

## RASCALS, Shipley Road

This property once belonged to Sir William Stirling Hamilton of Woodgaters, now Woodgetters. It was also at one time the home of Lady King and her grandson, John Willcocks, recorded the following memories of the years he lived at Rascals between 1922 and 1933 (kindly lent to SLHG by Mr K Johnson, formerly of Woodgetters)

*"Grandfather died in 1920 and two years later my grandmother. My mother and I moved to Rascals, which was on the edge of Southwater and about four miles south of Horsham. The house was called Rascals because it was close to Rascals Wood which, in times past, had been a haunt of highwaymen. We came to live there because my mother's sister, Aunt Lil, whose first husband, Hugh Hope had tragically died in 1920 after they had only been married for about a year, had been working at the nearby chicken farm and had been allowed to live in the house by her employer, Sir William Stirling-Hamilton. She had moved out and my grandmother, Lady King, took on the lease in 1922.*

*The house was fairly isolated in the middle of fields and was the most wonderful place for a small boy to be brought up, with complete freedom to wander anywhere in the adjoining fields and woods. In those days there was no danger of children being assaulted, even in the remote countryside. In the garden there was a very muddy pond which got very smelly if it got stirred up when one fell in.*

The overgrown pond today



*On it we had a so-called "punt" which was really no more than a large wooden box about 4 ft. by 3 ft., made by the village carpenter, Mr. Ockenden, and impossibly heavy. Out of this I and my friends regularly fell, much to the inconvenience of various parents. The pond was the reason for theft of public property by the family. One dry summer the pond became rather low in water and needed filling up; it was thought that this could be done from the pump which supplied all the water for the house. Uncle Sandy, Aunt Lil's second husband, was staying with us and, under his direction, a ditch was dug most of the way from the pond to the pump. However there was still the problem of getting the water across the drive. On the way into Southwater, Uncle Sandy had noticed, lying beside the road, a long flexible pipe which had been used for filling up the tanks of steam traction engines. A gang of children and grown-ups marched down the road for half a mile, picked up the pipe and carried it back home on their shoulders without being seen. It was a great success and nobody seemed to miss the pipe!*

*There was no mains water or electricity at Rascals, even as late as 1932. Water came from a well 70 feet deep and the pump was worked by a pony which walked round and round in a circle. The water was very hard and tasted of Epsom salts; it was almost undrinkable, so our drinking water was brought in buckets from a better well at a cottage at the bottom of the drive, or else we drank home-made lemonade which disguised the taste. All the laundry had to be done in rain water: if well water was used, a white dust would come out of the clothes when they were dry.*

*There were no fridges at that time and to set jellies in the summer they were let down in a basket to the bottom of the well. There was only one flush lavatory upstairs in the house, otherwise there was only an earth closet just inside the front door and another across the back yard for the servants to use. The buckets of these had to be emptied daily by the gardener. The "sewage disposal" arrangements consisted of a cesspool in the garden, covered with rough boards and surrounded with a flimsy wire-netting fence to prevent me falling in. Our lighting was by candles and small paraffin lamps; the latter had to be filled and the wicks trimmed every*

day. However, in the drawing room, we had an Aladdin lamp with an incandescent mantle; this gave a very good light but it would sometimes suddenly flare up with a lot of black smoke and have to be carried into the garden to cool off.

We also had one of the very first wireless sets, obtained through Uncle Chris, my mother's brother, who worked at the B.B.C. It consisted of a box about eighteen inches square with two "valves" on the top; these looked like electric light bulbs. At the side of the box there were two "coils" (actual coils of wire) which one moved to and fro to tune the wireless. It was powered by an L.T. accumulator and a large H.T. battery; the former had to be recharged about once a week. We had three or four sets of headphones connected to the wireless as although loudspeakers were available, my grandmother considered them to be anti-social as everybody would have to listen to whatever programme was on. How right she was!



If one's parents wrote to the B. B. C. one could be wished "Happy Birthday" on Children's Hour. This was done for me once and, at the same time, the announcer told me to go and look at the bottom of the wireless mast in the garden; this I did and found a birthday present there. All most exciting! In those early days of wireless one had to have an aerial running from the house to a pole which was even higher than the house itself.

Uncle Chris was the black sheep of the family, to such an extent that he was hardly mentioned, particularly not in my presence. He was always in debt. He never married but what was really damning in those days, "he lived with a woman". I suspect that, in fact, he lived with a number of women at various times!

My mother and grandmother were not at all well off but we still had a staff which one would not dream of having today. There was Nanny, Mrs Pilbeam, the cook, a house-parlourmaid and a gardener, Worsfold. Only Nanny lived in the house, while Mrs Pilbeam, the wife of the village taxi-driver (the taxi was a Model T Ford), the maid and Worsfold came in by the day. Mrs Pilbeam was very fat and one day she caught a pheasant in the garden by falling on it. About the only meal that Mrs Pilbeam did not prepare was Sunday supper which was always cold meat, left over from lunch, and anchovy eggs.

