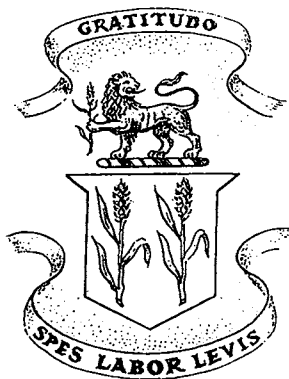


# The Biglands of Cheshire



BILL STALLYBRASS

**LHP**

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TO

Emma Bigland (b. 1967)  
Philip Bigland (b. 1967)  
David Bigland (b. 1969)  
Joanna Bigland (b. 1969)  
Helen Bigland (b. 1972)  
Edward Bigland (b. 1973)  
Lucy Bigland (b. 1974)  
Alexandra Bigland (b. 1977)  
Kate Holt (b. 1978)  
Jonathan Holt (b. 1981)  
Max Bigland (b. 1986)

## PREFACE

I have known the Biglands of Cheshire for nearly 70 years and have been the husband of one of them for 40. A friend to whom I showed my writing remarked: "The Biglands tackle what they do with a heroic all-out quality which makes it a saga indeed." They have distinguished themselves in Parliament, government, the Army, business, rowing, scouting and craftsmanship. They have given me much of what I hold dearest in life. As I think of the Bigland family motto, *Gratitudo spes labor levis* (Gratitude and hope don't cost much), I realise that gratitude and hope are the two dominant emotions of my life today.

At Christmas 1967 my wife Margo published privately the story of her mother, Helen Bigland, for the benefit of the seven grandchildren who never knew her. Now, twenty-one years later, I intend, for the benefit of her eleven great-grandchildren, to pay tribute not only to her, who never knew me as a son-in-law, but also to Bob, my much loved father-in-law, and to their whole family.

We still have spare copies of Margo's story of her mother, which gives an interesting picture of the Bigland family and which we should be happy to send to anyone who would like one. This writing is intended to be a sequel to hers.

While Chapters 1, 2, 5 and parts of 7 are largely historical, the remainder of the book is a collection of personal reminiscences; this may explain why I have devoted two whole chapters to my father-in-law and why I have written more about Ernest and his family, who lived near us for many years, than about my other brothers-in-law. I have not attempted to go in any depth beyond the Biglands of our own generation.

This is a joint venture with Margo, who has allowed me to make full use of what she had already written a few years ago about her father. She has read everything that I have written and much of it has been heightened as a result of her useful suggestions.

I have been greatly inspired by and drawn much information from a magnificent family tree, prepared by Tom Bigland and drawn up by the Neston artist David Scott. I am also grateful to Kenneth Bigland, who kindly lent me some fascinating documents about the family; to Walter J.C. Todd, OBE, TD, DL, President and former Captain of the Royal Chester Rowing Club; to the Rt. Hon. Edward Heath, MBE, MP, T.G. Cawte, H.R. Dannan, A.J. Forrest, E. Minty and A.A. Pearce, all formerly of 107 HAA Regt, RA; to Graham Coombe, the Scout Association Archivist; to Miss H.M. Dickinson and Mr W.D. Harrington, both of Guardian Royal Exchange plc; to Michael and Margaret Hutchinson, who made many helpful recommendations on content and style; to my

neighbour John Cook for advice and practical help on the photographs; to W Heaton Cooper for permission to quote from *The Tarns of Lakeland* (Frederick Warne, 1960); to Howard Baker Press Ltd for permission to quote from *The Bantams – the Untold Story of World War I* by Sidney Allinson; and to Hamish Hamilton Ltd and the author for permission to quote from *Monty* by Nigel Hamilton.

Bill Stallybrass  
October 1988

# 1. BIGLAND ANCESTORS

## Bigland Hall

Members of the Bigland Family have lived for something like a thousand years at Bigland Hall, Buckbarrow, on a hill above Ulverston in what was Lancashire, but today forms part of Cumbria. In a Cumberland newspaper of 22 June 1962 Brenda Colston writes:

“Georgian in front, medieval behind – that is how one might describe Bigland Hall ..... Very few houses in Lancashire can fill that description nor have they the wonderful panorama Bigland Hall commands.

“Whoever it was that chose Bigland Heights, 550 ft above sea level, for the site on which to build the family stronghold, certainly knew what he was about.

“Nestling among the green fells, the Hall overlooks some of the richest prospects in the country, from the vale of Cartmel to the whole of Morcambe Bay, from the flat country behind Lancaster to the wild bracken-covered hills of Furness, with the majestic Lakeland peaks towering above all, forming a picturesque background.

“But there is one great mystery surrounding Bigland, and that is who built Bigland Hall? This, no one can answer, and the grey stone walls remain silent witnesses .....

“However we can be certain of one thing, that the Hall was standing on its present site in 1167, for an oak beam in the servants' hall, now blackened with smoke and age, gives that date and the initials I. and M. B., but this probably marks renovation of the older part of the hall.”

