

# DR ROBERT FRANCIS EDWARD WATSON

8<sup>th</sup> March 1910 – 16<sup>th</sup> July 2004



Entry music: Haydn, - "Opus 74 - No. 2 - Andante Grazioso"

***Ray Owen***

Good morning everybody and welcome.

We meet here today to celebrate, honour and pay tribute to the life of Dr Robert Francis Edward Watson, who is now at peace.

We are also here to remember him, say our last goodbyes and amidst the sadness, give thanks for his life.

My name is Ray Owen. I am a Humanist and I am privileged to be asked to take today's service, which, I should explain, will be Humanist in style and broadly non-religious, on the basis that, during his life, Robert followed no obvious religious path.

Whatever our individual beliefs, there will be common values which we all instinctively share within the commemoration of Robert's life and here today we welcome people of all faiths, and those of none.

Can I also reassure those among you who do hold religious belief, that there will be a short, quiet moment of contemplation, for reflection in our ceremony for everyone to have their own private thoughts of Robert, or to remember him in terms of your own faith.

Life's significance lies in the span of time between birth and death and our experiences and achievements, of which Robert had many, during that time-span.

Like each one of us, Robert was unique; and it is this uniqueness, the separateness of each and every human life which is the basis for our feelings when someone in our family or circle dies.

But he will still live on in your memories and though no longer a visible part of your lives, he will always remain a member of your family, or your circle, through the undoubted influence he had on you and the special place which he held in your lives.

During his long journey of more than 94 years, from his First World War childhood, through his Second World War service, his own education followed by his highly successful and accomplished career in Education, and of course in his family life, and within his musical interests, Robert's life would have touched literally many thousands of people, and it falls to us here this morning to represent all those who shared his journey, as we honour a life which has now ended.

I am the only one here who did not know Robert, and it is fitting therefore that it will be the words and memories of Robert's family, friends and colleagues, which will paint the portrait of him with which you will all be familiar.

Into this service however, you will each bring your own personal and individual memories of Robert, and your place within his life. You will inevitably recall the everyday features of his life; the things he liked; the things he disliked; the way he looked; the things he said; the things he did. We shall remember him as a living vital presence.

Just before we begin to talk of the events and features of Robert's life, could I please ask Peter to give us our first reading, a favourite poem of Robert's.

Peter will read "Jim"

*Peter Watson*

### ***Jim Who ran away from his Nurse, and was eaten by a Lion.***

There was a Boy whose name was Jim;  
His Friends were very good to him.  
They gave him Tea, and Cakes, and Jam,  
And slices of delicious Ham  
And Chocolate with pink inside  
And little Tricycles to ride,  
And read him Stories through and through,  
And even took him to the Zoo--  
But there it was the dreadful Fate  
Befell him, which I now relate.

You know--or at least you ought to know,  
For I have often told you so--  
That Children never are allowed  
To leave their Nurses in a Crowd;  
Now this was Jim's especial Foible,  
He ran away when he was able,  
And on this inauspicious day  
He slipped his hand and ran away!

He hadn't gone a yard when--Bang!  
With open Jaws, a lion sprang,  
And hungrily began to eat  
The Boy: beginning at his feet.  
Now, just imagine how it feels  
When first your toes and then your heels,  
And then by gradual degrees,  
Your shins and ankles, calves and knees,  
Are slowly eaten, bit by bit.  
No wonder Jim detested it!  
No wonder that he shouted "Hi!"

The Honest Keeper heard his cry,  
Though very fat he almost ran  
To help the little gentleman.  
"Ponto!" he ordered as he came  
(For Ponto was the Lion's name),  
"Ponto!" he cried, with angry Frown,  
"Let go, Sir! Down, Sir! Put it down!"  
The Lion made a sudden stop,  
He let the Dainty Morsel drop,  
And slunk reluctant to his Cage,  
Snarling with Disappointed Rage.  
But when he bent him over Jim,  
The Honest Keeper's Eyes were dim.

The Lion having reached his Head,  
The Miserable Boy was dead!

When Nurse informed his Parents, they  
Were more Concerned than I can say:--  
His Mother, as She dried her eyes,  
Said, "Well--it gives me no surprise,  
He would not do as he was told!"  
His Father, who was self-controlled,  
Bade all the children round attend  
To James's miserable end,  
And always keep a-hold of Nurse  
For fear of finding something worse.

***Hilaire Belloc***



## Ray Owen

Robert was born to parents Herbert and Catherine on 8th March 1910 in Hornchurch, Essex. He had one brother, Frank, who sadly died some years ago. The two brothers grew up in Westcliff, where among Robert's childhood memories of the First World War, are of watching one of the earliest examples of aerial combat, and the excitement of Armistice Day 1918.

At school at the age of 11, he won a prize, "The Story of Hereward", which remains in the family, and a year later he won a scholarship both to Westcliff High School and the Art School, at the time a record achievement. In his education, many more achievements followed. He was regularly top of the form, and eventually entered Kings College, London to study German and French, and also excelled in various sporting activities, as well as playing in the orchestra.

Following his First -Class Degree, Robert decided that his career would be teaching, and so enrolled for a one-year post-graduate course in Southampton. His first teaching post was in Birmingham, at Saltley where he met and became life-long friends with Alby Barnes. Apart from teaching German, English and Chemistry, Robert continued with his sporting and musical activities.

In 1935 he took promotion, and moved south to Bishopshalt School in Hillingdon, where in no time, Robert had formed a school orchestra. It was at Bishopshalt that Robert met Vivien, who arrived in 1939 as head of girls PE. They became a courting couple and on 19th December 1940, they married, setting up home in Robert's house in Swakeleys Road, Ickenham.

Wartime had already arrived and Robert's military career began with his enrollment in the ill-equipped Local Defence Volunteers, often known as "Dad's Army, until he volunteered for the Territorial Army, and his inevitable move into the Intelligence Corps where his considerable knowledge of German was to be put to good use for the rest of the War, during which Robert served at home, on activities allied to the breaking of the Enigma code, and abroad in France, Belgium and Germany itself, in the aftermath of the D-Day landings. He began as a humble Private Soldier but ended the War as a Staff Officer with the rank of Captain. In 1946, Robert resumed his career at Bishopshalt, before taking another promotion which took him to St Clement Danes School in West London, where he once again instituted the school orchestra. Having decided to study for his Doctorate, Robert took his final promotion to the headship of St Nicholas Grammar School in Northwood, and within a year, was awarded his Doctorate. He spent 20 years at St Nicholas, before he officially retired, and on that point perhaps we could hear the tribute from ex-colleague Peter Clarke.



From left, mother, brother, father and Robert  
Railway holiday to Scotland in 1920s

With Alby Barnes early 1930s

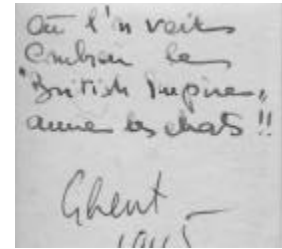




Robert and Vivien in the garden of their first house in Swakeleys Road, Ickenham 1940



Military service in the Intelligence Corps took Robert to France, Belgium and Germany



### **Peter Clarke**

Robert appointed me to be head of English at St. Nicholas Grammar School in March 1955. The school was newly built and was to admit pupils in the September. It was his first headship.

There were nine of us whose task was to shape a new school which, of course, had no traditions and no record on which to base progress. This team was led by Robert. That the school became an excellent grammar school inspiring a very real sense of community amongst its pupils demonstrates the quality of Robert's leadership. Good leaders it is often said, lead from the front. Robert didn't do that – he led from everywhere and without display unflappably generated within the school an affectionate acceptance of his authority and willingness to seek to achieve his goals. In doing this he welded his staff into a group, which had a strong sense of purpose and identity. No fewer than 16 of them went on to headships, a remarkable record considering St. Nicholas's regrettably short life, and one that shows the care he took to advance the careers of those he "mentored" so effectively.

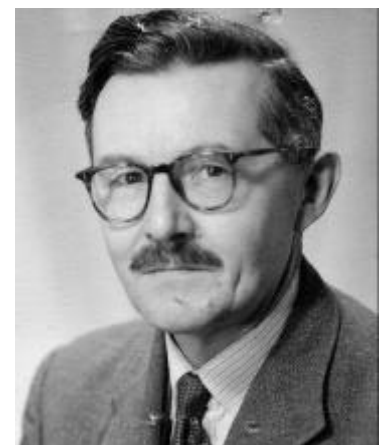
Robert was by no means a remote academic figure. He had a great respect for academic excellence, and himself possessed it, but he also respected other human attributes and could reveal a quiet, even at times iconoclastic, sense of humour. He attached great importance to the daily school assembly, when he would appear in his gown, which on memorable occasions he would remove or rearrange to allow him to play his viola, joined by the school musicians. In addressing the school at assembly although a master of language he would sometimes explore a theme with unusual metaphor or adopt rather startling phraseology.

Many there at the time would recall such advice as that before an important evening concert: "Finally, all of you should remember to avoid noise during the concert. Do not rustle programmes and if you must scratch, scratch between the items."

It is for others to tell of him as a family man. But as a Headmaster Robert was humane in his approach to people, broad in his interests, as for example his considerable musicianship indicates.

