

Breaking the Dams



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the flooding of existing production

MOHNE DAM
AERIAL PHOTO
1954

Breaking the Dams

The Story of Dambuster David Maltby and His Crew

*

Charles Foster

Pen and Sword Aviation

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In memory of

David Maltby DSO DFC

John Fort DFC

William Hatton

Victor Hill

Vivian Nicholson DFM

Harold Simmonds

Antony Stone

of the 1,394 people who died on the night of 16–17 May 1943

*of the 55,000 other members of RAF Bomber Command
who died between 1939 and 1945*

*and of my mother Jean Maltby,
her sister, Audrey,
and their parents, Ettrick and Aileen*

R I P

Note: The 1955 film and the Paul Brickhill book on which it is based, published in 1951, are both called *The Dam Busters*. However, the term Dambuster is more commonly seen these days, and I have chosen to use that in this text (except in specific references to the film or book title).

Prologue



Young, Happy and Beautiful

There's nothing glorious or noble about dying in war. It's a terrible tragedy which also affects, in many different ways, those who survive. But amongst those who took part in the Second World War, especially those who volunteered to fly in the RAF, there was a certain fatalism – an acceptance that death might come. It was well expressed by the Battle of Britain fighter-pilot Richard Hillary who survived severe burns after being shot down and wrote one of the best books about the war, *The Last Enemy*, while recuperating. Against medical advice he returned to flying and was killed in an accident. He wrote in a letter:

...we were not that stupid ... we could remember only too well that all this had been seen in the last war but, in spite of that and not because of it, we still thought this one worth fighting.¹

This casualism – the ritual of the letter standing on the locker for the Committee of Adjustment Officer to post if you were killed – was hard for the families left behind to bear.

Mrs Elizabeth Nicholson, the mother of Flt Sgt Vivian Nicholson, soon after her son had been killed in the same tragedy as David Maltby, wrote movingly to David Maltby's father about a photograph taken in London on the day when the boys had both been decorated, three months earlier: 'It is indeed a terrible and deep wound for us when we look at them so young, happy and beautiful.' Words that are strikingly similar to those of the writer Iris Murdoch, in her novel *The Red and The Green*, describing the dead as being 'made young and perfect for ever.'² Murdoch's close friend Major Frank Thompson was killed in a Special Operations Executive (SOE) operation in Bulgaria in 1944 and, as her

¹ Sebastian Faulks, *The Fatal Englishman*, Vintage, 1997, p.172

² Iris Murdoch, *The Red and the Green*, Chatto, 1965

biographer notes, she was surely thinking of him as she wrote those words.³

Most of the seven young men who feature in this book were still teenagers, 'young, happy and beautiful', when they went to war. They weren't much older when they dropped the bomb which caused the final breach in the Möhne Dam on a moonlit night in May 1943, and then when they died just four months later. Each of them left a mother, a father, a brother or a sister; two of them had an infant child. This is their story.

3 Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch*, HarperCollins, 2001, p.195

Chapter 1



Introduction

It's a piece of music that's as familiar as Rule Britannia or Over the Rainbow (and like them now downloadable as a ringtone for your mobile phone) but to us, growing up in the Home Counties in the late 1950s, it was indisputably – and slightly embarrassingly – our tune. If you sing that famous descending melody – 'daah-da-da-da-da' out loud in company, someone is bound to complete it... 'da, da-dee-da-da-da-da'. It instantly evokes an image: clean-shaven, bright-eyed young men putting one across the Jerries in a daring night-time raid. Or, perhaps, football fans in too-tight England jerseys urging their country on in another doomed penalty shoot-out. It is, of course, Eric Coates's music 'The Dam Busters March' first used in the 1955 film of the same name.

I can't remember when I first heard it – we had a scratchy 78 rpm record at home, played by the RAF Band, and it was often on the radio in the late 1950s. I know, however, that I didn't see the film itself until about 1961, when I was 11. During one school holiday my brother George and I were staying with my Aunt Audrey and Uncle Johnnie near Oxford. Together with our cousin, David, Audrey had driven us to some obscure cinema miles away (was it Abingdon? Aylesbury? Banbury?) because she had noticed that the film was showing. This time, instead of leaving us to sit through the screening on our own and collecting us afterwards, which was her usual practice when she took us to the pictures, Audrey came in with us. She paid sharp attention. 'Here it is,' she whispered to us as the scene began where Wg Cdr Guy Gibson, played by Richard Todd, and Gp Capt Charles Whitworth, played by Derek Farr, are shown leafing through an album full of photographs of aircrew, looking for pilots for the special mission. 'Oh yes, David Maltby,' says Whitworth and they pass on to the next page.

The film tells the rest of the story: a new RAF squadron is formed, 617 Squadron, led by Gibson. Their Lancaster bombers are specially adapted to carry a secret new weapon, the so-called 'bouncing bomb', designed to attack several large dams in the Ruhr valley, the heart of Germany's industrial region. But when they attack the first dam things don't go exactly to plan. Four aircraft attack, one crashes in flames, but the dam is still in place. David Maltby is piloting the next plane. 'Hello J-Johnny are you ready?' asks Gibson. 'OK Leader,' says the actor George Baker, playing David. Then there is silence as his aircraft approaches, two others flying ahead of him to draw the flak. The bomb is dropped, bounces four, five, six times – then a pause, followed by an explosion at the base of the dam. Still the soundtrack remains silent, but, just as the next aircraft is lining up, someone shouts out, 'It's gone, look, my God!' A rush of water through the dam – and a blast of music.

In the cinema that day a prickle of recognition ran down the back of my neck, a feeling that I have had countless times since. Even at 11, I knew well what connected my family to this story because I had read, and reread, Paul Brickhill's book which shares the name of the film. The pilot who dropped the bomb which broke the dam, David Maltby, was my uncle – the only brother of my Aunt Audrey and my mother, Jean.

At the age of 23 David had been a bomber pilot for almost two years. He had completed one tour of operations and been awarded a DFC before he took part in the raid. He had been selected to fly in this new squadron set up specifically to destroy a target the Germans believed to be nearly impregnable. After six weeks of training he had flown in the first wave of bombers that had left a bumpy, grass runway in Lincolnshire on a bright May evening, piloting a plane with the code letters AJ-J, J for Johnny. For his role in the operation, he was decorated with a DSO.

Four months after the Dams Raid he was dead, leaving a wife, Nina, and a ten-week-old baby son, John. His aircraft went down in the North Sea, his body was brought ashore in Suffolk by an Air Sea Rescue launch and he was buried in Kent, in the church in which he had been married 16 months before.

We had a number of mementoes of David around the house. A reproduction of a drawing by Cuthbert Orde, published as part of a double page spread in *The Tatler*, a photograph of him meeting the

King (my mother always pointing out the bulge in his tunic pocket where he had stuffed his pipe and tobacco). I would look at these and notice how much David resembled my mother – the same roundness in the cheeks, the nose and chin, the height.

His height is the first thing that everyone remembers as their first impression. In his book *Enemy Coast Ahead*, Guy Gibson, who was himself originally turned down for the RAF as too short, calls him ‘tall and thoughtful’,⁴ and in the 617 Squadron photos you can see him towering over most of the others. The Maltbys are a tall family – Audrey and Jean were both 5 ft 10 in, and Ettrick, their father and my grandfather, was well over 6 ft.

George Baker, who played David in the film, is also a tall man, and confirmed to me in 2006 that the casting director Robert Leonard and film director Michael Anderson had tried to find lookalike actors to play the various parts.

On the desk in front of them they had a photo of [David] and one of me and I must admit that there was a considerable similarity. Then when I met Group Captain Whitworth he fell into the habit of calling me Dave, which was really quite disconcerting.

