

Annie Wren's reminiscences of her childhood at Lamer House, in Wheathampstead.

Annie Maria Wren, née Hobbs. Born 23 October 1889. Died aged 88 21 September 1978.

This recording of Annie Wren, then aged 86, was made in January 1977, in conversation with her daughter, Amy Coburn.

Annie's memories are of her childhood at Lamer Park, Wheathampstead, and what her mother had told her about Dernford Park, near Hungerford, Berkshire, where she and her brother Tom were born. Her father, Henry Hobbs, was coachman to the Cherry family — later known as Cherry-Garrard. (See "George and Henry: their lives in Victorian Wheathampstead" by Mary Amy Coburn (1992)).

The Hobbs family moved from Dernford to Lamer in 1893/4, when General Apsley Cherry-Garrard, with his wife Evelyn, four daughters, Mildred, Elsie, Ida and Peggy, and one son, Apsley, came to Lamer to live. The Dernford Estate was kept on for a few years but was eventually given up.

The recording was transcribed by Liz Adams in March 2024.

NB 'The General' that Annie refers to was Major-General Apsley Cherry-Garrard, father of the polar explorer Apsley Cherry-Garrard.

Annie Wren: Father, did, he said, 'If I go there,' he said, 'I'm a long way from the stables, and I want to be with my horses.'

So the General said, 'Well,' he said, like that.

So the two loose boxes at Lamer were converted into one bedroom and the other one for a kitchen. And then, I think, we had the scullery, a little place at the side for Mother to do her cooking.

She said, definitely, she refused to be away from Hobbs (*her husband, coachman Henry Hobbs*) because she said, she told the General right; I wasn't there, but I heard Mother tell the story to so many.

Amy Coburn: *She wanted to stay at the stables?*

Yes, because you see, at that day, Amy, they were away at night a lot: he'd got a daughter for dancing, all that sort of thing. And I think he'd had one or two little spills, especially if the roads were bad, and perhaps the horse might slip, or anything like that.

Father was very, very wise and he said, they stood before a house or a cottage; he'd sooner live in the stables.

So, the two big loose-boxes, the old General had Owen (*the builder*) there, made them up.

And what did your mother cook on then?

Oh, in the corner, she had a little gas stove....

It wouldn't be gas...

No, a little old meat thing ...

A little open fire, was it?

Yes, that's right, a big open fire.

And, she was very friendly with the cook, so, and then the old General said to her, well, if you've got a joint, the cook will probably help you to bake it.

And I can see Mother now. They were big meat-eaters, the General was, meat, you know, cold meat then.

And then, she used to take it up to the kitchen, Cook, and bring it down and Mother could pop it in her oven, the little old oven, at the side and send up a hot meal at night.

Mother was a wonderful cook, she was, really.

Was there a sink?

Oh, no. Dad made up one. He was another good one. He'd turn round and find, perhaps look round the place and find an old sink, or something, turned out from the house, or anything like that. I can remember poor old Dad making it up.

What did you do with the water? Put it down the drain?

Oh, he made an old ??? Father did, or something, and he put it over one of the drains, I expect.

Then, you see, we used to walk across the common to Gustard Wood School. Very young we were.

Yes, you were only three when you went there.

Yes, that's it, and Tom wasn't that, quite. But of course, when I went away with Mum, and not him, he cried, he nearly broke his little heart because he was taken away from me. We were, no doubt, a loving little pair, Annie and Tom.

What sort of lavatory accommodation was there?

Oh, a bucket!

That's all?

Yes, and poor old Dad, he got two bits of wood, and put a bit of wood there and a bit of wood there and we had to sit on there in the bucket. There was nothing else.

And then of course Dad, he was at the stables, you see, there was the dung yard. So Dad, every time us knickers, or him - well, he went up to the men's lavatory. I could show it to you now...

It was worse for Mother, really, because Mother had a bit of a job to pull her clothes up because in them days it was big skirts and full ones, you know.

It wasn't very easy altogether.

What was the lavatory accommodation at Lamer, in the Big House?

Oh that was better, a bit better, yes, I could show you...

Did they have proper...?

Yes, there were two of them ...went down ... and there was a seat. And then the so-and-so went down there and that went out into the yard a bit.

A cesspool?

Yes. Oh, we had some funny times.

But of course, as the General said, he said, of course, it wasn't his fault. But you see, his coachman, you see: there were two or three cottages, like, but they were too far away from the stables.

They were a long way from the stables.

And, as I told you, Father said he wanted to be where his horses were. And go out at night, you never knew in them days, it was heaps of times. The footman used to walk in front of the carriage home at night, at twelve o' clock or later.

With a lantern?

Yes. It was foggy, you see. Father, he wouldn't trust a pair of horses, you know, it wasn't safe.

Of course there was one thing about him, he was always sober.

Yes. He never took anything, never.

Because some coachmen had a bad reputation.

Oh, my dear woman, I could tell you no end - always kept a bottle box in the back, you know, or under the seat.

Of course, this could be dangerous on a bad night if you had a coachman who had had a drop too much.

Yes, and Father used to tell who was with him, the footman, you see, he said, 'Now, don't go and drink anything.'

But still, on the other hand, you see, Father had to walk home with a pair of horses.

And of course the roads weren't as good then.

Oh, no ...

Did you used to take your dinner to Gustard Wood School?

Oh yes, sandwiches; egg sandwiches as a rule, Mother used to make us.

You liked that?

Well, we ate it, didn't we? My brother was very fond of eggs, very fond. Mother used to boil them hard and just chop them up a little. We had plenty of butter you see, Mother bought the butter from the farm, see.

