

## Hilda's Childhood Memories<sup>1</sup>

I was born on Christmas Day in 1912 and my parents were Charles and Agnes Flemington, but Mum hated her name so pretended her name was Alice. There were five children; I had two elder brothers, Francis and Maurice ('Morrie'), an elder sister Irene ('Rene'), and a younger sister, Mabel.

My parents were kind and we lived a very happy and carefree childhood, although we were brought up very strictly. For instance, on Sundays we had to go to Sunday School in the morning, stay for the adult service, go home for lunch, back to Sunday School again in the afternoon – home for tea, and then back again for the evening service with our parents. We all called our father Daddy, even Mum did the same – I will call him that as I go along, it was how my sisters and I referred to him throughout our lives. Mother was always Mum

### **Drove End Farm**

We lived at Drove End Farm until I was about 9 years of age. Daddy was a farmer so we all led a very active life as we were given our special jobs to do each day – like feeding the chicken, collecting their eggs from around the field hedges and from their nesting boxes, feeding the pigs (one bit my finger once) or cutting up mangolds, turnips and swedes for the cattle to eat.



*Drove End Farm on the Salisbury to Blandford Turnpike*

We had horses, cows, pigs, chicken and goats (I didn't like goat's milk, it was too creamy and made me ill). It was hard work for my parents, because in those days he had no tractors or anything mechanized. The ploughing of the fields was all done by a horse-drawn plough and the cutting of hay was done by a horse-drawn implement

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<sup>1</sup> Hilda Flemington. Begins with memories from her life at Drove End Farm up to about 1921, then at Martin, starting with some stories from before she was born when her parents were first married.

with a huge cutting scythe attached, and the corn was cut in a similar way but with a flaying machine and binder similar to a lot of clothes horses joined together. A local contractor called Jabez Poore threshed the corn with his steam threshing machine.

Our farm was called Martin Drove End Farm and was 1½ miles from the village of Martin, so it was a long way to go to school, and to the church. I didn't start school until I was six years of age because Mum maintained it was too far for a little one to walk. Sometimes one of the labourers used to give me a lift on the bar of his bike and if Daddy had to go to the village he would take us in the trap (a little horse-drawn vehicle).

There was a Public House just the other side of the road to Martin called the Coote Arms. The farm and the pub were the only two dwellings on a lonely stretch of the main Salisbury to Blandford Road, 10 miles from Salisbury. The landlord at that time was Mr Lewington who ran it with his wife. They had 2 children: a boy Bernard and a girl, Victoria. Vic was 3 years older than I was, but we were great friends all though our school days, but sadly we lost touch after I left school and went away.



*The Coote Arms*

My sister Rene and I used to go up to a wood called Vernditch with Bernard and Vic and have lots of fun climbing trees and sliding down their branches, over and over again. Our parents weren't very pleased with the state of our knickers when they were taken off at night. There was a well at one end of the wood with a huge concrete slab which only covered half of the opening and Vic, being a bit of a dare devil, would hang onto the concrete and swing herself backwards and forwards in the hole. The rest of us were petrified that she would lose her grip and fall into the well - but she was a very lucky girl.

Another time we went to the top part of the wood where there was a field with several walnut trees in it. In the old days, there was an estate there called Knighton Wood

House, but by our time there were only ruins. Anyhow, we climbed the fence and went up to the walnut trees. We had almost picked up enough nuts when Bernard said "Run for it, the cows are coming!" Normally the cows were quiet, but if they had a bull with them, he would run and so would they. We took to our heels and luckily managed to get to the fence where the others climbed over, and I was lifted bodily by Bernard and thrown over – he probably saved my life that day. Needless to say we didn't venture into that field any more.

My brothers would sometimes sneak out in the evening with a horse each and go up to the down, about ½ mile away and then race each other, on these poor horses who had been working hard on the farm all day and needed their rest. I remember Daddy going out in the yard and saying: "Listen to the young bleeders racing the guts out of Dragon and Punch – wait till they get back". They had a good telling off but it didn't stop them. Francis was an excellent horseman but Morrie was not so good: he was more mechanically minded.



*Mabel with Daddy & Mum around 1922*

sew, the same as the other girls were doing. She said that I couldn't until I had been shown how to do it. I assured her that I certainly could and from then on I did everything the other kids did. Rene was a bully in her teaching but she did a good job on me.