Describing Bigland Tarn in his book *The Tarns of Lakeland*, W. Heaton Cooper writes: “The name is derived from the old Norse ‘Byg land’, barley land. This hill overlooking the sea is in a strategic position for a watch tower and beacon. The hollow in the top of the hill which contains the tarn and the Hall cannot be overlooked or even seen from any other point. It may have been used by the Romans, and it was certainly chosen as the home of a powerful Norse settler. After the Norman conquest some of the Norse who had settled and farmed in this part of the country were allowed to retain their land. The Bigland Crest, ‘Lion passant regardant, gules’ and holding in his paw two heads of barley, or byg, with the inscription ‘Gratitude’, suggests that his may have happened. Yet no Bigland would serve under their Norman overlords or marry into Norman families, even though Ulverston was given by King Stephen to the powerful Guillaume de Taillebois. Everything we know of the Bigland family points to a typical Norse characteristic of sturdy independence .....

## **Garter King of Arms**

“The earliest written records of the family and the Hall were made in 1511, and these are included in a genealogy composed by Ralph Bigland, who was Garter King of Arms in the reign of George III.”

In the autumn of 1971 at a sale of the contents of Carlecotes Hall, Penistone, Yorkshire, which had previously been owned by one of Ralph Bigland's ancestors, his full ceremonial uniform was auctioned and was bought for £615 by Tom, Ernest, Oscar and Richey Bigland. It is now kept at the College of Arms in London. A newspaper cutting of the time gives this brief biography: “Bigland was born in 1711 and elected Blue Mantel in 1757, Somerset Herald 1759, Registrar 1763, Norry King of Arms in 1773, Clarenceau in 1774 and finally Garter Principal King of Arms from 1780 until he died in 1784.”

## **Birkby Manor**

The Biglands of Cheshire are direct descendants of Thomas Bigland (born 1585), elder son of Edward Bigland of Bigland Hall. He married in 1610, left Bigland Hall to his younger brother and moved about 40 miles further north to live at Birkby Manor, Crosscanonby, Cumberland, three miles North-East of Maryport. Nothing is known of his wife, as the Parish Registers were destroyed in the Civil War. The motive behind the move is a mystery. There is no indication that it brought any change in his social standing, for three years later he is described as “statesman of Birkby”. The Bigland family crest is carved in stone on the fireplace of the front room of Birkby Manor. Thomas's son, also named Thomas, married the daughter of Gawin Scaife of Birkby Lodge.

The Society of Friends, known as “Quakers”, was founded by George Fox between 1648 and 1650. One of his close friends and companions, who travelled extensively, was James Lancaster of North Scale, Walney Island, near Barrow-in-Furness. In 1653 Fox persuaded Lancaster to hold a series of meetings in the area of Cockermouth. One of these was held at Rose Gill, an estate belonging to Henry Wilkinson immediately north of Birkby. A contemporary manuscript describes how “James Lancaster declared Truth plainly, and several were convinced, some whereof gave up their houses to keep meetings at, and entertained frds.” Amongst these was Thomas Bigland's grandson, Gawin, “who appears to have had his share of the persecution which Friends in those days had to suffer.” His marriage to Mary Smith, daughter of John Smith of Dearham, a village a few miles south of Birkby, has been described as “an early Quaker wedding”. Some of their descendants still maintain the Quaker tradition.

Gawin's son, also named Gawin (1673-1723), though the name sometimes appears as “Gawen” owing to faulty spelling by clerks,



married the daughter of an Irish lady with property in Dublin, but his son Benjamin (1709-1800) and his grandson Jonathan (1747-1798) both married Cumbrian wives, the one from Allonby, a few miles North-East of Birkby, the other from Kirkclinton, some miles North of Carlisle.

### **Merseyside**

The move from Cumberland to Merseyside occurred about 1812, when Jonathan's son Amos (1786-1859) married Ann, daughter of Isaac Cooke of Liverpool. Amos founded the family firm of fat brokers, Bigland Sons & Jeffreys of Liverpool. His second son, John, married a New Brighton girl and is described as Senior Partner of the firm. It was eventually taken over during World War I by Lever Brothers. Amos's fifth and youngest son, Edwin (1822-1882), my wife's great-grandfather, died as a result of an accident at Birkenhead Ferry, caused by the pole of a two-horse tram.

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1982, Tony and Yvonne Bigland set off for Norway on their motorcycle and visited the small town of Bygland on Byglandsfjord, where they met some of their distant cousins, members of the Bygland family.

## 2. FRANK BIGLAND AND HIS BROTHERS

**Frank Bigland** (1853-1900), my wife's grandfather, left a collection of letters written to his wife in Quaker parlance with "thou" and "thee". She was Rosa Hagedorn of Hamburg (1848-1921), possibly a descendant of the Hamburg poet Friedrich von Hagedorn, who laid the foundation for a new literary movement in the first half of the 18th century by introducing English literary ideas into German poetry. She may well also have been related to the American poet Hermann Hagedorn, who published in the 1940s a book of poems under the title *Combat at Midnight*, and an epic poem, *The Bomb that Fell on America*. She was as small and round as her husband was tall and well built.