From the dairy?

Yes, from old Mrs Clark, she was dairy maid at Lamer.

And, of course, that, where the dairy was, that used to be the chapel for them. That's where the services were held there, before we came to Dernford ... before we came to Lamer ...

From Dernford ...

See, yes. That used to be...

Each, you see, there were three big houses to the Lamer Estate, three big houses, like Lamer, see. Each one had a chapel attached to it.

The other one was Dernford, and where was the other one?

Oh, I couldn't tell you this moment, I couldn't tell you, it won't come to me, not the proper word. But in the country somewhere.

But, as I tell you, heaps of people asked me, you know, before, when we used to have a lot of visitors at one time, but all...what's-a-name... coachmen, you know, quite friendly with a few coachmen, you know.

And, as I said, that's where it was. I could go and show it to you now.

And then, when we came to Lamer, the General said ... he was very furious because there wasn't a place for the dairy, you see. So then when he looked round - I can still remember it although it's all those years ago - that he said, no, he'd have the chapel turned into a dairy.

They stopped using it as a chapel?

Oh yes, they stopped using it. And it had ... and it was nice - it was beautiful windows in it; that's what used to please - if Mother was here she'd tell you that.

Was there stained glass?

Beautiful stained glass windows; it was the chapel, for the Estate, joined on to the laundry.

And then, you see, there was a curate used to come up like in... sometimes I think it was in the morning and another time it would be in the afternoon he'd come up, for a service.

Where did they have them, when the chapel wasn't there, then? In the house?

I expect so, that, I can't go into that.

Because they gave up Dernford when they came to Lamer?

Oh yes, they gave it up.

And then he had another house, the General did, as well, down in the country somewhere. He packed right up directly because he didn't like it.

And because he chose Lamer, was because he was so fond of shooting, the game you see.

This was good game country?

Yes, that's right.

And Mother, you see, she was so sorry; she loved Dernford - well her babies were born there, weren't they, because Mother had three, you see. She lost her first baby, my Mother did. And yes, Mother was very sorry to come away from Dernford.

Because at Dernford, you see, the chapel there was in the house... in the park, quite a little distance. Mother used to put us two little babies in the pram because we always went to church, of course, and I think once it was held a month in the morning and another month perhaps in the afternoon, like that.

And then Mother, who of course was... not a lot of folks go there ... and pushed us over to chapel, both of us. We were both - I was - and my brother - we were both christened at Dernford Chapel.

Then they brought the font to Lamer... to Gustard Wood Church?

To Gustard Wood, that's right.

Who gave Gustard Wood Church? Do you know?

You mustn't ask me that.

You've forgotten?

I can't say it at the moment. No, half a minute, let me see: I think there was so much money left, and then there was a collection, or something like that.... But it won't come to my head this minute. And there's nobody now to ask about it.

No; it will be down in the records.

When you first went to school, what did you do?

Well, you see, poor old Miss Gilbert, there was poor old Miss Gilbert; I forget who the other teacher was, I can't remember that at the moment.

Father used to Oh, bless their dear hearts! (???) I did have a loving father and mother, I did (???) Father used to take my brother on his shoulders, always, to school in the morning.

And Mother used to bring ... and we couldn't go home to dinner, you see - that was too far.

Across the Park, yes.

And so we used to take little sandwiches, and I remember the tiny little sandwiches Mother made for us.

What lessons did you have?

Lessons? Well, the ordinary, it was all strokes and ladders strokes and ladders..... You know that, don't you?

Pot hooks and hangers.

Pot hooks and hangers - well, strokes, and all that.

On a slate?

That's it, on a slate. Oh bless my heart and soul alive! Oh, when we got to like Standard 1, as you would call it, well, then we had some paper and a pencil! Oh, we was grown up then!

You really thought you were grown up?

Oh, we were grown up then, oh yes.

When did you start using ink?

Oh, I can't remember. The pots of ink was in the ... along the desk, at the top. And I can remember poor old Miss Gilbert, or Frances - Frances was only a little scullery maid, no, not a scullery maid, but only a little one.

A pupil-teacher?

A pupil-teacher! And all she could do was learn us strokes, and then ladders; strokes and ladders.

And you used to learn the kings and queens of England

Yes

and all sorts of things

Yes

just chant it off

Yes

like your tables...

That's right.

Did you used to learn the Collect?

Yes. Yes, did we! Always had to learn that to say that Monday morning. And I remember...

If it was a long Collect, it was a bit awkward.

Yes, it was a bit awkward. But dear old Mother - because you see, my brother had to be carried to school; Father used to carry him on his shoulders - and Mother walked with me and then we said it going across the Park.

Oh, I hope the old darlings know what I am talking about! It does make you think, pet; I often go through it all.

There used to be a lot of cowslips, too, in Lamer Park?

Oh cowslips, my dear, yes, you would think (???)

No, no, no And oxlips?

Yes, they've gone, I expect.

Yes, because I haven't seen an oxlip for years.

No, they're gone. Oh yes, Mother always made cowslip wine,

Did she?

oh, Mother always did.

And of course at that time, you see, most of the gentry, they all went out to dinner at night, somewhere or other.

But I can remember Mother, when Father was away somewhere - he might perhaps be going to Welwyn, or anywhere like that - I could tell you the names, or if anybody said them, (?they'd?) be right. And ... but Mother never went to bed. It might be one or two o'clock in the morning, Mother was waiting up for Father, in case, you see, of an accident.

She always looked on the black side, did she?