This is the same Whitworth whose screen character was supposed to have picked David out of an album. During the war Whitworth had been the station commander at RAF Scampton, and when the film was being made he was asked to become the technical adviser. In a 2005 radio interview,⁵ George Baker told a story about David being so wound up after a raid that he used to shoot china plates with his service revolver to relieve the tension. He heard this story from Whitworth:

[Whitworth] would often refer to an incident thinking that I had been there. This is how the story of the plate shooting came to be told, quite obviously the men of the squadron became extremely tense before and after an operational flight but other indications from the Group Captain told me that he was a very funny man and a delightful companion. I feel very honoured to have had the chance to portray him in the film.⁶

Because George Baker had played our uncle, our family ‘adopted’ him – when we were growing up we would look out for him in films or

4 Guy Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, Michael Joseph 1946, p.242

5 BBC Radio 4, Today, 13 December 2005

6 George Baker, Email to author, 17 May 2006

on TV. He turned up in various Wednesday Plays, episodes of *Z Cars* and *Up Pompeii*, before appearing in a couple of James Bond films and *I Claudius*. Now, of course, he's best known as Chief Inspector Wexford in the *Ruth Rendell Mysteries* TV series.

The scene in the film where Gibson and Whitworth select the pilots for the raid is actually complete fiction. It derives from Gibson's own account in his book *Enemy Coast Ahead*, except that in the book he says that he gave the names of the pilots he wanted to a 'fellow with a red moustache' called Cartwright. Whitworth was not involved at all.⁷ In reality, Gibson asked for some pilots by name, but they were mainly those he had flown with previously. Other Lancaster squadrons – including the squadron with which David was flying in March 1943 – were asked to recommend experienced pilots and David obviously fitted the bill. David had never served with Gibson up to this point. It is possible that their paths had crossed in some officers' mess or other, but I have never found any evidence of this.

Other fictional scenes were also added to the film for dramatic effect: the most famous being when Gibson and one of his crew are supposed to get the idea for using spotlights to gauge the aircraft's height over water from a visit to the theatre. In reality the idea to use spotlights came from an Air Ministry scientist.

But no matter. *The Dam Busters* was released on the twelfth anniversary of the raid itself, in May 1955, and was an immediate box-office success. The interest lies not only in the tale but also its timing and, 'the manner of its telling, which reinforced the nostalgic optimism of Britain in the 1950s before Suez: 'Churchill back in Downing Street, Everest conquered, a new sovereign', writes Richard Morris.⁸ But for some, the depiction of their loved one on screen was too much. My grandparents turned down their invitation to the premiere, choosing to see the film quietly and anonymously some time later when it came on general release.

The actual raid and the film have become so conflated in people's minds that it is perhaps no surprise that truth and fiction are sometimes confused. A mini-industry in 'collectables' has sprung up around the Dambusters and it does its best to further the confusion by offering for sale as items of equal importance 'Dambuster tribute' prints, first-day-cover envelopes and other artefacts signed either by one of the few men still alive who flew on the raid – or by Richard Todd, Guy Gibson's

7 Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, p.239

8 Richard Morris, *Guy Gibson*, Penguin 1995, p.315

celluloid equivalent. Thus for £40 you can get a print signed by Todd (a fine fellow who had a distinguished war career, but still an *actor*, playing a real life RAF pilot) or by George Johnson, the real-life bomb-aimer who dropped a bomb on the Sorpe Dam and won a DFM for his efforts. (£40 is at the bottom end of the celebrity scale. You need to pay almost twice as much for a Manchester United print signed by Wayne Rooney.)

Even the most peripheral connections to the Dambusters legend are exploited. A pub near 617 Squadron's wartime base at RAF Scampton, in the Lincolnshire village of the same name, which had no pub at all in the Second World War, was until recently a 'living tribute to the legendary "Dambusters" of the Royal Air Force' where you could enjoy the 'convivial atmosphere that exists within its limestone walls – walls that are adorned with a marvellous and poignant collection of Royal Air Force WW2 memorabilia.' This pub has now closed, the reason perhaps being what one bulletin board correspondent noted as its rather unwelcoming atmosphere. However, the owners obviously thought they were convivial enough hosts. They were very proud of the fact that you could dig out your battledress or utility skirt and recreate the wartime mood as a member of a local '1940s Re-enactment Group' which met there to 'add flavour' to the locals' Sunday lunchtime pints. It was almost enough to make you choke on your powdered egg.

The arrival of the internet has further fuelled Dambuster mania. There are dozens of websites with material about 617 Squadron and its exploits, many repeating the same inaccurate information. Some websites can tell me the registration number of the Lancaster aircraft that David flew to the Dams, but can't get other things right – the correct spelling of his father's name being an obvious example.

Working on this book, however, has made me realise that there is a lot I simply don't know. I remember many of the stories that my mother told us about the war, but she has been dead for 20 years. Her tendency to over-embroider any narrative got worse towards the end of her life, and now I wonder whether she made some of it up completely. She once told my brother Andrew that she had been taken by the police to identify David's body. But I never heard this from her myself, as either a child or an adult.

So I began the work by trying to put together a better picture of the rest of the crew of AJ-J. Their names were familiar to me from the air-

crew lists in my mother's copy of Guy Gibson's *Enemy Coast Ahead*, but it takes a bit more research to find out more than just their ranks and surnames. The crew that flew with David on the Dams Raid – or to give it its official name, Operation Chastise – were:

Flight Engineer:	Sgt William Hatton
Navigator:	Sgt Vivian Nicholson
Wireless Operator:	Sgt Antony Stone
Bomb Aimer:	Plt Off John Fort
Front Gunner:	Sgt Victor Hill
Rear Gunner:	Sgt Harold Simmonds.

There is one invaluable guide to anyone trying to find out more about Operation Chastise. John Sweetman's 1982 book, revised in 2002 as *The Dambusters Raid*, is the most authoritative account of all, and, as I am later to discover, much more reliable than those accounts which purport to be 'definitive'. As regards the crews, he quickly debunks the myth that they were all veterans and hand-picked by Gibson:

... the majority were not decorated (including six of the pilots); and far from having finished two operational tours some had not done one. Many who would fly to the German dams in May 1943 had completed fewer than ten operations against enemy targets.⁹

In fact, David Maltby's crew was probably the most inexperienced of the lot. Three of them, Nicholson, Stone and Simmonds, had never flown on an operation at all. John Fort and William Hatton had only flown a handful. David, by contrast, had done a full operational tour of 28 flights in 106 and 97 Squadrons between June 1941 and June 1942. After a few months on the usual between-tours break, in his case commanding a target and gunnery flight, training bomb aimers and gunners, he had gone back for a second tour. It was on his return to 97 Squadron in March 1943 that he met the five who were to be his crew: all waiting to start work. They crewed-up together but were then transferred the few miles from Coningsby to Scampton, to the new 617 Squadron to begin the special training. Another front gunner originally came with them, but he was replaced by Victor Hill only 10 days before the actual raid. He brought some real operational experience to the

9 John Sweetman, *The Dambusters Raid*, Cassell, 2002, p.98

crew, having flown on more than 20 sorties in 9 Squadron.

During the training for the Dams Raid the crew of AJ-J obviously came in for some ribbing from the rest for being so inexperienced. The Squadron's Adjutant, Harry Humphries, says that David himself used to call them 'sprogs' and 'rookies'.¹⁰ However, they acquitted themselves admirably when put to the test. So well, in fact, that navigator Vivian Nicholson and bomb aimer John Fort were decorated on their first and second missions respectively.

This same crew flew together on just three more sorties over the next four months until on 15 September 1943, turning back when recalled from a low-level operation to bomb the Dortmund Ems canal, some sort of accident occurred and the aircraft plunged into the North Sea. Only David's body was ever found – the rest must still be trapped in the broken fuselage hundreds of feet below the surface.

It seems to have been a happy crew, but they had no illusions about how difficult their jobs were and the risks involved. In the letter left for his family, which they received after the fatal crash, wireless operator Sgt Antony Stone wrote: 'I will have ended happily, so have no fears of how I ended as I have the finest crowd of fellows with me, and if the skipper goes I will be glad to go with him. He has so much to lose, far more responsibilities than I.'¹¹

* * *

What have the obsessions of website researchers and harmless 're-enactment' charades to do with the real Second World War – a war in which hundreds of thousands of British people, and perhaps forty-five million people worldwide, lost their lives? At each of these deaths, a family was bereaved. A son or a daughter, a brother or sister, an aunt or an uncle – each loss affected someone else. For many of the generation who survived, the war became something they were not able to talk about: it was too painful. The writer Ivy Compton Burnett could not read the war trilogy in Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time* novels, 'finding any reference to war unbearable after the death in action of a much beloved brother'.¹² Her feelings were shared by many others.

