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## Introduction

I have often thought how many of us would like to have known more about our ancestors, in particular our parents, and what life was like for them in their younger days, as they approached middle-age and in their latter years. If we stop and reflect all our occurrences in life I am sure that we would be very surprised to find how numerous they were. We all tend to remember the good things in life but not many of the bad.

I therefore thought that I would like to record happenings in my life which, I hope, will be interesting to my children and grand-children (and maybe their children) in years to come.

Many people keep their diaries of day to day occurrences but to print these, particularly those of some people, would run to many volumes and contain a lot of detail which, to some people, may not be very interesting reading, for example, what the temperature was on 31st August 1937 or how Aunty Mary's cold was progressing on 1st December 1947.

In deciding to write this brief history of my life I thought that I would like to confine it to the more interesting details, in my opinion, and not to irrelevant matters which others in years to come would find of little interest. Would they really want to know that on the day ( 5th November 1992) I commenced this document that the weather was fine and children in the neighbourhood looking forward to 'firework night' or that tonight Eda (my wife) and I will be going to 'Westpoint' at Clyst St Mary to see the 'Torvill and Dean' Ice Show; they will all know that the 5th is Bonfire Night (they may not know the origin) and will probably not have heard of the stars of the ice show. It is for these and other reasons that I wish to confine my writing to the salient points in my life.

Factually I have tried to be correct but as years pass one tends to become forgetful and I therefore apologize for any inaccuracies which may be found and there may be many of them.

## Chapter 1:- Births

LUSCOMBE--On 12th July 1926 to Reginald George and Mabel Dykes, a Son, Terrence Reginald at 28 Cedars Road, Exeter, (as my parents were living in a small flat in Fore St, Topsham).

This announced my arrival into the world. I was the first born.

BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTRATION ACT, 1874.  
**CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRY OF BIRTH.**  
(Fee not to exceed Three-pence).

*I, the undersigned, Do hereby certify that the Birth*  
of Terrence Reginald Luscombe born on the  
12<sup>th</sup> day of July One thousand nine hundred and Twenty six  
has been duly registered by me at Entry No. 494 of my Register Book No. 41

Witness my hand, this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of August 1926  
H. J. Baker Registrar of Births and Deaths  
District St Thomas Sub-District Paroad Cleft

Printed by Authority of the Registrar General by MacCommodale & Co., Ltd.—12/26.

**CAUTION.**—Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on this certificate, or (2) uses it as true, knowing it to be false, is liable to Prosecution under the FORGERY Act, 1913, or the Perjury Act, 1911.

On the 16th March 1931 another son was born—Ronald Henry—also at 3 The Strand, Topsham.

The marriage of my parents took place in St Leonards Church Exeter on the 19th of April 1924. The best man was my father's brother, Harry, and the bridesmaid Miss Eva Mitzi Lanning, who was a childhood friend of mother and they remained friends for the rest of their lives, Mitzi never married and was known to my brother and myself at 'Aunty' Mitzi. Upon my mother's death my wife, Eda, and myself kept a 'watchful eye' on her until her death. Mitzi's father, George, lived into his late 90s and it was only after having his leg amputated that he died. In his later years he had difficulty in shaving and I used to shave him with a safety razor to which he objected as he had always been used to an open razor.

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Family at Cedars Road, Rons Birth?  
L/R Henry, Dot, ? Dick, Mabel Reg ??

Mother was born at 28 Cedars Road Exeter on 12 February 1898 and died at my home 10 Southport Ave, Exeter on 28 March 1981.

Father was born in Topsham on 25 January 1898 and died on 29 November 1957, in his home at 'Serrallicks' 43 Exeter Road, Topsham.

My father's parents were Leonard and Eva Luscombe, Leonard was a male nurse at Exminster Mental Hospital and lived in Number 4 The Strand. Leonard retired early through ill health and I only just remember him, especially sitting in an arm chair laboriously scraping a marble mantelpiece which

had been painted white by a lady who had given it to him and had it fixed in exchange for a wooden mantelpiece, I have often wondered why, was it valuable, maybe an Adam?. My father had one brother, Harry, who once attempted to swim the English Channel and just failed but he held the Bristol Channel record for a number of years. Harry had three sons, Francis, Ian and Angus

My mother's parents were Henry and Emily Anning who lived in Radford Road and latterly in Cedars Road, Exeter. Henry was a printer with Townsends of Exeter but he also had ill health associated with his trade and again I can only just remember him. My mother had a brother, Henry (who had a daughter Beryl) and a sister Dorothy.

My parents first met when they both worked for Liptons (of tea fame) who were grocers and provision merchants. The shop was at the top of Fore St, Exeter, my mother was the cashier and took her dog 'Bruce' to work with her each day, my father worked on the provision counter. He later moved to the Home and Colonial for a while in Bournemouth. He eventually took over his mother's shop at Number 4 The Strand—more of that in a later chapter

The house in which lived was of unusual construction in that it was a three storey building built on two levels, as were others in that part of the Strand. The house was built against a cliff face. Our house was on two floors, the



Topsham Quay with Strand to the right

ground floor (first floor) and second floor and the entrance was from the Strand. The entrance to the third floor which was a separate house (more a Flat) was in Monmouth Hill, a road running level with the second floor ceiling of number 3 and at the back of it, in fact it was only the ground (first floor) and second floor of the house which was built against the rock/cliff, consequently the only windows were at the front of the house. When I refer to our house I only mean the ground (first floor) and second floor. In the

front of the house there was one room in which was a window and the front

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entrance, leading directly on to the pavement. Behind this was the kitchen/dining room with a small window for 'borrowed' light from the front room. Off the kitchen was a toilet partly hewn from the rock and lit by candle light, and the only water tap in the house. Also in the kitchen was a coal house which again was hewn out of the rock, almost like a cave. The only open fire was in the front room and cooking was by means of an open fire range.

A staircase lead from the kitchen to two bedrooms. The bedroom at the top of the stairs (no door) had no window, such was the state of the house that on one occasion a leg of a bed in the 'flat' above came through the ceiling. This room lead to the front bedroom with one window. It was in this room that both my brother and myself were born (sic). The view from the upstairs window was wonderful as it overlooked the river Exe, the prosperous Topsham Quay with boats loading and unloading and in the distance the Exeter Ship Canal and the Haldon Hills.

All lighting was by gas, some of the lights were 'fan' gas lights (for those who cannot remember these were wall mounted and had an open fan shaped gas jet above which, and to the back of, was a brass plate about eight inches in diameter to reflect the light and also to prevent the flame from burning the ceiling and wall). There was one of these in the kitchen and front bedroom. In the front room there was the more modern type of incandescent mantle, both types were rather dirty as the gas was then town /coal gas (we now burn natural gas), but they gave warmth. For a moment moving ahead and more of which I will write later, my father, when we moved to number 4 The Strand and had electricity installed but retained the mantle gas light in the shop window as it prevented the glass from 'steaming up.

A further problem with the house, and also with Number 4 and other nearby houses was that when Spring Tides and a South Westerly Wind coincided the river rose and we were frequently flooded, consequently the house being built against a porous red sandstone cliff and the flooding was forever damp, wall paper would be hung only to peel off and would have to held up with nails or drawing pins—these eventually rusted and down would come the paper again. I remember all this from my early youth.

Eda Luscombe was born on 4th June 1932 at 35 Mansfield Road, Exeter, her parents were John Herbert Hamilton (a bus driver) and Violet May Hamilton (Nee Williams).

## CHAPTER 2:- Topsham

Many books have been written about Topsham in particular its history and these can be purchased from local bookshops in Topsham and Exeter and I would not therefore attempt to repeat or enlarge upon them only to say that the town is situated about four miles from Exeter and lies between the River Exe and River Clyst, the River Clyst meets the Exe just below Topsham at what we all knew as 'the bottom of the town' at the end of the Goat Walk near Riversmeet House.

I will try to describe Topsham as I knew it as a young boy, others of my age may with their own knowledge be able to add to Many of the activities for the young were centred around the Churches of which there were four, St Margaret's Parish Church, St Nicholas Methodist Church, the Congregational Church and the Roman Catholic Church of the Holy Cross. Some of these had their own Sunday School activities. The highlight of the Sunday School I attended was the annual Sunday School Outing, usually to Dawlish or Teignmouth when we played games and finished up with a good 'bun feast' at a local church hall, travel was either by train, in which case it was by ferry across the river and train from Exminster Station or by Char-a-banc (coach today) needless to say many felt ill after the cream buns etc.

The Methodist Church had a Church Hall in which from time to time we had a 'magic lantern' slide show, I cannot remember how many times I saw the same slides but it was always entertaining. In the early years of the Second World War Mr Osborne who had a radio/electrical shop in the Fore Street held Movie (cinema) shows in the Congregational Church Hall on Saturday afternoons and I used to help him. A Miss Mingo used to organise the event.

After the show we loaded the projector and screen into Mr Osborne's 'motor cycle with a cab on' and went to Woodbury Village Hall and repeated the show. We always finished the performance with a record of Henry Hall's recording of 'Here's to the Next Time'. I carried on with this until just before I was called-up for war service.

The town also had its Girl Guides and Sea Scouts, there was no Youth Club until early in the war years when Miss Holman offered her sail loft as a meeting place, in the beginning it was for the girls only but shortly after boys were able to join.

The Club was no doubt the centre of activity where there was an old 'wind-up' gramophone, but with the knowledge of some members we soon had an 'electric' model, and many, with tuition, learnt Ballroom Dancing (Victor Sylvester was popular at that time). There was a short song about the Club but I can only remember the first verse and it was sung to the theme song of a radio show of that time --Much Binding in the Marsh--and went something like this:-

"At Much Topsham on the Mud,  
there we had our own Youth Club,  
Miss Holman was leader oh so good and bright,  
But when 10 o'clock did come  
she stood up and said 'good night',

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and then she rang her little bell with all her

ruddy!! might,

At much Topsham on the Mud.

In 1991 a fifty year Reunion of members was held at the old club premises (now the Topsham Museum) at which many, but now much older friends, were met.

Shortly after the beginning of the war an Army Cadet Force Company was formed which many of the boys joined and usually remained members until they had to join the Forces.

There were four Tennis Courts, Bowling Green and a Putting Green beside the Matthews Hall which also housed the local cinema which was usually open on Saturdays and at some other times.

It had various names, one being 'The Rex' and another 'The Tivoli', the cheapest front seats were bench type but the others were 'tip-up' and upholstered. On frequent occasions the projector failed and it was then a question of 'money back' or await repair.