Well, you've got to think, when you've got a man out like that, with two horses, driving: and it might come on foggy

Well then when it was like that, you see, the footman used to go, and then he used to walk in front of the horses, home. Well then Mother wasn't so worried then. But it was when Father was alone and fog came on later in the evening - that worried my Mother a lot - not for herself but for her two children.

Then we was allowed milk, you see - we had to pay a penny for that, yes, pay a penny for it.

Was it skimmed milk?

Oh yes! With old Mrs Clark - she'd skim the what's-a-name twice or three times. There wasn't a spot of cream on it!

So you didn't get a good milk pudding?

My dear woman! The milk was as poor as poor! (???) Mother grieved a bit about that, you see, to think the milk was so poor, because we had a milk pudding every day - what else could we have?

So Father said he ... so he got round old Charlie.

Old Charlie Sparrow?

Yes, the milkman.

Poor old Charlie.

Yes, poor old Charlie.

And so he gave Mother a drop, you know, for a copper or two, or something like that.

Proper milk, without, that hadn't been skimmed?

Yes, that's it, straight from the cow.

Where did you get the eggs, then? Did you keep chickens?

Oh yes, Mother always kept chickens, oh yes. So we always had ... because my brother was very fond of a boiled egg, very fond.

Oh, it all comes back to me! We had the old pig styes at the back. Well that was nice for us kids because we liked hide and seek. And of course we wasn't - well, there were no other children about.

And another thing: Father never allowed us to play with other children.

Did you used to play with the Lamer children?

No.

Not the girls?

No. No. They weren't allowed to come down to us, you see, in case there might be anything in my head, because I had lovely long hair in curls, you know; I did!

And they were so afraid that, you see, they might take some of my bad what's-a-names ...

I bet you never had fleas!!

No! Course I didn't!

That was one night when we used to be at play, Mother (???), so Mother used to say, "Now my children, get to take your clothes off, and be washed and then you go to bed." Well any rate, you see, when it came to that, just before we went up to bed, you see, Mother combed - I can see her now: she combed my hair down, combed it up this way, down - because I'd got long hair, you know - like that, down. Just to see, you see, if there were any dirty things. And then she had to fight again for the gnats.

Nits?

Well, we called them gnats.

Did you?

Well, you can say nits - perhaps we did - to see if there were any of them there.

Were there many children with dirty heads at school?

Well, as a rule, you see, there was always quite a ... there was only about, er ... how many? ...about sixty to seventy children, that was all.

That was quite a lot, though.

Yes. And there was only Frances, you know, Frances Williams.

But some of the children at Gustard Wood weren't all that clean, were they?

Oh, my dear - you could see the things in their heads! And the fleas.

And of course that was another ... that's why my Mother was so very friendly with Miss Gilbert, the old Mistress, you see.

The Governess?

The Governess; because, you see, of the old General. (???)

And them poor little kids at Lamer - the two of them, or then it got to three - used to be combed every night, you see.

I can remember ... ooh that comes back to me ...

Was Ben Owen ... Owen - he was the carpenter?

He was the carpenter and the, er, coffin maker; we called him the coffin maker. And of course at that time we knew very well when there was going to be a funeral. So one or two of us kids was grown up a little bit, we went up and watched him make these coffins.

I can remember it as if it was only yesterday.

Because his woodshed, or his woodyard, was on the other side of the road?

That's right, the other side.

Where the garden ?

That's right. Yes, we used to toddle up there and watch him making the coffin.

And when the boys were seven, they went down to Wheathampstead School?

Yes, Wheathampstead School, and of course they felt very proud because, of course, then, where the father had got the money, he used to buy an old bike. Mind, it was only cushion tyres, cushion tyre bikes.

I know my brother used to cry a bit, he used to say it was so hard work, 'cos that was a longish way from Lamer down to Wheathampstead School.

What happened when the Scripture Inspector came? There was one you used to like coming and one you didn't... There was one you used to go and pick mallows ... because he was very fond of them.

Yes, I can't (???) that at the moment.

Then you see, in those days, there was a lot of things done that made the children jealous. Now, you see, like the old Scripture Inspector used to come along and say, "Where's my little girl?" So, of course, I knew that was me, you see; see? And he used to go along the row and tickle you

under the chin, like this, till he found the little girl. And when he was nearly coming to me, I began to cry.

You used to spend a lot of your time crying, didn't you?

What else could I do?

Well, I suppose you could have giggled?

No, it wasn't like that; I never was like that. I never was one of the, you know, very friendly ... because, of course, we couldn't be at Lamer. Father had to be very particular with us children, to be well behaved.

And I, many a time, I saw Mrs Cherry-Garrard coming across the Park, and I was going to school; and I knew I should meet her so what do you know, what I did? Never went to school! Went back and I said, "I've got a bone in my leg (or something) and I couldn't go any farther."

Had to curtsey to her! Always had to curtsey to her, and the boys always had to touch their hats.

Where did you go to church? Did you go to Ayot or Wheathampstead?

Yes, Mother took us (???) - because Wheathampstead was our church but, erm, no, that wasn't right and Father said, "No, stop it altogether - you won't go to church! You won't go."

So Mother, who wanted very much to go to church, so she said to Dad - I can't even say as I can remember how it was said - that she would go to Ayot.

So he used to have to drive, you see, to the lodge, you know.

It's not very far.

That's ... it came down sometime later ...

That lodge is down?

Yes. But it was a goodish walk, up the drive, and then we used to go up to church.

You liked going to Ayot Church?

