'heard' it too. So did the cock pheasants in the woods at the top of Thunder Lane. My Father, thinking it was quite impossible for my Mother actually to hear it, asked her to press his hand every time she heard whatever it was. The sound had grown more intermittent now, but every time we heard the distant thunder she pressed his hand. instantaneously the cock pheasants let out their screams of protest. It made the war seem alarmingly close and it was increasingly important for everyone to do what they could about it, even me. But nobody seemed to want a girl of 15, even 16, and I was utterly unqualified for anything except having a good time. My Mother had joined a circle of women, based in SurreyStreet, whose job it was to rewind old bandages on a special wooden gadget. One rotated a spindle to receive the long, sterilised bandages, turning a handle on one side, while the other hand had to keep the bandage absolutely flat and tight. I went to help with this several times, or to make tea for the workers, but I was longing for something more

active.

There was some consolation, I admit, in the influx of young soldiers. One lot were quartered in Thorpe, where they were given a warm welcome, even though they spoke 'foreign', They belonged to a Scottish Regiment, although unfortunately unqualified to wear the kilt. But they marched through Thorpe" daily to a pipe and drum band, while everybody turned out to watch. It was odd how often I happened to be exercising my pony at the same time. For some reason I remember them particularly well as they marched up the river-side stretch, towards the Church, past the green where the War Memorial now stands.

Norwich was full of strange uniforms, mostly khaki, but some were in Navy blue and a few in the new blue-grey uniform of the R.F.C. An aerodrome for this, the youngest Service, had sprung up on Mousehold, and we were becoming used to the heavy old De Havilland bi-planes lumbering overhead; the pilots in their open cock-pits usually leaning out to return our waves. Most of the Officers were only too glad to spend their off-duty times joining in our dances, hunting and wild mixed hockey parties at High House, which was open house to them. My Father had offered the house to the County Medical Authority as a Nursing Home, but the offer was refused because of that impossible' drive.

The men were all immensely cheerful, although the news from France was becoming more and more depressing. There was no radio then, of course, although amateurs, including Gerald, were making their own crystal sets, based on a cat's whisker, on which Gerald, at least, swore that he could hear Dame Melba singing, beneath the roar of static interference. So we had to rely on the papers for news and I believe these were pretty severely censored. I seem to remember sentences, even whole paragraphs, heavily blacked out, just as the letters from France were. There was certainly no sense of panic in England, no evacuation, no shortages or rationing that I can remember, nor even a black-out. The Zeppelins were too unpredictable to worry about and the Kaiser was generally treated as a joke. But this was the typically British reaction to an ever increasing threat, or maybe the ghastly facts of Ypres, Mons and the Marne were kept from me, owing to this appalling handicap of being too young – just as my wolf Cubs had suffered such frustration because they were too young for Scouting.

It was a great excitement and relief to me, therefore, when we heard that a Nursing Home for the wounded was to be opened at Sunnyhill, with Mrs. Jarrold as Commandant. That, I think, was in '17, or at least that was my age when I managed to get involved in it. How Mrs. Jarrold became eligible for the very responsible job I don't know, except that I think she had been a member of the Red Cross for some years, and, small as she was, had a certain air of authority and leadership which was generally accepted and appreciated. My Mother opened negotiations with her and learned that Sunnyhill was to be staffed by V.A.Ds (Voluntary Aid Detachment) with only two trained Nurses to be in charge. To become a V.A.D. one had to qualify in two Courses on First Aid and Home Nursing. Also one had to be 18. The latter difficulty was easily overcome, by wearing my longest skirts, which were just above the ankle, and by 'putting up' my long hair. This was generally accepted as a sign of being adult, though I doubt if I made a very convincing job of my heavy bun, twisted up and more or less secured with innumerable hairpins.

Crash courses in both these obligatory subjects were laid on in the Parish Hall, run by Dr. Davidson, our local and well loved G.P. Both of these I thoroughly enjoyed, to the amazement of my governess, who didn't know I was capable of concentrating on anything. Possibly my d.i.y. Scout training in First Aid was a help, although the Red Cross did not seem to encourage B-P's idea about removing foreign bodies from the eye by rolling back the upper eye-lid over a match-stick, which had never been a very easy or successful operation.

The examinations were run by a strange Doctor from Norwich and I managed to achieve the necessary marks to qualify, though I felt it was a matter of touch and go when the examiner produced various instruments~and asked their name. My mind suddenly went blank when he produced a pair of forceps and asked what they were. I floundered and told him what they were used for, to which he replied patiently that he knew that but what were they called ?

I said "Oh - you know."

"Yes," he admitted, "I know, but do you ?" And then, kindly : "Come on , Of course you know."