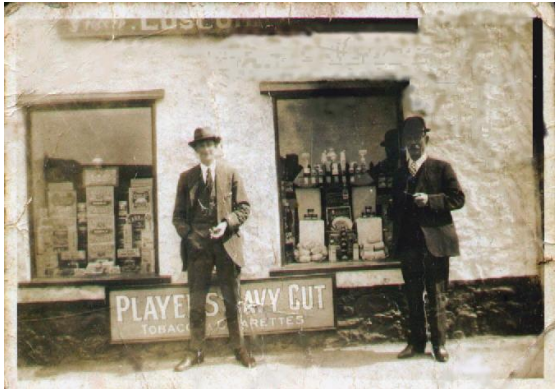
I remember that I saw my first talking film in this cinema, Gracie Fields in 'Sing As We Go'. On one occasion it was open for a full week (or maybe two) when the film 'The Bride of Frankenstein' was shown, the Exeter City Council would not allow it to be shown in Exeter, but as Topsham was not a part of Exeter the Local Authority of which Topsham was a part permitted it. Gordon Radford and his wife were the caretakers of the Matthews Hall and kept the 'greens' in an immaculate condition. Gordon only died recently

The meeting place for the youth of an evening appeared to be by the Town (Matthews) Hall and often the local police constable would stop for a chat and depending upon the time would suggest that we made our way home because if he saw us upon his return he would have to have words with our parents, this had the desired effect. The police as I then knew them were true Community Policemen, I remember P.C.s Newberry, Coles and Mearns.

The Recreation Ground was another meeting place but it had very few amenities except for swings. The 'Rec' was not a very healthy place as it had been a rubbish tip and being near the river was over-run by rats. I remember that on one occasion there was a 'rat catching day' when people assembled with wooden staves etc. and assisted by the Topsham Fire Brigade, who by directing their water jets into suspected rat holes, flushed out the rats, a number of which came to an untimely ending

The venue for the local football team changed from time to time from being on a field owned by the military at Sir Alex Walk, to the Bowling Green Marshes (always wet).

## Chapter 3:- No 4, The Strand



Reg and Leonard

As I have previously mentioned my father's parents lived in No 4 The Strand where they ran a small grocers shop. I understand that it was started about the time of the first World War when grandmother made home-made sweets from brown sugar and some butter, these she called 'almonds' and 'balls', almonds because they were elongated and 'balls' because they were round, sometimes they contained chopped nuts. These were sold to local customers including workers at the local cider factory (now Strand Court) eventually her stock was extended to include tobacco and cigarettes, biscuits (sold loose) and other items of provisions.

As I have mentioned my grandfather was ill and shortly after he died my father took over the shop. A small opening was made between No 3 and No 4 to give father access to the shop without disturbing his mother. Eventually grandmother moved to No 3 and we moved to No4 which was a larger house.

Once again this house was very similar to No 3 in that it was built against the cliff face but it was double fronted. One of the front rooms was the shop. The front door to the shop was also the door to the house. Two internal doors lead from the shop, one to the front living room and the other to the 'kitchen'.

The front room had two windows with wide window seats as the walls were about 2 feet thick (no damp course). On one wall was the marble fire place which grandfather had so laboriously cleaned.

In the middle of the room was a large round table at which eight could be seated with ease, in addition to two easy chairs there were four oak dining chairs and two carvers (dining chairs with arms), when at a later date my mother, because of illness, came to live with Eda and myself and her furniture sold these chairs commanded a price almost to the value of the other effects.

The floor covering, as in the rest of the house, was linoleum. Directly opposite the front windows and covering the whole length of the wall from a height of about three foot was a glass partition which gave light to the

dining room behind, in this wall was also a very narrow door leading to the dining room and 'kitchen', it was so narrow that my father who was a well-built man could only squeeze himself through side-ways.

In the dining room there was a very large oblong table to again seat at least eight, a glass fronted dresser, an open fire cooking range (eventually we had a gas cooker), again as in No3 the coal storage was through a small door into a cave shaped small room hewn from the rock, this room was always dripping water.

The kitchen was long and narrow and three-quarters of its length was hewn into the cliff (real cave-man stuff!!). At the end of the 'kitchen' was a water pump which supplied water from an underground well, frequently the pump had to be primed with a bucket of water kept for that purpose. This pump supplied all our water needs including the bucket flushing of the toilet which was also in the kitchen. It was only after the Local Authority condemned the well, goodness



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knows why as many persons had drunk the water over the years without any ill effects, that mains water was installed.

I spoke of the flooding in a previous chapter and whenever this happened my father had to plug the toilet with a specially shaped block of wood and also the drain beneath the pump. Bath time in the kitchen was either in a galvanised bath or in a larger enamel full length bath, in either case water had to be heated on the range.

From the kitchen a flight of stairs led to the three bedrooms, the main front bedroom was very large and had two very big windows, the floor, as in the other bedrooms was very uneven and had decided slopes to them so all furniture had to be blocked with wood to make them level as goodness knows what would have happened to the water in the wash hand stand basins.

The second front bedroom was of fair size and was occupied by my brother and myself but when we had guests we were relegated to the third back bedroom and the only light it had was borrowed from my parents' bedroom through a small window about 18"x18".

The rooms and staircase were covered with linoleum and we had the same difficulty with wallpaper as in No 3.

Initially lighting throughout was by gas, both fan and mantle and it was not until later that we had electricity but that was not without its inconvenience because whenever we were flooded, sometimes to a height of two feet, water would get into the electric points and the system would fuse, hence we retained some gas lighting.

Another effect of the flooding and dampness was that the floor boards were always rotting and had to be replaced frequently. The floor joists were of oak resting on earth and whilst the boards rotted the joist never did and to drive a nail into them was very difficult, I think eight out ten nails bent in the process.

During the evening of my father's death there was flooding but there was no time to put the flood boards in place or to move the stock from the ground consequently when I arrived I found foaming soap powder and packets of chocolate biscuits floating. The Fire Brigade arrived and pumped the water out and helped me clean up.

In modern times such conditions would seem to be unacceptable but no doubt there are many in this country and even more in the Third World who are currently experiencing even worse conditions.



Reg and Francis

The house was fairly warm as we had no problems of through draughts (no back entrance!), plenty of coal fires, and warmth from the gas lighting. Above all we were a very happy family with kind and understanding parents.

The Shop had a large display window and 'L' shaped counter and shelving behind on two sides, this was built by Daniel Trout of the Quay. On a third side was a counter for cheese,

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bacon, ham etc. there was no refrigeration so there had to be a quick turnover of these items especially in the summer.

The shop stocked almost everything and very little was pre-packed, tea, soap powder, sugar, soda, dried fruit, salt, had to be weighed and bagged, vinegar delivered in a cask had to be measured into containers brought by the customers. Most of the customers were those people who lived locally and lived on 'credit' that is they had goods from the shop during the week and paid for them on Saturdays when the menfolk received their wages, the shop usually kept open until 10 o'clock on these evenings to make sure that the menfolk, some after leaving the 'local' came and paid their family bills.

Most of Friday evenings were spent by my mother in preparing these bills. There were one or two colourful characters who came into the shop; one was a lady who lived in a large house on the Strand who always called my father 'Reggie' and pre-war employed servants and a cook; with the advent of the war the servants and cook left to undertake war work or to join the forces consequently the lady had no idea of house work and least of all cooking; one day my father supplied her with a chicken thinking she knew how to cook it, unfortunately she didn't, the following day she came into the shop and complained how terrible the chicken was; after a lengthy discussion it was found the lady had hardly plucked the chicken of its feathers and certainly not 'drawn' it (removed the inside) before cooking.

Another customer before the war would only buy rotten bananas and 'over ripe' blue cheese. One man came in every day for a box of matches, he never bought anything else.

The war years naturally had its problems with rationing as many necessary and popular items of food were rationed such as tea, sugar, butter, cheese, cooking fats, meat, sweets and chocolate, soap, and sometimes potatoes. There was also a points system for tinned food. Such items as bananas and other imported luxuries were rarely seen.

The job for the family on a Sunday was to count all the ration coupons and send them to the local office of the Ministry of Food to obtain vouchers in exchange with which to purchase further supplies from the wholesaler.

The little shop was often quite busy and father employed a girl to assist, I can remember a few of them. There was E.N. who never seemed to want to leave work until her boyfriend arrived to collect her, sometimes as late as 8 o'clock in the evening.

The girls always had a mid-day meal with us and I can remember R.H. sitting down to the meal with a plate unfortunately balance near to the edge of the table



Reg and Mabel

with the result that with the first cut of the food the plate over balanced and the contents of the plate finished up in her apron, R did not despair she lifted up her apron and tossed the meal back on the plate as if nothing had happened and carried on eating.

R.V. was asked by a customer for 1lb of grapes on display outside the shop, father became very concerned at the length of time R was in getting the grapes so he went to see if anything was wrong only to find that R was picking the grapes from the

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bunch one by one.

E.R. was a very clean and polite girl. At one time father had a small greengrocers shop in Fore St on the corner of White Street in which Mrs L was employed. The shop did not last long as dad found the Mrs L was very obliging to her customers by selling them newly delivered produce and not the older stock, consequently there was much waste which he could not afford. Mrs L was an elderly lady who owned an old 'sit up and beg' ladies bicycle; one day I asked her if I could borrow it and she agreed, the result was that I fell off the bicycle, outside the Salutation Hotel, because the saddle was too high and I could not get off, the result was that I broke my arm and had three days in hospital.

My father apart from keeping the shop in which my mother helped, mainly with the book work, had other interests. He worked an allotment in Elm Grove Road (Back Road as it was known to us), during the Second World War he looked after a Small Holding at the back of the Strand for a person on war service. There he also kept pigs in an enclosure as did others on their own land, I believe that you were allowed a ration allocation to feed the pigs (apart from scraps etc.) on the understanding that if you kept over a certain number you had to sell one in every so many to The Ministry of Food. It was surprising how one hid the odd one or two live pigs when the 'grapevine' let it be known that the 'pig man' was in the area.

He also kept chicken in a large run, one day one of the hens escaped and was seen in an apple tree in the small orchard which was part of the Small Holding, he tried to encourage it back to the run with grain but with no success, as a last resort he thought that he would frighten it back with a shot gun he kept in the shed, he took aim with the intention of just missing the hen, the outcome was that we had chicken for dinner the following day.

On another occasion one of the pet rabbits we kept also escaped when my brother and myself were not present, this time dad threw a lump of soil at it again with the intention of frightening it but he hit the rabbit, he thought that he had killed it but put it back in the run hoping that we would have thought that it had died of 'natural causes' but to his surprise the following day found the rabbit running around as if nothing had happened -- he had only concussed it.

Dad also took an interest in local Council work and served for a number of years on the Parish Council and St Thomas Rural District Council, and was a member of the Conservative Club.

During the war he became a member of the Local Defence Volunteers later known as the Home Guard in which he became a sergeant. After the war he helped with the Army Cadet Force and served on the Committee of the Football Club at a time when funds were being raised to purchase the present field (Coronation Field).

During the salmon season (February to August) he was one of the crew of four in the Voysey's salmon boat. Salmon fishing in those days was hard work as the boat had to be rowed, depending on tide, to the area to be fished, the most popular (and lucrative) being at Turf at the end of the Exeter Ship Canal. He was also for a number of years Secretary to the Topsham Carnival Committee and for his services he was presented with a chiming clock suitably inscribed, which my brother has, and is still working.