Yes. Well it was because, you see, with the clergyman. And my brother was really a pretty little boy, you know. And I can remember when we went up there the first time, and he was there ... and he liked mother very much, in some way or another, I don't know why ... and as we went in - and of course Mother had got hold of our hands, you see - and he went up to my brother and put his two hands each side of his little face. And give him a kiss.

Of course, that was alright, that was! So, of course, my brother thought he was a very nice clergyman.

And then we used to take our little I can see Mother now, cutting up them little sandwiches, like you cut up that - what was it (???) ?

The mincemeat fingers...?

Yes. Well, that's how Mother used to make the little sandwiches so they were easy to pick up, not to dirty our hands, you see.

'Cos there were no cloakrooms at Lamer ... at, erm, Gustard Wood, were there?

No. No.

But you could wash your hands there, I suppose? Was there a bowl?

Oh yes. There was a place out the back and there was a bowl or two, to catch the water that came off the roof.

So it would be rainwater?

That's right: came off the roof.

And of course, then when it come, you see, to seven years old, then my brother had to go to Wheathampstead School, you see, when he got to seven years old.

And I can remember the time when it come to that, and Mother said ... Mother grieved a lot to think her - he was Mother's favourite - and, but that doesn't matter - but, erm, ... and then she said, so she said, "Well Father," she said, er, "Annie must go across the Park and then I shall walk down to the village with Tom." That was a long way from Lamer, you know.

They went down the drive to ...

Yes, down the drive, that's right, down to the Lodge, you see.

And then my brother didn't like the little boy at the lodge much.

Who was that? Was it Clive?

(????) But of course as you know very well, when you have little fresh kids come, if you don't like 'em, you're going to kick 'em up the bum!

It's funny - it all comes back to me.

And then down by Cavan's dairy?

That's right, straight on (?) it's a long way.

And then of course, Mother and Father knew that he couldn't come home to dinner so then there were sandwiches. And I can remember now as if it was only yesterday! Father was very worried. And old Isaac Hulks, he lived in the what's-a-name yard, near the river, what is it? What's the pub's name there?

The Bull.

The Bull! The old chap lived there. So then, Father being so sorry about his dear little boy, he spoke to old Isaac and old Isaac said, "Well, never mind, Henry," he said, "You let him come into us to have his dinner." See?

Wren Annie tape 18 side A 44 mins, Side B 22 mins

Well now, my little, poor little brother didn't like that, see, but any rate, when it was nice weather they let him sit out in the yard till the bell went. Because the bell always went, at 1 o'clock.

And of course, then Mother always used to toddle down to ...

To meet him?

Oh, always! And it was a long way, from there up to Lamer.

Yes, it is quite far

And yet, you see, I'm the one that's lived the longest of them all, of them all.

Uncle (???) was a good age when he died, wasn't he?

Yes.

He was over 90.

Yes.

My father was a man who was very - I don't brag because it's pleased me to know it - he was thought a lot of! He was always - got a smile, Father had, always a smile.

Because he used to be worrying for Mother, very much, which I realise now, 'cos often they'd come along on those dark nights and the old General would be going out to dinner somewhere, you see. And many-a-time he'd go to somewhere - to Ayot or Digswell or - I could say a lot of the names of where they went ...

"The groom," Father said to the General, "No, sir," he said, "I'm not driving alone there tonight!"

So the General said, Well ... So in the end it happened you see - they let the groom go.

And then if it was a very foggy - I mean to say, in your time, we've never had fogs like we had at that time, in my time - and then he walked in front of the horses; pair of horses, you see; at night.

How many horses were there?

Six or eight, like that.

Then there was some ... four: two - two horses for the carriage, and then there was one for the wagonette and one for riding. Like that you see.

And a pony for the children?

And a pony. And a donkey.

Always had a donkey?

They always had a donkey. Yes - and you know what? I can still remember it as though it was this afternoon!

And they would come down - I forget: whatever was the old man's name? I can't remember, I forget them. Any rate ... came down and said they'd have the donkey.

Wren Annie tape 18 side A 44 mins, Side B 22 mins

Well, of course, Father said, "Well, very good, but" he said, "as I've told you, the donkey might stop."

And true enough, on this very particular day, they went out in the donkey and cart and they got so far and it stopped. And old donkey would do that, thought he would: stop dead as a doornail! Stop!

Wouldn't go?

No.

Because Grandfather Wren had a donkey didn't he?

Yes.

But the most amusing part of it is, so they came down, you see, for Hobbs, you see - they ran back for Hobbs - because it wasn't so very far from the stables where they were going.

So they ... I don't know whether Father went or whether he sent the groom. Perhaps he sent the groom? I believe he did. So Father sent the groom up. So they untangled it out the stables [*sic*]. He wouldn't go any more: he'll stand as stiff as stiff can be!

And so Father said what's the proper word for, say, when you? ... it's gone out of my head this moment. And so then they take him out, and then one of them leads him back to the stables, you see. But you can whack him.; you can whack ... always across his rump ...

Because he wouldn't go. ... Take him out of the shaft?

That's it. But there you are!

Donkeys can be stubborn!

Oh ... stubborn?!!

And of course, Father would never allow the grooms ever to whack the horses; never allow them to do that, no. Because as he said, once you whack them you've had it.

Who used to shoe the horses?

At times, at times they'd come up.

From the village?

Yes.

Who was that? Was it Westwood or the other farrier?

Oh - no, that wasn't Westwood; no, that wasn't Westwood. No. 'Cos Westwoods came into it when, of course, the boys got grown up.

And the Wrens used to do the coaches?