In my family, the loss that was felt all through their lives by my mother, her sister and her parents, Ettrick and Aileen, not to mention David's wife and baby son, was tempered by the undoubted pride

¹⁰ Harry Humphries, *Living with Heroes*, Erskine Press, 2003, p.34

¹¹ Stone family correspondence

¹² Anthony Powell, *To Keep the Ball Rolling*, Penguin, 1983, p.341

they felt in him. He had been decorated twice, had taken part in one of the most spectacular events of the war and, later, immortalised in a film complete with stirring music. No wonder that, as children, we were brought up with the legend, shown the pictures and the medals, encouraged to read the book – and to write in to *Children's Favourites* on the Light Programme requesting the record.

David wasn't the only person in my mother's family to be killed in the war. Of the nearly 580,000 British and Commonwealth people who died, three more were her first cousins – Ralph Maltby, Louis Maltby and Charles Bartlet. Ralph Maltby, who was also Ettrick's godson, was a Captain in the Royal Artillery and died at Arnhem in September 1944. Louis Maltby had been born and brought up in South Africa. A Lieutenant in the Kimberley Regiment, he was wounded while fighting in Italy, captured by the Germans, and died as a PoW in November 1944.

On the other side of her family, a fearful symmetry occurred. My grandmother, Aileen, had an older sister, Mildred Bartlet, and she also had one son and two daughters. Charles Bartlet and David Maltby were born a few months apart in 1920 and spent many holidays together as boys. As neither had a brother they were very close. David died in September 1943 and Charles, a Lieutenant in the Irish Guards, died at Anzio just five months later. I remember Great Aunt Mildred only as my grandmother's rather severe and a bit scary older sister. No wonder she seemed forbidding. As children we often treat our elders with indifference, but now I shudder when I think of what this pair of sisters, who had also lost a brother in the trenches in the First World War, must have gone through.

Growing up in the 1950s and early 1960s meant that it was impossible to escape the Second World War, even though I was born five years after it finished. Not only were there the experiences of our parents and other relatives (my father, already in the navy as an officer cadet before the war started, finally saw active service in the Indian Ocean in 1943), there was also the never-ending stream of other cultural material. I was a great reader as a child, and used to devour comics like the *Wizard* and the *Victor*, which contained lots of real-life war stories, as well as the small format Battle Picture Library and War Picture Library comic magazines. Then there were the proper books – *The Great Escape*, *Reach for the Sky*, and *One of Our Submarines* (a particular favourite of

mine, written by Edward Young, who designed the very first Penguin Books). There were also the films – *Reach for the Sky* (again), *Sink the Bismarck* and *The Guns of Navarone*. Even our playthings – Eighth Army plastic soldiers, Airfix models, old Army tin helmets rescued from jumble sales- recreated the war.

But as we grew older, memories of the war began to change, almost imperceptibly at first. In 1963, aged 13, I went away to St Edward's School in Oxford, where Ettrick, my grandfather, had been in the 1890s. This was the same school at which Guy Gibson, later to be David's commanding officer in 617 Squadron, had been a pupil in the 1930s. By the time I arrived Gibson was commemorated in some style – as the school's only VC he had his own memorial window in the chapel. The school had other famous war heroes, notably Douglas Bader, the subject of *Reach for the Sky*. He, of course, survived the war, and was frequently seen making his jerky way around the Quad at the Gaudy speech day.

These were the well-known ones, but, as in most English public schools, you didn't have to be famous to be commemorated – just dead. The names of hundreds of young men were carved in stone on the rolls of honour on the chapel walls and I spent many a boring sermon idly reading the inscriptions at the end of my pew. Every November, on Remembrance Sunday, our regular service was moved outside, and we would stand in the cold while wreaths were laid on the war memorial. As the chapel clock struck 11 I would try and picture David, the uncle I never knew, during the two minute silence that followed.

By the time I went away to school, my grandparents were getting on. They celebrated their golden wedding a year later in 1964, and had the usual photographs taken for the local papers in Northamptonshire. (My father, slightly exasperated by them at times, read the press cuttings and complained, to me at least but probably not to my mother, that they had managed to 'bring up the Dambusters again'.) Then, at the beginning of 1967, they both died, quite quickly and within a few months of each other. Ettrick, who never seemed in the best of health but was then 82 years old, took to his bed after Christmas and died in late January. Then Aileen was diagnosed with lung cancer, and died in April. The ever present Gold Leaf cigarettes, balanced Andy Capp-like in one corner of her mouth for so long that she had developed a yellow nicotine stain on the side of her hair, had caught up with her. She had never smoked before David died.

As their generation passed, gentle mocking of the war began to be more acceptable. I doubt very much that my grandparents ever saw *Beyond the Fringe*, but extracts from it were shown on TV sometime in the 1960s, and I remember being discomfited at the moment when Peter Cook tells Jonathan Miller:

I want you to lay down your life, Perkins. We need a futile gesture at this stage. It will raise the whole tone of the war. Get up in a crate, Perkins, pop over to Bremen, take a shufti, don't come back. Goodbye Perkins. I wish I was going too.¹³

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the enormous success of TV programmes like *Dad's Army*, which glossed over the war's horrors and mocked pomposity and bureaucracy in a cosy, unthreatening way. Other programmes found it easy to adopt a sharper tone. The catch phrase 'Don't mention the war' is funny when uttered by barking mad Torquay hoteliers, but it must still have evoked difficult memories for people who loved and lost.

But then there came a further slight shift in the public's attitude. It began with the realisation that a generation was dying and that, perhaps, not enough was being done. From 1989, the anniversaries started in earnest. The commemoration of the occasion of 50 years since the start of the war, started a cycle of golden anniversaries: the Battle of Britain, Pearl Harbor, El Alamein, D-Day, VE Day, Hiroshima, VJ Day. The cycle went round again with the 60th anniversaries but by 2005 it became clear that on each of these occasions, the people who had direct experience – the ranks of bemedalled British Legion members standing still as the sound of Nimrod swelled in the chill November air – were diminishing. So up stepped the kids. In came the school projects, the People's History archives, the museum living exhibits. Asking your granddad about the war became a national pastime. So much so that people now complain that for the British schoolchild modern history seems to consist of the Second World War and little else.

* * *

Ettrick Maltby and Aileen Hatfeild were married on 28 July 1914, shortly before Ettrick's thirtieth birthday. Ettrick was the fourth of five

13 Roger Wilmut ed, *The Complete Beyond the Fringe*, Methuen, 1987, p.74

children, and his father and grandfather were both clergymen. He was born in Aspley, Bedfordshire, where his father was the vicar. Family legend says that he derived his unusual Christian name from the river in Scotland where his father was on holiday fishing when he got the word his son was born. (A true sportsman as well as a man of the cloth, he is reputed to have finished landing the salmon he had hooked before making his way to his wife's bedside.) After being sent to St Edward's, a school founded in 1863 to cater for the sons of the impoverished clergy, Etrick had taken another step on this traditional educational path and went up to Keble College, Oxford, where he was good at sport, winning a Blue for hockey and a half-Blue for golf. After leaving Oxford he started teaching at a preparatory school in Kent.

Etrick may have come from a line of poor vicars, but Aileen's family were quite prosperous, from a well-connected family in Margate, the Hatfields (spelt in this unusual way). They were active in local politics, Conservatives naturally, and both her parents served on Margate Council. Aileen's mother, Maud Back, aged 25, had married her cousin Charles Hatfeild, who was already 50, in September 1885. They had seven children in quick succession, of whom Aileen was the fifth, and the second daughter. Charles Hatfeild died in 1910, at the age of 74.

Aileen had only just turned 19 when she and Etrick were married on 28 July 1914. Perhaps Maud didn't find this too much of a problem, given that there had been an even larger age gap between her and her husband. Sport may have been what brought Etrick and Aileen together for, like Etrick, Aileen was good at games. Under his tutelage she also took up hockey, becoming a goalkeeper like him, and was eventually capped for England several times in the 1920s.