We kept farm dogs; one in particular – Jack - was a house guard dog. He had his kennel at one end of the house where, to the casual glance, he appeared to be tethered with a short chain lead. However, his chain was clipped to a thick wire rope that ran along close to the ground which allowed him to run from one end of the property to the front gate. One day a tramp came to the front gate and Mum called out to him: "Don't come any further or the dog will have you". He took no notice and kept coming. My Mum said to the dog: "Jack!" and with that the dog belted along the wire and, sadly for the tramp, tore his trousers (he was lucky it was only his trousers). He cursed my Mum, but he went away and never returned.

Rene used to get Vic and I into the barn where she had rigged up a blackboard etc. She sat us down on a pile of straw and taught us how to write, read and spell, and do sums. She made a very good teacher, so good that when I started school at six I could do all the basics, including knitting and sewing, as well as being able to milk a cow. The first day I went to school the teacher (Miss Cranshaw) gave me a sand tray and a peg. I asked her what I was to do with it and she told me to draw. I burst into tears and said I wanted to



*Daddy haymaking at Drove End*

Another time there was a very bad drought and, as we had a lot of animals to feed and drink we didn't have enough water in the well for both them and the house. Daddy had to fill the wagon with barrels and drive to the village pump in Martin twice a day to keep us going. During this time some gypsies came along the main road and asked Daddy for water. He explained to them that he had to fetch his own from the village and just didn't have enough to give away, and suggested that they go the 1½ miles to get their own. Well, they didn't believe him and cursed him, saying that from that day he would have seven years' bad luck. Never underestimate a gypsy: for seven years we lost cattle through illness and accident, crops failed etc. It was a very bad time.

Our grandfather and granny lived in the village and on school days we would go to their house for our midday meal. I think I must have been badly behaved because my granny sometimes used to say: "You'll have to take that child to task Granfer". When I asked my parents where 'task' was, they of course laughed but never told me.

We had aunts and uncles living in and around London and they loved visiting the country during the summer. Aunty Flo was a particular favourite of ours - she was so kind. Each Sunday while she was visiting us she would preach at the local chapel in the evening service. It was always a popular evening with the villagers, even for us kids, because she made her sermons so interesting. Her husband, Uncle Gus was one of Daddy's two brothers and he was very tall and stately looking, always dressed in black. The other brother lived in Blackheath but I don't remember him.

Granny died in 1920 while we still living at Drove End Farm and Grandfer<sup>2</sup> came to live with us. He used to have mouth organ with a horn attached and he would play a tune of about five notes which would go on and on - mother used to do her nut. He stayed with us for a couple of years then went to London for a holiday with Daddy's sister Aunty Fanny and died there - my Mum was very upset by that.

My other grandmother was Mary Wallin who was my Mum's mother, and she lived over in Whitsbury<sup>3</sup>. When Mum was giving birth to Mabel in 1918, grandmother came over and took complete charge; I suppose she had done that when I was born. She was a tall severe woman dressed all in black and when she arrived one of the first things she did was to order me out of the farm and I had to go and stay with my other granny and grandfather in Martin. I didn't like her and I never saw her again.

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<sup>2</sup> Hilda said her grandfather looked like Jan Smuts, the South African Boer War general.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Wallin had been a widow for many years. Her husband George was an ex-soldier and a veteran of the Crimean War. He died in 1893 and was remembered as a hard uncompromising man. Mary's eldest son Sidney emigrated to South Africa and fought in the Boer War, whilst their youngest son Eddy almost survived WW1 but was gassed in 1917, captured and died as a POW. Their middle son Hugh drowned in a well on Scotland Farm, Whitsbury. He was only 8.

Everybody kept a few chicken and a pig in those days. During harvest time after the harvesting was completed, the women from the village would come up to our fields and pick up the heads of corn which the harvesters had left behind along with all the separate grains, which they used as feed for their chicken.

We used to kill about two pigs a year for indoor use. The pork was used first of all; the rest of the pig was salted and hung up in the chimney to smoke and cure, and after that treatment it would last for months. We had no freezers, but we could always have a piece of gammon cut straight off the side of the bacon – it was great!