Yes. They were wheelwrights.

Mmm - coach-builders.

Yes - they were wheelwrights as well, you see.

Because the coaches were varnished beautifully and looked lovely.

Of course they were.

And supposing you see like, supposing you were say you or let's say, supposing it was me then; you see - if they had visitors at Lamer, the footman always brought the ... er ... used to come down and help Father, you see, for visitors. Some visitors, you see, the old General allowed them.

What, showed them round the stables you mean?

Showed them round the stables; showed them the horses, you see.

And of course we - our house - was joined then onto the stables.

So you saw everything that went on?

Yes. But we was always never to come forward - must always stand back.

You know it wouldn't allow ... Dad wouldn't allow us two children to be running round, we had to go back - and hide in the holly, or something. Well, you know what children will do!

'Cos at first when we went to Dernford er...

To Lamer.

Lamer - no; I'll speak of Dernford first.

There were cottages up on the top of the hill: there was a cottage for the coachman and a cottage for the head gardener. Well, when we got there - 'cos I've heard all this ...

Because you were only three when you left.

That's all.

Can you remember Dernford?

Yes, it comes to me - well, 'course I go and look at the photograph!

Yes.

I see Mother (???) in the photograph and it all comes back. And these cottages stood on the top ... some little distance away from the house and the stables.

Well then, you see, when it came to that, and the old General took Father to show him where he was going to live, Father said, "No Sir," he said, "I won't be away from my horses."

That was at Lamer or Dernford?

Dernford ... I'm speaking of Dernford.

Wren Annie tape 18 side A 44 mins, Side B 22 mins

So then the General said, "Well Hobbs," he said, "that will be where your house will be, where you'll live."

So Father said, "No, sir," he said, "I must live with my horses." And he said, "And I can't possibly live up here and go and take you out to dinner at night and come back, probably at one or two o'clock in the morning."

So then the old General said, "Well, if it's like that then Hobbs," ... 'cos all this I've heard in later years, when we used to have visitors, and always used to be the same old story ... and so he said, "Well then, Hobbs, the only thing for me to do, then," he said, "is for me to convert one of the stables into living quarters, for you."

And it was, you see - that's what the old General did.

'Cos Father said, where you have horses - and of course carriage horses - you must always be with them.

'Cos often when Dad used to come in at night - this is when he lived, when we lived up at the top - right up at the top of the hill - and Mother used ... and us little kids used to say, "Mum, Mum's crying. What's Mum crying for?"

So then we started to cry and I always remember my poor, dear Mother coming in. And my brother was passionate on behalf of his Mother, passionately. Then he said ... so of course she had to explain to him that Father - we had to say Father, we didn't have to say Daddy, never. Not in service, like that. And ...so ... well, that's how that was.

So then Father said to the General once ... I can hear all this, when Father used to tell all these stories when we used to have visitors; always used to be the same old story ... that he was sorry, he would have to leave, because his children got very, very low in health, from him being away from them especially, because you see: You come here in the winter time when there is a dinner party, perhaps you're not home till, perhaps nearly one o'clock in the morning; and of course, us little kids crying. Mother didn't know what to do with two crying babies.

So that's how it was. So then, you see, the General had these, this house made up down there near the garden, see, and the stables for us.

He always kept the stables ... were always ready for inspection?

Yes. They were always ... I can always remember, I don't know ... not ... perhaps not every week but the flat ... the flat ... that they put in front, see, there was always straw laid down in the stable where the horses stand.

And the groom ... Father was very particular about that, he would have his stables clean ... and they used to (???) the straw and make it so pretty to put along in the front, where the straw was at the back.

And that was ordinary ...

Yes - it always looked nice and tidy.

Only of course it had to always be so particular, you see, because there were a lot of the ... what shall I say? not army but the ...

Military people?

That's right.

His friends used to come from Bedford to see him, did they?

That's right.

'Cos sometimes my poor mother ... I can just ... I've often thought of it since: Father used to go out to dinner somewhere and take two of them - perhaps the General and the Missis would go - and he hadn't always got a groom with him, you see, with him - he drove alone, you see; the other side of Hungerford, then, or somewhere - a long way to go perhaps ... that my poor Mother never went to bed, never went to bed, till Dad got home.

She used to go out to the gate with us two ... we were loving little kids, as a rule, loving little kids, my brother and I. We used to tap one another and say, "Mummy, don't come in and go to bed. Mummy don't come in to go to bed." No, poor Mother used to keep ... because if she went out to the gate she could hear the horses trotting, so far away.

Yes, on the drive, mmm, - sound will travel on a cold night.

If there were visiting people coming to Lamer, did they used to bring their groom and coachman and he had to sleep?

Yes. That's it.

He slept in the harness room?

That's right.

And they had spare loose boxes for the horses?

Yes, yes - and then Mother could always, Mother used to go in and look round and then she could send the sheets to the laundry.

The laundry at the house?

That's right. Same as (???) you see, they all had their laundries.

*What happened if there was a sick horse?
Did they used to have a vet or look after it themselves?*

Oh! They always had the vet! Father wouldn't take that on - no; not take anything like that on.

Because often perhaps with the horses ... and with perhaps ... 'cos in those days, as you know, they often drove over very stony roads, especially if they was going up to a house where the drive hadn't been done up the same as it is today - stony. And perhaps the horse might have got a bit of something in its ... what's-a-name ... in its fettle.

Fetlock.

And er ...

They had a job to get a stone out like that.

Yes, they sent for the vet, see. And that has happened often, when it's been, you know, a bit late at night, when you couldn't get a vet to come through.