"Yes, of course I do. I just can't remember." '

"Relax and try again. You don't want to fail your exam because of these little things, do you ?"

'Well - they're not pliers," I volunteered. He agreed that they were not pliers and looked at me sadly, but we had to give up. The word 'forceps' sprang at me as I mounted my bike for home. Seeing the Doctor's car held up at the bottom of Chapel Lane, waiting for his chance to emerge, I raced down and yelled at him : "FORCEPS " just as he was driving off. A broad smile seemed to be an acceptance of my postscript.'

Mrs. Jarrold accepted me as a V.A.D. without further ado, advising me to buy my uniform at once. I think it was Garlands, the draper in London Street, who fitted me out with a long-skirted cotton frock in blue-grey, with long sleeves and a high neck line. Above this one had to wrestle with a stiff, starched collar, guaranteed to chafe, and an equally unrelenting starched belt. The cap was a sort of horse-shoe shape, with a starched front, but the important thing was the enveloping white apron, as long as the skirt, with a large red cross on its breast. What could be seen of one's feet were, of course, black woolly stockings and 'sensible' black shoes. I was always on the morning shift, beginning at 8 or 8.30 and ending five hours later. I must have been in a daze for the first few days as I can remember little of them. But I was the youngest V.A.D. and soon found that I was the general dogsbody, whose main duties appeared to be cleaning, washing-up, helping with bed-making and serving dinners.

Sunnyhill was meant to be a post-amputation Home, so the majority of the men had lost a limb and were convalescing or learning to walk on crutches. There were no other forms of walking aids, except a stick or a Nurse's arm. These men were all in high spirits, because they had "bought a Blighty one" and would not be going back to France, their disability seeming to be of small account by comparison. There were a few men who had been sent to us by mistake, being more seriously ill. They usually occupied beds in the corners of the big ward, where they could turn their backs on the school-boy hilarity. I remember one day hurrying into the ward with a laden tray, when a man near the door called "Stop, Nurse" I duly stopped to see that he was. pointing his bandaged stump of a thigh at me above the bed-clothes, as if it were a camera, while he ducked his head beneath a sheet and ordered "Smile " I learned afterwards that they were laying bets on how soon I should drop something, for I always seemed to be in a hurry; also what Matron would say to me.

The Matron was indeed a dragon, who had a habit of appearing out of ' no-where and saying automatically and all in one breath: 'What-are-you-doing- Nurse-don't-do-it". Sister, the only other Hospital-trained Nurse, was almost as grim and had a fanatical 'thing' about beds being made with proper envelope-cornered sheets, upon which the whole outcome of the war depended. No wonder if they were rather tough, considering the motley collection of staff for whom they were responsible. The V.A.D.s were of all shapes and sizes, some being older women who had come out of retirement. At first there was only one big ward, holding about a dozen beds, but I think another must have been opened later, as ambulances kept toiling up our drive and could not be turned away. We finished up with over twenty men, as far as I can remember.

After awhile I was allowed on to the ward, actually to help with dressings and treatment, as well as everlasting cleaning. Matron's ruling was that we were always to be cheerful and friendly with the men but there was to be NO loitering. One didn't have time to loiter, even if one had wanted to or

had understood Matron's implication. It was tempting to retaliate to some of the men's teasing, and we might have made time for this if we could understand them better, which was not always easy. There were Cockneys, Welsh, Scottish and even an Australian, as well as some quite unidentifiable brogues. Not a Norfolk voice among them.

The first time I was told by Sister to bandage a shoulder and upper arm, which had been wounded above the amputated hand, I set about it with great pride and self-assurance; finally producing an immaculate 'spica' bandage with a perfectly even criss-cross pattern. Once or twice the man protested: "They don't do it like that, Nurse. They just sort of wind it round." But I assured him I knew what I was doing, for we had spent hours struggling with this particular bandage in the Home Nursing classes. Sister inspected it in silence before she burst into most uncharacteristic laughter, "Oh Nurse!" she gasped at last. "It's very pretty but we don't do that sort of thing here."

So much for my training. But it stood me in good stead when I was allowed to help Sister or even a Doctor with the dressings; sterilizing the instruments, even passing the Doctor a pair of forceps when he needed them. A Doctor would come out from Norwich at odd times to deal with any complex cases, although Sister dressed all the amputations herself. I had soon grown used to amputations and treated them as lightly as their owners did. Only once was I really tested and that was a day when the Doctor did not come, owing to some emergency. The patient, Price, was one of those sent to us by mistake, for he should have been in Hospital with a severe abdominal wound. But we had to keep him for a short time and every day the Doctor would arrive punctually at eleven o'clock to treat him. This was a terribly painful ordeal for Price. There were no screens or curtains, so that job had to be done in the open ward with everybody else busy looking the other way.