Margo writes; "I was always told I was exactly like Granny Bigland whenever I was in disgrace. I thought it unfair, as I knew everyone found her intensely irritating. She lived near us in Heswall village and came to lunch every Sunday. We were expected to be on our best behaviour. There was always an atmosphere with Mum trying to act as go-between between mother and son. Dad would get apoplectic because, he said, she would always go upstairs to wash her hands just as the joint was put on the table; he would send us into the hall to bang the gong every few minutes, but Granny remained unperturbed. As a great treat, I was allowed to count the little velvet bows down the front of her best Sunday dress. She died when I was eight."

Frank worked as a stockbroker in Liverpool. When his firm went bankrupt, he insisted on paying all his debts. He died shortly afterwards at the age of 46, it was said "of a broken heart", leaving four children aged between 20 and 13.

Frank was the third of six brothers. The eldest, Edwin, died at the age of ten. Frank's elder brother, Ernest, and his two younger brothers, Alfred and Percy, were all born within five years of each other and were all over six feet tall. It is said that as young men they used to holiday together on the farm of a mutual friend and to complain that a goose was such an awkward bird, too big for one person and not enough for two. They rowed together as a four, coxed by their youngest brother Walter, who was five years younger than Percy.

**Ernest Bigland** (1852-1942), the second of the brothers, was a wealthy shipping magnate. He was left a widower and had little love for his two daughters. It was expected that Bob Bigland, who looked after his investments for many years, would be his heir. His brother Alfred, ("the silly old fool", as the family thought and said), decided that it would be nice for him to have a wife to share his old age in his big empty house in Woking, so he introduced him to a dear little old lady who wore bonnets and lace caps. His match-making went wrong and Ernest, at 70, married the old lady's daughter, Frances Parbery, known as Florence, who was

only 40. Her old mother spent the last years of her life with them.

They were a handsome couple. He was very good-looking with lovely white hair and moustache and vivid blue Bigland eyes. Aunt Flo, as I later came to know her, was a fine figure of a woman, six feet tall and with flaming red hair. He brought her to the wedding of Eric and Eileen Bigland in Birkenhead, where the family gathered to meet her for the first time. They arrived just ahead of the bride and Aunt Flo sailed down the aisle dressed in flowing white lace and a huge picture hat, her ample bosom covered with flowers and diamonds and with chandeliers of diamonds hanging from her ears. She stole the show.

Aunt Flo then announced her intention of giving the Bigland family a boost. She and Uncle Ernest had a coxless pair-oar racing boat made for Tom and Ernest and gave them a huge old Sunbeam car which could transport an eight. She took her husband round the world. She dressed him up as a Viking at fancy dress balls – he had inherited his Viking ancestors' looks. She got him full court dress and had him and herself presented at court. As a widower, he had had a perfectly organised domestic life, his every wish catered for by a devoted staff. Helen Bigland remembered breakfast appearing at one door as he entered by another. After his second marriage, all the staff left except the chauffeur, who soldiered on as an all-purpose man to the end of Aunt Flo's days.

Helen Bigland once described the embarrassment of going for drives with them. He loved driving round Brookwood Cemetery, where his grave awaited him. She would sit on the back seat between them. He would appear to go to sleep and when Aunt Flo started grumbling about a marriage that had turned out very different from her expectations, Helen was never sure if he was really asleep and not listening all the time. She was the only one of the family who made any effort to get on with Aunt Flo on a basis of genuine friendship.

The 19 years of their marriage imposed a considerable strain on Margo's father Bob, who was their stockbroker. After Uncle Ernest's death, he had the daughters on one side, demanding what they regarded as their rights, and Aunt Flo on the other, while he had to do as well as he could for them all.

**Aunt Flo** (Mrs Ernest Bigland, née Frances Parbery, 1883-1961) also played a big part in our lives from 1948 until her death. Shortly after we had settled into the first home of our own, "White Cottage", Goldney Road, in the then unspoiled woods on Frimley Ridges, a friend in Moral Re-Armament asked Margo if she knew anything about a Mrs Florence Bigland. In conformity with the family line on the woman who had spoiled her father's chances of wealth, Margo bluntly replied, "Don't touch her with the end of a barge pole!"

It transpired that she had met Dr Frank Buchman and a force of Moral Re-Armament in a building known as "The Club" in Los Angeles.

On her return to London, she had arrived one day at Dr Buchman's London home with a huge bunch of flowers and announced that she had come "to join the Club".

Having been told about us by friends in America, she phoned us, knowing of course nothing about the phone call to Margo, and invited us one Sunday to lunch at Phyllis Court Club in Henley. Andrew, our elder son, was at that time an infant and, knowing that children were not allowed in the Club, we left him sleeping happily in his carry-cot in the back of the car. Aunt Flo was horrified and insisted on us bringing him in despite the rules. Fortunately, he behaved beautifully and won hearts all round.

She then invited us to Christmas dinner in her Woking home and appeared as "Mother Christmas", a gorgeous apparition in scarlet and silver. The following Christmas she came to us. Margo was in hospital with our younger son Peter, then three days old. Ruth Mathys, a Swiss girl learning English in our home, (today Mrs George Dallas, wife of a Belfast specialist), and Margo's youngest brother Tony were undertaking the household duties in her absence. Ruth was puzzled as to what to do with the Christmas pudding, which was wrapped up in a cloth, and consulted Tony, who said "Wash it". Shortly afterwards he found her washing the pudding under a cold tap. His caustic comment severed relations between them for a time. I collected Aunt Flo in our car, drove her to Brookwood cemetery to see Uncle Ernest's grave, then on to "White Cottage", where Ruth and Tony had made it up sufficiently to produce a first-class dinner. Afterwards I took Aunt Flo to see Margo and Peter in hospital.