And if the horse goes lame ...

Yes, well then Father used to tell Mrs Cherry-Garrard she'd have to stay in the carriage all night. And if it wasn't too far, Father used to go somewhere and get a hot water bottle, or a couple of hot ... I believe Dad always kept two hot water bottles in the carriage, I think so.

They used to have containers didn't they, special ones for coaches.

That's right.

'Cos horses are quite a responsibility, aren't they?

I think, yes.

When the General was Justice of the Peace, and people were caught poaching, did he used to have them up to the house and dress them down? Do you know?

Well, it just depended, sometimes, you see they might not ... they had to go to court houses (?) or something. I think ... the name this moment won't come to me. But, I've heard my poor old Dad say, that one or two of them said Cor, they'd rather have anything than go before that old General: "He's an old bugger he is. He don't half tell us off!"

I can remember all that now.

Yes he was very ... obviously severe.

Oh! he was too severe!

Very severe.

Too - too much so.

Because he was a big man, you know, the General was; the General was a big man, yes. Oh, a fine-looking man. And he had rather a lot of curls in his head, you know, in his hair. He was, he was a very pretty man.

Was the house nicely furnished?

Well of course it was.

A comfortable house?

Oh it was a big house, yes everything ...

But comfortable? Because sometimes they are big and not

Very, very comfortable. And then of course, when they went away, Mother went down with us two little kids. Oh, that was too much for her.

And slept in the house?!

Yes.

Where did you used to sleep then?

In the ... in the er ... oh dear, ... in the butler's room. The butler's room.

That was quite a responsibility!

A responsibility?!! It was enough to drive my Mother to drink!

Then Father, I can remember my Father saying, he didn't like his wife being down there without somebody. Then the old General said, Well, all right then ... So he let old Charlie Sparrow

'Cos poor old Charlie was a little old man.

Of course he was!

I can't imagine he was ever very robust.

Well, there you are! So that was that.

When they went away on holiday they went down to, they used to go down to Devon ...

That's right.

*... because there is a letter about meeting them from the station.
They used to go by train I suppose?*

Yes. And, 'cos ...

And they wouldn't drive all the way down?

Well, no: the General always thought about his horses.

You see, when he used to go away, sometimes, and take the carriage with them, you see, the General - the first thing ... I mean, the horses was more important to the old General than the children were. You see? He wanted to see where his horses were going to be kept at night - didn't matter about Hobbs and the groom; that didn't matter!

They'd stop at a friend's house, would they, or make arrangements...?

They made arrangements - and then, I think, the old General had some straw or hay or something sent down, 'cos of course, he worshiped his horses and that.

He always had good bloodstock?

Of course he did!

We used to have the odd treat because, you see, the old General was High Sheriff of Hertfordshire, one year. And, er, 'course then, then the General lived in Hertford and of course then they had to find somewhere for my father to live and the groom, you see.

*Yes, you were telling me about that the other day.
You said that when you went over to Hertford you went in the trap
- and you hadn't to get too close to the carriage!*

Yes, that's it.

Of course, the old General was a very fine looking man. He didn't well, of course ... he was - a fine looking man.

When he died it was a big funeral?

Oh yes.

But Grandfather had left by that time?

Mmm. But we went to the funeral and Father walked with the Butler and so on, well, you know, Father did.

Who was the butler?

I can't tell you this minute, the names won't come to me - the names won't come to me.

Tilbury was in the ...

Tilbury was the Head Gardener. And Old Charlie Sparrow was the cowman.

Mm-mm. The gardens were nice? (Mmm?) The gardens were nice?

Well of course they were, yes. The greenhouses ...

They had a lot of greenhouses, did they?

Several greenhouses - very nice they were - well of course they were because there was the men to tidy them up!

They used to keep the House in flowers and that sort of thing?

Oh yes! And there was the cows with Old Charlie, his cows ...

And there was a pond near the house, too, wasn't there?

Yes, just in front of our house! And that - the General liked that because, you see, in a bad winter, and there was ice and that, you see, the old General, you see, would go down there, skating.

He liked that?

Yes, I can still remember it now. But he could not teach Miss Lassie to skate. She would not do the right thing. Because the old General - he served his children just the same as he did when he was in the army with a lot of young soldiers. He didn't half ... He ... Poor old Mrs Shorting, never did anything right for her father.

She didn't stand ... there's a proper way for standing, you see ...

Because she was very tall and lanky wasn't she ... (Yes.) ... and a bit stoopy anyway.

That's right, but she would not pull herself up.

He didn't like it?

No! He wanted her to be, you know, (???) like this. But she always did that - stooped.

Yes. He regimented his family?

That's right.

What was Apsley like as a young man?

Well, of course ... I'd say ... He went to college. Well he wasn't home much: very little; very, very little. And, as he had no love for what he was doing, for what his father wanted him to do, he was no ... no picture for his father, because he didn't like the job that his father wanted him to do.

What did his father want him to do?

Well, I forget now, at the moment. But at any rate, Apsley wouldn't do it. He didn't like doing it. He used to say to Dad - "Hobbs," he said, "I don't want to do it!"

So, I heard, I used to hear ... 'cos we weren't allowed to say anything because we were only just little ... we'd listen to the gossip ... He'd say, "Well, you'll do as your father wants you to do, Master Apsley."

"Well," he said, "I don't like it, Hobbs; I don't like it, Hobbs."

Because the little beggar, of course - he did disappoint his father. And then, when he had finished school and that - something else - and then, of course, the little beggar run away ... run away.

Did he?