During a visit to Exmouth with my mother on 4th August 1947 he saw two girls in difficulty in the water, fully clothed he went into the water and rescued them, for this he received the Royal Humane Society Commendation which read:-

*At the Meeting of the Committee of the Royal Humane Society held at Watergate House, York Buildings, Adelphi W.C.2. on the 25th day of November 1947 It was*

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*Resolved Unanimously: -*

*That the Honorary Testimonial of this Society, inscribed on Parchment be hereby be given to REGINALD GEORGE LUSCOMBE for having on 4th August 1947 gone to the rescue of two girls who were in imminent danger of drowning in the mouth of the River Exe at The Foreshore, Exmouth Devon, and whose lives he gallantly saved.*

My Mother was a member of the Topsham Mothers Union and a founder member of the Topsham Women's Institute. During the early war years she was actively involved with billeting of evacuees.

Briefly I have tried to give a picture of my parents and their parents, their main activities, the houses in which I lived and activities in the town, and there were many more which I have either forgotten or have not mentioned.

In the following chapters I will attempt to outline what I believe the more interesting events in, what is to date sixty six years of my life, who knows by the time I finish it could be ??? years.

## Chapter 4: - Me 1926-1992

I will now attempt a brief resume of my life history, or what I can remember of it because as we all know no matter how short our life, to date, we cannot possibly remember everything. No doubt I will fail to record many and probably many important events, but with the aid of my computer I expect I will be able to insert some of these as I go along.

As you already know I was born on 12th July 1926 and although I cannot remember it I was Christened on 11th August 1926 at St Leonards Church, Exeter, which was my mother's Parish church before she was married.

My Godparents were Edward Wannell (father's cousin) and Mitzi Lanning (mother's friend), the Vicar was Reverend T.F.C. Bewes.

I was eventually Confirmed in Topsham Parish Church on 13th March 1944 by The Lord Bishop of Exeter, the Vicar was the Reverend T.D.Thomas.

In order to make easier and less confusing reading I thought I would divide my life into set periods, although some events or happenings will 'roll-over' from one period to another but this cannot be avoided.



Terry

I have decided that my first' span of life' will be from:-1926-1939.

As is normal with children I was taken daily for walks in my perambulator which was of the coach built type with very large wheels, at times during the day I slept in this in the yard opposite the house. Some weekends my parents would push me in my 'pram' to my grandparents in Exeter, a journey to be repeated some years later when Stuart was pushed in his coach built pram from Southport Ave, Exeter, to Topsham to spend a weekend with my mother.

The 5th November is a memorable day apparently because whilst at my father's brothers house at 18, Parkfield Road, Topsham, where my older cousins were having a firework display, a firework accidentally came through the open window and exploded very near me and thereafter I did not like exploding fireworks and kept well away from them. It was not until many years later, when I was in the army I had no option but to become more used to explosions etc.

I also gather that I was not a very good traveller, and suffered from travel sickness in bus or train, again I overcame this in the Forces.

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I suppose the first thing that I really remember was when I was 4½ years old would be the birth of my brother Ronald. I recollect that one night there was a lot of activity with 'comings and goings' between my bedroom and that of my parents, and a strange lady being present, I later found out that she was the midwife. I vaguely remember seeing my 'new' brother in the morning.

The popular afternoon walk with my mother and brother was down and around the Bowling Green (now Topsham Marshes) where we used to sit on a seat near the railway end of the walk, my brother would play on the grass and I would wander off picking flowers. A popular pastime was picking the heads off the pink clover and pretending that they were strawberries, there was also a plant which grew in the wall behind the seat which had thick round leaves and these were the pennies which my mother had to use to purchase the strawberries. In 1991 when I last walked the Bowling Green the seat was still in position but of course with new wood.

Occasionally we would stop and sit on the seats on the Goat Walk (the seats are still there) and I would play on the only bit of 'beach' in Topsham. At the end of the Goat Walk there were some large stones and when the tide was out we would turn these over looking for crabs, but it was a muddy job and often I got into trouble because of this.

School I think came next, I started at Topsham Junior Council School in Majorfield Road (it is now the Infants School). The school catered for children of 5 - 10 years, it was even in those days an old school with outside open toilets for the boys, heating was by means of enclosed coal burning 'Tortoise' stoves, these were enclosed stoves with an iron fire guard around which our daily third of a pint of milk was warmed and drunk at playtime in the morning.



Terry and Ron

In the first class we were in we had ½ hours rest in the afternoon which was on hard rough coir mats on the floor. After our rest we had Gym and usually finished up with the maypole dance (much I remember to the displeasure of the boys). In later years, when I was 65 I had to make a maypole for our grand-daughter, Lauren, and erect it in the garden and then, with her, dance around it.

Football: even at that young age was the popular game for the boys and hopscotch for the girls. Three of the teachers I remember were Miss Goldsworthy, Miss Drew and Miss King.

At about the age of ten we moved to the Topsham Senior Council School where most children remained until they left school at the age of 15. Here the boys started wood work and the girls domestic science. The teacher in our first year at the school was a Miss Magowan and frequently

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used the thin edge of the ruler on the boys' hands for any misconduct (never the girls).

The headmaster was Mr James.

In these days there were no school meals and everyone went home to the mid-day meal. The journey from home to school and in reverse was a time for the boys to play football or marbles in the street (very little traffic), the girls continued with their hopscotch. The playground at the school was divided into 3 areas, a general area for all, a girl's area and a boys.

It was at this school football started in earnest as once a week we were taken to the 'Rec' for an hour, there were no goalposts (only coats), no jerseys (no-one ever new which side they were on), no football boots, and no rules!. It was from this school pupils took entrance examinations for entry to grammar schools, either at Exmouth for boys and girls or Hele's School, Exeter, for boys.

It was for this reason that I started at Hele's School in September 1937.

I think that I went to Hele's School because my mother cousins had been at the school and also my eldest cousin was at the School. The Headmaster was Mr Nicholls a very strict disciplinarian but very fair (he sadly lost his son, an R.A.F. pilot during the war).

The School took pupils from 10-16/17 as it had a sixth form. All pupils were divided into four 'houses', Tintagel, Rougemount, Pendennis and Powderham, all names of castles, every four weeks each pupil had a report giving details of 'credits' or 'debits' he had received, the credits were for good work and debits for bad work or misconduct.

There were three types of report, a blue for excellent work, white for average work and pink for bad work or misconduct. It depended on the total of each of these received by boys in each house as to whether you received a 'merit' holiday (half a day, usually on a Wednesday) every three weeks however there was a catch in this because if the School First or Second teams had a match at home (Old Vicarage Road Fields) you had to attend to give your vocal support. We even attended school on Saturday mornings.

My first class was in the old part of the school beside the Belfry, so every time the bell was rung, at the beginning and end of school and at break time the whole classroom shook. The floor boards had large gaps in them, unfortunately when a boy one day brought a home-made 'stink bomb' to school and lit it, it fell between the boards with the result that the Fire Brigade arrived and proceeded to tear up the boards.

Investigations could never discover who did it so consequently the whole class lost a few merit holidays, if the headmaster had ever found out who was responsible the boy would have been expelled. One boy in the class was expelled for discharging an air gun in the room with near disastrous effects as a pupil almost lost an eye.

The conduct rules of the school, both in and out of school were very strict; a cap had to worn at all times and 'touched' to ladies, and adult person, ties had to worn, short trousers for boys under 11 years, no ice creams ate in the street and no bad behaviour in public at any time, disregard of these rules meant that unless you had a good excuse you were on parade outside the headmasters study for six of the best (with a cane).

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A number of us travelled to School by train from Topsham each day, a school season ticket was about 5s(25pence) per term.

There were also girls who attended Bishop Blackall School, they always travelled in separate compartments to the boys because often they had Domestic Science class in which cakes and other goodies were baked and travel with boys often resulted in their cake tins arriving home empty with nothing to show 'mummy' of their 'skills'. Often the girls got their own back by throwing the boys caps out of a moving train window.

I believe I was an average boy, liking some subjects more than others; I liked most sports except for cricket and represented my 'house' from almost day one in athletics, in which I represented Devon School Boys at a later date, I also received house and school colours in rugby. I was never any good at cricket.

There were school dinners which were very expensive so I rarely had them. You had to be on your best behaviour as the Headmaster and staff ate the same meal in the same dining room (in fact the Head carved the meat) and was always watchful of our table manners. A boy was once seen to be eating his peas with an inverted fork by the Head and the meal was taken away from him and replaced with a plate of only peas which he was made to eat properly.



Angus and Terry

As we had a 1½ hour lunch break I usually went to my Grand Mothers in Cedars Road where on Mondays we always had thick Green Pea Soup with ham in it, it was delicious, many years later I tried to make it but without success, (it was thick like cake and could be cut with a knife)

Enough of school for the present, what else did I do in these early years before the start of the war? I have already told you how I fell off the bicycle and broke my arm, this did not deter my parents from buying me a small bicycle which was painted blue, my cousin, Angus, also had a bike, his was black, and the bikes were known as Bluebird and Blackbird. We travelled many miles on these bikes, our parents were not too worried as there was very little traffic at that time.

We used to go to a farm near Clyst St Mary ( we were friendly with the owners sons) and ride horses, help with the hay making, milking etc. at other times we would go to a little stream at Clyst St George to catch minnows or sail our boats, even pick primroses and bluebells in a copse we knew.

How did we amuse and entertain ourselves?

There was no Television, Leisure Centres, Swimming Pools and many of the activities we have in 1993. We played football in the street, when the 'Rec' was



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flooded, cycle rides in groups, going for long walks, climbing trees (my cousin fell off the same tree twice breaking an arm on both occasions), we played 'Cowboys and Indians' in what we called the 'Forest' which was an area of undergrowth and trees parallel to Sir Alex Walk (Sir Alexander Hamilton lived in a large house at the end of the walk) My parents' house 'Serrallicks' was a local spelling of Sir Alex.

You could walk along Sir Alex Walk, by the river, as far as Exeter without having to cross many roads, The walk was very muddy at times and because of this was not very popular, except for the children who appeared to like the mud (I was never very popular with my parents when I ventured on this walk—neither was I when I went 'mud larking' when the tide was out) Topsham was always known as 'Topsham On The Mud" (remember the Youth Club Song in Chapter 2 ).

My brother and myself in the winter evenings amused ourselves playing with our toys, my favourite toy was my Hornby Train Set, my play was often interrupted by my younger brother insisting that we should have a 'Smash'. I suppose as brothers we got on fairly well but I do remember one 'disagreement' we had and that was about the ownership of a cat. The story goes like this—my father wanted a cat for the shop and across the road from the shop were old stores, a cat had kittens in one of these and by devious means my father was able to catch one of the kittens and brought it into the house, needless to say it was very wild but after a few days it calmed down and we decided to call it Peter, it lived for many years (I am sure it had more than 'nine lives'). My brother thought the cat should be his but I thought otherwise.

At that time groceries were sometimes delivered in large cardboard boxes and these we used to play with and pretend they were our boats, at the time there was only one box which we both wanted, so it was decided that one of us should have the box and the other become the owner of the cat, I knew my brother wanted the box (I also knew that it would not last long) so I 'through kindness'!!!!???, let him have it and I had my cat (I was devious in those days - go on I never changed !).

