



## *Memories of A Stratton Family*

### **Mr William and Mrs Jane Cox**

William Henry (1857-1947) and Jane Cox (1867-1955) were my Great Grandfather and Grandmother. In the 1891 census it shows they lived at The Green, Lower Stratton. The 1911 census shows them living at Sturmy's Cottages, Highworth Road, Stratton before moving to 112 (now 17) Kingsdown Road. As a child my sister can remember visiting Granny & Grampy "over the road", mainly because of the tiny staircase in a cupboard to get to the bedrooms!

William married his first wife, Laura Amelia Lavington in December 1880. Surprisingly, the 1881 census shows they are living at St. George Hanover Square, London. He had two children with Laura; Laura Alberta born May 1881 (only 5 months after they married!) and Florence Catherine born 1883. Sadly Laura, his wife, died in May 1885.

In March 1888 William married Jane Hicks from Little Hinton, he was 34 and she was 24, and together they had six children. Frederick William (my Grandfather) was his fourth child born on 21 May 1893. Making a living for 8 children must have been very tough and the 1891 census shows William working as a striker in the Great Western Railway works.

In his obituary in the Evening Advertiser in 1947 it stated "Mr William Henry Cox, one of Stratton's most picturesque figures has passed..... He was a very keen gardener and an exhibitor at local shows. He worked for 50 years in the GWR works. For many years Mr & Mrs Cox were caretakers of

the old Zion Chapel." Both William and Jane are buries in Upper Stratton Cemetery opposite the Baptist Church.

### **Mr Frederick "Fred" William and Clara Effie Cox**

In 1914, aged 21, Fred (my Grandfather) married Clara Effie Lovelock. Prior to getting married Clara lived in Lotmead Cottage, Wanborough with her adoptive parents (Ann & James French). Clara was actually illegitimate, being born in 1895 at Bedwyn Common in the middle of Savernake Forest to Sarah (Ann's sister). At the time it's believed Sarah was a servant in Tottenham House, home of the Earl of Cardigan.

In 1916, at the age of 23 years and 4 months, Fred was enlisted to serve in the army in the first world war. Fred and Clara were very much a "lovematch" and after 28 years of marriage, Fred wrote a beautiful letter to Clara as follows:

"Darling - After 28 years of married life and on the anniversary of our wedding day, I want to say how dearly and sincerely I love you. We were sweethearts in our childhood days and I realise more as the years pass by how dear you are to me. We have reared our family dear, 6 children of which we are both justifiably proud. Strong, healthy and intelligent every one.

You have been a loving, devoted and excellent Mother to them and a loving devoted wife and sweetheart to me dear. You have nursed me back to health and strength when I have been down. You have worked very hard dear for us all and it makes me realise how dearly I love you. You are dear, indeed a treasure to me and I appreciate and thank you for all you have done for me. As a token of my love dear please accept enclosed.

With fondest love Darling. Fred"

Sadly, we do not know what Fred actually gave as his token of love.

Fred and Clara were married for 55 years until Fred's death in 1969. Clara died in 1971 and both are buries behind St. Margaret's Church in Lower Stratton Cemetery. Together they had six children; Frederick, Alfred, Hilda, Mavis, Marion and Norman.

### **Mr Harold (Alan) and Mrs Elsie Mavis Patricia "Mavis" Lott**

Mavis was born on 19 April 1922, the fourth child of Fred and Clara. She was christened Elsie Mavis Patricia but as she hated the name Elsie she was always known as Mavis. At the time the family were living at 25 The Street, Lower Stratton, a two up two down cottage. Mavis would tell of sleeping in a small bedroom, curtained in the middle, the three boys in one bed and the three girls in another. However, although times were hard, Father was a Painter and Decorator "inside" in the GWR, the family had a very loving and Christian upbringing. Father also had an allotment and Mother was a very good cook so they worked very hard to provide for their children. The children attended the Primitive Methodist Church in Lower Stratton. In the early 1930s Mavis was awarded many certificates in books for her scripture successes.

When Mavis was around eight years old in 1930 the family moved to a newly built council house at 81 (now 2) Kingsdown Road, opposite the Kingsdown public house. This house, with 3 bedrooms, an upstairs bathroom (however the toilet was downstairs outside) and a long garden, was very spacious in comparison to The Street. The front parlour room was kept for Sundays but it had a rear living room with a beautiful coal-fired black range on which to cook, making the home very warm, welcoming and comfortable. The family were almost self-sufficient as Father would grow all the vegetables as well as keeping chickens at the bottom of the garden.

It was from here that Mavis attended the Upper Stratton Senior School (which we now believe to be Beechcroft Infants School as the New Kingsdown School was not built until 1937). Mavis very much enjoyed her family and school life which is confirmed by the school reports and testimonials. She also wrote in her school workbook of her favourite bicycle ride to Baydon. Getting up at 5.30 am Mavis and her mother cycled through Lower Stratton up Callas Hill; all the while stopping gathering wild flowers and listening to the many birds singing. Upon her return home they found a big fire and a nice breakfast put ready by her big sister, Hilda.