They had a long duel(?) before they found him - you know, police and all this ... they found him, brought him back ... Which, I mean to say, many of them do that ...

Lots of youngsters ...

Yes, yes - they are not always pleased. You see, in that sort of time, years ago, you had to do what your father wanted you to do. If you wanted to go and be a brick-layer and your father thought you ought to be a carpenter, well you must be the carpenter, much as you hate it, and would rather be a brick-layer.

Mmm. It wasn't really fair, was it?

Well, it was very hard in those days - they never had the chance 'cos ...

You always do the job you want to do better than the job you don't ...

That's right ...

'Cos your brother didn't want to do what he, what your father wanted him to do, did he?

No, no. So, in the end, Tom took his hook, you see.

It's a pity then.

Well, it can't be helped, can it?

No ...

And of course with me, at that time you see, Mother wasn't feeling too good at that age, and of course I couldn't - didn't have to go away because I had to stop at home to look after Mother.

And of course, like the young girl at that time, I wanted a little money - 'cos I wanted, perhaps a new dress. Father said, "You can't have it ... your Mother hasn't the money for it." They obviously kept

Did you get any pocket money?

Eh? Not very much. It might have perhaps been eighteen pence or something like that, nothing more ...

As much as eighteen pence? (Eh?) As much as eighteen pence?

Well, it might have been, perhaps, that as ... because I had left school. Then, you see, of course, then they ... 'course I went as a teacher.

A pupil teacher?

A pupil teacher. A pupil teacher.

Did you enjoy that?

Well, that was alright. And then you see, every Saturday, I went up to Hertford - to ... what was the special school - to study all day.

To Hertford?

To Hertford.

Did you go to St Albans as well?

Eh? I can't quite No, if I went to St Albans that more or less was for painting and drawing ... that was.

So you went to Hertford every Saturday by train?

By train.

Who paid your train fare? You had to pay that yourself?

Well, I expect so. Unless Father perhaps or somebody put down ...

The school didn't pay it?

No, not to my knowledge, no - but that's gone out, gone out of my head, for the moment ...

Then you had lessons with the, er, headmistress?

Oh, bless you yes...

Miss Coe?

Miss Coe.

And she was a dragon? (Eh?) And she was a dragon?

She was a bitch. *(Surprised laughter!)*

No, it's all very well but, you know, perhaps there were some things I couldn't do ...

She wasn't an easy person, obviously?

No.

She was quite young though, wasn't she, at that time?

Oh yes, just out of college.

So she thought herself much superior to everyone else?

Of course she did; of course she did!

Miss Gilbert carried on living at Gustard Wood, even after she retired, didn't she?

Oh, yes, at the house - that was her mother's house, you see, just down there ...

Her father was a tailor, wasn't he? (Eh?) Her father was a tailor?

A tailor, that's right. And still the house is still there.

And of course Mother was so pleased, you see, because, you see I was always home, you see - never out anywhere - I mean, of an evening or anything like that. I ...

Well, it was a long way to go out on your own from there, wasn't it?

Yes. The only thing was to go across the Park, you see.

Mm. And not everyone would want to walk across the Park after dark.

No, no. ... No. I ... I had to do something and I had to go across the Park and I think I upset myself and I think I heard Mother and Father had a few cross words about it. Because Mother said she didn't want her child out at that time of night; people would know or chat or something and know if I'd be coming across the Park and run after me. I could hear all that. It still comes back to me. So then, you see, when I came back, Father met me - down at the spring.

Old Mrs Clark was a funny old woman wasn't she?

Yes, a funny old gal - yes, funny old gal.

When she used to burn her bits of wood - she used to go out wooding, didn't she?

That's right.

And stick them in that little grate.

That's right.

It used to be terribly dangerous...

Yes, that's right. It's a wonder she didn't burn the place down.

She'd got some odds and ends around her.

She had - quite a lot.

*Because she used to walk to Knebworth didn't she? Once a year.
To someone's ... to put flowers on someone's grave?*

Yes, that's right, she did.

(????)

That's right -went across the Park - up to Lamer Lodge. *(????)* That's right.

Not very far, as the crow flies, using footpaths, really.

No, no. They were the good old days of peace, weren't they.

*Oh, I don't know You had the Boer War (Yes) and the 1914-18 war ... (Yes)
...wasn't all that peaceful a time ...*

What about the fair on Gustard Wood Common?

The Fair? Lord bless you - we always looked to the Fair. It still comes now, just the same you know.

No, not to Gustard Wood.

Not? No?

They used to make that sticky rock where they used to pull it over a nail.

That's right.

Did you have any?

Of course we did. If Mother'd give us perhaps twopence or threepence or like that. 'Cos we'd got no money in those days, only what Mother gave us. Perhaps we might get a penny if we did anything.

Mmm. What did you used to have for Christmas presents?

Oh well of course at that time there was a lot of things at Christmas time: there would be a doll and a horse and various other things ...

Little ones.

Yes.

Did they used to give you a Christmas present from the House?

House - yes; that would be a doll, most likely.

And a pudding! Mother didn't never think much of the Christmas puddings - were uneaten(??)

They weren't as good as she made?

Good gracious of course not! The old cook said they was for the workers: what did that matter?

So she didn't make very good ones?

No she didn't! I don't know as we touched it. I don't expect us kids - we were two fussy kids really ... Well, Mother didn't spoil us ...

But she was a good cook?

Mother was a good cook.

Well, she had been a cook ...

She had been a cook, you see.

So she knew what was what.

And of course, Father was a particular man.

And your mother liked cooking?