For some reason, presumably to do with his health, Etrick didn't go into the forces during the First World War. As he had turned 30 on 12 August 1914, he was certainly too old to be conscripted. After their marriage, he and Aileen moved first to Willingdon, near Eastbourne. He had a job teaching in a school named Hydneye House after the road in which it was situated, The Hydneye. Their first daughter, Audrey, was born there on 26 June 1917.

In July 1918, the school moved to a large redbrick Victorian house in a village called Baldslow, near Hastings, in an area known locally as The Ridge. The house was renamed Hydneye House and Etrick became joint headmaster of the school. It was there that their other two

children were born: David, on 10 May 1920, and Jean, my mother, on 30 December 1924.

They were to stay at Hydneye House for 37 years with a short interruption during the war when it was requisitioned by the army. We often spent family holidays there in the first five years of my life and I remember it well as an impressive country house style residence – you swept up a drive past a gate lodge to an open space in front of the house, itself fronted by a big lawn overlooked by two giant cedar trees. Inside, large rooms opened up off a wood-panelled hall, with a big staircase lifting you gracefully to the first floor.

Doubtless it was a great place to grow up as a child. Certainly my mother always talked of it nostalgically and was very upset when it was demolished in the 1970s to make way for a comprehensive school. In the 1980s more development took place in the area and a new district hospital, the Conquest Hospital, was opened almost opposite where the school once stood. It was in this hospital that my mother died, in July 1987, and she was cremated a short distance further along The Ridge, at Hastings Crematorium. So, she was born, died and her ashes were scattered in three separate places, just a few hundred yards apart.

It turns out that my grandfather kept a diary all his life, and it is now in the possession of my cousin Anthea. She told me on the phone that the entries are very short but that it seemed to run from the 1920s through to the 1960s. A few weeks later, sitting in her kitchen in Edinburgh, I was able to examine it. It is a five year diary, with thick, smooth paper bound in a pale brown rough artificial moleskin. It was given to him by someone called Bill Mallory, according to the bookplate pasted carefully on the flyleaf. Ever economical, Ettrick obviously decided to make use of it for as many years as he could, and recorded events on its pages over four decades, which makes it rather confusing to follow. Some pages have got many entries, each for separate years from the 1920s to the 1960s, others very few. And the entries vary in their content – recording family movements and events, appointments of staff at the school, current affairs ('Chamberlain flies to Munich'), the weather, race meetings, cricket scores and gardening records. Mainly in pencil, it's all written in his neat, rather feminine hand which I remember from my childhood.

I realised that the only way of making sense of the diary would be to

type it up myself in chronological order but, in the meantime, Anthea and I occupied ourselves by looking up days on which we thought he would have recorded something of interest. Her birthday – 27 March – has a number of entries, which include:

1930: A[ileen] & I to Belper.

1941: Tropical rain at Witherdon. D[avid] motored down from Oxford. Inspected craters.

1943: Became Granpop! Anthea born 1.30pm at Southborne, T.Wells

1945: A & I left Witherdon for good + trailer & hens! And home about 7pm & found Jean at Tanner's lodge where we lived & pigged for about 10 days.

I was most interested, of course, in the war years, in which Witherdon features a lot. Hydneye had been evacuated to this large house near Okehampton in Devon in 1940. By 1945, they were obviously relieved to be on the way home, even though the war was not yet over.

The arrival of a fifth grandchild, me, on 4 January 1950 is celebrated more prosaically:

4 January 1950: A to Worthing. Charles born Malta.

David, of course, features many times. A little nervously, I turned to the dates that I know will be important. How much detail did he record?

16 May 1943: (16th & 17th) Great 'Dam' raid in which David took part & won the D.S.O. (29)

And then, curiously, underneath but with a pencil arrow placing it above the first line, he wrote:

1942: D over Copenhagen (Gardening 24)

This would imply he wrote the 1942 entry *after* that for 1943. As I flicked through the pages, I saw other German cities mentioned, each accompanied by a circled or underlined number:

15 Jan 1942: D over Hamburg. (17) 1190 incendiaries! in a Manchester

(1st pilot)

27 April 1942: D over Trondheim (19) Tirpitz

3 May 1942: D shot up over Dunkirk & had to do a horrible crash landing at Coningsby (Stuttgart 21)

The numbers must refer to the running total of operations completed, and the occasional incorrect sequence shows that he obviously did not write every entry exactly on the day it occurred. However it was still going to be a very useful, almost contemporary, record of key events.

I began to wonder how he got this information. Was David ringing or writing to his parents every time he completed an operation? That seemed unlikely. Or did Ettrick write them all up at one time, later, perhaps after he died?

I turned to September, and the sequence of dates which must have been terrible for him to record:

15 September 1943: David, approx: 1 A.M. – we had the news at 3.30p.m.

This was written in a dark pencil. Then underneath, in his customary lighter pencil, obviously written later:

It was his 33rd op. trip – most of his big ones had been done in Lanc. 906, but this was 981.
813 hrs–20mins.

He can't have known these details on the day of the crash, but he was right. I knew when I read these words that on the raid on which he died, which was aborted mid-operation, David wasn't flying the Lancaster which had taken him safely to the Dams and back, but another newer aircraft, No. JA981. His Dams Raid aircraft, Lancaster No. EE906, call sign AJ-J, must have been a lucky plane. It survived the war and was eventually scrapped in 1947. Lancaster JA981 had only flown for 41 hours before it crashed. As I read I puzzled over how and when Ettrick had managed to get hold of the serial numbers of his aircraft, let alone the total number of hours David had flown in his RAF career.

On 17 September 1943, they left Devon for the long drive to Kent for the funeral. Ettrick wrote:

Left Witherdon to go to Hemel. Audrey & Anthea arrd. there from B'head.

This was a Friday. Aileen's youngest sister Violet lived in Hemel Hempstead, where her husband Ted was the village doctor. I know from the newspaper cuttings that they were all at the funeral, which took place the following day:

18 September 1943: David's funeral at Wickhambreaux. A went to Hengrove afterwards – we ret'd to Hemel with Audrey & Johnnie.

Why did Aileen go to her brother's house at Hengrove in Kent, while the others – Audrey, Johnnie and presumably my mother who doesn't get a mention but who I know was at the funeral – went back to Hemel Hempstead? Whatever the reason, two days later they returned to Devon, where the school term was about to start:

20 September 1943: Milner-Everitt & Miss Hook joined staff. Returned to Witherdon to find 84 letters waiting for us.

News travelled fast, even in wartime. David's crash had occurred in the early hours of Wednesday morning, and he was buried on the Saturday. Many people had probably seen the notice in *The Times*, but that had only appeared on the morning of the funeral.

For most of the rest of September 1943 very little is recorded. Aileen's sister Mildred Bartlet and her daughter Frances, who had a small child, couldn't go to the funeral but visited them at Witherdon shortly afterwards. Sixty-three years later Frances told me how she remembers Aileen and Ettrick sitting, still in shock, in separate parts of the garden. Their daughter Audrey said to her: 'The problem with Mummy and Daddy is that they can't console each other.'

I left Edinburgh with a complete photocopy of all the pages, and started the long task of typing them up in order.

* * *

Another series of phone calls put me in touch with some more valuable sources of information. I spoke first to Terry Rogers, the archivist

at Marlborough College and was taken aback when he told me that 241 boys from the school were killed in the Second World War, at a time when there were about 500 boys in the school. (That huge number is itself dwarfed by the 742 who died in the First World War.) Also he mentioned that there were two Marlburians on the Dams Raid, the other being Flt Lt John Hoggood, the pilot of AJ-M, the second aircraft to attempt a strike on the dam, and shot down with the loss of all but two of the crew. Terry told me that he got a lot of help from another archivist called Alex Bateman, who apparently is an expert on the men who took part in the operation.