From then on, she was devoted to our boys and became a frequent visitor to our home. She once told us that those who never hesitated to sponge on her seldom invited her into their homes; perhaps they felt they could not compete with her usually lavish hospitality. She won our hearts by the gratitude she expressed as she sat by the log-fire in our tiny cottage over a simple tea of home-made scones. She once said that the only thing she saw of me was my backside as I knelt between her and the fire to encourage the logs, which were usually damp.

A generous and gracious hostess, she once arranged a large lunch party for Dr Frank Buchman at Claridge's. She responded to the bigness of a venture in which many people were making sacrifices to bring about new attitudes which could heal divisions.

On another occasion, hearing that a party of British miners were trying to raise the money to go to the annual Moral Re-Armament conference at Caux in Switzerland, she chartered a plane to take them. She accepted to fly out with them, provided, she typically stipulated, that she was not expected to share a room with one of them, and she invited me to accompany her.

Margo was unable to leave the boys at that point. The day before we were due to go, Aunt Flo fell into a man-hole in Park Lane and damaged a knee. (She was very short-sighted, but always refused to wear glasses.) Her doctor strongly advised her not to travel, but she insisted on going. On arrival she was found to have water on the knee and was confined to bed for several days, after which I used to push her around in a wheelchair. She would dress for dinner each evening, often with a tiara and with artificial orchids across her breast. One day I introduced myself to a young man who expressed great surprise: "Good heavens!", he said, "I always thought you were the private secretary of a Hungarian princess".

When Aunt Flo phoned to complain about something Margo's brother Ernest had done which had offended her, Margo told her very fiercely to shut up. For some time there was a coolness between them; then we began to realise that, for all her wealth, she was, in many ways, underprivileged, whereas we had all that we wanted in life. On that basis, Margo agreed to apologise. We went together to her Mayfair flat. As Aunt Flo opened the door, Margo blurted out, "I'm sorry I was rude to you!" Aunt Flo engulfed her in a huge embrace and said over her shoulder to me, "You have got a little spitfire of a wife, haven't you?" She never criticised the family to us again.

One morning Tony went to call on her; he was met by a doctor who was most grateful to see one of her family as she had been taken desperately ill. We went to visit her in hospital and found her full of tubes and drips. "I died on the operating table," she said. "I went all the way to heaven and St. Peter came out and said: 'I'm sorry, Florence Bigland, we've no halo big enough for you, so you'll have to go back and wait.'"

Before we left for Ghana in 1960, Margo went to say good bye to Aunt Flo, who was by then in her late seventies. "I'm not leaving you anything in my will", she said. "I never asked you for anything", Margo replied. "Well, I will leave you just a little present for yourself", she said, "but you're not to go and spend it on those boys of yours". She died while we were in Ghana, leaving us enough money to pay Andrew's Shrewsbury School fees in advance. We had entered him in faith with no idea as to how we would possibly be able to pay the fees. There was enough money over for Margo to buy herself a gold Omega wristwatch, which is still giving her excellent service.

**Alfred Bigland** (1855-1936), the most distinguished of the brothers, was Unionist Member of Parliament for East Birkenhead from 1910 till 1922. For 25 years he issued annual business pamphlets on the probable course of markets during each coming year. When Joseph Chamberlain brought out his fiscal proposals, Alfred was one of the earliest adherents of the Tariff Reform League. He served on the School Board and Education Committee of the Birkenhead Council. In 1916 he became Assistant Director of the Propellent Branch of the Ministry of

Munitions to provide glycerine for cordite. In 1917 he became Controller of Oils and Fats under Lord Rhondda. After the war he was Chairman of the Empire Development Parliamentary Committee.

Perhaps his chief claim to fame was as the founder of "Bigland's Birkenhead Bantams". The full story is told by Sidney Allinson in *The Bantams – The Untold Story of World War I* (Howard Baker, 1981):

"Today no-one knows his name. The first Bantam was a short, wide-shouldered coalminer who had walked the entire one hundred and fifty miles from Durham to Birkenhead – crossing the Pennine Mountains and the Lancashire plain, visiting Preston, Manchester and Liverpool on the way, doggedly trying to enlist in the army. Each time he was turned down because of his lack of height, he set out again on foot to find a regiment that would accept him. His journey finally took him across the Mersey River to Cheshire, where he met the one man in England able to recognize a fresh new source of manpower.

"Alfred Bigland was the Member of Parliament for Birkenhead, a large vigorous man who had thrown his powerful personality into recruiting local men to answer Lord Kitchener's call for volunteers. He headed the City Recruiting Committee, working tirelessly to stage public rallies.