Above all he was a man of absolute integrity who stood fast by what today seems often lacking – a regard for the individuals responsibility for his or her behaviour and their contribution to society.

He will be remembered by his pupils, his staff and by the community he served so well with great respect and very genuine affection.





### ***Ray Owen***

Continuing in the same theme, many of you will be familiar with the organisation known as the "SNOBS", the St Nicholas Old Boys, from whose members many messages of condolence have been received by Robert's family. I extract a few of the many comments from both pupils and colleagues.

One writes, "Dr Watson is somewhat of a legend in my eyes. He established an atmosphere of tradition and the school became a worthy educational institution... because of Dr Watson's foresight and vision. In the vernacular, he was... quite a guy". From others, "I have such fond memories of St Nicks and it was most certainly down to the man who took the lead"; In the third year, the school was so short of physics teachers that he took my class for that subject, admitting that he was learning with us, showing that a good teacher is good, whatever the subject".

A colleague writes, "I remember his courteous calls to the staff common room every break time, with his knock before entry. It was a daily ritual and he would stand chatting and beaming in his inimitable way. Courtesy and consideration seemed to be the main management tools in those days, and he made such little fuss over running such an excellent establishment".

Even after retirement Robert remained academically active, still teaching in local schools and doing valuable work for VSO and Commonwealth organizations. He continued teaching until his 90's, covering a variety of subjects, languages and music, once even to a professional guitar player who had never learned to read music.

In his family life, Robert and Vivien have two sons, John and Peter, who were both encouraged in music and academic life, and who were also introduced to their father's love of walking, also later extended to the grandchildren.

John and Peter both have fond memories of the many caravan holidays in Britain and throughout Europe, in various vehicles and caravans of ascending quality. Somehow Robert also managed to find time to manage an immaculate vegetable garden, and keeping a firm hand on painting and decorating the two family homes, at Swakeleys Road and then for 50 years in Parkway, Hillingdon.

Both Robert and Vivien were thrilled to receive their card from the Queen on reaching their 60th Wedding Anniversary, and in 1999 were able to attend a family celebration lunch at the Sandy Lodge Golf Club. Vivien sadly died in January last year.

Vivien and Robert have 6 grandchildren, Matthew, Bryony, Claire, Caroline, Helen and Paul, and one great-grandchild, Sophie, and I should now like to ask Caroline and Matthew to speak on behalf of the grandchildren.





### ***Caroline Negrine***

For those of you who don't know me. I am Caroline the third eldest of the six Grand children. And mum to Sophie - Robert's first Great Grandchild.

I have the honour to say a few words on behalf of the family. We will all remember Grandad in our own way and will have many different memories of him. We will remember Grandad and Grandma always being together at Parkway. He was always supportive and encouraging to us in the decisions we made and was never judgemental. I cannot remember a time when Grandad lost his temper, was cross or angry.

He loved his garden at Parkway and was never happier or more at home than pottering around the vegetable patch or having a bonfire. Loganberry pudding and homegrown asparagus will always stir memories of Sunday lunches we shared with Grandma and Grandad. We enjoyed many happy Easter holidays all together and his amazing ability to climb mountains in his late eighties is one I am sure I have not inherited.

He loved teaching especially the music and languages. I remember he once tried to teach me the violin but gave up after a couple of lessons because I would not hold my bow correctly. I kept sticking up my little finger.

He possessed a wonderful selective deafness. English would not be heard even with a hearing aid, but if you spoke French or German he appeared to hear clearly!

We will remember the family group musical attempts, the potatoes eaten off the floor, the zip up slippers, the rude German phrases and much more. I am sure everyone has a story to tell.

Grandad led a full and happy life of 94 years and was a committed family man. We will all miss him and I hope we will use some of what we have learnt from his life in our own lives and pass it on.



### ***Matthew Watson***

Matthew described his grandfather's sense of humour, questioning whether this may have skipped a generation, and ended with a reading of a limerick that was one of the last that Robert read and chuckled over, within a few weeks of his death.

There was a young lady named Cager  
 Who, as the result of a wager,  
 Consented to fart  
 The whole oboe part  
 Of Mozart's Quartet in F Major.



## ***Ray Owen***

I should now like to ask John to share his thoughts with us.

## ***John Watson***

I would like to add some personal recollections about Robert Watson as a father and grandfather.

He was rarely seen to express emotion, and never anger. Even when Peter or I turned up with a bent car he just organised the repair and paid for it. There was not even much trouble when we came home with rather bad reports from school. And he never gave us a hard time about the difficulty of living within a grant at University, making up our deficits without complaint.

Advice was given sparingly but was always to the point and we were even known to take it to heart, even if we did not admit it at the time.

He ran the family like a good manager, although in control he allowed the rest of us, and especially Vivien, of course, to feel great freedom to do what we wanted.

My father taught me some of the finer points of French by marking and commentating on prose translations when he was well into his eighties, and the analytical intellect was undiminished.

He read extensively and voraciously and I made it my pleasant task to ensure that he was always provided with plenty of intellectual fodder. Beevor's Stalingrad was read in a day, all of Pepys diaries, as well as much Richardson, Johnson and Gibbon. The latter's French grammar came in for some criticism! Other favourite authors were Sterne, Bryant, Scott and Stevenson in English, Goethe, Schiller, Kleist and Keller in German and Balzac, Flaubert, Proust, Zola, Daudet and Maupassant in French. Many literary biographies and much history was consumed; crime fiction was left to Vivien and the modern novel almost ignored except for the works of Julian Barnes, younger son of his best friend, Alby.

He had a good sense of humour, especially liking coarse comedy such as Benny Hill or *Are You Being Served*. Peter has read you an antecedent of the great Stanley Holloway monologue that supplied a number of his sayings.

He welcomed his daughters in law into the family and treated them as full family members.

The best of his teaching was by example, although he set such a high standard in terms of intellectual rigour, hard work, dedication to helping others and personal integrity that it might have been tempting not even to try to follow the example.

Pride was a mild sin. He was proud of his accomplishments and could be a little dismissive of those with fewer talents.

He was also very proud of the achievements of his sons and grandchildren, and famously of his ability to retain a full head of hair while outliving all known close relatives.

However, in Robert's case there were huge achievements of which to be proud and his generosity with time, energy and money and his kindness to everyone who crossed his path was outstanding.

I should mention a whole family from Roumania, the Bireks, who were able to start a new life in the US and Canada thanks to the support given by my parents. They left Roumania with only their musical instruments. Adam is now a successful paediatrician working in Fresno, California.

Now, another poem, *The Village Schoolmaster*, by Oliver Goldsmith, which by no means portrays my father's type, but has the literary style that he loved.





# THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER

(From THE DESERTED VILLAGE)

Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,  
With blossomed furze unprofitably gay,  
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,  
The village master taught his little school;  
A man severe he was, and stem to view,  
I knew him well, and every truant knew;  
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace  
The day's disasters in his morning face;  
Full well they laughed, with counterfeited glee,  
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he:  
Full well the busy whisper, circling round,  
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned;  
Yet he was kind, or, if severe in aught,  
The love he bore to learning was in fault;  
The village all declared how much he knew;  
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too;  
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,  
And even the story ran that he could gauge.  
In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill,  
For, even though vanquished, he could argue still;  
While words of learned length and thundering sound  
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;  
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew  
That one small head could carry all he knew.

**OLIVER GOLDSMITH**





### ***Ray Owen***

Following Vivien's death, Robert spent the last 17 months of his life at Baldock, close to John and within easy reach of Peter's visits. He was still able to read his beloved French, German and English Literature until after his 94th birthday. He died peacefully in Baldock in the early afternoon of 16th July, rather fittingly at the same time as the current school year was itself, drawing to a close.

When anyone in our circle dies, it leaves a hole in our lives, but today is a day for commemoration, for concentrating on his memory as we all pay tribute to Robert's life. You are all aware of the importance of music in Robert's life, he was still playing chamber music well into retirement, and our musician's, with whom Robert played, have chosen for our ceremony, Haydn pieces which they recall Robert being fond of. They will now play for us the second of their choices. Perhaps while the music is playing, and during the short quiet period which will follow, would be a good time for you all to have your own private thoughts of Robert, or if you wish, to remember him in terms of your own faith.

Music: Haydn, - "Opus 33 - No. 3 - Adagio" played by string quartet

Short silence:

We now come to the last act in our formal parting.

We have been celebrating, honouring and paying tribute to the long life of Dr Robert Francis Edward Watson, who is now at peace, and here in this last act, in sorrow but without fear, in dignity and gratitude, with the respect and devotion which are his full due, we commit Robert's body to its end and his memory to our hearts.

"So be my passing,  
My task accomplished and the long day done.  
My wages taken and in my heart  
Some late lark singing.  
Let me be gathered to the Quiet West  
The sundown splendid and serene."

We have been remembering with love and gratitude a life which has ended and soon we shall be returning to our work, our homes, the routine of our daily lives; and when you leave, you will take with you your own memories of Robert, and your place within his life.

When you leave, remember too how you felt today, sharing this ceremony with each other.