The drive up to the house was about 150 yards long, a mere cart-track made of broken bricks. It frequently developed pot-holes and there were always piles of rubble beside it. Any able-

*bodied visitor was given a hammer and made to break up bricks to fill the holes.*

*Living as we did out in the country, I had very few young friends "of our sort" with whom to play. My mother must have been very broad-minded for those days as she was quite happy for me to play with Wilfred Sayers who lived at the bottom of the drive.*

*My other friends were the son of a farm foreman who lived at Shipley and occasionally came to tea, and two small girls, Pat and Molly Howard. It was, I think, Molly who caused me much embarrassment, though this was not her fault. She and I were made to act "Little Miss Muffet" on the stage in the village hall and I had to KISS HER at the end in public!*

*While we were at Rascals my mother started to breed rabbits to add to her meagre pension; this was not much of a success and the only thing produced was one pair of fur gloves!*

*During the summer months the front lawn had to be a cricket pitch; we even had a Pavilion, a small wooden hut, and anybody, at any time, would be bullied into playing. On one occasion we had a Test Match; England was represented by Uncle Wilfrid and me while the Australian team was Mummy and Nanny. This ensured a win for England.*

*One day we had a point-to-point; I had built the course of fences made of bits of wood and brushwood over which the rest of the family were expected to run. Unfortunately it all ended in tears as Guy and John started to pretend to be bookies, loudly shouting the odds; something I had not planned. I burst into tears saying that "They had spoilt it all !" They said that I was a spoilt brat or words to that effect!*

*I was lucky in that Rascals was surrounded by farmland, owned by Sir William Stirling-Hamilton, and the main farm buildings were just across a couple of fields. In good weather I would go off there on my own "to help". It was entirely dairy and poultry, and I well remember the milking parlours (most unhygienic by modern standards), the pig styes and men carrying buckets of milk on yokes.*

*The Hamiltons lived at Woodgaters, a large Victorian house which always looked down at heel and the garden uncared-for. Old Sir William dressed as a farm worker, with a jersey out at the elbows; he frequently did not go to bed but slept in his study in an old wicker arm-chair. The dairy was near the house and the butter was made in a large wooden churn turned by hand. Occasionally there were children's parties at Woodgaters when we played charades or dumb-crambo, both of which I loathed as I was horribly shy of acting in front of people. We also slid down the great wide staircase on tea-trays; the carpet was much too old and threadbare to suffer any damage!*

*Sir William had a sister, Liz, who was always looked on as a "funny old thing". She was unmarried and, to say the least of it, was eccentric. Her clothes were Edwardian and she wore the most enormous and elaborate hats covered with yards of ribbon and artificial fruit and flowers. She went everywhere on a heavy old-fashioned, bicycle and was frequently seen at wedding receptions and other buffet parties going round at the end, when most people had left, putting left-over bits of food in her large handbag.*

*As one went through the second of the gates in the drive leading up to Rascals there was, on the right, a shed where wood was stored and a stable for the pony. We had to have a pony to pump the water and also it was driven in a small trap by the*

*gardener. On one occasion Nanny and I were being driven to a nearby village and, going down a hill, the pony slipped on the tarmac and came right down on its backside, much to everybody's consternation. This pony was too large for me to ride, so, when I was about seven, my mother set about trying to find something smaller for me. She really knew nothing about horses and knew nobody in the horse world so answered an advertisement for a safe*

*child's pony. When it was brought for me to try and I sat on it, it immediately gave a small standing buck, I fell off and broke my arm! The owner of the pony, a somewhat gipsy-looking man, was sent off with a flea in his ear and I was taken off to hospital. Although it was only a "green-stick" fracture it took quite a long time to mend completely and my arm never got entirely straight again; this meant that, later in life when I became very keen on gymnastics, I could never do a hand-stand as my arm gave way. The staff at the Cottage Hospital in Horsham were rather unsympathetic towards the young, particularly the Matron, who doubtless thought she was dealing with a spoilt only child! Anyway, Guy and John, who were living with us at the time, suggested that I called her "a cow's behind"; probably because this was the nastiest thing they or I could think of at that age.*



*I was given a .22 rifle at the age of about eleven or twelve, something that would be thought most irresponsible these days. However, there was not then so much vicious crime about as there is now and it taught me, at an early age, the rudiments of how to use a firearm safely. I managed to knock-off quite a number of rats that lived round the pond.*

*Worsfold, the gardener, was a great ally of mine and I remember on a particular occasion when I got half a blank cartridge stuck in my leg. I had been given a small pistol which was perfectly safe if you treated it properly: it looked like an automatic but only fired blanks. One day I wondered what would happen if I just put one of the cartridges on a block of wood and hit it with a hammer. This I did and it went off with a lovely bang but, unfortunately, one half of the cartridge blew out and went into the side of my knee. I knew there would be a fuss if I went and told my mother, so Worsfold and I managed to pull it out with a pair of pliers; I was none the worse and nobody was any the wiser! Doubtless if it had become thought that Worsfold had abetted me, he would also have got a telling-off!*