I used to spend many hours with Charlie West who had a small workshop opposite the shop. He made wooden ladders, all hand crafted. I watched him many times saw the full length of a 9" pine trunk down the middle, the trunk could be 30ft or more in length and the two halves after he finished would be identical.

He would then strip the bark from the trunk, plane the rough saw edges, drill holes for the rungs, make and insert the rungs in the holes and clamp together, the wedges in the rungs would hold the ladder tightly together, sometimes he would add steel rods underneath some of the rungs for extra strength.

These rods were made by George Harris who was a Blacksmith and again had a small workshop just above the shop, I also spent many hours watching him, but quite rightly he would not let us into the workshop when the hot forge was in use. He made many things including horse shoes, railings, and many other items for use within the building and boat trades.

We were very lucky because my father had a 'wireless' (today's radio) this consisted of a large wooden box measuring about 30ins wide, 18ins deep and 12ins high, the top was hinged, inside were valves and wires and a very large H.T. battery and a smaller 'grid bias' battery. On the front were two dials, outside the box was a 'wet' battery known as an accumulator which had to be recharged weekly, it was my job to take this every Saturday to Osbourns Electrical shop to collect a recharged replacement. The speaker of the wireless was very large horn which stood on the sideboard away from the 'box', the aerial for the set stretched from the house for about 20 yards into the yard opposite.

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Incidentally it was in this yard that I had my first experience of gardening because it was between old disused cider and vinegar barrels I found a small area of loose soil, about a yard square (large to me), in which I planted some turnip seeds given to me by father, they germinated, but alas no turnips only a lot of top growth struggling for light between the barrels—even so I think that the 'soil' was only old coal dust from Nortons the Coal Merchant nearby

On Sundays during the summer months the family usually went to Exmouth Warren which was the end of Dawlish Warren nearest to Exmouth (this part of the Warren has been eroded over the years and no longer exists as in 1939).

We went to the beach from Topsham in Dick Pym's Boat called the 'Joyce' (his younger daughter's name), it was a boat with a cabin which would seat about 10 and seating for about another 10 under a canvas cover.

The time we left or returned depended on the tides. Dick Pym was a cousin of my fathers and held two Cup Final Winners Medals when playing for Bolton. He was the goal keeper.

I expect that in our pre-teenage years we all remember some special 'treats' provided by our parents such as particular events or holidays. Unfortunately we were not able to have the traditional family holiday because of the shop which was open six days a week and Sunday mornings, but even so I can remember four pre-war holidays.

Firstly mother, brother and myself had a two one week holidays with my mother's sister, Dorothy, in Bath, both were very enjoyable particularly as there was an ice cream factory at the rear of one of the houses she lived in and the owner would give the local children free, but small, cornets.

I used to enjoy playing in the local park which had a stream running its full length in the middle (in the late 1980's Eda and myself visited Bath and saw my aunt's old houses and I also found the park—the stream was still running).

In Bath the trams were still operating and rides on these were novel having never ridden on them before or since.

Another holiday the three of had was with my mother's brother, Uncle Henry, and



Beryl and Terry

his wife, Aunty Olive, and their daughter (my Cousin) Beryl. It was at Bude (in Cornwall) and I can well remember the lovely beach and rocks and rock pools in which we found crabs and small fish. My brother's means of conveyance was in his push-chair and to return to our holiday accommodation meant descending a small incline, my uncle who was usually pushing the chair would let it roll gently down the hill much to my brothers delight, my uncle called the push-chair a train and brother Ron was known as 'Bill the Shunter' (no doubt these days it would have been something associated with the 'Thomas the Tank' series.)

In August 1939 we had another two weeks holiday with Uncle Henry and family, this time it was at Looe, in Cornwall, again there were beaches and rocks and nice cliff walks. On this occasion my father closed the shop at mid-day on the Saturday at the end of our first week and travelled to Looe to be with us all for the weekend. One rainy day Beryl and myself were allowed to go to the

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pictures at the local cinema (we also had a bag of sweets) and I can remember the film was 'The Lily of Lagoon', the main song from which was with us for the rest of the week.

Beryl, my cousin, also kept us entertained in the evening by singing to us various songs she knew, one in particular as I remember was 'A Tisket a Tasket I've Lost My Yellow Basket'.

A visit to a cinema in Exeter was a rare treat and usually meant a train journey from Topsham and return. I remember one wet Easter Monday we were taken to the Kings Cinema in Okehampton Street (about a mile from where we now live) to see a film 'Alf's Button Afloat' in which Alistair Simm appeared, this film was shown one afternoon on Television in 1991 (some 53 years after I first saw it !!). The Kings cinema no longer exists as it closed at the beginning of the war and has since been a warehouse, disco, night club and currently it is used for Lazer games.

I have said very little about the river near which we lived within a few yards, the reason being that we were not encouraged to play or swim in it as it was very polluted, but even so I occasionally went rowing on it as I had friend who lived in Shell House on the Strand whose parents had a small boat which was moored at the bottom of his garden, across the road, opposite his house. I only ever saw the river frozen once.

My father's brother, Uncle Harry, who I have said before was a very strong swimmer, taught boys from Church Stile School, Exminster (a reform school), to swim, this he did in the river Clyst at Topsham, just above the weir. He taught them by means of placing a belt around the boy and this in turn was attached to a pole by a length of rope, he could therefore instruct the boy from the river bank at the same time ensuring the safety of the pupil.

Bonfire night on the 5th November was quite an event. Weeks before the night the local children would collect all types of rubbish including old furniture, tyres, oil, wood etc. and depending upon the tide would erect the bonfire on the foreshore at Hannaford's Quay, it was usually a very big fire and when lit it would carry on burning until the tide came in and put it out. I have seen some of the bonfire floating down the river still alight. As I have said before I did not like fireworks or bonfire night so I saw little of the evening.

This takes me to about the age of 13 years and there are no doubt happenings which have been missed, but what I can remember I enjoyed considering the limited resources of my parents as we were not a wealthy family but were very happy.

As this chapter closes it is 1939 and as you will no doubt know it was in that year on 3rd September that that war with Germany was declared and the Second World War commenced and not to end until August 1945 when Japan surrendered.

The next chapter starts with the outbreak of the war and will relate events up to 1947.

## Chapter 5:- 1939-1947

I suppose the next nine years I will write about were probably the most exciting, and dramatic years of my life as in these years I changed from being a boy through to manhood, as seven of these years were the years of the Second World War, starting on 3rd September 1939 with the declaration of war against Germany and ceasing on 15th August 1945 when hostilities against Japan, an ally of Germany, ended.



? and Terry Jan 1939

I will not attempt to relate the military activities of these years as many books have been written by the historians and I expect 'taught' at schools. If any reader is interested in the history of the war a number of very good books are available the local libraries.

The 3rd September 1939 has been mentioned as the day war was declared against Germany, I can remember day quite well, everyone knew that an important announcement was due to be made on that day at eleven-o'clock as this was the time that the ultimatum given to Germany to cease hostilities against Poland expired; Germany did not respond. At eleven-o'clock on that

day a number of local people living near us assembled in our front room to hear the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, announce on the radio that we were at war with Germany and that during the day a number of announcements related to the emergency would be made and that we were to keep listening to the radio.

Needless to say my parents and all the older people were very upset at the declaration of war, but I was at that time too young to understand the significance of the situation but I do remember my father saying rather hopefully that it would be all over by Xmas' (he always maintained that he did not say which Xmas—he made a similar statement when I was conscripted into the army in 1944 that the war would be 'over by Xmas' — as if my being called up would make any difference!!!).

In my view the first significant happening was the 'black out' whereby it was necessary to black out all windows at dusk until dawn, car lights and torches had to have shades to direct the light down, no street lights as it was considered that any lights showing would be of help to enemy aircraft. To show a light was therefore a punishable offence. Many methods were devised to black out windows as suitable materials were not always available in the shops, we in the shop were lucky as we had plenty of cardboard boxes which were initially used but eventually we had black curtains but some people made purpose built wooden shutters for the inside.

Opening of doors, particularly in the shop caused problems and curtains were erected across the door. I think most children and in particular teenagers liked the black out as no one could see what they were up to!!!.

The air raid warning sirens were tested that day to give people some idea of the sound. The sound for a possible air raid was 'wailing sound', that for 'raiders past' (the 'all clear') was a continuous sound, It was not until 1942 that in

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the Topsham/Exeter area were these to be sounded for any meaningful purpose, although a few incendiary bombs were dropped on the marshes between Topsham and Clyst St George destroying two cottages and part of the church in Clyst St George.

Other parts of the country had been having air raids for some while. Church bells were no longer rung as they were to become the means of warning people of an invasion by the enemy, thankfully this never happened.

It was considered that the Germans would more than likely resort to the bombing of our larger cities, areas of industry and ports and in which case the civilian population would be at risk more so than at any other time, particularly after the evacuation of Dunkirk (when our forces were over-ran in Europe and had to be evacuated, Eda's father was one of those safely evacuated). Because of this risk to civilians it was decided that all children should be evacuated from the vulnerable areas and so the mass movement of children commenced, some were even evacuated to other countries such as Canada (in due course this ceased as transportation by boat was thought to be very risky because of the German submarine (U boat) strength and because of this were evacuated to the non-risk rural and semi-rural areas. These children were to become known as 'evacuees'.

As the possibility of war became more imminent a committee, mainly of ladies was formed to make arrangements for the reception of the evacuees, people in the town were asked if they would accept the children, usually between 4 and 15 years of age, how many they would accept, whether boys or girls and a register was made of these names and addresses, in some isolated cases people in large houses with no excuse to accept children were made to do so by law.

The day came when the evacuees arrived. They came by bus and train and all assembled in the Matthews Hall in Topsham, they were boys and girls from the Fulham Central School in London, they all wore labels giving their names, carried gas masks and the few belongings such as clothes that they could carry. They were then taken to their 'foster homes' and introduced to the families.

Most of the children settled in very well, a few had to be moved as they were unsuitable or unhappy with the families and some wished to be with their brothers or sisters if they had been billeted in different homes. The first problem to arise was with the schools as there were not enough places in the two schools to accommodate the extra children, so for a few weeks children only attended school for a half day each day.

More evacuees arrived from Ashford School in Kent and these also had to be accommodated, eventually other Halls in Topsham were taken over and schools were back to normal.

At Hele's School we had boys from Beckenham High School in Kent for a while we only attended school on half days.

The local children and the evacuees appeared to get on very well together although at times there was some friendly rivalry, particularly between the boys with regard to sport especially football.

The number in the Youth Club increased as did the Girl Guides.

For a while events were not normal, all cinemas closed as did other places of entertainment for fear of bombing but these reopened after a while, we all had to carry our gas masks wherever we went.

Rationing of food commenced, this meant that every person was only permitted a certain quantity of particular items, butter 2oz per week, lard (2oz), tea

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(2oz), almost no coffee, meat (4oz), sugar (2oz), sweets (2oz), tinned meat and fish was also rationed as were many other items.