As we leave, our musicians will play again for us the Haydn piece they played as you entered but just before then, and to bring our ceremony to a close I should like to read you the last of the poems chosen by Robert's family, a well-known Shakespeare sonnet, selected in tribute to Robert, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in tribute to the life shared by Robert and Vivien:



"Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O no! It is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken.  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me prov'd  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved."

*William Shakespeare*  
Sonnet number 116

Exit music: Haydn, - "Opus 74 - No. 2 - Andante Grazioso"





# Robert Francis Edward Watson 1910 - 2004

## ***Immediate Family***

Robert was born on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1910 at No 2 Sunbeam Villas, North Road, Hornchurch, Essex to Herbert Francis and Catherine (née Sulman) Watson and died on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2004, in Baldock. His younger brother, Francis Herbert Henry, was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1912 in Christchurch Road, Southend-on-Sea, and died on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1993. Frank's widow, Elsie survives both brothers.

## ***Parents and forebears***

Robert's father, Herbert Francis Watson, was born 20<sup>th</sup> October 1876 at S. Tottenham. He was educated at Broad Lane School. He left school at age 13 and joined the London and North Western Railway as a clerk. By age 30 he was in charge of a 'town office' at Smithfield. This office organised transport of animals, meat and goods generally and collected charges. When he retired in 1936 he represented the LMS railway (London Midland & Scottish) at Shows and Exhibitions in London. (There was no long distance road transport.) After 1941 he worked on Railway accounts at Denham station.

His parents were William Watson, born circa 1850, educated Charterhouse School; joined the Midland Railway, resigned because he was dissatisfied and never held a steady job after that. He married Eliza Alma Harriet Alcock, fathered 13 children, 5 of whom died young, and the family lived in a state of poverty. His wife died at about age 60. He lived to be 77, living with daughter Edith in Wakefield Road, S. Tottenham and in his last 10 years did nothing but sit around smoking a pipe. Robert's great grandfather was in the shoe-making business, described himself as an 'Upper Cutter' and is said to have walked to London from Norwich. He was probably the son of the John Watson born 1777 as written in the family bible.

Robert's great grandmother was said to have been a 'Clear Starcher' by trade.

His father had two brothers – Harry, who died at about 50 and William, who became a regular soldier (R. Artillery) and subsequently a Commissionaire. He had five sisters, all of whom lived to be 80 or more.

Robert's mother was born Catherine Sulman, on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1877, and died on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1940. She was the daughter of Frederick Sulman, born circa 1855 and Catherine Worboys, born 1855. The Sulmans are thought to have been Flemish weavers and Frederick ran a toy factory in Bethnal Green, where Catherine was born. German imports caused his business to fail. The next thing we know is that he ran a timber business in Tottenham, where Robert's parents met. The timber yard was destroyed by fire and the family moved to Southend and lived at 'Truss Cottage' on the main road in Westcliff. Frederick set up as a photographer and had a stall on the front at Southend near the pier and he and Robert's grandmother did a lucrative business through the summer season. While he took photos of the 'trippers' and developed and printed them, grandmother would shell a sack of peas for one shilling for a hotel and his daughter Catherine would play the piano while people had tea at a large tea-room. He made enough money to buy a piano (Cramer upright ? £80). Robert's mother had one brother, Frederick (born 1880) who became a bricklayer. We know nothing of the Warboys family, because Robert's grandmother's parents died of typhoid when she was eight. She then had to work for her living and never learnt to read or write. Robert's parents married while the Sulmans were still at Southend, in 1898 at Prittlewell Church and must have lived with the parents. Both families moved to Benfleet, 6 miles West of Southend.

Robert's first memory of them is of a thatched cottage 'Stinging Nettle Rest' at Hopes Green. The family used to go over by train every week. If they left after dark Grandfather ('The Old Pot, who earned a living decorating etc.) escorted them to Benfleet Station with a lantern. The cottage had a tap in the kitchen, a large stove in the living room with a chimney through which you could see the sky. Robert remembered his uncle Fred very well. He had built a house on a piece of land given to him by a man whose estate (? 15 acres) he looked after. He kept chickens, goats and rabbits, and bought two Welsh pit ponies. He sold Nobby, the male, but kept Bonny, bought a trap and once

drove over to see Robert's family in Westcliff. Uncle Fred had a daughter and two sons, Fred and Bill, who were brought up by Robert's grandmother (Mrs Sulman junior was unfaithful and sent packing). Robert's grandmother was a very strong woman, both in physique and character and died in 1948, aged 92. Robert and Vivien took JRW to see her and uncle Fred when Robert was on demob leave in 1946 (in the Austin 10). His cousin Fred went to Australia aged 16. Robert visited cousin Bill in 1990. He died in 1992 aged 83.

### ***The Watson family from 1900***

The family moved to Hornchurch soon after 1900. Father commuted to London, Mother did dressmaking and employed two or three women to make collars (fashionable at the time for female wear). The station near Sunbeam Villas was Emerson Park Halt between Upminster and Romford. When Robert was mobile he overturned all the chairs in a draper's shop in Romford. In 1911 they decided to move to Southend and Frank was born in 1912. Father's season ticket was at the ¼ rate, but although they were now not too well off, he always had his Guinness at midday – an Irish doctor in whom they had implicit faith recommended it as good for the 'nerves' – nerves gave a lot of trouble in those days – and he smoked Waverley cigarettes with a holder. Waverley cigarettes provided a good series of cigarette cards, which Robert and his contemporaries used in a playground game against a wall, by flicking them. If your card lay over another you won. His father also took the 'Daily Chronicle' a Liberal paper. Just before Robert went to school they moved to a terrace house in Westcliff very near Chalkwell Park and then every three years to another house or flat.

### ***The First World War***

Robert's father volunteered, but was apparently deemed too valuable to the railways where he was in charge at a so-called 'town office' of the London and North Western Railway Company at Smithfield. Uncle Fred, his mother's brother, was called up into the Royal Engineers. He was often under fire constructing bridges, but survived 'without a scratch'. Southend had a number of air raids; nothing fell in Robert's part of Westcliff, but it was disturbing at night, when one could hear the throbbing of the Zeppelins (large airships). His grandfather took a photo, which appeared in the 'Southend Standard', of a collection of bombs that had not exploded. They were canisters with a handle that were dropped overboard from the 'gondola' of the airship. German aircraft, so-called Taubes (German for pigeon). Robert recalled seeing an aerial combat with anti-aircraft shell bursts. His mother was so worried by broken nights that his father sent them to Launton, on the railway from Bletchley to Bicester for 2 weeks peace. A neighbour had relatives there. Robert remembered the excitement of Armistice Day and going with father to our allotment, where he 'dug for victory'. His father took along the pushchair carrying an enamel bath! It was about half a mile and they usually arrived with a plentiful supply of horse droppings.

### ***School***

In 1917 the family moved to Wellington Avenue, very near to Chalkwell Park and only five minutes walk from Chalkwell Hall School, to which Robert went at age 5. His brother Frank attended two years later in 1919. 1920 to 1921 was a terrible year, when the boys caught measles, whooping cough and chicken pox and his parents sent Robert for about a year to a small private school kept by a Mary Willis and her daughter at 1/6d a week, where he progressed rapidly. When suffering from whooping cough, he was taken by tram to the seaside at Southend and stayed near the gas works, from which the smell was said to be beneficial. Also in Wellington Avenue was the Malley family – Mrs. Malley took daughter Elsie, the same age as Frank, to the infant school and there got into conversation with Robert's mother. This started a life long friendship and led to Frank's marriage to Elsie in 1937. In about 1919 they moved to Eastwood Boulevard close by, only 100 yards from the park. Meanwhile, the brothers had both been promoted to the 'Big Boys School' where they in turn advanced to class VII and at 11 were working with boys about to leave school at 14 – promotion was according to ability, not age. Robert won a prize – 'The Story of Hereward',

but failed to get a scholarship to Westcliff High School at 11. He did win a scholarship in 1922, and at the same time a scholarship in the Art School, which was regarded as a record.

At Chalkwell Hall School the boys were sent one afternoon to the 'Manual Centre' (tram pass provided), where they practised planing and chiselling and sawing and made useless things like an egg stand, a simple theodolite etc.

Westcliff High School opened in 1920 as the Commercial School in a large Victorian house in Victoria Avenue, which ran due North from the centre of Southend. The first headmaster was H.C. Williams, a Welshman, a distinguished historian from Kings College, London and sometime captain of Blackheath RFC.

Robert travelled by tram to Victoria Circus (one penny) and the school was only 200 yards away. He was put into 2A (scholarship boys and girls), 2B being for fee payers. The Chemistry Lab. was also used for assembly and the stables at the back had been converted to a gymnasium. No Physics appeared on the curriculum. He was always top of the form. In the fifth form boys and girls made two separate forms prior to the boys moving to the new school in Eastwood Boulevard, to which they moved at Easter 1926, just before taking 'Matric'. The standard was very high – distinctions were very rare – but Robert was top in Maths, Chemistry, French and German and collected four leather bound prizes.

Robert entered the sixth form to study English, French, German and Latin, but at the new year 1927, the headmaster decided that he would not be taking High School Certificate in the summer 1928, but Inter Arts in November 1927. That examination demanded three arts subjects and Mathematics, so he dropped English and received extra lessons in Maths. He was successful in the examination and continued studies in French and German. Round about this time he travelled to Oxford with a fellow pupil to try for a 'Doncaster Scholarship' but did not succeed.