Cartoon by Gabi Butler

*An even younger escapade was my first experiment with smoking. I owned a tiny pipe, the sort of thing that some people thought was fashionable to smoke cigarettes in; I used to walk around with it in my mouth trying to look grown-up. One day I found some of my mother's cigarettes; I took one to pieces, put some tobacco in my pipe and lit up. My mother was wise enough to let me continue and, as a result, I made myself feel extremely sick and did not try smoking again for another twelve years !*

*From the age of nine or so I was allowed to go off on my own into the woods surrounding Rascals; they were proper old woods of oak, ash, thorn and hazel. The rides were often much churned up where there was logging. There were no tractors hauling timber in those days, it was all done by beautiful great cart-horses. There were lovely little streams in the woods and one could spend hours damming them up to make pools and irrigation systems.*

*On Sundays we would walk the two miles through the woods to church for the 11 o'clock service; later when we had a car we often used that, but it was not nearly such fun as going through the woods, even when they were very muddy. The general rule in the village for Sunday services was - 7 o'clock Communion Service for the village (so that the servants could get back in time to cook breakfast for their employers and the farm workers could get on with the milking), 8 o'clock Communion for the "gentry", 11 o'clock Matins (sometimes followed by a short Communion), 3 o'clock Sunday School and, finally, 6 o'clock Evensong. Our church had good Church of England Prayer Book services, there was no mention ever" of "Mass" or "Eucharist"; that would have been considered far too close to Rome!*

*It must have been in about 1926 that my grandmother gave my mother her first car. It was a Citroen two-seater with a "dicky" and a let-down canvas roof. It was extremely heavy; it had a wooden steering wheel and a windscreen wiper which one worked by hand. My mother, of course, was thrilled with it and called it her "priceless lemon".*

*I played cricket for the village when I was older and, in this way, I got to know many of the village people who were always most kind to me. Mr. Gardner was the blacksmith who had his forge at the Horsham end of the village (nearly opposite Southwater Street) and, from very early days, I used to go and pump the bellows for him. When we bought our house in Froyle, my mother got him to make for us a beautiful little wrought iron gate and also a large horse-shoe knocker for the front door.*

*Mr. Piper was the wheelwright and had his yard in the middle of the village, near the butcher. His workshop was subsequently moved complete to the Downland Museum at Singleton, near Chichester, where one can see it today.*

*Mr. Chantler was the grocer and had a very beautiful daughter known as Tuppenny who was much admired by the lads of the village. She later married Mr. Batchelor, the local builder, who continued to do work for my mother, even after she had moved out of Southwater. Mr. and Mrs Polly ran the bakery and Mr. Standen was the butcher. Both he and Mr. Chantler were very keen*

*cricketers and the former painted his cricket boots with glossy white paint. There were two pubs, one in the middle of the village, The Cock, and one at the Horsham end, The Hen and Chicken.*

*The Charmans were a very old local family who were tenants of a large farm with a beautiful old farmhouse [Great House Farm]. Their son, Aubrey, blew his hand off with a shot-gun. When this happened he walked home and into the kitchen. He held out his bleeding arm to show his mother what he had done; she initially thought that he was just holding out a very bloody rabbit that he had shot!*

*The cricket ground, as in most villages, was a square cut in the middle of the field and much of the outfield was long grass, sometimes it was difficult to find the ball if someone hit a boundary. The pitch was on a slope and when it dried out in the summer it could be quite dangerous.*

*The first school I went to, at the age of about six, was a little private school run by Mrs Pemberton, just outside the village near the Hen and Chicken and about two miles from Rascals. There were, I suppose, some dozen children, all either too young or a bit too "superior" to go to the village school. There were, for example, Doreen Polly, the baker's daughter, Pat and Molly Howard (the latter, as I have already told, I had to kiss in public), and the daughter of the parson at Shipley, a village a few miles away, whom I could not abide and I hated having to go to tea with them. The Shipley vicarage was next door to the windmill in which Hilaire Belloc lived. My mother once pointed him out to me in The Black Horse in Horsham; he appeared to me a very sinister figure dressed in a black cloak and a large broad-brimmed black hat.*

*When the weather was fine I used to ride to school on my "fairy-cycle" accompanied by Nanny on her bicycle. This was for two miles along the main London to Worthing road, hardly a thing that one would want a small boy to do nowadays. Whatever else I learnt at Mrs Pemberton's I certainly got an interest in carpentry, as her husband was a good carpenter and was very helpful in encouraging the young.*

*During the summers in the twenties there were frequently Army manoeuvres around us and I well remember my mother taking me out to watch what was going on, as even at that age I was intent on becoming a soldier. One morning we came upon a gunner battery coming into action, and much to my excitement the Subaltern commanding the section. Mr. Sinclair was known to my mother, so I felt very proud talking to a real officer in uniform! I think he had probably been at the Shop (Woolwich Artillery Officers Training School) when my father was Adjutant as he was first commissioned in 1917. There is also a newspaper cutting with a picture of me sitting on a wall in Southwater, with some other village children watching soldiers marching by."*

Written by John Willcocks, with thanks to Ken Johnston.