

Part One-Gertrude Banks of “Tancred”

Sue Short

I have used information from the Arthur Seymour Banks and Jane Gertrude Banks family history website for this article. I am most grateful to Anne Johnson née Banks, David Johnson, Julia and Maureen Watkinson for their help and encouragement. Many villagers fondly remember Arthur and Gertrude; it was a great privilege to gather the information and write this article for the Pratts Bottom website. **They certainly deserve a place in our village records.**



Figure 1 Jane Gertrude Wyborn

Anne Johnson

Jane Gertrude was born on May 11th 1893, at 58, Palace Road, Bromley and was the daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Wyborn. The 1901 census recorded that, aged seven, she was living at 43, East Street, Bromley. She was a pupil-teacher at County School for Girls, Bromley and sat for her certificate in Dartford. Jane disliked her first name and always referred to herself and was known to others as Gertrude or Gert.



Figure 2 Arthur Seymour Banks

Arthur Seymour Banks was born in Croydon on December 18th 1882 and was the son of Frederick Seymour and Elizabeth Banks. At this time the family were living at Leslie Lodge, Lower Addiscombe Lane in Croydon. Arthur was educated at Havergate College, Edgware. His interests included natural history and he collected birds' eggs, butterflies and moths.

Records show that he was boarded at Cranleigh School in Surrey between December 1895 and December 1900. In December 1899, aged 16, he passed the Junior Examination of the University of Cambridge in compulsory subjects including Dictation, Arithmetic, English and Latin. According to his school reports he was a good pupil, a capable artist (sketching), and was a member of the school Cadet Corps.

In 1912 Arthur and Gertrude met in a cinema queue in Bromley where apparently '*The Last Days of Pompeii*' was showing. By 1915 they were engaged and on December 28th 1916 were married at St. Andrew's, Holborn in London. Arthur was 34 years old, an Engineer's Assistant Manager and Gertrude was 23 years old. After the marriage, Arthur and Gertrude lived with his older brother George at Court Farm House, Epsom.



Figure 3 Gertrude and Arthur Banks

By October 1921 they were living at 3, Mashona Terrace, Keston. This was also the address of Tess (one of Gertrude's sisters) and Edward Fromings; Arthur and Gertrude were still at this address in 1923.

After this date their home was to be 'Tancred', Pratts Bottom, where they remained for the rest of their lives together. The bungalow was part of the Chelsfield Park Estate, a development of Homesteads Limited, whose head office was in Essex Street, The Strand in London.

(See 'PRATTS BOTTOM-A JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE' by Sue Short; the chapter entitled 'WHEN COWS WALKED UP THE A21' by Dulcie Gardener for more information about Homesteads Ltd.)



Figure 4 'Tancred'

'Tancred' was originally purchased by Mr. H.J. Hopkins in 1922 and sold to Arthur in 1923 for £950, raised by a mortgage; it occupied plot 28 next to the footpath that ran up the hill and half of plot 27. "The bungalow was called 'Tancred' by the developers, after the eponymous knight of the first crusade; other properties were similarly named after knights" (many of these properties have been radically altered or demolished; the plots are now occupied by large houses)

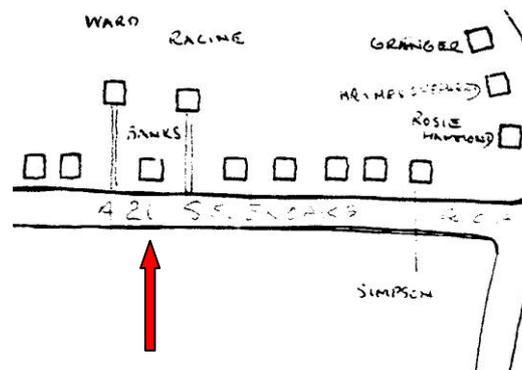


Figure 5 A sketch by Mr Brennan showing the location of 'Tancred' (marked Banks)