It was then decided that Robert should enter Kings College, London to take German with subsidiary French.

While in the sixth form he played regularly in the orchestra, played a number of times for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rugby XV, captained the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cricket team and at the school sports day won the high jump for which he received a small engraved cup and a 100 yards race for which he received a chess set. Some time after World War II an annual reunion of the Co-Ed pupils of W.H.S. was organised and Vivien and Robert travelled to Southend each May until about 1990, when the survivors were too few in number to make it worthwhile.

As a railway official, Robert's father was entitled to a free pass for the family twice a year and a 'privilege ticket' at a quarter for all other rail journeys.

In 1911 his parents visited Banff, where they hired a pram for Robert and in 1912 to Aberystwyth. After the War there were holidays at Llandudno (two or three times), Morecombe, Scarborough, Inverness (1926), Oban and Pwllhelli, while from 1922 on they visited Ilfracombe for a week every Easter.

Holidays were spent in 'Apartments', where the 'guests' bought the food and the landlady cooked it. The Hill family at Ilfracombe became family friends; Mr. Hill (Tom) was a tailor, with wonderful tales of his war service in Egypt, and a repertoire of Devon dialect – 'us went into Barnstaple'.

## ***University and Teacher Training***

Robert commuted to Kings with a quarter rate season ticket, sometimes travelling with his father and his bridge friends, arriving at Fenchurch Street with sore eyes because there were usually about eight smokers in the compartment. Travel was slow but comfortable and Robert did most of his reading in the two hours each day in the train.

His teachers at Kings included Professor Atkins (Dean of Arts since 1902), Frederick Norman, later to succeed Atkins as Professor, and Professor Pribsch at University College. The course of study was German literature through the ages, starting with Gothic and Old High German, Middle High German, the age of Luther and Hans Sachs, Goethe and Schiller, right up to modern times. Grammatical accuracy was imposed in prose composition and essays.



They had no examinations until finals, which meant a fairly lengthy oral, and 6 three-hour papers, taken over three days at the Imperial Institute at South Kensington, 10 to 1 and 2 to 5. Robert hoped that his train from Leigh-on-Sea to Fenchurch Street would be punctual each morning! He obtained a 'First'.

Having decided that teaching was to be his career, he took his headmaster's advice and enrolled for the one year post graduate course at University College, Southampton, where the Professor of Education was a friend of the headmaster. He treated Robert extremely well, arranging for teaching practice during the autumn term at King Edward VI School at Southampton – an excellent school. The spring term was lectures at the college, but for the summer term he had a luxury term of teaching at Lord Wandsworth's School near Odiham. One weekend the school had a visitor who arrived with his wife in a 'Puss Moth', which he had flown to S. Africa and back. Robert was fortunate to have a flight over the Hampshire countryside.

### ***Early Professional Career***

At the final exam, he obtained a teaching certificate of the University of Cambridge and an ordinary Teaching Certificate, which included PE and Music. While at Southampton he played a fair amount of chamber music with local people including string quartets.

He had two interviews. One was with the head of Gillingham Grammar School and took place at Charing Cross Station, where the HM told Robert he would be carrying a white handkerchief – this one was unsuccessful.

A little later came a summons to Birmingham, for a vacancy at Saltley Secondary School, Bilchers Lane, Birmingham in which he was successful. Two other young men were appointed on the same day. Albert Leonard Barnes, who became a lifelong friend, was father of Julian the novelist and Jonathan, Professor of Philosophy at Balliol College, and then at Geneva (1998). Alby died in 1991. The other appointee was Gordon Radford, with whom Robert was still in touch until recently. All three had London 'Firsts'.

Robert taught German (head of German was Miss Cameron), English and Chemistry (Year 1 in 1932 – 3). He played rugby in school team against former pupils, made music with Higgins (French master) and attended Chamber Music classes at the Birmingham and Midland Institute. He had a term's violin lessons from Hytch and bought a new Italian violin (Fagnola) for £35 in 1935. It was later sold to Bears for £75 in 1950 and the same instrument was sold by Sotheby's circa 1985 for £40,000.

After a 'General Inspection' of the school in 1935, the headmaster suggested that Robert should seek promotion. In May 1935, he was appointed to Bishopshalt School, Royal Lane, Hillingdon to teach German and some French. The organisation of this three form entry school was that the A-form would begin a second language – German or Latin, so that he had German classes of only 18 pupils (half the A-form in years 2 to 5) and one 4<sup>th</sup> form French class of 35/36. When the excellent results of Robert's first 'O' level form were announced in 1936 John Miles, the headmaster, was very pleased and was able to award a special allowance of £30 a year, in addition to the 'London' allowance of £25.

Soon after arrival at Bishopshalt, Robert set about forming an orchestra, which included the senior mistress ('Kate') who, in spite of having lost a finger, played the cello. A double bass, found in the loft, soon found a volunteer to learn, so Robert took it home to 109 Swakeleys Road over Christmas to practice playing 'God Save The King' and taught a boy to play in the lunch hour.

In 1937, Robert performed the part of Stephen in the school production of 'Iolanthe'! He attended school Lake District camps at Easter 1936 and 1937.

Each year the German examination results were very good and a pupil wrote to Robert in April 2000 to congratulate him on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, describing his lessons as 'fun', because they had a weekly 15 minute session of German drinking songs and folk songs.

## **Marriage**

In 1939, Vivien Baker arrived at Bishopshalt as the new head of girl's PE. Robert was the only bachelor and before long he was being introduced to Vivien's parents at Hurst House, in Redhill. He was disapproved of by Vivien's mother because of his very skinny legs. Robert was an athlete of the long distance running variety, and of light musculature whereas Vivien's mother preferred the sturdy "all-in wrestler" build. Of course a mother's disapproval often confirms a daughter's choice, and the marriage took place in Redhill on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1940. The date was chosen so that Vivien's brother, Roy could attend. The couple moved into Robert's pleasant semi detached house in Swakeleys Road, Ickenham, close to the diminutive River Pinn.

Robert's parents had moved from Southend to Ruislip and his mother is buried in the churchyard of Ickenham parish church, at the end of Swakeleys Road, opposite the duck pond and pump.

Sons followed after the war had ended, John in 1946 and Peter in 1947. They were encouraged in music and academic life as were Robert's grandchildren when they were old enough. In 1952 the family moved to 32 Parkway, Hillingdon, in order to be closer to the little private primary school that Robert had no doubt chosen carefully for the academic credentials of the formidable headmistress, Mrs. Hempstead.

Both Robert and Vivien were thrilled to receive their card from the Queen on reaching their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in 1999 and were able to attend a family celebration lunch at the Sandy Lodge golf club.

## **Notes on War Service written by Robert Watson in the late 1990s**

On 22 June 1940, I enrolled in the Local Defence Volunteers (now known as "Dad's Army") - no uniform, just an armband, and no weapons (Our headquarters was a cottage opposite the pump in Ickenham). After some time some Ross Rifles arrived from Canada, and an evening was spent removing the grease. One night a week was spent in a cottage (now demolished) opposite Ickenham Pump and involved two hours sentry duty. Supper was bread and sausages, fried on bayonets placed over a gas stove. One Sunday we had a coach-trip to Aldershot where we did some firing. I resigned in the summer of 1941, when I knew I should be called up.

However, I decided to volunteer into the Territorial Army and applied to join the Intelligence Corps as a fluent German speaker. I was called before a large committee and put through various tests and was accepted and received the "King's Shilling" at Hounslow in July. I reported to King Alfred's College (Teacher Training Establishment) at Winchester in September. One of four civilians and about 120 men who had done basic training in other Regiments e.g. Fusilier Mizzi (a Maltese), I received 3 months infantry training - rifle drill, PE and learnt to ride a motorcycle (350 Matchless), first on a field and finally passed by completing a hazardous test on very rough ground on Bagshot Heath.

The next stage was 3 weeks at Smedleys Hydro in Matlock, where we were treated very well, apart from having to march up a one in four hill from Matlock Station in "Full Service Marching Order and with rifle" in pitch darkness. When we were about to collapse, the order "Left Wheel" allowed us to march on the level until the Hydro appeared. About 20 of us were commended for good work on the course.

Private WATSON No. 10350696 was then sent to Harpenden to a country house (Rothampstead House) and park as Corporal WATSON. Duties were looking at German Radio Messages, and noting the "discriminant" - first six letters, and if this was a new one to telephone to "Beaumanor" These were messages subsequently decoded (Enigma) at Bletchly Park, though I did not know this at the time. The duty roster was 3 evenings, 3 days, 3 nights and 36 hours leave, so that one could travel home every 9 days with a railway warrant and half a week's ration card - always very welcome.

After about 6 weeks I was posted to 109 Special Wireless Section in Essex. The C.O. was Captain Hugh Skillen (Teacher of Spanish and French at Harrow County School) who in 1995 invited me to attend with Vivien a conference of ex-service people, who worked on ENIGMA, held at Bedford. The weekend included a visit to Bletchly Park.