When I rang Alex Bateman it turned out that not only did he have a file full of stuff about David Maltby but he also had an enormous archive of material which he has been collecting for nigh on twenty years, and he was generous with his time and help. In the bundle of stuff he sent me later that week were a number of gems, including a photo of the whole crew, taken at RAF Blida in Algeria in the summer of 1943. He had been given this by Mrs Grace Blackburn, the sister of Sgt Harold Simmonds, the rear gunner. I pored over the picture: David I recognised straightaway, the tallest of course, fourth from the left in a pair of service khaki shorts and long socks. The rest I don't know, but a note confirms the line up. Front gunner Vic Hill is on the left, in long service trousers and flying boots. Antony Stone, the wireless operator, is next, thin and bare-chested. Bomb aimer John Fort, the oldest of the group, is on the left of David. To his right is flight engineer William Hatton, in a rather dashing cravat. Harold Simmonds is on the end, a cowlick of dark hair falling over his face, and wearing a huge pair of trousers that start half-way down his chest. Crouching in front is the young Vivian Nicholson, who won the DFM in his first raid, navigating AJ-J safely to the Möhne Dam and back.

I thought of what I then knew of them all, aided by some books and their entries at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website. Hill: a gardener's son from Gloucestershire. Stone: whose father was a barber in Winchester; some of his old customers still remember him – he kept a portrait of his son in his shop until he retired. Stone's mother had turned up in Harry Humphries' office the day after Stone was killed, repeating over and over, 'Did he suffer? Did he suffer?'¹⁴ Fort: from Lancashire and the oldest at 31, who had been in the RAF since 1932. Hatton: a Yorkshireman from Wakefield. Simmonds: a Sussex

14 Humphries, *Living with Heroes*, p. 61



The crew who flew Lancaster AJ-J on the Dams Raid, pictured in Blida, Algeria, some time between 15 and 24 July 1943. Standing, left to right: Sgt Victor Hill (front gunner), Sgt Antony Stone (wireless operator), Plt Off John Fort DFC (bomb aimer), Sqn Ldr David Maltby DSO DFC (pilot), Sgt William Hatton (flight engineer), Sgt Harold Simmonds (rear gunner). Crouching: Sgt Vivian Nicholson DFM (navigator).

PHOTO: GRACE BLACKBURN

boy like David, who had a girlfriend called Phyllis. Nicholson: who came from County Durham, and had been shipped across the Atlantic to Canada to do his navigator's training.

I had also been able to reach Robert Owen, the official historian of 617 Squadron. He told me more about the Dambusters who are still alive and contacts them on my behalf. Over the next few weeks I received letters or emails from four of them. It's a humbling experience receiving these notes – these are all men in their mid or late 80s, and they are uniformly courteous, even though they are repeating stories that they must have told hundreds of times before. They all remembered David and were able to pass on some useful information.

Two of them live in Canada: Fred Sutherland and Grant MacDonald, both gunners, who flew in Les Knight's and Ken Brown's aircraft

respectively. Fred Sutherland sent me a long email with some detail about the night David's plane went down. He mentioned that he himself was shot down over Holland the very next day, 16 September 1943, but baled out and eventually got home with the help of the Dutch resistance. Les Knight, his pilot, died that day, heroically struggling to maintain height long enough so that the rest of the crew could bale out. It was a terrible day for 617 Squadron: in four of the other eight crews all the members were killed outright. Fred Sutherland also mentioned that he knew Vic Hill quite well, and had been in touch with a friend of Hill's daughter a few years back. He dug out an old address for the friend, and eventually I obtained the phone number for Valerie Ashton, née Hill.

Valerie is therefore the first relative of a member of David's crew that I actually spoke to. She was two when her father died and has a vague memory of being taken to the railway station by her mother to say goodbye to him. Her mother remarried after the war and so she was brought up by a new stepfather. She now regrets not finding out more about her real father before her mother died. But she has turned up some material including letters and photographs.

The only surviving pilot from the Dams Raid is Les Munro, who went back to New Zealand after the war. His long email, answering all my questions, is full of nuggets of information. Like David, he had previously been in 97 Squadron, but when he joined it in the autumn of 1942, David was serving in the Target and Gunnery flight on his between-tours break. Ten days after David came back to start a second tour they were both transferred to 617 Squadron.

* * *

Immediately the war started David left his job in mining, travelled down from Yorkshire and tried to sign up for the RAF. Ettrick recorded in his diary on 8 September 1939 that David 'went to Brighton to enlist but wasn't wanted!'. He eventually managed to join the RAFVR (the RAF Volunteer Reserve) in March 1940, but wasn't actually called up until 20 June. The sheer logistics of getting more than a quarter of a million new recruits into the service must have almost overwhelmed it, and David obviously just had to wait his turn.

It's worth recalling just what a state the country was in at the

time that he finally got his call-up papers. Churchill had been Prime Minister for little more than a month. He had almost broken down in the car on the way back to Admiralty House after being appointed by the King at Buckingham Palace. When his bodyguard, Inspector Thompson, congratulated him saying that he knew he had an enormous task, he replied, with tears in his eyes, 'God alone knows how great it is. I hope it is not too late. I am very much afraid it is. We can only do our best.' As John Lukacs has noted, Hitler's advance not only seemed irresistible: in many places and many ways it was.¹⁵

Churchill made two of his greatest speeches in that month. On Tuesday 4 June he told a silent House of Commons about the fall of France, Belgium and the retreat from Dunkirk. He spoke of how it might be necessary to fight to defend 'our island home', ending with his famous peroration: 'we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...'. Oratory on a grand scale, designed to rouse the nation. He had to wind up his gift for inspirational language again, just a fortnight later when his words were broadcast once more. This time he warned the listening world that the Battle of Britain was about to begin: 'Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour."' "

It's curious how oratory has the power to influence a national mood. Just a few days after I had looked up these words and typed them out, a CD of great speeches popped out of my copy of *The Guardian* one Saturday. Included in it was the earlier, post-Dunkirk speech. Even now you can hear the determination in Churchill's voice, the whole massive backing of power and resolve behind his words like a fortress: they are never words for words' sake. As Simon Schama wrote in an accompanying essay, referring to a contemporary article by Vita Sackville-West: 'They were words for everyone's sake. They were the lifeboat and the blood transfusion. They turned the tide.'¹⁶

The day after Churchill's deep growl resonated from a million wireless sets, David set off from Okehampton railway station for a reception centre at RAF Uxbridge. New aircrew were badly needed: even though the Battle of Britain had not yet started, bomber pilots in inadequate aircraft were already falling like flies. (Max Hastings tells the

15 John Lukacs, *Five Days in London*, Yale 2001, p.6

16 Simon Schama, *Great Speeches of the 20th Century No.1*, *The Guardian* pamphlet, 2007

story of one called ‘Ten Minute’ Jenkins who was shot down on his first operation before he had even unpacked his kitbag.¹⁷)

By September 1940 Churchill had already identified the expansion of Bomber Command as the key to victory. He wrote in a memorandum to Lord Beaverbrook:

The Navy can lose us the war, but only the Air Force can win it. Therefore our supreme effort must be to gain overwhelming mastery in the air. The Fighters are our salvation, but the Bombers alone provide the means of victory.¹⁸

When Churchill wrote those words it was by no means clear that Britain, then standing alone although bolstered by its forces from the Commonwealth, would emerge victorious. In the end, of course, it did – but at the price of the lives of more than 55,000 Bomber Command aircrew. These would include the seven young men in Grace Blackburn’s picture, a casual snap taken in the unaccustomed heat and dust of North Africa. Two months after the picture was taken, and four months after taking part in the most famous single bombing operation of the war, they were all dead.

¹⁷ Max Hastings, *Bomber Command*, Michael Joseph, 1979, p.69

¹⁸ John Terraine, *The Right of the Line*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1985, p.260

Chapter 2



In Memoriam

If there was an organisation that searched the countryside for the archetypal English village for films then Wickhambreaux in Kent would score highly. It has buildings in a mixture of redbrick, flint and white weatherboard, a village green overlooked by a grand house, a Church, a pub and an olde worlde mill. The village is in one of Kent's most beautiful valleys, that of the River Stour, and lies five or so miles east of Canterbury.

On one day in September every year a small group of elderly men gather in the village. Smartly dressed in blazers and sporting ties with a propeller motif, they order their lunch from the menu at The Rose pub and then, accompanied by their ladies, cross the roughly cut green to the iron wicket-gate in front of St Andrew's Church. One at a time, they pull back the gate's stiff hinges and walk the few yards to a low grave next to the War Memorial. A few other people are present: mostly elderly, others in various stages of middle age who are perhaps slightly too young to remember the war, but would have heard their parents tell of it. One of the gathering speaks, reading from a script typed in capitals on a manual typewriter. He invites another to lay a wreath, who steps forward and, stooping slightly awkwardly, places a red, white and blue roundel on the grave. They all bow their heads for a few moments silence.