We had a large orchard containing all sorts of fruit trees – apples, pears, cherries and plums, plus raspberries, loganberries, gooseberries and red and black currants. If ever we were missing during fruiting time, our parents always knew where we were – up a cherry tree, pear tree or whatever. The best apples were on a tree which grew over the outside lavatory and I always assumed there was something special in the soil at that spot!



*Mary Wallin outside her cottage  
in The Close, Whitsbury*

In the old days cattle and sheep were driven everywhere on the hoof – no lorries then. Every now and then there was a Sheep Fair, mostly held in Salisbury. It was an event we looked forward to: during this time the turnpike was packed with sheep being driven from the farms around on their way to market. Daddy used to allow the drovers to make use of a grass field for an overnight stay, so that the drovers and their sheep could have a well-earned rest. The men slept in the barn and we were busy taking them jugs of tea and listening to their tales of travelling across country.

Sometime during the 1914-18 war a tank came along the Blandford – Salisbury road right by our farm and frightened the life out of us. We hadn't seen anything like it before. I was probably about 4 years of age, and about the same time I saw my first car.

Initially both of my brothers worked with father on the farm, but Francis didn't take to the humdrum life at all and made up his mind to leave as soon as an opportunity came. He eventually left home and went to work for another farmer for a few months at Cobley Farm, about 2 miles away near Woodyates. He still didn't like farming so one day in 1919 he made his way to Trowbridge and at 17½ joined the army – the Royal Field Artillery.

Francis wanted to start from scratch, so he made up a parcel of all the clothes he had worn to get there, even including the few pence he had in his pockets, and sent it all home with a letter saying that he was starting a new life and wanted nothing from the old. Both my parents cried a lot – especially Daddy! Year later, after the 1939-45 war, Francis said he was going to write a book entitled “Farm Boy to Captain in

Twenty Eight Years”. Whether he did or not I never heard but he died at a relatively young age of 63, so it probably never happened.

He served in Ireland first of all, when the troubles had begun, then he went to India and other counties in the Far East, where in those days we had our big feet in – in fact he was there until just before the outbreak of war in 1939. He returned home then and was in charge of a series of gun emplacements over the South of England including Dover for shooting down V1 doodlebugs. He had a Big Bertha near my house in Paignton where I lived during the war and he spent all his spare time with us (Happy Days!).<sup>4</sup>



*Francis*

Mum was a fearless sort of person; at least I thought she was. One night we were walking home from evening service in the pitch dark, when we heard a horrible moaning and groaning noise along the side of the road. We were scared but mother only hesitated for a moment, than said: “I’m going to have a look”. She went over and shone her big torch on a body in the ditch. “It’s all right, it’s only Old Dick, drunk as a lord. Let him lie there until he sobers up”.

It was at that particular part of the road, near a track up onto the downs called Middle Lane that quite often we would hear a noise like someone raking a lot of stones about, but there was never anybody there. Another time a large ball of light passed over the road from one field to another. We always thought that part of the road was haunted, but I daresay there was a logical explanation for it – but now, if I had to walk down that road past Middle Lane again, it would frighten the pants off me.

### **Martin Village**

Mabel and I were born down at the farm, but the other three were born earlier in the village where father and mother lived when they first got married in 1900, and where father had a smallholding, and a haulage business with horse and cart. Daddy always said that the first time he saw my Mum she was sitting up on a pony trap, and he decided there and then that she was going to be his wife.

The house they first lived in was haunted and they told me some of things that went on there. There was a heavy coat that always hung on a peg by the back door and they would hear the coat fall to the floor, but when they went to look the coat was still hanging there. Again – they would lie in bed and would hear a gate open, heavy footsteps come up the path, door open and shut – footsteps up the stairs into the bedroom and stop besides the bed.

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<sup>4</sup> After his discharge from the army Francis became Secretary of the Royal Artillery Association as well as his job as Education Welfare Officer for the Leeds Education Committee.

The first time they heard this they were petrified but Daddy managed to pluck up courage to strike a match to light the lamp and there was no one there, and no footsteps back down the stairs. This happened quite a few times but as it didn't do them any harm they learned to live with it, but were glad when Drove End Farm came on the market and they took it over. When I go to the village (which is rare these days) I always look at the house and wonder if the ghost is still there walking in his hobnail boots.