"He was particularly effective in cutting through the red tape which threatened to hamper every advance of his Committee. Stores, accommodation, and food were in desperate need as tens of thousands of men poured into Birkenhead, eager to enlist. Time and again, Bigland would slash through the delays and bureaucratic procedures set up by civil servants and officials which might otherwise have delayed the effectiveness of his recruiting drive. He was not only interested in signing up a satisfactory volume of bodies; his attention never wavered from the human side of war.

"Bigland later wrote, 'It was painful and discouraging to find how many cases of severe hardship existed owing to the men who had joined up having failed to fill in the forms correctly as to wives, children, parents, or others absolutely dependent on them. It was our first duty to get all the papers in working order.

"It was brought to the notice of my Committee that totally inadequate accommodation was furnished for the thousands of men being sent to Chester to create Kitchener's Army: a deputation of the Committee waited on the G.O.C. of the Western Command and insisted on an immediate improvement in the whole system of billeting the new recruits, which the authorities in Chester quickly adopted.

"The next matter this Committee decided was that, as Army Regulations closed all Recruiting Offices at 6.30 p.m., we should open one at our own cost to carry on the work from 6.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m., the very hours that the men were most about the streets. The Committee

divided itself so that three members should be in attendance every evening to answer questions, give advice and attend to complaints.'

"How the Durham miner's arrival caused the Bantams idea to be born is best told in Mr Alfred Bigland's own words:-

"One morning, Mr Alfred Mansfield, who was an active member of the Committee, came to me and said that they had had a lively scene in the recruiting office the night before – a young man who presented himself for enlistment. The sergeant said: "Take off your hat and stand under that machine." He did so, and the sergeant said: "Nothing doing, you must get out" – the young fellow demanded an explanation, and the reply was – "Army regulation height is five feet three inches, you are only five feet two."

"Then ensued the scene – the aspirant for fighting the Boche turned round and offered to fight any man in the room – he scoffed at the idea that an inch in height precluded him from joining the Army. Though he raged and swore, the sergeant was obdurate and refused to give him the usual papers and with great difficulty, got him out of the office.

"Mansfield said: "This is a serious matter: when we only wanted a small army a regulation height of five feet three inches might be good, but now every available man is wanted, and the subject should be reconsidered."

"After discussion, it was decided that I should write direct to Lord Kitchener and inform him of our view that a very valuable contingent of his army could be raised of "Bantams" – five feet to five feet three inches, provided they were strong, sturdy fellows and suggesting that by stipulating for an extra inch in the chest measurement over the regulation 33 inches, sickly weedy men with insufficient stamina would be excluded. Although we could not raise a battalion of such men in Birkenhead alone, we expressed the opinion that if he saw his way to give us authority to enlist over the whole of the country, we could do it.

"I wrote accordingly, but did not get a reply direct from Lord Kitchener. However, in a few days there came an intimation that Sir Henry McKinnon, the G.O.C. of the Western Division, desired to see me. I waited on Sir Henry, and he informed me that the War Office was interested in the idea of Bantam Battalions but were too much pressed to undertake the formation of a new type of regiment.

"However, he had authority to say that if the Birkenhead Recruiting Committee would undertake the whole service we should have every assistance from the War Office – that for specially raised battalions, regulations had already been drafted fixing a definite amount of so much for housing, a ration allowance, and payment for uniforms and equipment. The War Office would provide rifles, baggage wagons, etc., but all other matters must be undertaken by the parties raising

the battalion.

"I summoned my Committee and put before them Sir Henry McKinnon's message. They suggested that the Town should become responsible, as it was quite possible the sums named might prove quite inadequate to house, feed and equip the men and someone must be responsible for such a deficit if it occurred.

"I saw the Mayor, but after consulting the Town City Clerk, he said it would be quite impossible, as the members of the Town Council would be personally charged if they voted to undertake the work and there was a deficit. No charge, even if voted by the Council, could be met by the ratepayers. My Committee, too, declined to take responsibility for an unknown liability and it looked as though the bright idea would fall through.

"So keen was I, however, to form a Bantam Battalion, that I studied the financial risk very carefully and came to the conclusion that the appropriations in aid fixed by the War Office might, with good management, be made to fit the bill. I saw Sir Henry McKinnon again, told him I would take the risk myself, and so it was agreed.'

"Bigland estimated that he would likely be able to raise the whole battalion of one thousand men in a Bantam unit. He began reserving dining rooms, stables for officers' horses, drilling grounds and houses for the men. He looked around and found all these facilities under the roof of the local Agricultural Show Ground. He briskly set about taking over the buildings for his new project.

"He somehow managed to pass along specifying information about the Bantams to every recruiting office in the United Kingdom within a matter of days. His announcement informed each local medical officer about the requirements for men with chest measurements of 34 inches, minimum height of 5 ft., and a maximum height of 5 ft. 3 inches. These men would be provided with railway warrants to Birkenhead where they could join the newly designated 15th (Service) Battalion 1st Birkenhead, The Cheshire Regiment.

"On the morning of November 30th, 1914, we had everything in readiness to receive one thousand one hundred men,' wrote Bigland. 'As each man coming from a distance would already have passed a medical board before he received his railway warrant, we provided half a dozen doctors to examine all recruits coming from our own neighbourhood. As I passed along these volunteers, I was depressed to find large numbers of them being turned down as ineligible. A very considerable number were satisfactory, but they could not expand their chest measurement to the required 34 inches and I began to fear for my promised thousand.