Unit 109 spent about a month at Sibbertoft, Northants, a couple of miles north of the site of the Battle of Naseby. Returning from my first 36 hours leave I took my bicycle and rode the 15 miles from Rugby Station. On my next leave I left the bike at Rugby Station. We arrived at the small village of Sibbertoft and billeted for the first night in the Village Hall. There were no heating or cooking facilities, but there was a fireplace. Noting that there were quantities of cinders outside, I used 'initiative' to get the chaps collecting buckets of cinders and we soon had a splendid fire, which provided some warmth, and enabled us to cook cheese on toast.

104 section was part of 9th Armoured Division (General Horrocks). Our next move was to Newton Hall, an attractive modern residence, about 5 miles South of Cambridge near the village of Harston. When going on 36 hours leave from this place, I parked my bicycle at a pub in Royston - a ride of 7-8 miles, and took the Great Northern Railway train to Kings Cross. Vivien spent the Whitsun weekend with a kind lady in Harston.

At the end of June 1942 Captain Skillen called me and Sergeant Bob Emerson into his office and told us that it had been decided that each Special Wireless Section should have three officers, and that he had recommended us for the promotion. About ten N.C.O's were therefore summoned to London, and asked whether we wished to accept promotion. In July I received a grant for officer's "Service Dress" - made to measure at Austin Reed's on Regent Street and was posted as second Lieutenant to an Oxford College for a short "officer" course. My promotion after 331 days of service was dated 25/7/42.

I was then posted as a full lieutenant (two pips) to 104 Special Wireless Section, C.O. Captain Tom Normanton, later to become MP for Rochdale, and subsequently a European MP (I met him again at Bletchley in 1995). Section 104 was at Chart Sutton, near Sutton Valence, a few miles South of Maidstone, again handy for 36 hours leaves. The Signals C.O. was Captain John Smith, with whom I got on well. A few days after my arrival I was sent with three or four wireless operators and some Intelligence Corps corporals to set up a listening post - a 3- ton lorry with several wireless receivers on the cliffs between Folkestone and Dover, at Capel le Ferne. I found the Naval Wireless Section, under Dover Castle, extremely helpful and was given some tapes with messages picked up from over the Channel. One message was hardly of strategic importance and read: "OTTO IM PUFF". Such messages were known as "spoof, and this one informed the world that Otto was in the brothel! At this time Dover was being bombarded from France. A special unit somewhere else on the cliffs watched the French coast to record the flash of the guns, and the time taken by the shell to reach Dover allowed the residents enough time to take shelter.

One interesting event is worth recording. I was the only officer on the premises one weekend when the Royal Signals Sergeant put the Intelligence Corps Sergeant "on a charge". He was rather idle, lay in bed too long and was generally slack. After lengthy talks, I managed to persuade the I. Corps Sergeant that he was "letting the side down" and he agreed to do his best to mend his ways, so I was able to report the next day that the problem had been solved.

My stay at Chart Sutton was interrupted by an Officers Course at Matlock. (see photo of the C.100 officers who took part). Former PM Stanley Baldwin's son was one of the participants - hardly an enthusiastic soldier, who had the highest mess bill of those on the course. A few weeks later I was at Cambridge for an "Interrogation Course" of two weeks, followed by a weeks interrogation of real German prisoners at the 'London Cage' in Hyde Park. At Whitsun we stayed at Winchelsea for a week and then moved to Pett Level near Hastings. Meanwhile Capt. Normanton had left and Capt. Roberts had taken over (a very 'nice' man with whom I got on well).

At Pett Level Roberts left, and Capt. Bewick became C.O. He believed very much in "Bull S" and I learned subsequently that he was a "Cold bath chap". He instituted PE, which I volunteered to organise (I had learned about PE Tables at Southampton).

At this point (late summer 1943) Roberts, who knew that I rather disliked Bewick, somehow managed to get me called to London, where I worked in Petty France for some time, commuting from home, and working on 3 letter codes. (Haeressignal tapfel). I was now in Army Group H.Q., which moved to Kensington. Monty's H.Q. was now at St Paul's Girls School, which was bombed three or four times. One night, on evening duty, I was not able to get home, damage to the



Piccadilly Line, but all was clear by the next morning. In spring '44 we moved to Rustington, Littlehampton. Officers' billet in "Xylophone", a bungalow owned by a very fat popular musician, Teddy Brown.

The Unit was called No 1. Special Intelligence Co. As we approached D-Day, wives were not allowed to come within 10 miles of the coast. On a free afternoon I took a bus into the country in the direction of Midhurst, and found the very pleasant village of Fittleworth, where the postmistress directed me to Fulling Mill Cottage (Mrs Saigeman), who received us most kindly on three or four occasions. It subsequently transpired that the postmistress was the mother of Peter Gosden, first historian at St Nicholas who knew Mrs Saigeman very well, and was a friend of Fred Saigeman who went to Oxford.

We were still at Rustington on 5-6 June, when we watched gliders passing over and had a busy night with messages.

Towards the middle of August we embarked on a landing craft at Portsmouth and sailed overnight for Arramanche where we landed in the morning. My main friends in the unit were Trevor Harvey (musician), who spent many weekends at 109 Swakeleys Road for music - e.g. Brahms Violin Sonatas - (he died ca.1990); Lou Iller (a French speaking Swiss); Phillip Brook, of Moorhouse and Brook, Cloth Merchants of Hudders field, whom we met again in 1960 at Dover on our first caravan journey to the Continent; - we, ie Iller and Brook shared a room on our journeys.

We spent 6-7 weeks near Bayeux on the South of the St. Lo road - we could not find the field where we were encamped when we drove along the N177 in about 1980. After the collapse of German resistance, we moved off eastwards to the Chateau de Carcy, not far from Roven, a ca 1800 building (surrounded by orchards) which had been used by a German unit. I remember having to visit the dental unit for a stopping - the dentist used a treadle for his drill.

I now had a batman, not very bright, and a "tic-tac man" in civilian life. (Made signals to bookmakers at race meetings)

Next move was to a monastery just South of Amiens, where the "handy-man" dug a fine loo- pit only to discover that it was just below an image of the Virgin Mary and had to be filled in. We were not long there, and we were off to Brussels, where we occupied a new "old peoples home" on the Rue de Ninove, a couple of miles west of the centre of the city, and we remained there about 6 weeks. I was appointed messing officer, which involved procuring beer at about 3 pence per bottle. To travel to the centre one used the tram 77 (septante - sept) and in trams, buses and trains soldiers (nos libérateurs) travelled free. We continued the system of 36 hours leave every nine days. This was a very interesting time. Cultural activities were quickly organised - Brussels has been liberated only two weeks before we arrived. I recall seeing several operas and a Beethoven quartet series. With the prospect of several months in Brussels I paid a visit to the Conservatoire, where I saw the Secretary, M. Jean Van Straelen, who not only lent me a violin, but invited me regularly to dinner and music.

I also had a letter to deliver in Ghent, a member of the French staff at Bishopshalt, Miss Doherty, had friends there from whom she had not heard since 1939. I think it was during my second 36 hours break that I hitched a lift about 30 miles to Ghent where I located the house on the Chausee de Bruxelles where it enters the centre of the city. Madam de Moor and her two daughters, Mijo and Genevieve (father (deceased) had been a wealthy lawyer) invited me to stay for lunch (the wine was Chateau Lafite) and I promised to visit them and stay overnight during my next 36 hours.

We became family friends and visited them on our first continental holiday in 1960 and again in 1961 after Madame had died.

I also made the acquaintance of a Canadian officer from Kamloops B.C. (Hugh Vicars, whose wife sent us food parcels. From then on I travelled to Ghent almost every time I had 36 hours leave and stayed overnight. I was introduced to numbers of their friends and even played the violin at a little concert they arranged, and was present when the Bishop came to lunch.

Later that year we moved a few miles South to Genval, a pleasant suburb. If one did not get a lift by Army transport one took the tram which travelled via Waterloo. I still managed to get to Ghent. The

Van Straelens invited me to stay overnight at Christmas, which was very pleasant. When I left next morning a sole German plane was machine-gunning Brussels but I got safely back to Genval.

In February we moved into Germany and took up residence in a very large farmhouse a few miles South of Kempen (St Thomas a Kempis), where I visited the mayor and requested cleaning materials. The nearest town was St Tonis, not far from Krefeld and Mönchengladbach.

Most of the messages picked up in the last weeks were from units reporting how many tanks they had left, or their petrol and diesel stock.

On "Victory in Europe Day" Lt. Hornsey (a keen Scout) found some discarded clothes in the loft of the farmhouse and made a Union Jack, which we flew, from the top of the roof. After that it was a matter of preparing to return to the UK and I was given the task of writing a history of the 3-letter codes in the German army and air-force, so this "magnum opus" is now somewhere in the Archives. (My thesis on three-letter codes is mentioned in Sympezeuk 1998).

Finally we drove in convoy to GOCH on the Dutch frontier, where we entrained for Calais - Dover, and a couple of weeks' leave. I am reminded that a German marching song contained the line "Und wir fahren gegen Engelland". The I-Corps corporals sang this song at the top of their voices as we passed through towns and villages before we reached Goch. On our train journey we spent a night at Tournai in Belgium, where I was able to buy some eggs at the market to supplement the one egg a week ration when I reached home.