The place where this little ceremony is enacted each year was actually once the location for a real film. During the summer and autumn of 1943 Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger shot several scenes for their film *A Canterbury Tale* in the village of Wickhambreaux and, as the camera crews and actors took their positions for the scenes filmed in the churchyard, they must surely have noticed the fresh earth and fading flowers that marked the cemetery's newest incumbent. For it was



Wickhambreaux as it must have looked in the 1930s from a contemporary postcard.

PHOTO: PAUL TRITTON

here, a week before, that David Maltby had been laid to rest. St Andrew's was the parish church of his parents-in-law, George and Hilda Goodson, who had a farm called Frognall, just outside the village. It was the same church where he had married his wife, Nina, 16 months earlier. It's a small but attractive church built in the 14th century and extensively restored in Victorian times. The huge Art Nouveau stained-glass east window dates from that restoration. It is the work of an American glass manufacturer and was installed in the church in memory of a wealthy American woman, Harriet Duer Gallatin, who is also buried in the graveyard.

Right next to the church is the village's grandest house, Wickhambreaux Court. In the 1940s this was the home of Frank and Elizabeth Montgomery. The house was used in the film *A Canterbury Tale* as the home of the mysterious local magistrate, Thomas Colpepper, with the Montgomerys themselves appearing as extras in some scenes. In the film when the character called Alison (played by Sheila Sim,

who later married Richard Attenborough) first sees the house she sighs: 'What wouldn't I give to grow old in a place like that', and one wonders how many other day trippers to the village have said the same since. The Montgomery family still own the house, and Mrs Elizabeth Montgomery (who came to both David and Nina's wedding and David's funeral) lived there until a few years ago.

Some time after the film crew left, a stone was placed over David's grave, with a short inscription:

In loving memory of
 Sqn/Ldr David J.H. Maltby D.S.O. D.F.C.
 R.A.F.V.R. Bomber Command
 Aged 23
 And of his crew
 Sept. 15th 1943

The men who gather here every September are the East Kent branch of the Aircrew Association, an ex-servicemens' association open to anyone who has served as aircrew in the RAF. In effect this means people who served in the war, as there has never been large scale recruitment into the air force since. They are from my parents' generation and, even though he was a naval man, my father would have got on fine with them, yarning away in a country pub rehearsing his wartime stories.

As a surrogate for my parents, I felt slightly awkward the day I was there. With no direct experience of my own to relate I had to fall back on my family history, which of course is what brought us all together on this particular day.

While we chatted I was reminded of the odds they faced, just to survive the war. The bulk of the RAF's casualties were in Bomber Command, where the number killed made up more than 10 per cent of the entire military casualties suffered by Britain and the Commonwealth. According to some estimates, nearly half the men who actually flew in Bomber Command were killed.

David is buried at Wickhambreaux, but the bodies of his crew were never found. However, most of them are commemorated in other places: there is a plaque remembering Flt Sgt Vivian Nicholson DFM in his local church, St Mary's in Sherburn, Co Durham; Sgt Harold Simmonds' name appears in a book of remembrance in Burgess Hill in



Members of the East Kent branch of the RAF Aircrew Association, after the wreath-laying ceremony at David Maltby's grave in St. Andrew's Church, Wickhambreaux, 14 September 2007.

PHOTO: CHARLES FOSTER

Sussex; Sgt William Hatton is on a memorial board in his old school in Wakefield; Flt Sgt Victor Hill is on the memorial in Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire, where he had been the head gardener; and there was once a bench dedicated to Flt Sgt Antony Stone in the grounds of Winchester Cathedral, although local reports suggested recently that it seems to have been moved. All their names appear on the Commonwealth Air Forces memorial at Runnymede, dedicated to the 20,456 British and Commonwealth airmen who died in the Second World War and who have no known grave.

All eight of the men who died that day are also listed at 617 Squadron's

own memorial in Woodhall Spa. This is a large monument in the shape of a dam wall, an evocative choice perhaps, but one which gives it a somewhat brutalist look. It is carved with the names of the 204 members of 617 Squadron who died between May 1943 and the end of the war. A small stream of people, some knowledgeable, others merely curious, walk up to this every day, many looking for the famous names. The dead are listed in strict alphabetical order, just initials, surnames and decorations.

The memorial is right in the centre of Woodhall Spa. The spa town grew up in the 1830s around the village's natural well, when the fashion for taking the waters was at its height, and an elegant Victorian town developed. In its heyday it was a bustling little inland resort. It still has an air of faded grandeur, little changed in decades. The Petwood Hotel is probably the town's most famous landmark, and trades heavily on its RAF connections. During the war it was requisitioned for service use and a number of squadrons – including David's first unit 97 Squadron and 617 Squadron after the Dams Raid – used it as their officers' mess. The half-timbered exterior features in many a snapshot.

Just as I was taken aback when told of the number of boys from David's school killed in the war, the six panels of names in Woodhall made me pause when I visited the memorial. So many names, so many young men, from all parts of Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth. I searched for the names of David's crew, and took a photograph of each, but as I did so I was conscious of those listed above and below, all united first by the alphabetical proximity of their surnames but also because they had volunteered for the RAF and ended up in the same squadron.

War memorials are such a common feature in our cities, towns and villages that we scarcely notice them and frequently pass them by. I'm sure that every village in Kent has one – in Wickhambreaux there is a medium-size cross very close to David's grave. His name appears here again, among the other people from the parish who died on active service in the Second World War: The roll call of names couldn't sound more English: Sidney Bushell, John Cadman, Albert Friend, Peter Harmsworth, David Maltby, Norman Tucker, James Young. On every war memorial across the country there are similar lists: names linked by coincidence of geography, education, war service, employment – so various and so many that it makes their total number impossible to collate.

Back at David's graveside I thought of all these things, and, above all, I wondered why I had never been here before. Every year, strangers come to the place where my uncle, my mother's only brother, is buried. They place wreaths, and pay their respects, but why were we never brought here as children? I can only conclude that my mother would not, or could not, face up to the pain it would cause her. Perhaps this is one of the things that caused her so much anxiety towards the end of her life.

A tune buzzed round my head while I was in Wickhambreaux that warm late summer day. It was there again a few weeks later as I wrote these words and, suddenly, I know what it is. It's the last song from the film, *Oh! What a Lovely War*, sung just before the dramatic, awesome final shot, as the camera pulls away from a single white cross to reveal tens, hundreds, thousands more – row on row, filling the screen: 'And when they ask us how dangerous it was/Oh, we'll never tell them, no, we'll never tell them.'

Chapter 3



Before the War

Ettrick Maltby's diary throughout the 1920s tells a pretty typical story of a moderately well off, upper middle-class family, which is the life into which Audrey, David and Jean were born. It was the kind of family that automatically would have sent their sons away to a boarding preparatory school at the age of seven or eight, the difference being here that they actually lived in one.

The boarding prep school was a method of education that has almost completely vanished today, with the handful of schools that offer boarding facilities only doing so as weekly boarders. For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century things were quite different: boys came for a whole term at a time, eleven or twelve weeks away from home. Some schools would have a half-term holiday over a long weekend, but this was by no means common. Parents who lived near enough would be allowed to visit their children on occasional Sundays, usually taking them out for awkward lunches in nearby hotels. This kind of school has left its mark in many ways, most notably in literature. Many writers have recorded their days of happiness or, more likely, misery both as schoolboys or schoolmasters. They range from Evelyn Waugh and John Betjeman through to the more recent account of the Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion, whose memoir *In the Blood* captures the singular bewilderment of one small boy who couldn't quite work out why he was there.