Other goods such as sauces and pickles, eggs, flour were either rationed or in short supply (no ice cream or bananas). Petrol was only permitted to the essential services, police, fire, ambulance and doctors and because of this bus services were reduced.

Transport services generally were erratic caused mainly by the movement of troops and essential war materials. Very often we were unable to board our usual school train at Topsham to take us to Exeter because of the movement of marines from the Marine Camp at Lympstone, we did not mind as we had a good excuse for being late for school. Schooling at Hele's was not badly disrupted and sometime became very interesting for example in biology lessons we were given bags of soil and had to count the wire-worms, this soil was from reclaimed moor land and was to be used for growing potatoes but wire-worms effected the growth of potatoes so if too many were found in the sample bags of soil the potatoes could not be grown.

On the subject of potatoes we had many days from school potato 'picking' (picking up potatoes) at farms near Exeter, these were good days as it meant no school or homework on that day and we were even paid for it (6d a day). The better days were fruit picking, although the pay was poor the fruit was good and many boys over ate resulting in not 'feeling well'.

On another occasion the 15 year olds spent a week on a farm near Broadhembury, during the whole of the week I was employed in hoeing turnips, we slept in a barn on straw mattresses, but this was compensated by good food, including cream which was not obtainable in the shops.

During all these outdoor activities we were supervised by women from the Women's Land Army, ladies who preferred work on the land rather than in the forces. All able bodied men and some women were directed either into the forces or to other essential war work.

To ensure that all school children received nutritious meals the school meals were introduced (and still continue today), these meals varied from meatless days with only vegetables and stodgy puddings, meat days and fish days, but there was always plenty of vegetables. Similarly in Exeter there were established 'British Restaurants' providing meals for adults, all this supplemented the rations.

At Hele's School all boys over 15 years old were expected to undertake 'fire watching' at night, this meant that about eight boys and two masters remained at the school over night to be ready to extinguish any fires which may be caused through enemy bombing, particularly the incendiary bombs, thankfully (?) no bombs landed on the school because I for one was never instructed on what to do if there had been a fire, anyhow it meant a half day off school the following day.

The heaviest 'blitz' on Exeter took place on the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1942, the following morning we tried to get to school but the trains were very disrupted and the train we school boys eventually caught only ran to Polsloe Road Station, Exeter. We had to walk from there to school, through the bomb rubble, only to find that as the school was being used as a reception centre for people who had been bombed out of their homes we were sent home to return two weeks later.

I did not dislike school but was not particularly enthusiastic about some subjects and like most boys we enjoyed ourselves in the full knowledge that when we became 18 years old we would, if the war continued be conscripted into H.M.

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Forces. This was the reason that many boys joined the school Air Defence Cadet Corps, now known as the Air Cadet Corps.

The school A.D.C.C. was known as the 13F Squadron ('F' indicating a founder Squadron). About a year after joining the Squadron an Army Cadet Force was formed in Topsham and as I was more interested in joining the Army upon conscription I resigned from the Air Cadets and joined the Army Cadets, but more about them later.

I think that at school I was more interested in sports than most other subjects. We had a sports half day each week at the school sports field in Old Vicarage Road, Exeter. On Wednesdays of each week we were supposed to have a half day (as we went to school on Saturday mornings) but this meant very little as if you were selected to play for a school team this happened on a Wednesday, if you did not play for team you were expected to attend to give vocal support.

I represented my school 'House' in rugby and athletics and the School in rugby and Devon Schools against Cornwall Schools in athletics, I obtained 'House' and School Colours in these events. I was never any good at cricket.

With the outbreak of war came the formation of many different bodies undertaking various duties, I have mentioned the Women's Land Army and the Evacuee Billeting Volunteers. Another group of people were the Air Raid Wardens whose duties were to enforce the Air Raid precautions, they undertook duties of ensuring the 'black-out' regulations were not contravened, they organised rescues from bombed premises and undertook fire watching duties.

There were also the Auxiliary Fire Service and Auxiliary and Special Police who supplemented the 'full time' members.

In 1940 and after the evacuation of Dunkirk, when only the English Channel divided the Country from the Germans, the Local Defence Volunteers (L.D.V.) was formed, the idea was that these people, mainly those too old to serve in the Regular Army, would help in the defence of the country in case of invasion.

Initially they had very few armaments and it was often said that they undertook their arms drill with simulated wooden rifles and armed themselves with various implements such as shot guns, pick handles and garden forks. Soon they received army uniforms and service rifles and then became known as the Home Guard.

Their main duties were to guard strategic installations such as bridges, coastal defences etc. The Topsham Company were about 100 strong. Many years later a comedy series was made for television called 'Dads Army' and was a light hearted view of the Home Guard.

The youth of the Country also wished to become involved in some manner and many became 'runners' for the various organisations delivering messages etc. Others wished to become involved in more quasi-military activities in preparation of the time when they became eighteen and were conscripted into the Forces. I have already mentioned two such organisations, the Air Cadets and the Army Cadets, there were also the Naval Cadets. As I have already said I eventually joined the Army Cadets when the Topsham Company was formed. In the Company there were about sixty Cadets between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, we met at the Topsham Drill Hall (as did the Home Guard) in Lower Shapter Street, the hall is now a private residence.

We met once and sometimes twice a week, did drill and rifle practice, visited the rifle range at the Marine Camp, Lympstone, although the Drill Hall had its own small bore rifle range and undertook various exercises with the Home Guard, we were usually the 'enemy' with the objective of penetrating their defence, we were quite successful on a number of occasions. I thoroughly enjoyed my 4 years

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with the Cadets, I even became the company quartermaster (something I also achieved in the Army) The Cadets prepared me for my conscription into the army.

Now, what about my time in the army, well it was very eventful and would take too long to repeat everything what happened so again I will only write about the events which were of interest to me and I hope will be to you.

It all started one day in August 1944. I received my 'calling up' papers about two weeks before (having previously been medically examined and passed A1).

I said goodbye to mother at home and my dad took me to Topsham Station to catch a train about eight—o—clock in the morning, I remember him saying to me using what had become known as his usual saying 'it will all over by Xmas', as if my being called up would frighten the Germans into capitulation! !!.

I caught the train to Exeter and then on to Colchester in Essex, on the train I met another boy from my previous class at Hele's and we travelled together. We were to report to Hyderabad Barracks, Colchester.

On arrival at Colchester Station we were met by a fleet of army lorries, to convey what seemed to hundreds of us to the Barracks.

It was then that I became Private 14833423 T.R. Luscombe. The day was a Thursday and the weather was fine, I remember the day well thinking that this was to be the beginning of another stage in my life.

Upon arrival at the Barracks we were all assembled on the parade ground and allocated to various platoons of about thirty, taken to our barrack room which was to be our home for the next sixteen weeks, six weeks in a Primary Training Corps and ten weeks in a Regimental Training Unit, in my case the Gloucestershire Regiment.

There we were introduced by our platoon lieutenant to our platoon sergeant and other N.C.O.'s who would be training us. In the room there were about 30 double bunk beds to sleep 60 recruits, each of us had a small locker and there was one large table in the room, the heating was by means of a central 'tortoise' coal burning fire in the middle of the room beside which stood a very large and highly polished coal bucket, we were to find out in due course that this had to be polished each day, after having tipped out the coal and then refilled.

One of the N.C.O.'s allocated all of us various cleaning duties which were changed from time to time. Next we paraded for documentation and received our pay books (pay was to be three shillings a day —15 'new pence'), we completed our 'will' forms. It was then off to the Quartermaster's Store for issue of our uniforms and numerous other pieces of equipment including our rifle.

I will not go into detail about the uniform etc. only to say that it was everything from a greatcoat and cape to a 'housewife' (a pouch containing sewing and mending items), this all had to fit into a not very large kit bag into which also had to fit our three blankets. We were also given a mattress cover. We then all returned to our barrack room and proceeded to mark with stencils and punches all of our uniform and equipment. We then all made our way to a large compound containing hay and straw from which we had to fill our mattresses and then back to our room.

It was after all this that I tasted the first delights of the Army 'culinary extravaganza' meal. I cannot remember what it was (probably a stew followed by rice pudding —standard fare) but as I was so hungry I ate it. We returned to the room and were told that we could have the remainder of the night off but



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could not leave camp and also we had to pack our civilian clothes in boxes provided to be sent home.

We all then went off to the NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institution) civilian organisation providing canteen facilities, it was here that I had my first mug of NAAFI tea, about which the least said the better. We then all retired to bed on our straw mattresses and I suppose because we were all so tired slept well, 'lights out' was at 22.30hrs. Reveille was 06.30hrs the following morning (Friday).

At 6.30hrs on that Friday in August 1944 my first full day in the army commenced and although I did not know at that time service in the army was to continue for almost another 3½ years. Day began with the Reveille bugle call at 06.00hrs and simultaneously a Lance Corporal (who slept in a small room adjoining our room) appeared and using various expletives informed us that we should get up. The first problem which we encountered were the toilet and washing facilities, the barracks were pre-war and the rooms meant to accommodate half the number of men consequently it was a mad rush to use the facilities, we soon found it better to shave in the evenings when we had more time, the platoon sergeant appeared to be only interested in our appearance on the first parade of the day.

After washing etc. we were instructed how to make up our beds each day (except Sundays), it was not a question of making up the beds rather the 'unmaking' of them. The blankets (the army did not issue sheets) had to be folded in a certain manner and placed at the foot of the bed together with most other pieces of equipment, including boots and cleaning equipment.

We then marched to the dining room for my first army breakfast. In the dining room were a number of long tables with forms (benches) each side, every table sat twenty men, ten each side, the two men at the end of the table were responsible for collecting from the kitchen servery trays of food for their tables. The end of the table was a favourite place as not only did they collect the food but also served it, consequently they always had the largest meals. I cannot remember what I had for breakfast on the first day but I expect it was the usual army fare of porridge, followed by potatoes (in various disguises) and bacon then bread, butter/margarine, jam or marmalade and tea poured from large cans, we only had coffee on Sunday mornings.



In the whole time in the army, whilst in the U.K, I only had one egg and this was on the first Xmas Day, even so the fried egg was as hard as a brick.

We returned to our barrack room and met again the Platoon Officer and were introduced to those N.C.O's who would be instructing us. The instruction commenced by being told how to maintain personal hygiene, clean and polish, to a high shine, our boots (a pointless exercise as every day they got wet and muddy), how to 'Blanco' our webbing belt and packs, Blanco was a green water based

type of paint applied with a brush.

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Particular emphasis was given to the cleanliness of the barrack room. It was the time for our mid-day dinner, again I cannot remember what we had but as I have already said it was probably pork, potatoes and a vegetable followed by a stodgy pudding, no tea was available so one had to resort to the NAFFI for the mid-day drink. We had one hour for the break which was not long considering the amount of queuing necessary.

After lunch/dinner we were marched off to have a talk by the camp Padre and welfare representatives. It was then off to see the medical officer for examination to confirm that we were still fit for the Forces, this was followed by vaccinations and inoculations for smallpox, tetanus and typhoid. We were then told that we could have the weekend off but could not leave the camp, the reason for this 'generosity' was that most people could suffer some effects from the inoculations and would probably not feel well over the weekend, I was lucky I had no side effects but a number did.