After leave I was sent on a course in Hampstead to study Japanese wireless organisation preparatory to being sent to India. Fortunately President Truman decided to use the atomic bomb, and my stay at home ended and I was posted to the I Corps Headquarters at Wentworth Woodhouse where the Adjutant was Earl Northesk, and there we lived in comparative luxury with my friends from No 1 Special Intelligence Company.

A few days before I was to leave for Germany as an officer in the Control Commission I developed a carbuncle on my back. A few hours before I was scheduled to leave, I was found to have a temperature and I was immediately sent to Sheffield Hospital, while Gwelly Evans made sure that my luggage was not sent to Germany. With the help of antibiotics and penicillin the poisoning was cured, but not before it had affected my right eye, as I was to discover some time later.

After a period of leave I was sent back to Rotherham (Wenthouse Woodhouse) and sent with about 15 other officers to HQ, BOAR (British Army of the Rhine), at Bad Oeynhausen near Minden, and Herford, a pleasant spa town.

Arriving about mid-day, and not having a job to go to, I saw a Y officer - a colonel I knew, and asked if there was a possible posting for me. He sent me along to the "Intelligence Bureau", where there was a vacancy for a GS03 - General Staff Officer - so I became a Captain with staff pay! I spent about seven months in a small office, where, with a major in charge and three captains, we dealt with Denazification, dealing mainly with "good Germans", whose names were put forward as Germans who would reorganise, with a British officer, the various branches of industry.

It was while I was in conversation on the telephone with a Colonel Wolfe who was I/C German Railways, and who was saying: "Every time I find someone who is competent to reorganise the railways, you tell me that he is a NAZI". At this point a telegram was put into my hand to inform me of the birth of John Robert!

### ***Music during the war***

While I was stationed in Kensington, TREVOR HARVEY was posted to No 1 SI Section, and he was an "up and coming" conductor (OXFORD), who as often as possible joined us at Swakeleys Road for music - mainly violin and piano sonatas

One of the officers at Bad Oeynhausen was HUMPHREY SEARLE, one of our leading composers, who had been billeted in a house with a grand piano. He had already started a small orchestra, but I had no violin. However, he was soon to go on leave and we arranged that Vivien should hand him my "Fagnola" violin on Redhill Station. I had bought this violin, a new Italian, for 35 pounds in Birmingham in 1935. I sold it for 75 pounds in 1952! I learnt recently from ROBERT LEWIN that it was sold ca 1990 at Sothebys for 40,000 pounds! Not only did I play in this small orchestra, but played the solo violin part in Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No.5 in a concert at Herford with the

assistance of a full orchestra from the HQ of the German Military Music HQ, based not far away. Humphrey and I also had regular sonata evenings. Also in the office was Miss Nancy Powell from "Fiddlers Folly", Thursby, who was a very fine pianist, with whom I performed the three Brahms sonatas at informal concerts.

At my last weekend before demobilisation Humphrey invited me to join him and another officer in the Russian Section (lecturer at Glasgow University) to spend a weekend in the Harz Mountains, a few miles from the Russian Sector of Germany. We did some walking and visited Goslar and stayed at TORFHAUS. Somehow Humphrey managed to borrow a Mercedes and a prisoner driver for our transport.

"Demob" took place at Aldershot where I handed in army kit and was issued with civilian clothes including a suit of appalling quality.

Subsequently I received a letter awarding me the honorary rank of Captain.

I came home on leave while in the Control Commission in April, when I made the acquaintance of John Robert, was given petrol for BPE 72 (AUSTIN 10), and drove down to Benfleet to see my grandmother (then aged 91) and Uncle Fred. We had some trouble with rust in the petrol tank, but made the journey safely.

### ***OELDE***

An ex-pupil of Bishopshalt - Leon Long - had got himself engaged to Maria Goldkuhle, an "au pair" in 1939. She decided that it was her duty to return to her parents before war broke out. He heard nothing during the war, but communication was restored at the end of 1945. She and her parents had left Dortmund for a small town not very far from Bad Oeynhausen. Could I visit them?

The Autobahn Hannover - Ruhr was only 15 minutes walk from Bad O., so one Sunday morning in Feb/March 1946 I thumbed a lift in a SW direction and found my way to Oelde. I found the family living in some comfort in the depth of the country, and was invited to stay for lunch. Father was an artist (he gave me an oil painting of a hydrangea in a pot, and told me that he supplied local farmers with paintings in exchange for milk and other produce, so they were not exactly short of food. I visited them several times, usually with a tin of bully- beef which I scrounged from the kitchen.

In the summer of 1946 Maria came to England but could not bring her parents, so I "gave her away" at their wedding at Ickenham Church. Maria died of Cancer in 1993; Leon became a lecturer in Chemistry at the University of Exeter, where he still lives. (In touch again Sept 1998)

In April 1946 I found myself unable to read with my right eye. Apparently the carbuncle from which I had suffered the previous autumn had affected the eye. I visited the Army Hospital at Oeynhausen and was advised to see my doctor after demobilisation. Dr Richards (Ickenham) sent me to the Western Ophthalmic Hospital in Marylebone Road, where all kinds of tests were administered. I then attended regularly until 1969, when the consultant said: "The cataract is now ripe. When would you like to come in." By then I was virtually blind in the left eye. I stayed in hospital 7 days and was then prescribed a "contact lens" - then the latest treatment and have had an annual appointment at the "Contact Lens Clinic" (last visit May 1988).

### ***Postscript to wartime notes***

Captain (later Major) Hugh Skillen, worked at Bletchley Park from D-day 1944 until he was demobbed. Since the war he has been very active in compiling accounts of Enigma and the Y-service (he has published several books) and has organised several reunions at Bedford (Vivien and I attended the 1995 Reunion) and I have the printed record of the Symposium 1998 including a record of how I and Sgt. Bob Emerson were commissioned in 1942.

We attended Hugh's birthday party (82) in 1997 and he came for lunch with us in October 1998. Also in the Y-service were Bishopshalt Classics colleague Donald Hanson (appointed with me in 1935) and David Kerry, Old Westciffian, aged 83 in 1998.

### ***Motoring***

In spring 1938 Robert bought a 1932 Austin 10 'BPE 72' for £65 from Main's Garage (near W. Ruislip Station) and passed his driving test in April or May of 1938. He put it on blocks in the garage while he was in the Army, where it stayed until he had a week's leave and a petrol allowance



in 1946. The Austin 10's successors were a 'Maigret' Citroen, an Armstrong Siddeley with pre-selector gearbox, an Austin Sheerline, Austin Westminster, Jaguar 3.8 Mk II, and various other 'Rover Group' products, including 1800, 1800S, 2200, Princess and 216. Vivien had her own mini for a while and Robert also supplied both sons with cars, a mini van and a mini 'traveller'. Vivien took over the driving from the mid 1990s, when Robert's eye sight prevented him continuing.

## **St. Clement Danes**

Robert did not resume at Bishopshalt until 18 August 1946. Robert and Vivien decided that he should seek promotion in 1947, so he wrote to James McGill Clouston (rhymes with Euston), his headmaster at Saltley, who had meanwhile become head of St Clement Danes, asking him to update his testimonial. The reply was a request 'To not take any steps until you have seen me', and it so happened that he needed a head of German, because the previous head of German had been killed during the War. With the offer of a 'special allowance' and a phone call to John Miles, the head of Bishopshalt, who reported that the German results had been very good, Robert was appointed to St Clement Danes School in Duncane Road, Ealing, near Wormwood Scrubbs Prison, for September 1947. Other former staff from Saltley had also moved to St. Clement Danes – Harold Hill, head of Mathematics, John Belsborough, English, and Alby Barnes, Head of French. Robert considered that his main achievement at St Clement Danes was developing a school orchestra. He also taught violin at lunch time and had one pupil on the double bass. He had much help from colleagues, who included K.W. James (trombone) later to be the first Deputy Head at St. Nicholas. Arthur Campbell, who taught physics, was a leading amateur horn player and a very competent pianist and violinist.

***The Sayings of James McGill Clouston, BSc, headmaster of Saltley Grammar School and later of St Clement Danes Grammar School, Hammersmith (1935 – 1960): A collection by Robert Watson***

1. Telephone: "Are you important? If not, put me through to someone who is."
2. "Take time by the hemlock."
3. "His father is a big nut in the engineering world."
4. "You will come to school in grey flannels or nothing at all."
5. "Are these books any good Mr. Bilsborough?" (Senior English master at St. C.D.) "Yes, Sir they are invaluable." James McGill: "Well, get rid of them."
6. Describing a Swiss holiday: "We saw the Aga Khayam and his wife was wearing a minx coat."
7. To the master on duty during morning break: "Do go and see what's happening. There is a frightful fricassée outside Hut 'A'."
8. "The boys have been playing Old Harry with the caretaker" (Harry Brooks)
9. During the annual Staff versus Boys Cricket Match: "When is half time?"
10. Displaying acquaintance with Hamlet: "It's like Appolonius behind the curtain."
11. The school adjoined the playing field of the Burlington School for Girls: "Do not barricade the girls playing hockey."
12. "You need to go through it with a fine tooth-brush."
13. "Hillary and Shirker Tensing"
14. "Promptuality"
15. "Prespiration"
16. "In high dungeon"
17. "Is more brumas paper needed for the Banda?"
18. Telephone: "Clouston here, rhymes with Euston."
19. Would mime increasing sizes of rolls for ciné camera, duplicator and roller towel
20. School evacuated to Oxford during war. On return to Ducane Road, office equipment was awaited. Question about Miss Smith, School Secretary: "Have Miss Smith's little drawers come down?"