Mother liked cooking.

It must have been difficult for her, cooking under such restricted circumstances when she had been used to a big kitchen. (Yes) It must have been very difficult.

Then she had something of everything, you see. But then you see it was like that, you see ...whether we will say ... of course, it just depended on the kitchen folks: if the cook was alright ... and of course, Father always knew the servants in the House ... well, often the Cook, she'd say, "Well Hobbs, ..." (I don't know whether she'd say Hobbs or Mr Hobbs - Mr Hobbs, I expect Cook would have said ...)

And he'd call her Mrs ... wouldn't he; I don't know what her name was ...

" ... You tell your wife she can come up to the kitchen if she would like."

Well perhaps then Mother didn't like that sort of thing - Mother never did. But still, she used to go up with Father you see and they used to have two big stools near the big kitchen table and there they had to sit, you see - my brother and... and the other one ...

Was there much turn over of staff? Did the staff change very much?

Well, the girls didn't like it much: you see the General wouldn't allow them to go out at night.

No, but it was a long way from anywhere.

Of course it was! And dark in those days - no lamps about, you know ... not a lamp anywhere.

And, erm - it was a job to keep servants up there ...

When they went to church on Sundays...

Had a wagonette!

They didn't have a carriage?

No, wagonette.

They didn't like the carriage out ...

No, not on a Sunday, no: wagonette.

Even if it was raining?

Yes, they all had their umbrellas. Father had a big umbrella and if it was very wet probably there'd be one perhaps sit at the back and hold the umbrella up over Father.

Well, that's quite interesting really because one would have thought they would have gone to church in the carriage on a Sunday.

No. General wouldn't allow that, not on a Sunday.

He was very strict about Sundays?

Very strict - very, very strict.

And they went to Wheathampstead church?

Yes. And it was ... because ... it used to be funny sometimes, for some of the girls, if they'd got a new hat on, you see: half the carriage - the wagonette I should say! - was full of umbrellas!

And the servants went in the back of it as well?

Well, if it was very bad or anything like that, but the General really didn't like driving the servants about to a place of worship. He didn't like that. And you see they had the wagonette for Mrs Cherry-Garrard and the children. ... Not the groom. Not on a Sunday, no.

If Mrs Cherry-Garrard went out visiting, she went in the carriage?

Yes, in the brougham. And then the footman would go as a rule. If it was a little distance Father would say he wanted his ... one of the footmen.

Why was that? Because he liked to have another man with him?

Another man with him, you see.

In case of problems?

That's right.

Because Lamer was so much off the main road. It was ...

Yes. You see you'd got to drive down to Lamer Lodge on the Luton, you know, at the bottom, or go up to Ayot, to the lodge up there.

*It would depend which way they were going. (That's right.)
If they were going Kimpton way they went up ...*

That's right ... Up ... And if it was St Albans ... Down.

You can see the Clock Tower in St Albans from just outside Lamer House? Did you know?

I think I can, Amy.

*Mmm. We noticed it in the summer. (Yes)
And just up the drive, towards the Ayot Lodge ... (Yes) ... the lodge near Ayot... (Yes)
... you can see Hatfield House across the fields!*

Oh yes! Oh yes - I do know ... yes, I know that Amy, yes, yes.

It doesn't look very far across the fields.

No it doesn't. We'll say, a stone's throw.

Yes, it looks it.

Mmm. Of course, I will say of Father - he was a very, very happy man on the carriage - a very happy man. And you see, if there was any Nobs or anything come to Wheathampstead, you see, the General always went.

Mmm. They didn't have much to do with the Cavanns did they?

No, no. No.

Why was that?

It wasn't far enough, I suppose - something or other. No. 'Cos poor Mother, she always used to say to Father when he came in - she was always so interested to sit down and listen to Father, where he had been in the afternoon ...

(Cat enters room)

I'n't he contented!

Very good, isn't he.

Yes, isn't he contented. "So you see it's all very well, sweetheart, but you're not loving me, your loving auntie! See - you don't trouble about me!"

No - though he knows which side his bread is buttered!

"Yes you ought to love poor old Gran. Yes, 'cos God sent you to Granny! Yes he did - I tell you that every morning, long times. 'Cos Granny was lonely, so he sent you."

Did you have a cat at Lamer?

Eh? Always had cats!

All round the place?

Oh my dear woman, yes - we always had our cat.

You had it in the house?

Yes - course we did!

Did you have a dog?

Eh? Yes. My father always had a dog - Gyp (?Chip?), Gyp, that was his name - of the little dog, Gyp.

You had a Gyp when you were at Evans Farm, didn't you?

Yes, yes - Father always ...

(?)He thanked you very well (Yes...)

I wondered if they would have a dog round with horses?

Well he ... 'cos you see, you'd never go anywhere there was generally horses, whatever big house you go to ...

No, I wondered if in the stables they wouldn't ...

Yes. No. Well, Father treated them. But, you see, I can remember some of them ... some of them little ones ... and Father used to make them walk behind, you see, in the stables, you know - a path like that. And some: no - they wouldn't. Well then Father used to whip them for that - he'd got a little whip. No, they wouldn't do it. They would be made to do it.

You couldn't train them?

No, they ... you couldn't do it!

What's she looking at?

*She's thinking. (Eh?) She's having a think...
She thinks it's nearly tea-time, "Don't you "*

Wren Annie tape 18 side A 44 mins, Side B 22 mins

Oh ... That's it.

She's only going to make a fuss ...

Showing off!

That's all it is ...

Annie Wren died aged 88 on 21 September 1978.