I spent most of the weekend cleaning and preparing my kit and drinking tea in the NAFFI and also partaking of their 'wads' (a bun) and beans on toast.

On Monday we were to commence our training. Tea was always something cooked followed by cake, bread, butter, jam and tea. There was an evening meal with cocoa bread, cheese and any left-overs from the day.

Monday morning arrived and after carrying out the usual rituals which included the polishing of the steel coal bucket (no coal as it was still summer), we had breakfast and then paraded on the parade ground for our first instruction in Army Drill. We probably looked a 'motley lot' representing all physical sizes but they soon sorted us out with tallest on the right and shortest on the left, I seemed to be in the middle, then the fun started, some did not know their left from the right, some marched swinging their left arm in unison with the left foot (try doing it—it's most difficult), fortunately for myself and a few others who had previously been in one of the cadet forces this did not come too hard on us.

This drill carried on from 8.00hrs to 10.00 hrs when it was time for 15 minutes NAFFI break. After break we returned to the barrack room and were instructed on the cleaning and maintenance of our rifles. The first part of the afternoon we were given an insight into the Army Discipline Code followed by physical raining which included a 5 mile jog. This was followed by tea and back to the barrack room.

We were not allowed into Colchester during our first week, so most evenings were spent in the barrack room, some read, others played cards, some lay on their beds and others wrote letters. Lights out was at 22.30 hrs and most of us were ready for our sleep.

The next six weeks in our primary training period was spent on drills, assault courses, rifle ranges, field craft (how to avoid being seen or shot at by the enemy). Each week we had a route march, the first week it was five miles working up to thirty five miles in the last week, on this day we started at about 04.30 hrs and finished about 14.30 hrs (during the march we had regular breaks and wore full kit and carried rifles) towards the end of the march the Garrison Band met us about three miles from camp and we marched with them back to the Barracks, this was needed to rouse our spirits, as I, like many others felt exhausted, some, not many, had 'fallen by the wayside' during the march and were picked up by lorry, the main cause for falling out appeared to be blistering of the feet. These marches took place on a Friday giving us the weekend to recover.

We had completed our first six weeks primary training and about to enter our ten weeks initial infantry training. Most of us had our postings confirmed with the Gloucestershire Regiment (incidentally the only Regiment in the British Army to

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wear two cap badges, one at the front of the headgear and one at the back, this was an honour awarded to them as at some time they had fought 'back to back').

Training became much harder, although the route marches were not as long, there was much more field training, more rifle practice on the ranges and also learning to become proficient in the use of other armaments, the assault course was a daily event and it was during one of these that I met with an accident which resulted in my being admitted to Colchester Military Hospital for a week.

Night exercises were a regular feature and towards the end of the ten weeks we had a five day exercise away from barracks, this was not very pleasant as it was winter and we had to sleep rough in fields, woods and under hedges, the only protection at night was by using our waterproof capes to construct a bivouac (a type of tent), it rained and snowed most of the time and consequently very difficult to keep a fire alight over which we had to cook our own food, this was not very successful and we all appeared to consume half cooked potatoes, rice, and meat although the tinned cake was very good.

One of the members of the platoon lived in the area, he wandered off one night and came back with eggs and milk and a gallon can of fuel which he had scrounged from a local R.A.F. Station, this he thought would help to light the fires, he poured some on wet wood struck a match and 'Woof' there was a big flash and singed most of his hair and eyebrows, we eventually discovered that the fuel he had scrounged was High Octane Fuel.

We eventually returned to barracks exhausted, tired and very wet.

A week later I found myself again in hospital, this time the Colchester General Hospital (more pleasant than the Military Hospital) where I was diagnosed as having pneumonia, I remained in the hospital for about 18 days and upon discharge was sent to a military Convalescent Home situated in a small hamlet called Birdbrook which I think is in Essex, the nearest large town again I think was Halstead (I often intended to go back to Birdbrook with Eda but unfortunately never did).

The Convalescent Home was in a very large country mansion in acres of grounds, I believe it was owned by a London executive. There were about twenty army personnel in the house. The Red Cross ran the Home and the Matron was the wife of the owner and a lot of the staff were local people. The food was almost home cooking and a big improvement on army food. Reveille was at 08.30 Hrs, each man had a bed (with sheets) and most rooms had four beds.

A large number of ducks used the lake and if anyone fancied a duck egg for breakfast they were readily available. An army physical training instructor visited the home once a week to give us about a half hours P.E. and to pay us.

The hamlet was very small with one shop which was the post office/general store/telephone exchange, consequently there was very little to do except walk through the country lanes. A bus ran to Halstead once a week, it left Birdbrook at 14.00 hrs and returned at 17.00 hrs, just enough time to visit the local cinema and have a cup of tea.

On three afternoons a week the local residents provided some form of entertainment for us. During the six weeks at the Home I was allowed to take fourteen days leave, it was nice to go home to see my parents, brother and to visit the youth club to see my many friends.

After my period at the Home I was transferred to 101 Military Convalescent Depot at Kempston Nr Bedford, this was a definite military establishment with all the army rules and regulations, the object of the depot was once again to make you

## Home Town

physically fit for normal army duty consequently there was a lot of P.E. and a medical examination by doctors once a week.

Visits to Bedford were quite frequent particularly the Corn Exchange on a Sunday night where entertainment was provided by well-known stage personalities and ENSA people (ENSA was an organisation to give entertainment to the forces) At the end of four weeks at the depot it was decided that as I had not fully recovered my health to A1 fitness that I should be medically downgraded to B2 and that I should return to my Regimental Holding Unit which was then based at Felixstowe in Suffolk.

I arrived at the Holding Unit to find that its H.Q. was a school and we lived in houses that had been requisitioned by the military. Each morning we paraded on the school playground to find out whether we had been posted to another unit or to a regimental battalion. The Regimental Sergeant Major would also each morning ask for volunteers for any particular courses in which there were vacancies (these were for people other than A1 personal). One day he shouted out asking for volunteers for a C?????s course, it would appear that I did not quite understand what he said, I thought he said a Clerks course, I only found out to my dismay the following morning that I had volunteered for a Cooks course, I could not change this and so I was transferred to a catering unit at Rainham in Essex. This was a tented camp and it seemed to rain every day I was there, one advantage was that we had every weekend off.

The course was supposed to last six months but after six weeks I felt that being a baker making Chelsea buns, a butcher, washing up etc. catering was not my scene so I asked to return to my Holding Battalion which by this time had moved to Reservoir Camp in Gloucester.

Upon arrival at Reservoir Camp I found it to be all nissen huts (corrugated iron structures) and rather barren. I had only been there a few days, with only one chance to visit the City of Gloucester, when I was informed that with a few others I had been posted to the Middle East and that I had to report to the medical room for more inoculations after which I was given fourteen days embarkation leave and then to report to the Hotel Great Central near Marylebone Station in London (the hotel is now the headquarters of the British Railways Board ).The hotel had been stripped of all its furnishings and gave the appearance of just another army camp.



On arrival at the 'hotel' we were issued with our tropical uniform and told that we would be there for about a week, in the end it was two weeks. During this time the Germans capitulated and a day of celebration was declared, the day was to known as V.E. Day (Victory in Europe Day), we continued to be at war with the Japanese.

The celebrations in London were terrific, Trafalgar Square was packed with so many people one could hardly move, everyone was singing and trying to dance, the blackout was over and all the lights were on again.

The day came when we left the 'hotel', boarded a train which was to take us to Newhaven for an across Channel boat to Calais in France. For me it was a terrible crossing in a near Force Ten gale and I was very glad when the six hour journey was over.

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In Calais we boarded a troop train which took us on a fifty hour 'stop-start' journey across France to Toulon where we embarked on a boat (the Battery) for a five day journey to Port Said in Egypt. Thank goodness the sea was reasonably calm but even so I was still sea sick.

Upon disembarkation we were taken by train to Fayid in the Suez Canal Zone. This was an all tented camp, the tents just had the tops as these had been erected over six foot deep holes in the sand with a ramp leading down into the 'tent'.

The camp was on the side of the Great Bitter Lake which forms part on the Canal. It was very hot and we were warned about getting sun burnt (an offence in the army as it was said to be 'self-inflicted' but some people did not heed the warning and finished up having punishment in more than one way).

Washing facilities were in the open and even the cold water ran hot from the taps consequently there was no need for hot taps. Food was the usual army fare except that we had a lot of grapes in custard, melon in custard, in fact almost every fruit in custard.

I was to find over the next, almost three years, that this type of sweet was common to almost every mess in the Middle East. Every afternoon we had a siesta (as did every unit in Egypt) when we went swimming in the tepid warm lake.

Soon my new posting arrived and this was to be with 208 Camp Staff, Hyderabad Barracks, Cairo.

I travelled by train from Fayid to Cairo and was met at Cairo Station and taken to the Barracks which was situated in the City on the banks of the River Nile.

The barracks were very old having been built in the early 1900's. They have now been demolished.



Terry

Before I go any further it may be opportune to give you some idea of the situation which was pertaining at this time in the Middle East. Egypt had become almost a British Protectorate. In the early 1940's Egypt, it could be said, was in the front line of the fighting in North Africa, in fact at one time the German forces under Field Marshal Rommel had been within fifty miles of Cairo at an Egyptian town known as El Alamein.

At this time the Egyptians were becoming very pro-German and very anti-British until General Montgomery defeated Rommel's forces and drove them out of North Africa, but even so some anti-British feeling continued throughout Egypt after this. During my period in Cairo (and Palestine) there were a great number of anti-British riots, very often Cairo City was completely out of bounds to all troops, some parts of the city were however permanently out of bounds.

King Farouk was on the Throne at this time but was very unpopular and was overthrown.

Cairo itself was a very cosmopolitan city, mainly British and French, the influence of these two nations created a two class

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society with the very rich (including many Egyptians) and the very, very poor. There was much ill health and disease amongst the poor. Many worked for the Army performing the menial tasks for which pay was quite good when relating it to pay they would receive working for a local employer. Their pay was about seven shillings and six pence per week (the army private then received twenty eight shillings per week).

It was because of this two class society and nationalism that there was such unrest. A similar happening was occurring in Palestine (now Israel) whereby the Jews wished to have their own homeland. Two terrorist gangs fought against the British to achieve this which they did in 1948 with the partitioning of Palestine and the formation of the new State of Israel. Trouble has continued ever since between the Jews and Arabs and in the Middle East generally.

After much pressure from the Egyptian Government and the very anti-British feeling it was agreed that the troops should leave the Egyptian Delta area (which included Cairo and Alexandria) and move to the Canal Zone and eventually evacuate all troops from the whole of Egypt. The evacuation of the Delta took place on 29th March 1947 and I was amongst one of the last to leave, we moved to Port Suez, at the head of the Red Sea.

However I was back in Cairo within three days in civilian clothing attached to the British Embassy. There were about twenty of us and it was our job to hand back to the Egyptians properties which had been requisitioned. We lived in hotels and I continued in this job until demobilization in November 1947.