There is one famous work which may be the most accurate description in print of this strange world:

all skools ... are nothing but kanes, lat. french, geog. hist, algy, geom, headmasters, skool dogs, skool sossages, my bro molesworth 2 and MASTERS everywhere. The only good things about skool are the BOYS wizz who are noble brave fearless etc. although you have various swots,

bullies, cissies, milksops greedy guts and oiks with whom i am forced to mingle hem hem.¹⁹

These are the words of Nigel Molesworth, eponymous hero of the Molesworth books, four best-selling satires, starting with *Down with Skool!*, from the 1950s. The authors, Geoffrey Willans and Ronald Searle, were responsible for the introduction of a number of catchphrases and sayings to the English language (like ‘as any fule know’; ‘hello clouds, hello sky’) which people often use without knowing their provenance. Although the books are still in print, and indeed have been recently promoted to the status of Penguin Modern Classics, they are something of a cult phenomenon, reminding the nostalgic reader of a time when boys of a certain background wore grey flannel shorts all year round, learnt Latin and wrote letters home on Sundays.

Etrick, Aileen and Audrey, then 11 months old, moved to Baldslow in May 1918, a few months before the end of the First World War. Shortly after they moved, in September, Aileen’s oldest brother, Eric, was killed in France ‘gallantly leading his men’ from the East Kent Mounted Rifles over a hill ‘swept by rifle and shell fire’. Eric was the golden boy of the Hatfeild family, the heir to the family estate at Hartsdown in Margate, and a more than useful cricketer. He had been to Eton, where he was captain of cricket, on to New College, Oxford, where he got a Blue, and then played for Kent for several seasons up to the outbreak of the war. As far as I know, he is the only relative I have who appears in *Wisden* – or on the Cricinfo website, but it was there that I discovered he was quite a respectable slow left-arm bowler, taking 64 wickets in 65 first class matches, at an average of 23.04 with a career best return of 5 for 48.

The Hatfeilds had made their money from tobacco, and were also related by marriage to other tobacco families such as the Taddys and Friends. They also had a lot of property and other interests in and around Margate. When Eric was killed, only eight years after his father had died, the estate had to pay a second large swath of death duties, so its finances were not in good order. This led to his mother, Mrs Maud Hatfeild, first selling several parcels of land and then, in 1927, Hartsdown House itself and most of its grounds, to Margate Corporation. At the same time she continued her political career, becoming the Corporation’s first woman Mayor in 1926, and at one

19 Geoffrey Willans and Ronald Searle, *The Compleet Molesworth*, Max Parrish, 1958, p.7



Hydneye House School. Photograph taken in the 1960s, but the property would have looked much the same throughout the time the Maltby family lived there.

PHOTO: STUART ROBERTS

stage contemplating standing for parliament. She died in 1931.

The Hatfeild tobacco connections with Hartsdown weren't forgotten when the family moved out. In 1934, the Carreras company, who had taken over the Taddy family company and were the manufacturers of Black Cat cigarettes, chartered five special trains to bring 2,500 factory 'girls', on their second annual outing to Margate. A meal was served in what was described as the 'largest marquee in England' erected in Hartsdown Park. The meal was provided by 200 waiters and waitresses, and provided on 10,000 plates. Between the wars, Margate was at the height of its popularity as a resort. That year, the local press reported that more than 150,000 day trippers visited during the season.

Hydneye was a large house, and the Maltbys had both school and domestic staff, including a nanny, a maid and a cook, to help run it. This domestic support enabled Etrick and Aileen to pursue their sporting lifestyles, especially in the school holidays. For Etrick, this meant golf and cricket. He was a regular competitor in the famous



David Maltby, at Hydneye, aged about 2.

PHOTO: FAMILY COLLECTION

President's Putter competition at Rye in the first week of the New Year, a knockout matchplay competition open to members of the Oxford and Cambridge Society. This was made up of people who had represented either university in the annual match between them, and contained many of the best amateurs in the country. Although he never won the Putter, he did secure victory in the Easter gold medal in 1929.

In the summer there was cricket. A lot of this revolved around the Hastings Cricket Festival, the week during the summer when Sussex County Cricket Club played their home matches in the town and sometimes even played the touring test team. Up until the 1960s cricket festivals were very popular events in seaside towns in the summer months, attracting large crowds of trippers as well as cricket enthusiasts. Etrick was elected to the committee of the County Cricket Club at some time in the 1920s and was also on the committee that organised the Hastings Cricket Festival. In later years, he was the Festival's Chairman. They began a tradition of organising a cricket match between a 'Hydneye House XI' and the Hastings Police on the Sunday of Festival week. The series of matches lasted over 30 years, interrupted only by the war.

Aileen continued playing hockey, apparently even during the early stages of her pregnancies with both David and Jean. She played for

South Saxons Hockey Club in Hastings, county matches for Sussex, regional matches for the South of England, and on several occasions for the full England team. In those days, there was often only one international match a year, usually against one of the other 'home' countries, and her first international appearance was in an away match against Ireland, scheduled for St Patrick's Day, 17 March 1923. Ettrick recorded in his diary that he saw her off on the boat train to Dublin.

At the time, there was a certain amount of apprehension about an English team going to Ireland, which was still embroiled in a bloody civil war after the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922. A boxing world title fight was also being held in Dublin on the same night but Republican plans to blow up the theatre in which this took place were thwarted. The hockey match attracted less attention, everything went well and England won 3:0. A newspaper report quoted in the history of the All England Women's Hockey Association says: 'Many people seemed anxious as to whether the match would be allowed, all other games having been stopped the previous day. However, everything passed off in perfect peace.'²⁰ Another report, in the *Irish Times*, signifies that Aileen had a quiet enough match. 'Now and then the Irish forwards broke away, but could never press home their attacks, and Mrs Maltby was never really tested in goal.'²¹

Aileen was part of the English contingent sent to the first Triennial Conference of the fledgling International Federation of Women's Hockey Associations set up in Geneva in 1930 'to nurture the highest possible standard of play for members of the new Federation.' She later played in the 'demonstration' match between England and the Rest of the World.²² She went on to have a long career in hockey administration, serving on many committees and for a while as an England selector. Even in the 1960s, she was still going to the annual international hockey match at Wembley. England played one match there every spring, and it had become an outing for every hockey-playing girls' school in the country, who seemed to compete with each other as to who could scream the loudest. My mother usually went with Aileen but one year I was dragged along as well. A gawky teenager, I remember sitting in the back seat of the car in a traffic jam alongside coaches full of girls, blushing furiously as I saw the handwritten 'Boys Wanted!' signs stuck up in the windows.

David was born on 10 May 1920 at home in Hydneys, at 8.45pm. Like many children of their generation, Audrey, David and (later)

20 Nancy Tomkins, *The Century Makers: A History of the All England Women's Hockey Association 1895-1995*, p.102

21 *Irish Times*, 19 March 1923

22 Tomkins, *The Century Makers*, p.42

Jean were entrusted to the care of a nanny for a lot of their early lives. There is no record of the earlier person they employed but at some time between David and Jean being born Raynes Cook joined the family as their nanny. Ettrick notes the date of her leaving in April 1937, when Jean was 12. After that she went on to work for another family in Kent, and then retired to Bournemouth. My family got to know her well through her visits to us every summer when we lived in Plymouth. Then, soon after we moved to Gerrards Cross in 1958, she came to live with us permanently and stayed until she died in 1964. By then she was well into her 80s and, because she suffered from dementia, couldn't live on her own any more. We were always told that she had no family of her own, which is why she had come to live with us, but after she died my mother informed me that Nanny had once had a child and had to give it up for adoption, because she wasn't married. The name 'Mrs Cook', by which she was known, was a 'courtesy' title, taken up by her when she started nannying. It now seems a very matter of fact way of dealing with what must have been a very difficult time of her life.

A nanny who stayed with one family so long had a huge impact on children from this kind of background. From soon after they were born until they went away to school, she would have been the person they saw the most – getting them up and dressed in the mornings, feeding and amusing them during the day, then presenting them ready for inspection and a little quality time with their mother and father between tea and supper. Even when they went on holidays, in the case of the Maltbys camping all over Britain and Ireland, Nanny came too, and had to sleep in a tent with the youngest children.

The Maltbys were great campers and went on holidays every summer, often with relatives. Aileen's sister Mildred, and her family, the Bartlets, and Ettrick's sister Kyria, and her family, the Yules, were regular companions. Aileen and Mildred themselves built a caravan on a lorry chassis, helped by a man who worked at Hydneye who Frances Bonsey (née Bartlet) remembers was just called 'Sergeant Major'.