In the early 1920s farming was going through a bad patch, crops were poor and prices for grain and animals were low, but until then we had all lived a good life. During the 1914-18 war we had heaps of eggs and rabbits as well as plenty of milk which mother used to make lots of butter and cheese. Daddy used to take a load of produce into Salisbury to the Lipton's and Maypole grocery shops and barter for sugar, flour, tea and anything else that was in short supply during the war. He even used to go to Oliver's shoe shop and barter for footwear with mother's butter (butter was like gold dust during the war). Anyhow, after the war was behind us things weren't so good so they decided to sell up and start again.

Charles Flemington wanted to blaze the trail – to be a pioneer, so he became just that! With the proceeds of the sale of the farm he took over a large house in the village called the White Hart, which they renamed 'The Cross'. It had been an old inn standing in the centre of the village with the village green and the remains of an old stone cross in the foreground, and is mentioned in W H Hudson's book 'A Shepherd's Life'. It had a driveway at the side and a large barn with stabling.

His next purchase was a BUS! He was going to be the first motorbus owner in the area. He had my brother Morrie taught to drive, and when he was capable enough - they were in business.

They started their service around 1922 running to Salisbury on Market Days, which were Tuesdays and Saturdays. The bus was a fourteen seater with a roof rack and a tail rack, where crates of chicken etc could be carried. More often than not the bus was full for the last return journey, and the passengers that couldn't get in rode on the roof and tail racks, as happy as lambs, singing all the way home. Sometimes the load was such that the bus needed help up Coombe Hill (about 1 in 10 or 12) and the passengers would have to get out and push which nobody minded – it was accepted as a natural thing to do. The bus service was a great success and the villagers were thrilled to have their own motorbus to and from town, such a change from the horse and cart.



*Maurice with one of their pre-war buses*

Now, at about the same time another enterprising fellow had started a bus service in a village over the hill about six miles away called Handley. His name was Cyril Adams (we knew him as Reg) and he decided to run his service in competition with Daddy's, so he started off by coming through the village a few minutes before our bus was due. In some cases he pinched our passengers but the loyal waited for our bus. So the action began, we got earlier, they tried to beat us; if we stopped to pick up a passenger, Adams would dash past to the next stop to beat us, and so it went on: dog eat dog. In the end they realised there was enough business for them both so they became friendly rivals. For a long time Daddy had a 2-return trip on Tuesdays and Thursdays and three on Saturday, later he had a daily service.



*Daddy & Mum outside The Cross*

Apart from the bus service we also started a coal business. Daddy and Morrie would go to the coal yard at Fordingbridge and pick up two tons of coal and with that they would serve our village on a Friday and Pentridge and Woodyates on a Monday, which turned out to be quite a good sideline and it filled in the off days.

Daddy had a large garage built to house the bus and the stalls in the stable were filled with sacks of coal which they sold at 1/11 per cwt (1 shilling & 11 pence per hundredweight).

I was told that the White Hart was built around 1300 at the same time and with the same stone as the village church. In my early years there was a monastery in the village, and before I was born there had also been a nunnery. The monks were very kind to us kids. They gave us

a lovely Boxing Day party each year, which was held up some steps in a Granary, where they stored their grain.

We had a well in the back yard, which, if you had the nerve to climb down, which Francis did, would be found a tunnel. This apparently led from our house (which remember used to be the village inn) to the nunnery and on to the Monastery<sup>5</sup>, so I assume fun and games were carried on at some time.

Tidpit is a hamlet joining onto Martin where the road from Cranborne joined the road to Damerham and living there was a lady with a beard. She always sat at the window and I'm afraid we were very unkind because whenever we wanted a little excitement we would go down to her cottage and stand and watch her. Her name was Mrs Blandford, and she had a daughter who eventually became a local magistrate who also grew a moustache and beard, and we knew she tried hard to keep it under control.

There was a funny old man who went by the name of Ony, or Henny. He had a neck like a corkscrew and if he was walking away from you he could turn his head right

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<sup>5</sup> This story varied: Hilda had sometimes said that the tunnel led to the Manor House.



round until it was facing towards you. We used to run after him and tease him – he was a little simple and he didn't mind. We used to ask him about his cat and he always said: "I took my pussycat up in my arms and she shit all down my waistcoat, so I took her out and buried her under an apple tree".