"But throughout the day telegrams were received from many distant towns stating the numbers of recruits who had passed their examination and were coming. The next morning more telegrams were



received from Ireland, Scotland, South Wales, London, and so on, saying more and more men were coming. By noon that day, we added the total and found to our consternation that instead of the eleven hundred men we had provided for, two thousand had arrived or were on their way!

“I telephoned to Chester to wire the principle recruiting centres that the Bantam Battalion was full, and to stop enlistment. We were up against a real difficulty – only housing and sleeping accommodation for one thousand one hundred men, and what were we to do with the two thousand or more – all needing food and sleeping places to be found within a few hours! The Mayor opened the Town Hall to house them for the night, and fortunately I was able to get the promise of two thousand blankets which the Army Stores Department at Burscough said would be delivered in Liverpool by eight p.m. if I would have carts in attendance to bring them over the Mersey.

“We ransacked the town for bread, ham, and other comestibles, and as each party arrived we were able to feed them. To keep them cheerful and merry, we organized a concert and found that many of our Bantams were ready with songs to while away the time until the blankets arrived. To our dismay, nine and ten o’ clock came and still no blankets. However, just before eleven the welcome news came that the carts were at the door. By twelve-thirty we had them settled in for the night – sleeping on the floor of the concert hall, in the passages, and the committee room – two blankets for every man.

“It spoke well for the way they would face greater hardships at the front to see the cheerful adaptability of these good fellows in taking the situation with the merriment of boys out for a picnic. The next day, we commandeered the most modern school in the town, secured mattresses from shipping companies’ stores, and had the second thousand comfortably settled in by nightfall. I came to know many of these men individually and their stories of self-sacrifice – their belief that they would be looked after – their keenness to learn and to serve touched me to the quick.

“Most of them brought a small bundle of spare clothes and a little money, but one attracted my attention and I asked him where his kit was. He naively replied he had it all on his back. Think of it, leaving home, with no money, no spare clothes, no food; trusting himself absolutely without a thought to the care of those who called for his service. These things became known; the townspeople soon made them welcome, arranging clothing centres and amusements of all kinds, and were never tired of planning pleasant surprises to meet the exigencies of the day.” (pp. 37-42)

“With such an embarrassment of rank and file, Bigland and his committee were then faced with the urgent need to find officers and N.C.O.’s. Many trained officers and drill instructors had already gone

away either to the front or to more fashionable units. Very few of the available remaining officers were keen to take on the new military venture of Bantams.

“Members of the Corn Exchange, various ship building firms, and the sons of business executives he knew provided a ready core of officer candidates. He told each of the men he selected to be officers that they should have to buy their own kit, and after three months of training they would have to pass inspection. He warned them that if after their trial period they failed to pass, they would be dismissed and their uniforms would be charged to them. It says something for the astuteness of Alfred Bigland that not one of the officers he selected failed the training course, and many of them had distinguished careers with the Birkenhead battalion and some other regiments.” (pp. 47-48)

“When the two battalions left Birkenhead for training at Masham, Yorkshire, and his original idea was adopted on a national scale, Alfred Bigland went on to aid Britain’s war effort elsewhere. His administrative ability was recognized by the government, which appointed him a Deputy Director of Munitions. He set to work organizing Merseyside factories in a massive programme to manufacture glycerine for high-explosives.

“He was later sent to the United States as co-ordinator of food purchasing, a job he did so well as to be later credited with helping to avoid what could have been severe food shortages in Britain. In any field, Bigland had a rare ability – he got things done.

“This redoubtable Member of Parliament had his final moment of local glory on Sunday, March 21st, 1915. That day, Bigland stood with Lord Kitchener on the steps of St. George’s Hall, Liverpool, to review a march-past of twelve New Army units, including the Cheshire Bantams.” (pp. 71-72)

The 104th Infantry Brigade, made up of Bantams from the Lancashire Fusiliers and the Manchesters, had as its Brigade-Major the 28-year-old Captain Bernard L. Montgomery, DSO. Nigel Hamilton in his *Monty – The Making of a General* (Hamish Hamilton, 1981) quotes Liddell Hart: “Viewing his perky manner, peaky face and small stature it seemed amusingly apt that in the Battle of the Somme he had been a staff officer in what was called ‘the Bantam Division’” (p. 165).

Describing a period in the line when they were attached to the 38th (Welsh) Division, Hamilton quotes ‘Monty’ himself: “Considerable difficulties were encountered when the Bantams first arrived in the trenches as firesteps were of course too low for them; it was quite a common sight at this time to see a large Welshman standing on the firestep, with the Bantam he was teaching perched on a pile of sandbags beside him. It was also reported that the enemy were heard ‘crowing’ at ‘stand-to’ the first morning after we had arrived for instruction; the accuracy of this was never really verified, but at any rate no Bantam

prisoners were captured by the enemy during this period.” (p.96).