What about my time with 208 Camp Staff? This was a very small unit in a very large barracks. The duties of the unit were to administer the barracks which by this time had become a transit camp for troops coming to and leaving the Middle East. I became a clerk (at last!!!!), eventually was promoted to Corporal in the pay office and eventually to Sergeant.

After a while there was a vacancy for Garrison Quartermaster and I was promoted to that post, the rank I held until I was demobilized. I attended a number of courses in Jerusalem (in Palestine). Half way through my Middle East tour of duty I was given a month's home leave.

The journey home and back was via Port Said and Toulon, through France to Calais and Dover, the boats for the journeys across the Mediterranean were the Eastern Prince (a large liner) and the Argentina (a very small uncomfortable boat).

In November 1947 I became due for demobilization and travelled home on the Andes (large liner) from Port Said via Greece, Italy, Malta and eventually to Greenock (near Glasgow in Scotland), a sea journey I will never forget as I was sea sick most of the time, from there by train to the Demobilization Centre in Guildford, Surrey, and home to my family and friends.

I suppose that the one big difference which I found was that instead of living on the Strand we now lived at 43 Exeter Road, Topsham, a house which my father had had built, he still retained the shop on the Strand and also that my maternal grandmother was living with us. It was a good Xmas and I was looking forward to civilian life in 1948.

## Chapter 6: - 1948—1956

I suppose that these years can best be described as 'my adult bachelorhood years'. Upon demobilization from the army I was given 90 days leave during which time I commenced looking for suitable employment.



Mabel, Reg, Dot (Brooks), Mitzie,  
Richard Brooks. Sitting :- Emily Anning

Between leaving school and conscription I had been employed at H.M. Prison, Exeter, as a clerk and a job I very much enjoyed, I therefore approached them regarding employment as they had a legal obligation to re-employ you after leaving the Forces. There was a vacancy for me but in London, I was not anxious to work in London and I declined their offer. After a few interviews with prospective employers which resulted in employment offers, I took up employment with the Medical Department of Devon County Council, I commenced with them in February 1948 as a clerk.



Reg, Mabel & Peter the cat

The office was in Barnfield Crescent, Exeter, but we were soon to move to 'Ivybank', in St Davids Hill, Exeter. This was an old Tuberculosis Hospital which had now moved to 'Hawkmoor' Hospital, near Bovey Tracey in Devon, but a tuberculosis clinic continued to be held at 'Ivybank'. Both 'Ivybank' and 'Hawkmoor' are very relevant to my story because it was found that Eda, after commencing her nursing training, had tuberculosis and went to 'Hawkmoor' Hospital and upon discharge attended the 'Ivybank' Clinic. By her attendance at the clinic I was able to see her more frequently.

I first knew Eda when she was twenty, I met her through mutual friends, Brian Sadler with whom I worked and Melleny Baldwin with who she trained as a nurse. We were introduced at a Nurses Dance held at the former R.D. & E Hospital, in Southernhay, Exeter,

Between 1948 and 1953 (before I met Eda) I occupied most of my time with friends in Topsham and with those I had met at work. In Topsham I continued with my activities in the Youth Club, even taking part in the one of the annual pantomimes which was 'Bluebeard' (I was Bluebeard - complete with 'harem').

Rehearsals were great fun, the cast was about thirty. The pantomime took place at the Mathews Hall, Topsham and ran for four days with full houses each night. My other interests were with the Topsham Amateur Dramatic Society, playing tennis at the Topsham Club in the summer and football in the winter, my brother will say that he was a much better player than I (and I agree!!!) as I only played for the second team whilst he played for the first.

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Saturday evenings we attended dances at the Pavilion, Exmouth, catching the midnight train home. I also purchased a bicycle with which to ride to and from work.

With a few of my colleagues from 'Ivybank' I ventured on a two week holiday to Paris (France), I had said that in view of my experience on troop ships that I would never go on a boat again, but I did (as I also did with Eda years later), the holiday was 'marred' by a transport and postal strike whilst we were there and Eda never did receive some of the cards which I had sent her, even so we had a good time. We lived and ate in the City University and our Courier was exceptionally good as he appeared to know everyone in Paris, consequently we never paid to visit anywhere including the Moulin Rouge (the premier Paris night club) and with a gift of free bottle of champagne

It was whilst I was at 'Ivybank' that I, with others, decided to enhance my chance of promotion within work, to undertake a two year part-time course at the University College of the South West (now Exeter University) to obtain the Diploma in Public Administration (D.P.A.) and was successful, it was hard work as we were in competition with full-time students, even though the County Council gave us 'day release' on two half days of the week, most of my spare time was taken up in study. I only allowed myself Saturday evenings and Sunday evenings off, it was worth it because shortly after passing the examination I was called before a County Council Interview/Promotion Board the result of which was that I was offered a post of Supplies Officer at the Devon County Fire Service Headquarters at Clyst St George, Nr Topsham and continued in this very interesting post for twelve years.

As the result of this promotion I purchased, much to my mother's concern, a B.S.A. Bantam 125 c.c. motor cycle, which I had for a number of years, although I did change to a James 175 c.c. motor cycle for a while until I purchased from my brother his Ford Anglia motor car.

It was whilst with the Fire Service that Eda and myself were married and was eventually proudly able to take our son Stuart to see my fellow work colleagues.

My married life will be told in the next chapter but for a moment I feel that I must recall one other event at the Fire Service H.Q. The H.Q. was an old county house known as The Knowle, it was very large with acres of grounds which included a two acre walled garden with a large greenhouse. It was the intention of the County Council to rent ofut much of the land to local farmers but to retain the walled garden and to sell the produce, this did not prove to be a viable undertaking so the gardener was re-allocated to a job as one of my storemen and the walled garden put out to tender for rent.

A group of us submitted our (very low) tender and much to our surprise we found ourselves with a garden, no other contractor was interested in it. I suppose that all of us, like others at that time, were somewhat short of money and we spent all our spare time, including Saturdays and evenings in the summer tilling the land. We grew runner beans, lettuce, raspberries, potatoes, cabbages, cauliflowers and other small root crops.

In the greenhouse we grew tomatoes, chrysanthemums and freesias, all this was sold to local wholesalers and retailers and gave us all a little additional income, all be it not commensurate with long hours and effort put into the work.

Eda met my parents, brother and Pat by accident. We had decided to go to Torquay for the day, in the afternoon we went into a cafe for tea and to my surprise Mum, Dad, Ron and Pat were also in the cafe so there was no alternative than to introduce them to Eda. We became engaged on the 9th October 1954, on the day my brother and Pat were married, Eda was a bridesmaid and I was his best man, they



## Home Town

were married at the Roman Catholic Church in Topsham.

During our engagement Eda was working at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in Southernhay, Exeter. and I was only able to see her during her off duty periods, this was often as late as 8.30 in the evenings and then only for a few hours as in those days nurses lived in the Nurses Home within the hospital grounds and had to be in by 11 o-dock, except on the odd occasion with special permission from the matron.

There were no doubt many other happenings in my 'adult bachelorhood' which I have either forgotten or I consider to be of little importance, nevertheless the period was very enjoyable and I did many if the normal things we all do or did at that age.

## Chapter 7: - 1956 Onwards

This Chapter will mainly relate to our married and family life up to the time Eda died.

We became engaged and were married on 10th March 1956 at St Margaret's Church, Topsham, the Reverend Rich officiated. The Matron of Honour was Pat (my brother's wife), the bridesmaids were Susan Harding (my cousin Beryl's eldest daughter) and Ann Jenkins (Eda's cousin). My best man was my brother Ron.

After the reception at the George and Dragon Hotel, Clyst St George, at which there were about 100 guests. We went by train to London. Just after leaving Exeter a lady cleaner, who then travelled with the train, brought along her brush and dustpan and cleared the floor of the considerable amount of confetti which had been thrown at us on boarding the train. On the journey we both felt very hungry as we had little chance at the Reception to eat, so we bought ourselves coffee and sausage rolls and ate them in the First Class compartment in which we were travelling.

When we arrived at our honeymoon Hotel (The Cumberland) in London we were surprised to find a large bouquet of flowers which had been sent to us by Eda's Uncle Miles who had been unable to attend the wedding as he was on a cargo ship of which he was captain, unfortunately he died tragically on the ship shortly after we returned from our honeymoon.

We had many wedding presents some of which have never been used, however we were never given any saucepans so on our honeymoon we bought a set at Selfridges in London, also, whilst we were given a canteen of cutlery we had none for 'every day use' so we went to Woolworths in Oxford St, London and bought six knives and forks, both the saucepans, knives and forks have been used every day and continue to be used.

The first accommodation which we had in our married life was a flat in Posloe Road, Exeter, it was on the corner of North Avenue. It was a very large, self-contained and furnished flat comprising of a large sitting room (to emphasize its size a dining table and six chairs could be placed in the bay window alone, the ceiling was nine feet high and it took at least eight hours to heat the room by means of an open coal fire), a large bedroom of equal size, a small breakfast room, and a kitchen in which was a bath discreetly hidden when not in use by wooden panelling, we had part share of the garden with the person in the flat above, I also had part use of the garage in which to keep my motor cycle (I was still working at Clyst St George ).



Terry and Eda

There were cellars to the flat in which we could keep any furnishings we did not require or which we replaced with our own. For this flat we paid twelve pounds per month plus seven shilling and six pence per month for the garage. This may now appear to be very low but it must be remembered

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that this was a third of my 'take home' pay at the time and we still had to pay rates, gas, electricity etc.

The flat was very handy to Eda's work at the Hospital and we lived there for about eighteen months.

Eda who had worked at the R.D.E. & Hospital in Southernhay, Exeter, moved to another part of the Hospital at Heavitree, Exeter, firstly full-time and in charge of the Children's Ward and then part-time, it was whilst at this hospital, as the papers put it, because of her 'eagle eye' that an unusual illness was diagnosed. A television documentary 'Eye on Research', in which Eda appeared was made by the B.B.C. and presented by Raymond Baxter. A newspaper cutting is with Eda's personal effects.

When it was found that Eda was pregnant with our first child (Stuart) we decided that for a little more outgoings we could purchase our own property, it was then that **we moved to 10, Southport Ave, Exeter, in** early November 1957 and this became our home for the remainder Eda's life and mine to date. We often thought of moving but every time we realized that we preferred our own home in a quiet cul-de-sac where children could play in comparative safety with schools and shops near at hand.

We were naturally very proud of our new home which was a detached house with three bedrooms, bathroom, two reception rooms and a kitchen, there was a garden and a wood and asbestos garage which everyone said would need replacing, thirty plus years later it is still standing. Initially we were only able to furnish the dining room and one bedroom and a self-assembly cabinet for the kitchen.



Stuart, Mabel, Olive and Henry (Anning),  
Terry and John(sitting)

initially in the pram, then the push chair and eventually on reins. They were always clean and immaculately dressed when it is considered that we had no washing machine (not available at the time) only a small boiler and a 'wringer'. It was not until many years later that we had a twin tub washing machine and then an automatic.