Five minutes before the Doctor was due, Matron would administer a stiff tot of brandy, which was the only anaesthetic we had. When it became evident that the Doctor wasn't coming, and apparently unable to afford a second shot of brandy, Matron and Sister decided to carry on alone. But they needed another pair of hands and, seeing me hurrying away from the scene, summonsed me with the usual peremptory "Nurse!"

Although there was nothing to do but obey orders, laying out swabs, holding kidney bowls and passing things to the front line, it was extremely unpleasant and seemed to go on forever. Once Sister glanced at me sharply, "saying "Are you all right, Nurse?" and I assured her I was quite all right. To which Matron added: "If you're going to faint, Nurse, go away before you do it." This was so much like the usual 'What—are-you-doing-Nurse-don't-do-it', that it helped to restore my sense of humour. All the same, when it was over, it was Matron who said: "You can go away now, Nurse. We'll clear up." I just made the lavatory before I was very, very sick, and did my own clearing up, hoping that Matron would never know.

Only once, I think, did I seriously blot my copy-book and that was when I had the bright idea of getting the Cubs involved with war-work. The Pack was going strong, as I had had Saturday mornings off-duty from Sunnyhill. I suggested to Mrs. Jarrold that the boys might be able to help with some of the small out-door jobs: sweeping, tidying-up and running errands. She agreed, rather tentatively, while the Cubs all volunteered with great enthusiasm. At first this was a success, with shifts of three or four boys coming for an hour or so. They became so popular with the walking men that after awhile they were allowed on to the ward to play snap or noughts—and-crosses with the patients, as well as doing the odd job like posting letters for them or buying some small requirements. I was very proud of them as they were on their best behaviour, always smart, willing and cheerful. But one day I was summonsed to the Commandant's Office, to find a very grim-faced Mrs. Jarrold. "Did you know," she enquired, "that those Cubs of yours have been bringing in bottles of beer, at the men's request?" So that was the end of our first effort at Community Service. It had not occurred to me to warn the boys against any such misconduct; I had only asked them to do all

they could to help the men - and they did; nor have I any idea how they had managed to obtain the beer, unless it was with their Dads' connivance, but it is better to leave some things unexplored.

I have little memory of the celebrations marking the end of the War, but Sunnyhill did not close down for some time. An Armistice does not mean the end of mutilation and other scars. when the men did at last go, everybody missed them, for the walking wounded, with their bright blue uniforms with white facings and scarlet ties, had become part of the Village scene. They were always swinging along Thorpe Road on their crutches, or sitting on the green riverside verge, staring out at a world which, they were told, was going to be "a world fit for heroes to live in".

Sadly, it didn't turn out that way. To me there was some sense of anticlimax as I tried to readapt to the old life. But now, at least, I was eighteen and free to tackle the long- delayed training needed to become an "Akela". It was '25 when I became engaged to be married. At the time I was busy with the production of some sort of entertainment in the Parish Hall and roped in my fiance' as curtain-puller. After the Show, it was Mr. Supple who rose to thank us, and took the opportunity to congratulate me on my engagement, adding his congratulations "to the gallant man" concerned. No doubt he intended to pay tribute to the Royal Navy, but his choice of an adjective was unfortunate. There was a bellow of laughter from behind the curtain and presently the audience were lifting the roof, to the considerable discomfort of poor Mr. Supple. '

We were married in Thorpe Church with, to the Cubs' disappointment, a Naval guard of honour. However the Pack, under their new Cubmaster, who had fallen from Heaven at just the right moment, laid on their own show nearer the road. They provided an archway with crossed Flag and Totem Pole, a barbaric-looking Wolf's head mounted on a pole, which was then the pride of every Pack. This, wobbling about with excitement, nearly decapitated my new husband. '

So I left Thorpe, but was lucky enough to get back to High House for the birth of both my babies. The first arrived after three years on the New Zealand station, which left us both critical and appreciative of the semi-feudal life at home. New Zealand had not been like that. The second was due to arrive just when my Mother and Gerald were negotiating the sale of the place soon after my Father's death. The Pointers - the man with a nose for gravel - were being very business-like till they saw the empty cot, complete with my Mother's Victorian furbelows, waiting expectantly in my bedroom. Then they became immensely kind and co-operative. My son is now 56, so that, too, is history and the end of this over-longchronicle. High House is certainly not haunted with youthful laughter, for I believe it is so changed that a ghost wouldn't know where to begin. I only hope that the good folk who live there now are as happy as we were.