Before the drainage was put through the village, the spring water would rise to be a flood that would flow through the middle of the village, just like a river, and some people would walk about on stilts. That is why there were high banks along each side of the road with a footpath along the top. These have now gone and there are now just grass verges along the front of the houses.

Opposite our house was a lane called Sillen Lane which went up to the downs and which was a favourite walk for all of us. On a Sunday evening after the service, Daddy, Mum and us girls would walk up the lane, stopping at every field gate to see how farmer White's crops were doing, then along to another field for the same inspection. This went on right along the downland road until we came to the Pentridge turnoff, then we would walk back, inspecting the other side of the road.

The high hill on the down above the end of Sillen Lane is called Hanham Hill. Supposedly, in years gone by there was a king who was killed in a battle nearby and buried in the hill in a coffin made of gold. People would go to the hill digging away trying to find the gold – but nobody did.



*Dyke and Ditch from Hanham Hill*

Grim's Dyke<sup>6</sup> is a high ridge which follows on from Hanham and follows the downlands around into Dorset and Wiltshire. In places the ridge has steep sides and we used to love climbing to the top of the ridge and sliding to the bottom on our bums, then up again – it was fun!

One day during blackberry time, four of us went up to the downs: my sister Rene, Mrs Read and, her daughter Cathy who was our second cousin, and me. We were picking blackberries when Mrs Read screamed out that an adder had bitten her. Without a second thought, Cathy got her mother's stocking down and sucked the poison out of her leg, which probably saved her mother's life. I've never forgotten Cathy's bravery.

We went to Salisbury Fair every year, which was a great thrill for all of us. This was, and still is I expect, held in the Market Place. I can still see my mother trying to get along the cake walk (a wooden walkway that jiggled around) – the more it rocked and shook the more she laughed. We ate toffee apples and fair nuts (toasted sugared nuts) – it's still a lovely memory.

All of us kids joined the Band of Hope. We didn't know what we were doing, but we all signed what they called The Pledge. This was to say we would never touch intoxicating drink – what did we know about that at our age? Anyhow we used to go to the Band of Hope's outings every year. Two bus loads of us kids would be taken to

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<sup>6</sup> More correctly Grim's Ditch and Bokerley Dyke which run together on Martin Down.

Bournemouth for the day. It was marvellous. We had the princely sum of 6 pence to spend, but it went a long way. We brought home presents for Daddy and Mum, had lots of ice cream, and bought ourselves something as well.

First of all we would go to the beach and paddle, then walk back through the gardens to shops, always to Woolworths, then back to the sea. This went on all day – what fun! We were a happy lot of tired children as we made our way home singing: “And we’ll roll the old chariot along, And we won’t hang on behind“.

Mum used to make all sorts of wine, and the larder (which was bigger than the normal living room) was filled with barrels of the stuff, all popping away. Anybody who came to the house – and there were lots of visitors – were invited in for a glass of wine and a piece of Mum’s home made cheese.

In the dining room we had a big open fireplace where we burned huge logs and masses of coal. The fireplace had corners where, if we sat back far enough in, we could see the sky up the chimney. Daddy taught us all to play cards and we would all sit round the dining room table with our glasses of Mum’s wine, trying to beat Daddy but he usually won (by cheating I suspect).



*A Butter Churn*

Mum had always made butter and when we were old enough we all had to take it in turns to churn the butter, and in the warm weather this meant getting up early. First of all Mum used to pour pints of rich milk into huge flat looking pans and let it stand until thick cream formed on the top. This was then skimmed off into the butter churn, which was a round barrel with crossed bars of steel inside. On the end of the barrel was a handle and we had to hold the handle and turn the whole contraption round and round at a steady pace. This had to go on for a long time; maybe ½ an hour to an hour and our arms were nearly falling off with the constant turning.

All this time we could hear the flip-flop of the cream turning inside, but at last the cream would start to thicken and instead of the flip-flop noise it became a “thud-thud”. When we heard this we would call Mum and when she was satisfied she would take over by saying: “It’s turned, out of my way!” She would open the churn and manhandle the butter out, putting the lumps onto a marble slab. The butter was weighed into the correct weight and then with some nicely patterned butter pats (pieces of shaped wood with handles) she would pat the butter into pretty shapes, then put it into grease-proof paper and store it in the cold larder for sale or our use.