My mother continued to live in Topsham and to run the shop. I moved from the Fire Service to the Education Department of the County Council, I was only there for a year when I moved to the Library Headquarters at Barley House, Isleworth Road (a three minutes' walk from home) as the Chief Clerk, again I was only there for eighteen months when I obtained a position at the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary Headquarters at Middlemoor, Exeter, where I remained for the rest of my working life.

Eda being pregnant at that time was not working. Both our parents were very excited about being grandparents and my father was planning swings etc. for the garden, but this was not to be as my father died on 29th November 1957.

The house needed some redecoration but our priority was the nursery and this was ready when on 8th July 1958 our elder son Stuart George Luscombe was born at home at 4.15 am and who weighed 7lbs 10oz, the Doctor was Dr Merrick. This was a very happy time for us and our parents as it also was when our younger son John Terrence Luscombe was born at 2am on 30th May 1961 (weight 7lbs 8oz) and again Dr Merrick was in attendance.

With Eda and myself and the two boys we felt a complete family. Eda was very proud of them, taking them for walks each day

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It was shortly after starting work at Middlemoor that we bought our first car from my brother, it was a Ford Anglia XOD 422. Over the years we had various cars, all Fords, When I retired we bought a new Ford Escort 1.6 LX. Ten months after Eda died I changed this for yet another Escort, this car will I expect last me for the rest of my driving life.



XOD 422

In the early years when the boys were young our holidays were taken with relatives in Wales or with Eda's parents in Andover, my brother at Lymington, we had one long weekend with my Aunt and Uncle in Orpington Kent. We also purchased a beach hut on Early's Wall Dawlish, it was here that our dog 'Andy' learnt to swim because one day he chased a seagull on the rocks but in doing so he 'ran out of rock' and went into the water. Because the seas at Dawlish were very rough the hut had to be dismantled in the winter so we eventually decided to move the hut to Dawlish Warren, after a few years we sold it.



Paul, John, Jane & Stuart Dawlish Warren 1964

John and Stuart attended the local primary schools (Stuart at Montgomery, John Stocker and Redhills; John at Montgomery and Redhills). Eventually they both went to Hele's School (my old school).

Whilst at Hele's School Stuart went on an exchange visit to France and stayed with a boy called Jean Louis. Shortly after he came and stayed with us. It may be of interest to note that a number of years later there was a knock on the front door and upon opening it we were confronted by two men one of whom produced a photograph of Stuart and himself--it was Jean Louis and another of the French boys who had been on the same exchange, they stayed with us for a few days.

It was about this time that Eda felt that she would like to return to nursing, part-time if possible, it was then when she obtained the post in the new St Thomas Health Centre. One evening we saw an advertisement in local paper for a part-time practice nurse at a new St Thomas Health Centre, Eda applied and was appointed, she was the only nurse at that time and worked 2 hours each morning.

Xmas was a very happy time, more so when the boys were young, we usually had our parents with us and was quite a festive occasion. I can well remember the Xmas Trees with presents around and the boys eager to open theirs, later when we had a Spaniel dog 'Andy' who was also eager to 'unwrap' his presents.

Eventually we were able to furnish our sitting room and we would sit in this room on Sundays around an open fire eating our tea, in those days the Ice Cream van would call in the Avenue on Sundays so it always meant an ice cream in the afternoon.

Televisions were becoming popular so one Saturday morning I was in town in Exeter on my own shopping when I looked in a shop window advertising Television

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Rentals, I went in with the result that I signed an agreement to rent a black and white 14" set (no colour in those days) and asked them not to deliver it until the afternoon, this was to give me time to go home and explain to Eda what I had done as money was not easy in those days. Needless to say when I arrived home Eda was in the kitchen and she beckoned to me to look into the sitting room, there I saw the boys sat on the floor with their faces 'glued' to the screen watching Horse Racing—I did not get into trouble!!!. It may be interesting to note the Rental Shop eventually moved from Queen St to Heavitree (now Heavitree Radio) and I still rent my T.V. from them.

The boys eventually left Heles School and went to Exeter College, but not for long. Stuart decided to join the Royal Navy having been in the school Combined Cadet Force (Naval Section) and John likewise was also a member of the Cadets and also decided to join the Royal Navy. Both served for a number of years. Stuart never ventured East of Gibraltar, spending much of his time in the Americas and South Atlantic; John on the other hand spent most of his time East of Gibraltar. Both eventually, upon marriage, left the Navy and entered civilian employment.

My mother had continued to live in Topsham after my father's death and to run the shop, eventually she gave the shop up. She became unwell and suffered a few



Mabel

minor strokes. After one of these it was decided that she should come to live with us in Exeter. We had an extension built to the house which enlarged the dining room and kitchen. My mother occupied the room at the front of the house. She continued to live with us for about eleven years until she died.

Eda's father in the meantime had died and her mother came to live in Waterloo Road, Exeter, and continues to do so.

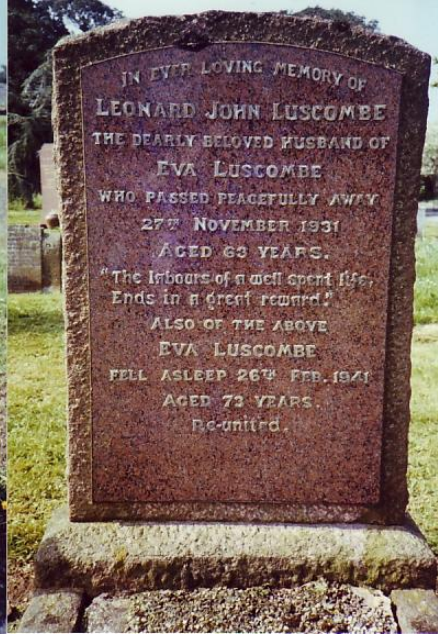
I continued to be employed by the Police in a varied number of capacities. Initially I was appointed the Resources Officer responsible for the purchasing of all uniform and equipment in the Force, equipping new Police Stations which included the new Training College at Headquarters (both Eda and myself attended the Official Opening by a member of the Royal Family which was followed by Luncheon and dance in the evening). I next occupied the post of Senior Administrative Officer, then Finance

Officer and finally Civilian Personnel Officer, this was the post which I most enjoyed.

When Eda became ill I was 61½ years old and as I was able to retire I did so. My retirement party was attended by probably 150 people from the Chief Constable down and I received some very nice gifts. Included was a large bouquet for Eda who was unfortunately because of illness unable to attend. My main concern during retirement was to spend as much time with her and try to do as much as we could. We both knew, although others probably didn't, that her life expectancy was not to be great so we both tried to put into it as much as we could, regretfully not all we had intended.

## Home Town

My Wife Eda died in the Exeter and District Hospice at 10:55 pm on Friday 16th April 1993, both John, our younger son and myself were with her when she died. Eda had suffered from cancer for the last six years starting first of all with breast cancer and then cancer of head of the pancreas this eventually spread to her abdomen, she died very peacefully although the last six hours of her life were not without some distress to her and also to John and myself. Eda had been very brave throughout the six years, was always cheerful, and willing to speak about her illness.



### Topsham Graveyard



At one time in about 1990 she was given 24 hours to live, but again her strength and will to live pulled her through this.

Eda's ashes were interred in Topsham Cemetery on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April 1993 (Plot Number C.S.41) present were myself, John, Eda's mother (Violet), the Vicar of Topsham (Rev Jefferies) and a representative of the Undertakers.

For those who may be interested Plot C.S.41 (in which my ashes will eventually be buried) is at the top of Topsham Cemetery, near the hedge and the vehicle turning circle, it is within 25 yards of my parent's grave, in due course an inscribed tablet will be

placed on the plot

It is not my intention to relate life with the boys as I feel sure that they have, or will, tell their children of their own upbringing and adventures. There are many photographs of all of us throughout our lives, including a Video of transparencies, in the early years of the family. There are also many older photographs of my parent's family, on the back of which, where possible, I have tried to identify the individuals and written their names (some are unknown to me). I hope that Stuart and John will sometime during their life time try to do what I am doing by writing their life story for the benefit of their children and hopefully grandchildren.

After the boys had left home and my mother died Eda and myself took holidays on our own, sometimes long week-end breaks and others of two or three weeks. Our favourite locations were the Yorkshire Dales when we stayed at Chapel House, nr Kilnsey and latterly we ventured abroad when we went twice to Austria. We both enjoyed these holidays and had Eda have lived longer we had planned many more, including a trip to Egypt, but this regretfully never happened. During her last two summers we took many day trips in the car taking picnic lunches and teas and this we enjoyed.

## Home Town

We both loved to see our grandchildren and Eda spent much of her spare time knitting various garments for them. Stuart, Barbara and children Peter and Robert came down from Poynton to visit Eda in the Hospice during March 1993, it was fortunate that they were there for 'Mothering Sunday' March 21st. The staff at the Hospice arranged lunch for all of us in a dining room on our own. This occasion was very memorable for me and it gave Eda very much pleasure and happiness. John unfortunately was working that day but he rarely missed a day visiting, Lauren, his daughter visited frequently.

The death of Eda, whilst not unexpected, came as a shock to me but with help of the children and Hospiscare nurses I think that I will gradually overcome this.

Unfortunately shortly after Eda's death I did not feel well and saw my doctor who diagnosed that I had Angina and arranged for me to have an ECG the result of which was to show that I had suffered a heart attack. I could not remember having any symptoms of this (I think that this is called a 'silent heart attack') although it may have been brought about by stress/strain over Eda's illness. The doctor has prescribed medication which is taken daily.

I had little enthusiasm for gardening 1993 (hope it is better in 1994). I joined the Hospiscare Plus Club for bereaved persons which meets every month at a Social Club and there is also a monthly afternoon get-together.

I spent Xmas 1993 with Stuart and family and occasionally visit my brother for a few days and frequently lunch out with our Sidmouth friends, I see quite a lot of John and Lauren.

As I have already mentioned much of our latter life is well known to the boys and as this is being written mainly for their benefit I see little point in writing what is common knowledge to them and as this 'story' has now reached the present day (4th March 1994) I will close this chapter.

The next chapter will therefore be a brief resume of what, to me, will be salient events which may happen in future life. I hope that you have enjoyed reading this story as much as I have in writing it—look after it, who knows!!!.

## Chapter 8: - Epilogue

3/1/2011. As I (Stuart Luscombe) sit here today I have completed the first draft of the edited memoirs.

It seems that I should jot a few words on what happened in the intervening years.

Well, Terry never really got over the loss of Eda. He continued to live at 10 Southport Ave. He declined as, one would expect but becoming ever more reclusive. This accelerated in 2005/6 and he walked out of his home in December 2007 (booking into a care home), never to return.

He went into the Treelands Residential Home in Ottery St Mary. His house was sold and he continued to live at Treelands until his death due to pneumonia in Jan 2009.

Ron died soon after of Bowel Cancer and the two of them were interred in adjacent plots on the same day at the Higher Cemetery in Topsham.



Terry at 80



Home Town

**THE END**  
(or is it?)