As was the custom then, Mavis left school at the age of 14 in 1936. She went into "service" for a family in Eastleach Martin. An afternoon off to go home to see her family would entail a four mile bicycle ride along the narrow country lanes of Eastleach to Lechlade where Mavis would then catch a bus to Kingsdown. Her brother Norman would meet her off the bus and pay her fare. This was quite an arduous trip for one so young just for an afternoon at home and one which Mavis did not enjoy.

The above position did not last long as Mavis' national savings book shows, in 1936, her address as 45 Bath Road. This became Mavis's second job in service and she was much happier there. Travelling from Swindon to Kingsdown was a much easier journey meaning she could go home more frequently. The family who lived in Bath Road were Mr and Mrs E. W. Barlow, Mr. Barlow being a well-known dental surgeon. They had two sons, Leslie and Morley Pierrepont Barlow. As seen from the Evening Advertiser newspaper cuttings Mavis kept, both Barlow boys lost their lives in tragic circumstances. Leslie Barlow was killed in a plane crash in October 1938 at the age of 26 and Morley Barlow was reported missing in Malaya 1942 but it was subsequently reported in 1945 that he had, in fact, died in April 1943, aged 27. In fact Morley Barlow is on the Most Secret List of SOE Agents. He was a Special Operations Executive, subject: Intelligence.

At the time of the death of Leslie, Mavis would have been aged around 16. Obviously she was deeply affected by these tragedies and, understandably, in later life did not want to talk about her time during the war, dwelling on the good things that happened. She really did hate everything about the war but especially the wartime blackout.

It may well have been because of these tragic deaths (the newspaper cuttings advise the Barlow family were obviously devastated) that Mavis left the Barlow household, but around the age of 19 she gained employments at Phillips and Powis (renamed Vickers Armstrong) at South Marston moving back to live at 81 Kingsdown Road.

At Vickers Mavis enjoyed working as a clerk in the stores office and in later life could still recite/remember certain part numbers for the spitfire aeroplanes. As shown in her Notice of Assessment to Income Tax, Mavis was paid £56 for the six months to 5 October 1941, and £69.10s 0d for the six months to 5 April 1942. This must have been her first year with taxable earnings and she did not pay any tax on her first six months earning but had to pay £10 7s 10d on the second six months.

In 1943, under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939-1941 she became a part-time member of the Swindon Civil Defence First Aid Service.

Mavis was 21 "becoming of age" on 19 April 1943. All the family sent very pretty birthday cards and together collected enough money to buy her a beautiful 18ct rose gold bangle. It must have been a very strange occurrence celebrating your 21st birthday whilst the country was at war.

Life was very busy during the war at 81 Kingsdown Road. Mavis would recall many servicemen staying overnight and enjoying her mother's wonderful cooking. These servicemen were referred to their home from the Arkell's public house across the road "if there was no room at the inn". It must have been a tight squeeze indeed, although by this time there were only 3 children still at home.

It was at Vickers that Mavis met her future husband Harold (Alan) Lott. Alan was born in West Hartlepool but, owing to the death of his mother when he was ten years old, and then the cruelty of his stepmother, Alan left home at 15 to travel across the country. At 16 he broke a leg playing football which, in those days, meant spending 6 months in hospital with his leg in traction. This resulted in the

muscles of his leg and buttocks wasting away leaving him with a shortened leg. He would, eventually, become well known in Upper Stratton for his lop sided walk, especially after visiting the Stratton Reform Club when it was thought he might be inebriated!

During Mavis and Alan's courting they enjoyed outings, such as to the Empire Theatre and to watch Swindon Town football. Closer to home, they would also stroll down the lane to Kingsdown Park (now the Crematorium). It was in January 1948, on the day of the fourth round FA Cup tie with Northampton, that they announced their engagement in the local Swindon Advertiser.

Mavis and Alan were married at the Lower Stratton Methodist Church on 18 September 1948 with a write up in the local paper. They also started their married life at 81 Kingsdown Road where their first child, Glenys was born. In July 1951 they were allocated a three bedroom house in Green Road, Stratton where Susan was born in December 1951. David came along in October 1953. This house had a boiler behind the fire in the living room with an open fire in the front room and main bedroom. It had an upstairs bathroom including toilet, together with an outside toilet, coal house and wash house. In the wash house was a double Belfast sink, a gas boiler together with a mangle. Washing in the boiler was stirred with a "copper" stick which could also have another use.; maintaining discipline with the children! The gas boiler had another important use as it was used to boil Christmas and Suet puddings along with ham joints! At the bottom of the garden was the railway line which ran from Swindon to Highworth.