Alfred and his wife, Emily Arkle (1855-1931), had five children, of whom two died in childhood. The eldest daughter, Florence (1880-1956), married Arthur Quinby, who had a dental practice in Rodney Street, Liverpool; the younger daughter, Hilda Gertrude (1882-1930), married Robert Dudley Wood (1873-1950); and the only surviving son, Douglas, was a Rodney Street specialist. He married and later divorced a fellow doctor, by whom he had two daughters. He subsequently married his housekeeper, who together with the two daughters, lived for a time with Bob Bigland at “Greyfriars”.

Arthur and Florence had one daughter, Lorraine (1904-1978). The Dudley Woods had three sons and two daughters. Nigel (1908-1941) was killed on active service. Gordon (born 1910) rowed with distinction for Mersey and London Rowing Clubs. Angela (born 1913) married Ronald Hoyle, an instructor at Pangbourne College. Terence (1914-1935) also rowed for Mersey Rowing Club and died as the result of a tragic rugby football accident. Rosemary (born 1922) married Denis Radcliffe.

**Percy Bigland** (1856-1926) studied Art for seven years at the Royal Academy in Munich and won the First Medal there in 1880. He was an original member of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters, London. He married Edith Hanbury Aggs (1862-1951), a daughter of one of the founders of the pharmaceutical firm of Allen & Hanbury, makers, amongst other things, of black currant lozenges, a favourite remedy for coughs for children of our generation. They were both practising Quakers and lived in a beautiful 16th century house near Beaconsfield called “Stone Dean”, close to the famous Jordans Meeting House.

Their daughter, Griselda, married Lloyd Fox, a descendant of George Fox, and they continue the Quaker tradition. Lloyd ran the family textile business, noted in World War 1 for Army puttees; they also made cloth for postmen’s and railwaymen’s uniforms. They later branched out into “Devon Potteries”, making fireplaces which were at one time very popular. Their lovely Elizabethan home, “Gerbeston Manor” near Wellington, Somerset, to which they have added a squash court and a bathing-pool, has been the scene of many huge family parties. In their 90s at the time of writing, Lloyd and Griselda are still extremely generous and hospitable. Percy and Edith’s only son, Ranulf, managed the estate of “Stone Dean” and later lived at Corfe Castle in Dorset.

**Walter Bigland** (1861-1943), the youngest brother, married Gertrude Roberts (1866-1956). He ran the Liverpool firm of Bigland Sons & Jeffreys until it was taken over by Lever Brothers during World War I. They had one son and one delightful daughter, “Queenie”, who died recently at a ripe old age. The son, Eric Walter, is remembered chiefly as the husband of Anne Carstairs (1898-1970), whom he married in 1923

and later divorced. Known as Eileen, she seems to have earned the strong disapproval of the family, probably because, despite the divorce, she chose to write under her married name.

**Eileen Bigland** (1898-1970), after training for ballet, became an ardent traveller, visiting and writing about many countries. She published 10 novels, of which the best known is probably *Rod Streatfield*. Her travel books include: *Laughing Odyssey* (1937), *The Lake of the Royal Crocodiles* (1939), *Into China* (1940), *The Key to the Russian Door* (1941), *Journey into Egypt* (1948), *Russia Has Two Faces* (1960). Her biographies include: *Ouida* (1950), *In the Steps of George Borrow* (1951), *Marie Corelli* (1953), *The Indomitable Mrs Trollope* (1953, reprinted 1970), *Lord Byron* (1957), *Mary Shelley* (1959). During the war she worked on the Ministry of Information staff and as a Lecturer to the services.

In his book, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals – The English Missionaries in Siberia*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), C.R. Bawden quotes from Eileen Bigland's *In the Steps of George Borrow* about the meeting in St Petersburg of Borrow with the Rev William Swan, who was then on his way to join the London Missionary Society's mission to Buryatia, in which my great-grandparents, the Rev Edward and Sarah Stallybrass, were engaged between 1817 and 1840.

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Of the five brothers, only Frank and Percy kept up the Quaker tradition.

### 3. HESWALL

In 1917 my family moved from Wallasey across the Wirral to Heswall to a house in Pipers Lane called "Dinglefield". Heswall lies approximately half way along the North-East, Cheshire, side of the Dee estuary, at a point where it is about 3½ miles wide, all water at high tide and mostly sand at low tide. On the other side of the river are the Welsh hills, the most prominent landmark being Moel Famau. Sadly, since those days, the river has silted up and Parkgate, the next village upstream, once the main port for Ireland, has lost its fishing fleet.

For the next three years I went as a day boy to St. Fillan's, a private pre-preparatory school run by a formidable Bishop's daughter, Miss Gore. There I first met Tom Bigland, the eldest of the family, who was a year older than myself. I followed him to The Leas, Hoylake, and to Shrewsbury, where we were in the same house, Ridgemount. His brother Ernest was also at St. Fillan's and The Leas, but, being two years younger than myself, I did not know him well at that time.

My first meeting with their father, "Bob" Bigland, whom I was later to call "Pop", was on a Sunday when he arrived at The Leas on a motor bike with a sidecar to take Tom out for the day and gave me a lift on his pillion.