## **LGSM**

In about 1950 the London County Council offered teachers the opportunity of improving their qualifications, so Robert decided to enrol at the Guildhall School of Music to study for a diploma on the violin. The two-year course, paid for by the LCC, involved one hour of violin and one hour of theory each week. At the Easter of his second year he took the 'Performer's Examination', playing the first movement of Concerto No. 2 by Wieniawski, the first movement of Beethoven's 'Spring' Sonata and an arrangement of the violin solo in Mozart's Haffner Serenade. Arthur Campbell accompanied. Robert thus became a Licentiate of the Guildhall School of Music with a Performer's Diploma.

## **PhD**

Still seeking to improve his qualifications, Robert decided that a higher degree would help promotion. He therefore saw Professor Frederick Norman at Kings College, who had been a lecturer in 1928-31 to offer himself as a candidate for MA. After being given some study work on a Middle High German manuscript, he was told that the quality of his work was good enough for a PhD. Professor Norman was himself engaged on a study of the manuscripts of the Nibelungenlied (Song of the Nibelungs – see also Wagner's 'Ring') and suggested a study of manuscript 'D'. The work involved a visit to Kings every two weeks to see his tutor, Dr. Thoma, who gave him every encouragement, and on Saturday mornings a session in the old 'Reading Room' at the British Museum.

## **Headship**

Robert was well on the way towards completion of the study when he started to look for further promotion. He applied for a headship at Baseley, Newport and was called for interview but was not appointed.

However, the Middlesex Education Committee planned to build two new grammar schools near Hillingdon, one in Northwood and one in Hayes and Robert applied for both headships. He was interviewed for Hayes, but not appointed. However, John Miles, the head of Bishopshalt who had by then retired, was chairman of the Education Committee and firmly supported his application for the Northwood post. Robert was appointed in February 1955. The building on Norwich Road and Wiltshire Lane, Northwood was partly built on a site which had once belonged to Kings College, Cambridge, which shares with Eton College the dedication of its foundation to the Virgin Mary and St. Nicholas, so the school became St. Nicholas Grammar School.

Robert completed the work for his PhD during the first years of his headship. Borrowing the school typewriter at weekends, he completed the typing (364 pages in 5 copies using carbon paper) in 1958.

Professor Norman was very anxious that Robert should publish his findings in an appropriate journal but it was not until 1962 that he was able to find one that would publish an article. It appeared on pages 272 to 291 in Euphonon, Number 57, in 1963. A number of German scholars wrote agreeing with Robert's decision that the manuscript was written in Bohemia and not in Bavaria, as had previously been thought. Dr. Michael Batts, Associate Professor of German at the University of British Columbia, even came to 32 Parkway to talk about the article.

As the building of St. Nicholas progressed, the first task was to recruit nine teachers. Robert decided that they should each be a 'head of department', although he was not at that stage able to offer any 'head of department' allowances. John Miles and Robert interviewed candidates at the Education Office in Uxbridge and in due course nine men were appointed.

Among Robert's colleagues at St. Clement Danes was a young mathematician, Ken James, (first class honours, London) and Robert encouraged him to apply for the mathematics post. He was subsequently appointed and over the next months helped Robert plan the organisation of the new school.

Robert's PhD studies with Professor Norman had led to his being appointed in 1953 as Chief Examiner in German (O-level) to the University of London for 4 years. Subsequently, he continued as an Assistant Examiner, first for O-level and then for A-level until after his retirement in 1975. Examining paid for family summer holidays.

Until four years before he retired Robert was able to interview applicants for teaching posts without a committee and he was proud that no fewer than 15 of them became heads of grammar or comprehensive schools.

Sadly, of the nine masters appointed in 1955, Banton (Geography), Armstrong (Handicraft), Plenderleith (Art) and James (Mathematics and Deputy Head) had died before Robert.

## ***Retirement***

As Robert was approaching 65, he paid a visit to HMS Sultan at Gosport and was subsequently invited to sit on an Admiralty Interview Board once or sometimes twice a term, a task he continued until 1983.

When it became known that he was to retire in 1975, the Headmistress of Hillingdon Court Convent was instructed to 'get him' to teach O-level and A-level French. He retired for the second time in 1978, when the Convent closed. In the school year 1978-9 he helped Bishopshalt by teaching an O-level class in French because the school had had a very lengthy absence in the department.

During retirement, in addition to his visits to Gosport, Robert worked as the administrator of the Commonwealth Linking Trust, a charity organising exchanges between schools throughout the Commonwealth. He was still giving this organisation some help up to 2000.

He also did some interviewing for VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) and for the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers.

Robert continued to teach pupils until his 90s, including eccentrics such as the professional guitar player who had never learnt to read music and candidates for a variety of A-level subjects, mainly English, French, German, Latin, Spanish and violin.

He also carried on the chamber music. After retirement he spent a couple of evenings a week on chamber music. He owned a near complete set of scores for classical chamber music (nothing written after 1900, of course) and played just about everything written for chamber groups by Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Brahms and many others from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Bach cello suites arranged for viola were a favourite solo when no accompanist was available. In his mid 80s his hearing started to fail and his chamber music companions dropped by the wayside. Retirement was filled with activity, much centred round his six grandchildren.

After Vivien's death he could no longer live in the Parkway house, needing 24 hour care. He spent his last 17 months in Baldock, close to John and within reach for Peter's visits. He was still able to read some of his beloved French, German and English literature until after his 94<sup>th</sup> birthday.

He died peacefully in Baldock just as the last bells of the school year were sounding round the country in the early afternoon of 16<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

## ***Some notes on Robert's enthusiasms***

### ***Teaching***

Robert was first and only head of St Nicholas Grammar School in Northwood, Middlesex. He ran a very successful school, despite a complete absence of 'mission statements', 'inclusiveness policies', 'league tables' or any of the other bureaucratic encumbrances that modern education is blessed with. He selected his staff carefully and led by example. Perhaps his enthusiasm for corporal punishment is now unfashionable, but many of the recipients asserted that it had done them no harm, if not positive good. He ran the school for 20 years and after his retirement the Education Authority merged it with the adjacent girls school, gave it a new name and turned it comprehensive. Not many of his hand picked staff stayed long after this change.

### ***Languages***

Robert had a very unusual gift for language. When he went to Kings London for interview the candidates were asked to write a short exercise in German. The Professor was startled to find that

Robert had made no grammatical error. This was Professor Norman, who had been interned in Germany throughout World War 1 and had come to be able to speak perfect German in any required regional variant. His job during World War 2 was to work out what the German decrypts from Bletchley Park actually meant.

Robert never made grammatical errors and when marking he would pick any mistakes and mark them in red pencil faster than most people could read through the passage in their native tongue. He spoke French to very nearly the same standard, having polished this skill and worked his way through almost all classic French literature after retirement, in order to take the A level French class at the nearby Convent School.

### ***Gardener***

Robert maintained an immaculate vegetable garden and at one stage had brought a huge area of allotment under control on the other side of Parkway. He cultivated most of the family needs in potatoes, runner beans, brussel sprouts, leeks, asparagus, and many varieties of apples and soft fruit. He left the flower garden to Vivien but always appreciated a good display of flowers.



### ***Painter and decorator***

Most household repairs and decoration, as well as laying paths all round the garden in crazy paving kept him occupied for more summer evenings and weekends. He was a home owner from the 1930s, first in Swakeley's Road, Ickenham and then for over 50 years in Parkway, Hillingdon.





***Mountain walker***

Robert had started walking on summer trips to Germany and Austria with his bother and introduced the family to mountains with a summer holiday in 1957 during which they worked up from the Wrekin to Snowdon. Slightly more adventurous trips followed, and he optimistically bought a new set of boots at the age of 65 in the French Pyrenees. Before long there were grandchildren to take walking and many happy weeks were spent in the Lake District during one or two of which he was introduced to the use of the ice axe in his mid seventies.





### *Caravanner*

Family holidays were initially spent with Vivien's parents in Kingsdown, Kent, in a small house rented from one of their neighbours. Later, a Hillingdon neighbour provided access to a static caravan at Naish Farm, near Christchurch, adjacent to the Chewton Bunny. The next step was renting touring caravans, starting with something called a 'Princess' that allowed speeds not much over 30 mph behind the family Armstrong Siddeley. Moving on to smaller and more mobile vans, the first purchase, in 1959 was a 'Bluebird'. This was towed behind an Austin Sheerline but still heavily restrained speed. The design was extremely unstable. However, even with such limitations and the fact that Vivien was never prepared to drive with a caravan, Robert took the family to Scotland, revisiting the haunts to which he had been taken on holidays by his railwayman father. Then it was Germany and Austria, and in 1961 a better towing caravan, a Cheltenham, for the first trip South of the Alps. The caravan towed well but in Southern climes the Sheerline gave endless trouble. Its clever design for warming up in English Winters led to vapour lock on any sustained incline in Italy or Southern France. Despite many consultations with 'experts' the problem was never solved. Caravanning continued with destinations taking in Greece and Turkey by the mid sixties, and continued via many changes of both car and caravan until the last Cheltenham was bought in 1973 and used for about ten years. This period was followed by holidays in a variety of French gites. Vivien did assert towards the end of her life that the only reason the family had had to be dragged round Europe summer after summer was so that Robert could 'show off' with his languages but this might have been a slightly unjust position!