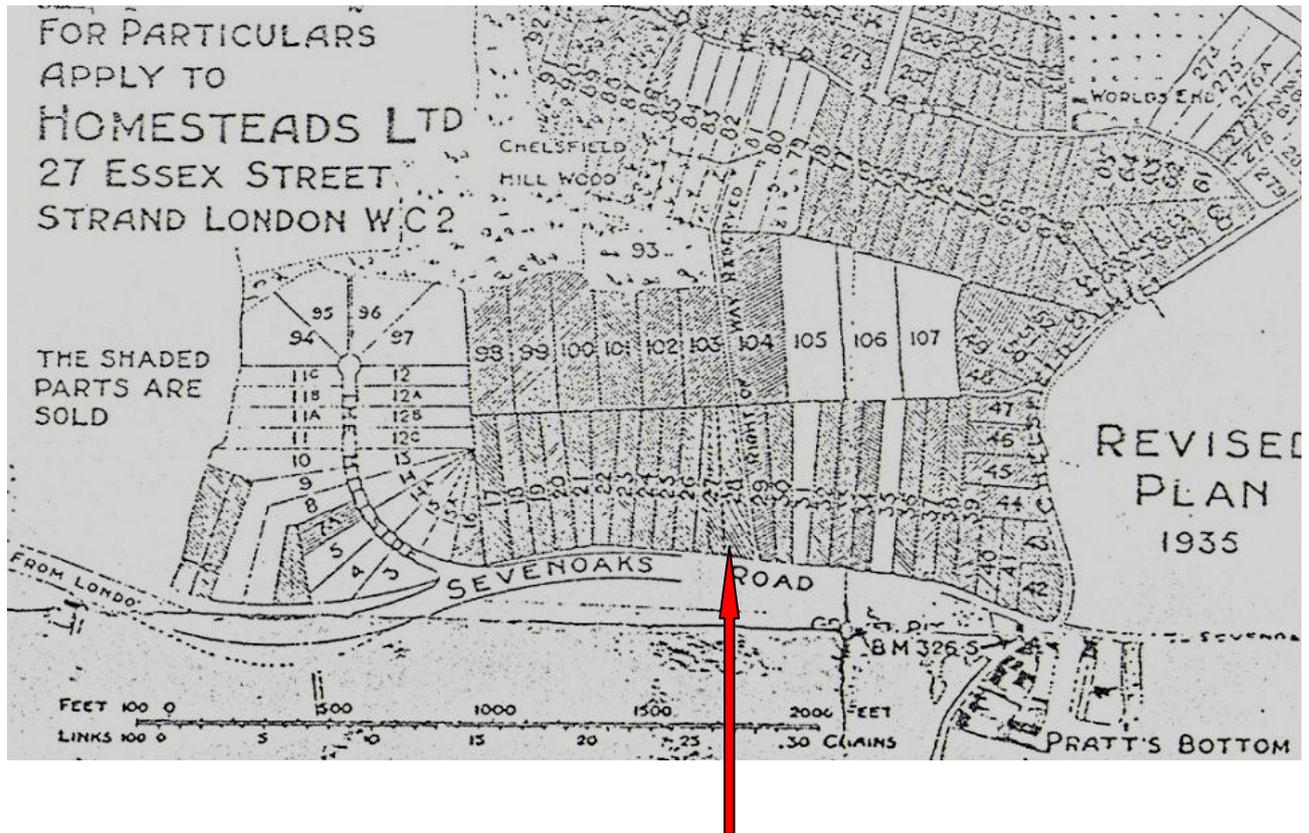


Figure 6
Homesteads limited Revised Plan of 1935
Plot 28 'Tancred'

'Tancred' was originally purchased by Mr. H.J. Hopkins in 1922 and sold to Arthur in 1923 for £950, raised by a mortgage; it occupied plot 28 next to the footpath that ran up the hill and half of plot 27. In February 1967, Gertrude sold her half plot between Tancred and Santa Rosa. In turn the owners of Santa Rosa similarly sold their half plot to make one full building plot.



Figure 7 Chelsfield Park Bungalows 1925

Identifying the bridleway with the boundary hedge that runs upwards about halfway along the development, 'Tancred' is probably the sixth house from the left,



Figure 8

The Chelsfield Park Bungalows from the field opposite circa 1925

In the view from the field opposite looking towards the bungalows, 'Tancred' is the first one on the left, which shows the hedge line and probably the bridleway along its right hand boundary.

Arthur was Company Secretary of Savage and Company, manufacturers of tea and coffee machines, which his brother George owned and ran. Arthur had an office at 4, Love Lane, Eastcheap in London.

During his life, like his father, Arthur kept and bred rabbits for their pelts and their meat. In 1923, he was Hon. Secretary of the Keston Fanciers' Association (established in December 1921) and Gertrude was Assistant Hon. Secretary. At one time, Arthur specialised in Black Beverens, and was a member and secretary of Bromley Rabbit Club. He was a registered show judge and officiated at many local shows; according to a fragment of advertising literature he was a breeder and exhibitor of Giant Blue Beverens and Argente de Champagne. His rabbits regularly achieved first place, as well as best in show; he had numerous silver cups and medals. He was also a member of specialist clubs including: British Fur Rabbit Society (Hon. Auditor), London Beveren Club (Chairman of Pelt Committee), London Havana and Argente Club (Vice-Chairman), Fur Board Limited, Bromley Fanciers Society (Chairman), Keston Fanciers Society (late Hon. Secretary), Orpington and Crays Fanciers Society and Crystal Palace Grand International Show (on the Advisory Committee). He was also a noted breeder of Sitkas and in one year (probably 1926) out of 23 classes he gained 18 firsts, 18 seconds, 9 thirds and 6 reserves.

He also published articles about rabbits. On the front page of *'Fur and Feather-Rabbits and Rabbit Keeping'* for April 1st 1927 was a photograph of "Three Noted Sitkas-The black fur breed, bred and exhibited by Mr A. S. Banks of Tancred House, Manor Road, Pratt's Bottom, Kent". On April 9th 1927, an article about "Mr A. S. Banks at his Kentish Home" entitled "A Famous Stud of Sitka Rabbits" appeared in *'Poultry Keeping'*.