As was the norm in the fifties and sixties, Green road would have milk delivered daily by the local milkman; Godwins Bakers from St. Phillips Road would come to the backdoor with freshly baked bread; Palmer's butchers would come to the square with fresh meat and the vegetable man would also come in his van on a weekly basis. Coal would be delivered to the coalhouse by coalmen and ashes in the dustbin would be collected from the back of the house.

Neighbours were Mr. and Mrs. Tremblin at number 73, Mavis' sister and brother in law Hilda and Jack Smith lived at 75, Mr. and Mrs. C. Uzzell at 79. At no 65 were Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer who moved in when the houses were first built in the late 1940's and are still there today, well over 60 years.

When the new Pressed Steel Fisher plant was built over all the fields of Stratton, Alan moved from Vickers to this new employer where he was to stay until he retired.

However, as rationing continued for years after the war, and money was extremely tight, around 1954 Mavis managed to obtain employment at the Goddard Arms Hotel. At first she was a chambermaid but progressed to become a Silver Service Waitress. The Goddard Arms Hotel was regarded as 'The Hotel' in Swindon in the fifties, sixties and seventies. Functions would be held in the ballroom for Round Table, Rotary and Free Masons. Any person of note coming to Swindon would stay at this hotel. For example, Mavis would "wait" at table on Princess Anne and Eric Morecombe. Mavis was eventually put in charge of the Hotel Bar. She retired from the Goddard Arms in 1982 having worked there for around 30 years.

Mavis and Alan were to remain in Green Road for the whole of their 47 years of married life and are now both buried behind St. Margaret's Church in Lower Stratton Cemetery.

## **Glenys Susan and David Lott**

As a child Susan can remember frequent visits to Granny and Grampy Cox at Kingsdown. The house was sparsely furnished but homely. Upstairs the bedrooms had just a spring bedstead with a feather mattress, wardrobe, chest of drawers and/or wash stand with a beautiful jug and basin. Sleeping in the feather bed was wonderful as it was soft, warm and comfortable. Making it in the mornings was great fun as we would love shaking it all back into place. Lino was on all the floors. The bathroom had a smell all its own as apples from the garden were stored underneath the bath!

The front room was kept for "best" and had the usual Aspidistra in the bay window, a piano on the opposite wall and a chenille tablecloth covering the best table.

There was always a lovely welcoming fire in the range in the living room and we would love sitting in front of it looking into the flames. It was on this range that all meals were cooked as well as the "mash" to feed the chickens, filling the house with a most unusual smell. Using Zebrite to black the range was regarded as a bit of a chore by us grandchildren.

In the larder off the hall, stored on orderly shelves, were all sorts of goodies: Eggs in isinglass; pears, apples, blackberries, chutneys, piccalillis and pickled onions etc. etc. all preserved in Kilner jars.

Glenys Susan and David would go to the henhouse at the bottom of the garden to collect the eggs from underneath the warm chickens and subsequently, when a chicken was past its best, would help to pluck it to cook for dinner. Glenys would even help in "drawing" them. Ugh! We were given the feet to play with; pulling the tendons in the chickens foot to make their claws move! Strangely, the memorable part of the vegetable garden, apart from the blackberry and loganberry bushes, was the enormous horseradish plant from which we would make the hottest horseradish you have ever tasted!

Christmas at Kingsdown would mean Granny & Grampy, plus the six children with their husbands/wives, returning for a Christmas meal. Everyone sat up to a properly set table, adults around a table cloth-covered painter and decorators table, grandchildren around a small table in the corner of the living room. It was a very tight squeeze indeed. A family photograph of Christmas 1952 shows 24 members of the extended family with Uncle Norman taking the photograph, making a total of 25 present.

Glenys Susan and David were christened at Lower Stratton Methodist church but attended Sunday School at Upper Stratton Baptist Church. David aged 4 months was enrolled in the Upper Stratton Baptist Sunday School and given a "Cradle Roll certificate" in 1954. In 1963 Susan achieved the Scripture Examination certificate. Around the same time, aged 10 Susan became a Juno, which was the Baptist equivalent to a Brownie. A Juno dressed in a green uniform with a light blue tie. Camps were organised by Mr & Mrs Jack Maisey of the Baptist Church, at Lydiard Park for all the Junos and Campaigners and great fun was had by all. Around the age of 9 David would be in the 2ns Swindon Boys Brigade run by Mr Arthur Simmonds. All the children would enter exhibits e.g. wither handicrafts or jam tarts, in the Baptist Annual Horticultural show.

Glenys Susan and David went to Beechcroft Infants School before attending Ruskin Junior School. Susan's first day at Beechcroft was memorable because she can remember crying the whole time after her mother left her there.

Glenys and Susan would pass their 11 plus examinations to go on to attend Headlands Grammar School. Later the education system changed to the comprehensive system meaning David went to Kingsdown School first before going on to Headlands.