The chapel preachers came from all around and often used to say the same things every time. One was quite an act, and I remember him starting the service with: “We will now sing Hymn two – the twelfth Hymn; and for another hymn he would say:

Vor zum are zick and zum are zad,  
And zum ‘ave lost what they niver ‘ad.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> From the hymn: At Even, ere the Sun was Set: For some are sick, and some are sad ... And some have lost the love they had.

Another fellow who was very old said: “ Dost thee know – I would’n be surprised if I don’t wake up in the morning and find myself dead.”

Daddy used to keep us in stitches with his anecdotes. He said he walked toward the church gates with my granny and when they got there, the gate was opened by a man with no head – a ghost I presume. We had a cat and Mum used to tease it by throwing orange peel at it, poor cat didn’t know where to go to avoid it – they hate the orange smell.

Daddy’s sister Fanny and her husband Arthur Hawtrey used to come down from London to stay each summer. One day Uncle and my brother Morrie were having a friendly fight in the garden and by accident, fell into my mother’s lavender bush and broke it down. This had been a lovely bush and Mum was furious, and she never forgave uncle Arthur. Neither of them visited us again, my mother had obviously made it quite plain that they weren’t welcome and she wouldn’t have them back. Such a pity – but that was Mum!

The lads in the village, mostly farmers’ sons and farm labourers, were a happy crowd and always full of mischief. One trick was to go to an old person’s cottage and tie a piece of strong string to the door latch, and tie the other end to a branch of a tree. They would knock on the door and the old person would try to answer it but couldn’t open the door, and a lot of swearing would go on when they realised what was happening. Morrie was one of those fellows.



*Maurice (on right) and another village lad*

On a Sunday evening there was nothing else for them to do so they went to the chapel service. As in most churches there was the ground floor where most of the worshippers sat, but in the chapel there was a gallery, or balcony which could hold 30 or 40 people. This is where the lads sat and all through the service they would roll up pieces of paper and aim them at the few bald heads which were underneath. We were in the choir facing everybody so we could see what was going on and we had a job to

stifle our giggles. I liked being in the choir and I got to know all the hymns by heart – even now nearly eighty years on I can remember the words and tunes of what I learnt there.

Sundays were the only days Daddy wore a suit. Weekdays he always wore knee breeches with garters, a waistcoat, a hacking jacket and always a trilby hat. I think this must have been the farmers’ uniform because they all dressed like it.

During his working days my grandfather was a farm bailiff for a large landowner at Rockbourne. He walked there and back every day, about four miles each way over the downland, and Sunday was his only day off.

When I was about eleven years old I had scarlet fever. I was a complete mess with spots and pimples all over, plus a very sore throat and it was serious enough for Dr Rake to send me to the fever hospital at Old Sarum beyond Salisbury. Although Rene didn't have the fever, she had to go to the hospital with me, because she had shared the same bedroom and it was very contagious. This obviously upset Rene very much but she had no choice. However, although I looked a mess I felt fine, but poor Rene developed quinsy, which is a bad case of tonsillitis. This gave her an awful sore and swollen throat and she was in terrible pain, she couldn't even eat anything for a couple of weeks. Eventually she began to recover and ate like a horse to make up for lost time.



*Me (left) and Vic at the Flower Show*

After about three weeks in the ward I was allowed to go outside into the orchard where – as usual – I climbed trees with the boys who were in the next ward and had a lovely time. In all we were in quarantine for six weeks.

Every year there was a Flower Show and Fete at Damerham and we always went. There were swinging boats, roundabouts, various stalls, and competitions that we all entered, and to us kids this was all was very exciting.

One year my teacher, Miss Sims encouraged me to enter the decorated bicycle competition. She was very fond of my brother Morrie at the time (he was nine years older than me and a young man at the time), so thought it would help if she made a fuss of me. So she loaned me her bike and helped me decorate it, it was entered and I won first prize. Sorry to say it didn't further her chances with Maurice – he wasn't interested!

*... and here it stops...<sup>8</sup>*

*Here are the three Flemington sisters: Rene (Chisnall), Hilda (Bond) and Mabel (Knight), taken many years later - around 1950 - outside Rene's house at Mintys Hill, Rockbourne.*



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<sup>8</sup> This was written over a couple of years during the late 1990s; Hilda died in December 2001.