After his mother's estate was distributed, following her death in 1934, Arthur inherited enough to retire and pursue his other interests. Arthur was a keen gardener and amongst his horticultural interests specialised in growing cacti; he had three greenhouses devoted to growing and displaying them. Gertrude was also a keen gardener; together she and Arthur grew dahlias in large numbers in rows, which they entered in competitions at horticultural shows.



Figure 9

A page from the family album including a photograph of Gertrude in the garden at 'Tancred'



Figure 10 The Wyborn sisters

Left to right back row: Aggy, Tess and Gertrude

Left to right front row: Helen, Gran Wyborn and Peg



Figure 11 The husbands of the Wyborn sisters

Arthur Banks is in the back row on the left

During World War Two Arthur was Post Warden in Pratts Bottom.
(Whilst researching the history of the village and talking to people about World War Two, many people remembered Arthur performing his duties as a Warden; they referred to him with great fondness. **Sue Short**)

He was Chairman of the Village Hall Management Committee for a time and took an active interest in the village.



Figure 12

The Civil Defence Group circa 1950

Gertrude is seated at the end on the right and Arthur is standing in the centre of this Civil Defence Group. Wearing glasses, between Arthur and the youngest man, is Thomas Andrew Blatcher, who lived at Crossways, Church Lane (just beyond the junction of Worlds End Lane and Chelsfield Hill. He was the step-father of Muriel Turner, who married Fred Banks, Arthur and Gertrude's son.



Figure 13 Fred and Muriel's Wedding Day.

Far left: Arthur and Gertrude, Gerald Watkinson was the best man.
Far right: Thomas Blatcher (Muriel's step-father) and Elsie May Blatcher (Muriel's mother)



Figure 14 Gertrude and Arthur Banks

Family photographs reveal that Arthur was a pipe smoker and sadly this may have contributed to his ill health. He died on December 14th 1960 at Orpington Hospital aged 77 years and was described as a retired Engineer's Company Secretary; he was buried in Orpington Cemetery.

Gertrude trained to be a teacher; she was a student teacher at Wharton Road Council School, Bromley for some time and she was warmly commended for her work there. On her marriage to Arthur Seymour Banks she was presented with a copy of '*Tennyson's Works*' by the managers of the National Schools, Bromley. After her marriage, she taught at Epsom Council Girls' School for nearly one and a half years. Following her move to Pratts Bottom, she taught in a number of primary schools; became a school manager of a primary school for six months; and then a school governor for a group of secondary and technical schools. She was a school governor of Orpington Girls Grammar School, whilst her granddaughter was a pupil there. Gertrude qualified to give "*First Aid to the Injured*" in July 1939 with the St. John Ambulance Association.



Figure 15 Gertrude Banks (pre- 1953) Figure 16 This photograph of Gertrude Banks was on one side of a card inviting voters to vote for her (Conservative) on Saturday 13th May (possibly 1961) in the Green Street Green Ward for Orpington Urban District Council

Gertrude was a member of the Conservative Party and was a councillor on Orpington Urban District Council (elected on May 9th 1953). In her election leaflet it was stated that "*she had lived at Pratts Bottom for 30 years; was Chairman of the School Managers of the Farnborough Group of Schools. She was a member of Pratts Bottom Village Hall Committee and of the Ward Coronation Committee.*"

She was an enrolling Member of the Mothers' Union, a member of the Parochial Church Council, and a Committee Member of the Women's Institute and was a member of the model Village Association and Horticultural Society. She was a member of the Kent Council of Social Service, which administered free milk in schools and cared for delicate schoolchildren. During the Second World War she was a volunteer Air Raid Warden".

In 1956, it was reported in the Orpington and Kentish Times that she was against the siting of a crematorium at Rushmore Hill, north of Birthday Wood, in Pratts Bottom. She spoke at the monthly meeting of Orpington Council and said that *"we do not want all essential services here (at Pratts Bottom)"*. She pointed out that there was already a refuse dump and a County Council road dump at Rushmore Hill.



Figure 17 Gertrude, Helen, Aggy and Peg (Fred on the left of the photograph)



Figure 18 Helen, Peg, Gertrude and Aggy



Figure 19 Gertrude in the garden at 'Tancred'

Amongst all her other commitments, Gertrude also sang with a group of others at old peoples' homes. They sang music hall songs that the residents would have known in their younger days.

At the time of Arthur's death in 1960, she was Chairman of Orpington Council Public Health as well as Halls and Libraries Committees. In February 1967, Gertrude sold her half plot between Tancred and Santa Rosa. In turn the owners of Santa Rosa similarly sold their half plot to make one full building plot. In her later life, in the late 1970s, she had a number of speaking engagements with a variety of organisations and gave talks on such subjects as *'Old Bromley'*, *'The Lost Rivers of London'*, *'The Street Names of London'* and *'The Origins of Holidays'* etc.

'Tancred' was sold in 1984 after Gertrude had entered a residential home, Colesdane House at Harrietsham; she died on April 26th 1989 and was cremated at Maidstone Crematorium.