### ***Vinophile***

Wine was a regular feature of the Watson Sunday lunch table, which was always the kitchen table unless important guests were present. Dining room tables were too important for spreading out academic papers, marking or children's homework to be used for eating. The wine became a bit more sophisticated with the years but it was hard to get Robert to splash out on anything much over a couple of pounds a bottle by the millennium. He did appreciate a good Malt and would often join Vivien in what she always referred to as 'something nice', meaning a rather sweeter alcoholic substance.

### ***Fussy eater***

No vinegar, no pickles, no mustard; numerous other things were unacceptable and plain food, not messed about, was the order of the day. To the end, he was able to appreciate the unparalleled chocolate biscuits produced by McVitie and Price, as well as the odd glass of beer. Robert's cooking skills were, however, decidedly limited and supper was of very limited culinary sophistication in the 1950s when Vivien was out teaching 'Keep Fit' classes. It was almost invariably Welsh Rarebit.

## Robert's favourite poem

### ALBERT AND THE LION

By Marriott Edgar

*from the Stanley Holloway record*

There's a famous seaside place called  
Blackpool  
That's noted for fresh air and fun  
And Mr. and Mrs. Ramsbottom  
Went there with young Albert, their son.

A fine little lad were young Albert,  
All dressed in his best, quite a swell.  
He'd a stick with an 'orse's 'ead 'andle;  
The finest that Woolworth's could sell.

They didn't think much to the ocean,  
The waves they were piddlin' and small.  
There were no wrecks and nobody  
drowned,  
'Fact, nothin' to laugh at at all!

So, seeking for further amusement,  
They paid, and went into the zoo,  
Where they'd lions and tigers and camels  
And cold ale and sandwiches, too.

There were one great big lion called  
Wallace  
Whose nose was all covered with scars;  
He lay in a som-no-lent posture  
With the side of 'is face on the bars.

Now Albert 'ad 'eard about lions-  
'Ow they was ferocious and wild;  
To see lion lyin' so peaceful  
Just didn't seem right to the child.

So straightway the brave little feller,  
Not showin' a morsel of fear,  
Took 'is stick with the 'orse's 'ead 'andle  
And stuck it in Wallace's ear.

You could see that the lion din't like it,  
For givin' a kind of a roll,  
'E pulled Albert inside the cage with 'im  
And swallowed the little lad - 'ole!

Now Mother 'ad seen this occurrence,  
And not knowin' what to do next,  
She 'ollered "Yon lion's et Albert!"  
An' Father said "Ee, I am vexed."

They complained to an animal keeper  
Who said "My, wot a nasty mis'ap;  
Are you sure it's your boy 'e's eaten?"  
Pa said, "Am I sure? There's 'is cap!"

The manager 'ad to be sent for;  
'E came and 'e said "Wot's to-do?"  
Ma said "Yon lion's et Albert,  
And 'im in 'is Sunday clothes, too!"

Father said "Right's right, young feller-  
I think it's a shame and a sin  
To 'ave our son et by a lion  
And after we paid to come in."

The manager wanted no trouble;  
He took out his purse right away,  
Sayin' "'Ow much to settle the matter?"  
Pa said "Wot do you usually pay?"

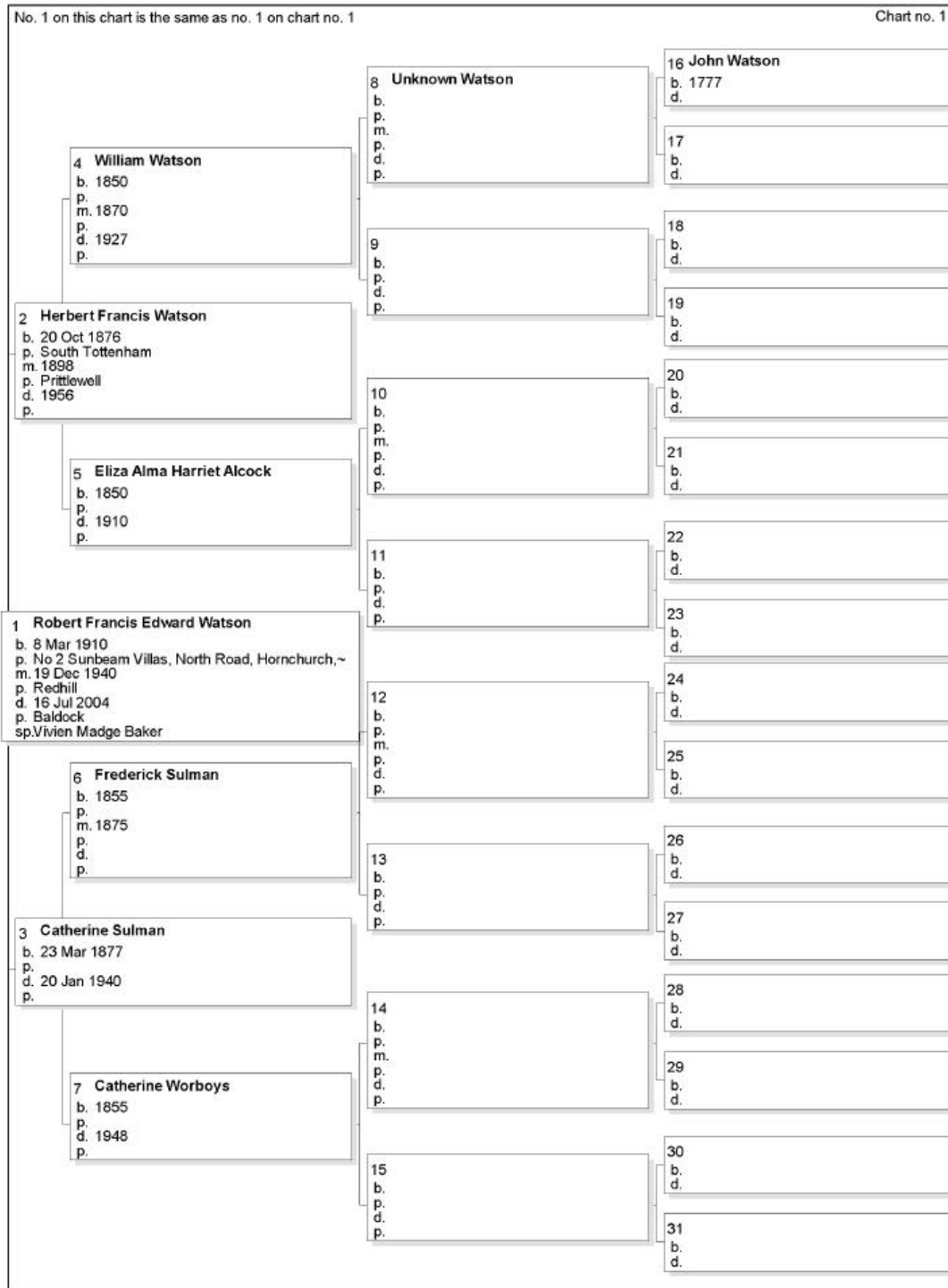
But Mother 'ad turned a bit awkward  
When she saw where 'er Albert 'ad gone.  
She said "No, someone's got to be  
summonsed!"  
So that was decided upon.

And off they all went to p'lice station  
In front of a Magistrate chap;  
They told what 'ad 'appened to Albert  
And proved it by showing 'is cap.

The Magistrate gave 'is opinion  
That no one was really to blame,  
And 'e said that 'e 'oped the Ramsbottoms  
Would 'ave further sons to their name.

At that Mother got proper blazin':  
"And thank you, sir, kindly," said she-  
"Wot, spend all our lives raisin' children  
To feed ruddy lions? Not me!"

# Pedigree Chart for Robert Francis Edward Watson





## Descendants of Robert Francis Edward Watson

Page 1

1-Robert Francis Edward Watson b. 8 Mar 1910, No 2 Sunbeam Villas, North Road, Hornchurch, Essex, d. 16 Jul 2004, Baldock

+Vivien Madge Baker b. 7 Apr 1914, d. 16 Jan 2003

2-John Robert Watson b. 6 Feb 1946

+Christine Marilyn Larcombe b. 22 Dec 1948

3-Matthew Charles Edward Watson b. 15 Nov 1976, Baldock

3-Bryony Jane Watson b. 8 Sep 1978, Baldock

2-Peter Roy Watson b. 13 Oct 1947

+Anne Mary Brampton b. 14 May 1950

3-Claire Marie Watson b. 23 Mar 1976

+Lee Cotton

3-Caroline Louise Watson b. 23 Sep 1977

+Robert Negrine

4-Sophie Negrine b. 7 Feb 2003

3-Helen Elizabeth Watson b. 25 Jan 1981

3-Paul David John Watson b. 7 Jun 1984



With Vivien in the garden of 32 Parkway, just after retirement from St Nicholas in July 1975