

Part Two-Aunty Gert

Julia Watkinson

Aunty Gert was my father's aunt; my grandmother, Nell, was Gert's sister and great aunt to Anne. I didn't know Arthur as he died before I was born, but my mother knew him.

Arthur and Gertrude looked after my father (Gerald Watkinson who was born in 1919) and his sister, Helen (known as Lella), for long periods of time when my grandmother was ill; Gert became a second mother to them. She had one son (known to us as Uncle Fred) whom my father looked upon as more than a brother.



Figure 1 Fred, Lella and Gerald



Figure 2 Lella, Fred and Gerald



Figure 3 Gerald Watkinson and Fred



Figure 4 Lella, Gerald and Fred



Figure 5 Gerald Watkinson

Aunty Gert was a mine of information, particularly history, and had a wide knowledge of arts and crafts. She was an amazing person, with a strong personality, very welcoming and extremely jolly. We all loved being with her, so our family visited most weekends whilst we were growing up. My brothers and I used to play in the large garden at 'Tancred', exploring the disused, but still intact, rabbit sheds. I recall seeing the rabbit certificates, old rabbit bowls and gardening equipment, and the 'wild wood' at the end, overgrown with huge brambles. When I was about 18 she gave me a small piece of hand sewn patchwork which she had started. It turned into a major project which I continued, turning it into a hand sewn double patchwork bedspread which she saw a photo of just before she died.



Figure 6 Gert and Julia

I remember Aunty Gert sharing her vast knowledge with us, and being truly fascinated by her memory of it all. I realise now, that she must have had a great deal of patience as we used to play her piano very badly on our visits and dash around the house. She told me when she was a child in school, the boys sitting behind her used to put her plaits in the inkwells.

Aunty Gert was an amazing person full of stories and information and with a zest for life and although she died when I was twenty seven, she had a huge influence on me. I still miss her today.

Major building work has now changed the appearance of the bungalow so that you only know where it is from the alley/bridleway beside bungalow.

My brothers, Matthew and Tim and I all remember Gert in her kitchen, the masses of stored apples in the pantry, the mangle and most of all, the huge, well kept garden, at the top of which was a section overgrown with brambles.

Biggin Hill also played an important part in our family life. My aunt Helen (Lella) married Donald Kingaby; he was one of the Battle of Britain Spitfire Pilots and his achievements are recorded in the Guinness Book of Records:

'Donald Ernest Kingaby; DSO, AFC, DFM and Two Bars was a British flying ace of the Second World War; he was the only RAF pilot to be awarded the DFM three times.'

He also features in the book *BIGGIN ON THE BUMP* BY Bob Ogley

I am so pleased that Sue wrote the book as Pratts Bottom was part of my childhood and a huge part of my family life.

Part Three-Gert and Arthur Banks

Maureen Watkinson

I first met Gert and Arthur Banks of 'Tancred' when I became engaged, in 1956, to my late husband, Gerald.

His mother, Helen, was one of Gert's sisters and I believe a year or two younger. My husband and his sister, also named Helen (Lella), spent some time at 'Tancred' as their mother was often unwell and their father often away from home with his work.

Gert and Arthur had one son, George Frederick (known as Fred), who was the apple of their eyes. He was several years younger than Gerald and Helen.

Gert was very outgoing, on several committees, did amateur dramatics and was very interested in all types of needlework. When she took up cushion lace making, my husband made her some bobbins on his lathe.

Arthur Banks was, as I recall, rather reserved. He had a large rabbitry with rare breeds which won him prizes at shows. When the rabbits were past their best, he would give the pelts to make gloves, tippets etc.

Every day Arthur would walk from 'Tancred' to Badgers Mount in old clothing plus a sack to collect dandelions for the rabbits. People who weren't aware of his station in life thought he was a tramp.

He also had several greenhouses full of rare cacti and an apple store where the many varieties of apple from their huge orchard were kept.

I had a small collection of cacti at the time so he and I had some rapport and he was friendly towards me. I didn't know him for long as he sadly died a few years after I met him.



Figure 7 Maureen (Julia's mum), Gert and Matthew

When our three children were young they loved going to 'Tancred'. Gert was very jolly and they had great fun in the garden climbing trees, picking fruit and playing. We all still loved going there as the children grew up, and after she moved into a residential home closer to her son, Fred, we visited her there a few times until she passed away.

Part Four-Memories of Mrs Banks

Dorothy Karnik

I remember Mrs Banks who lived at 'Tancred' on the main road (the bungalow next to the footpath up to World's End Lane). She attended All Souls Church regularly and wore a thick fur coat to services in the winter; she used to smother me inside the coat when she and my mum stood chatting in the cold on the corner of Rushmore Hill on their way home!

She was certainly knowledgeable and well educated and I believe she may have been a local councillor (Conservative) in the days when Sir Waldron Smithers was the MP.'



(8)Mrs Banks, Miss Palmer and Miss Baxter (seated right to left). Mrs Banks was a school Manager for many years and lived at 'Tancred' in Pratts Bottom.

(9)A photograph of Mrs Bond and Mrs Banks at the Pratts Bottom Flower Show that was held on 22nd September in 1956. Note the chairs supporting the flower displays. Large tables were not available at that time.

Helen Coomber

Mrs Banks, our local historian, lived along Sevenoaks Road. She visited the Guides and told us about the history of the village. She described how there used to be an Iron Age settlement at the top of the hill above the A21, near Chelsfield Hill (now the Chelsfield Lakes golf club). The North East end of the village used to be known as 'Marrow Bone Bottom' because of the shape of the hills (this shape has now been destroyed due to the heightening of the hill and the widening of the A21 link road to the motorway). She talked about maps showing Mr Spratt's field, once thought to have given the name to the village. Norsted Manor featured in the doomsday book and Chelsfield Grange had been a school at one time. There is thought to be an underground stream that fed the village well (at the site of the recreation ground by the school. Mill cottage (renamed Garden Cottage) used to work from the stream. The yew tree in the recreation ground is a significant tree planted for bow making. She told us about the stage coach travelling from London to Hastings. Shire horses were kept at the Bull's Head Stables, she said, in order to get the coaches up Rushmore Hill to the Porcupine Inn in Knockholt. There were stories of tea smugglers using caves in the area, hop pickers at harvest time and stories of ladies coming out from London in their carriages to the countryside and visiting the tea rooms in the area. E. Nesbitt used to sit, where I sat, by the railway line watching the tunnel being cut through to Chelsfield thus creating 'the mound'.