Nearly 80 years later Ruth Walton (née Yule) also remembers these holidays, and was able to send me some pictures taken at the time. One of them again stopped me in my tracks, and the handwritten caption sent me off on yet another piece of research.

It is the only picture I have ever seen of David and Jean together, taken on Camber Sands in Sussex when David was 9 and Jean only 4.



Playing at Camber Sands, June 1929. Left to right: Alan Pegler, Jean Maltby, David Maltby, David Yule.

PHOTO: RUTH WALTON

You can see the delight in her face, being allowed to play with the much bigger boys. It is obvious to me now that, at least at that age, she adored her older brother. You don't have to be much of an amateur psychologist to work out that this state of affairs continued for the next 14 or so years, until he was killed.

The caption told me that the other boys in the picture were David and Jean's cousin, David Yule, and a boy called Alan Pegler. I knew the latter name immediately. While we were growing up, it would crop up now and again in the news, and my mother would tell us that Alan had been a pupil at Hydneye, and been a good friend of the Maltby family.

The reason why Alan Pegler was newsworthy was because throughout the 1960s and 70s he was involved in several schemes to buy the Flying Scotsman steam locomotive, both to save it from the scrapyard and keep it running. He was always described in the press as a 'successful businessman', which indeed he was, but first and foremost he was, and still is, what is usually called a 'railway enthusiast'.

When I tracked Alan Pegler down in London, early in 2008, he still had vivid memories of his time at Hydneye and his friendship with the Maltbys. Even better, he had another photograph, taken when David had come to stay with his own family one summer holiday, probably when they were both 12.



Oiling the level crossing gate near Barnby Moor and Sutton station on the East Coast Main Line. David Maltby looks on as one of the railwaymen explains the procedure.

PHOTO: ALAN PEGLER

Most of Alan's pictures have been lost or destroyed, but he has one album of his own photographs. At the time, he lived in north Nottinghamshire, close to the East Coast main line, and took many pictures of steam engines, signal boxes and other bits and pieces of railway paraphernalia. Amongst these is a picture of David, looking on reasonably attentively, as a railway worker lies prone on the ground reaching under a level crossing gate to oil it. 'Was David keen on railways?' I asked. 'Not really,' Alan replied, 'but he wasn't disinterested. He was quite intrigued seeing all these famous trains roaring past.'

We sometimes forget how serious childhood illnesses, such as scarlet fever and whooping cough, were in those days before vaccinations and antibiotics. Of the Maltby children, David seems to have been the worst affected, with Ettrick's diary saying he was 'pretty bad' on a couple of occasions before he was three. However, he survived, and was ready to start being formally schooled two days before his eighth birthday, at Hydneye. Two years later, in September 1930, they decided to move him on to another school, and he was sent to St Wilfrid's in nearby Hawkhurst.

David was nearly 14 when he went away to Marlborough College. In fact he was only there for just over two years: from the start of the summer term in April 1934 to the end of the summer term in July 1936.

The two Davids. Left, David Maltby, right, David Yule, his first cousin. Sitting on the steps at Hydneye, probably in 1929, about the same time as the Camber Sands picture on p. 41

PHOTO: RUTH WALTON



The college's archivist, Terry Rogers, helped me trace his record by digging out old class lists and even his house rugby logbook. This indicates that he did not seem to have the sporting ability of his parents, playing only in a house second team, mainly as a second row forward: 'Maltby was slow but hard working and lasted right through the game. He was more often up with the ball than one would expect.' (In the same house and on the same team was a boy called Lionel Queripel, who was later to win the VC at Arnhem when, wounded, he stayed at his post armed with grenades and a pistol to cover the withdrawal of his troops.) David's academic achievements were about as undistinguished as those in sport, showing that he finished in the bottom half of the class most of the time.

When David left Marlborough he seems to have drifted about for a while, but then went to a school at Glen Arun near Arundel to sit his Oxford Certificate, which was an exam roughly equivalent to a modern AS level. ('David through everything except French', Etrick records in January 1937.) By the spring of 1938, he had decided to start training as a mining engineer, a career that seems an odd choice for a 18 year old, even one who had dropped out of Marlborough. What brought him to this decision no one now seems to know.

In April Aileen and Etrick together drove him up to Harness Grove near Worksop. Then they spent one day going 'round pits' in South

Yorkshire. This was obviously some form of reconnaissance expedition trying to sort out where David should go and with whom he could stay. Harness Grove was a country house and estate associated with the Jones family, who were the owners of Rother Vale Collieries, but I have not been able to establish whether either Ettrick or Aileen actually knew them. However, it is in the part of Nottinghamshire from which Ettrick's family came, so it is possible that there was some connection. Farndon, where Ettrick's grandfather had been the Rector for many years, is less than 30 miles away, and Southwell Minster has a window dedicated to the Maltby family. Ettrick and Aileen mixed up this trip with a little holiday, staying at Forest Lodge near Retford and Ettrick spent three or four days playing golf at Firbeck and Lindrick.

By 24 October 1938 everything seemed to have been sorted out. Using a phrase that crops up several times in his diary, obviously a favourite of his, he wrote 'David left home to start his new life at Treeton.' Aileen went with him, as Ettrick obviously had to stay at the school. Treeton is a small village in South Yorkshire, roughly halfway between Sheffield and Rotherham. Although it is a historic village, mentioned in the Domesday Book, by the early 20th century it was dominated by the colliery, which was the major industry in the area. In 1938 more than 1,000 men worked below ground at the pit, with nearly 300 more at the surface. The colliery, along with the nearby Fence and Orgreave mines, was owned by Rother Vale Collieries, and then by its successor, United Steel Companies.

Most of the information that I have now about David's year in Yorkshire is gleaned from the obituaries published after his death. In September 1943, the *Isle of Thanet Gazette* recorded that David 'began at the bottom of the ladder by working in the pit and lodging with a miner's family. His gift for making friends in all walks of life made him most popular with the miners and their families.' The lodgings appear to have been with a family called Smith in nearby Aughton, since Ettrick records that they visited him there on 3 January 1939, after he had been home for Christmas 1938. By April that year, David could obviously afford to run a car of his own, since Ettrick drove it to Forest Lodge and met him there.

Life at Hydneye may have been relatively well-appointed but by the time I remember their visits, in the 1960s, Ettrick and Aileen had

downsized a little. However their old fashioned speech patterns ('orf' for 'off', 'Marmmeet' for 'Marmite') still remained, the kind endlessly parodied since by the likes of Harry Enfield. In my grandparents' world, people didn't drive, they motored, they wore Aertex shirts, sat on tartan picnic rugs and smoked endless packs of Player's. Gentlemen played cricket as amateurs and joined the services as officers.

If all this sounds like an idealised vision of a 'Betjemanesque' golden age, furnished and burnished by the sun, then perhaps it was. Having a boys' prep school with its many bedrooms and acres of grounds as your house may have given Etrick a taste for a grander style of living than he probably could afford. In what could almost be seen as a caricature from Molesworth, he always had an abiding interest in what had won the 3.30 at Sandown, and by 1938, his diary records that he had taken on an accountant 'to straighten things out'. This led to a lot of tension 'behind the green-baize door', as my mother elliptically called what I assume to be the private areas of the school. She always said that Etrick lost any money he made from running the school, and plenty more of Aileen's inheritance from the Hatfeilds as well. In the end, Aileen took firm control of their financial arrangements, and he seems to have accepted that.

Whatever stability they had reached was about to be shaken severely. On 4 August 1939, they had gone to Harness Grove to spend their summer holiday camping. They drove over to Treeton to see David, and Etrick recorded that he went down a mine on 9 August. On 22 August, they travelled by river from Worksop to Farndon. However, they must have been keeping in touch with the news since in what looks like a change of plan, Etrick wrote on 25 August: 'Decided to pack up & leave Harness Grove next morning.' By Friday 1 September, they were back at home. Etrick drove over to Horsham to fetch a puppy, and while he was there he heard that Hitler had invaded Poland. The car broke down on their way home; not a good sign. On the Sunday, Neville Chamberlain made his historic broadcast announcing that war had been declared, and on Monday 4 September 1939 David gave up his mining career, and came home to enlist.