I first met Margo, who was two years younger than Tom and a year older than Ernest, at a party at the Hirds'. Bernard Hird had been a colleague of my father in the family cotton-broking firm of S.M. Bulley & Sons of Liverpool. He and his first wife, Nelly, were then living in "Moorside", the house next to ours, which had previously been my grandmother's. At that party, we played the game of Snapdragon, which involved pulling raisins out of a bowl of flaming brandy. I was a coward and could not bring myself to do it; I felt inferior to Margo, who was not in the least afraid. Also at that party was Mary Dalzell, who was later to marry Ernest.

When I first knew them, the Biglands lived in a house called "Dee Royd" in Telegraph Road, the main road from Chester to Hoylake. I remember going to a children's party there which included a paperchase over the fields to Thurstaston. The house has since been replaced by a health centre. The family moved to a larger house in Oldfield Road, "Greyfriars".

"Greyfriars" stands about half a mile back from the river and some 300 feet above sea level. Between the house and the Birkenhead-West Kirby railway line, which has since been closed down and is today the "Wirral Way", lies a broad stretch of common land known as "The Dales"; this consists of heather, gorse, bracken, outcrops of red sandstone and a disused quarry. At the bottom of "The Dales" can be seen the roof and chimneys of our old home, "Dinglefield". Beyond the railway are fields

and a row of fishermen's cottages leading down to the shore. On a clear day the summit of Snowdon can be seen, about 45 miles away as the crow flies.

The house is built on a steep slope so that what is the ground floor facing onto Oldfield Road, becomes the first floor at the back, looking out over the river. There are four floors in all. In the basement is a large "bottom room", which was used on occasions for producing plays and, during the war, as an air-raid shelter. "Greyfriars", renamed "Thistle House", is now owned by one of Margo's cousins, "Nico" Williams, Captain of the Royal Liverpool Golf Club; his father-in-law, John Peters, was once my pupil at The Leas, Hoylake.

Mrs Bigland and my mother belonged to a local book-club; each of the 12 members would buy each year a new book, which would circulate month by month. They were devotees of Jane Austen, whose great-niece, Mrs Francis Leadley-Brown, also lived in Heswall and did much to foster interest in her works by publishing sequels to two of her novels and completing her unfinished novel, *The Watsons*.

Mrs Leadley-Brown had a daughter, Helen, a little older than myself, who bore a remarkable resemblance to John Tenniel's illustrations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, and a son the same age as my younger brother Robin. They looked quite alike and made an admirable "Tweedledum and Tweedledee". Adjoining our large drawing-room and separated by curtains was a small so-called smoke-room, which made an ideal stage. We would invite our friends to see my mother's productions of scenes from *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. On one occasion Mrs Leadley-Brown produced there scenes from *Uncle Remus*.

Later, my Uncle "Scun", Captain Weatherhead, retired to Heswall. During his time as an Instructor-Captain, R.N., he had written and produced short plays for the men on his ships. His finest work was *The Merchant of Venice* "by Gilbert and Sullivan", a short two-act play in which Shakespeare's plot was accompanied by Sullivan's music with subtle parodies of Gilbert's words. The D'Oyly Carte Company's copyright precluded public showings of this, but twice during the Christmas holidays we invited our friends to private performances in the Parish Hall. To make a full evening's entertainment we started with a few songs, recitations and playlets, mostly written by the Captain himself.

On the first occasion we invited Margo and her father to take part. Margo and I were paired together in one of the playlets, and in *The Merchant* her father as "The Duke of Venice" gave her as "Nerissa" away to me as "Bassanio". Sadly, the Biglands were still struggling to learn their parts at the time of the dress rehearsal; the producer found this too nerve-racking and replaced them on the second occasion. Margo and I were paired off yet again in a Bronte play produced by Mrs Leadley-

Brown in the big "bottom room" of "Greyfriars", watched by a suitor of Margo's who eyed me jealously, though at that stage we had no further interest in each other.

After the death of her mother, Margo, who had been nursing her, felt it was her duty to take over the running of the home. With hindsight she has realised that she was wrong to imagine she could ever take her mother's place. Ernest and Mary were living in Heswall Hills, where their twin sons, Robert and John were born in 1938. Tom was at that time working as a stockbroker in his father's Liverpool firm, James Maclaren and Bigland, and was living at home.

## 4. "BOB" BIGLAND

### Brothers and Sisters

Robert T. ("Bob") Bigland (1883-1962) was the third son of Frank and Rosa Bigland. Their eldest son, Leonard (1879-1947), was an insurance broker and married Eleanor ("Helen") McMurray, daughter of the owner of a Belfast linen factory. They lived in Heswall before moving to Ilkley, whence he worked in Leeds and Bradford. They had three sons and a daughter: Oscar, Beryl, Richey and Kenneth. Although he did not keep up the Quaker tradition, Leonard and his three sons all went to a Quaker school, Leighton Park, Reading.

Frank and Rosa's second son, Edwin ("Ted") (1881-1969), was for a time a social worker in the slums of London. He was a talented mimic with a great sense of humour. He married Emily Brightwen; alone of Frank Bigland's children, they kept up the Quaker tradition. As a conscientious objector, he was in prison for a time during World War I. After that he did a variety of jobs, ending up by running for many years the Tudor House Hotel in Tewkesbury, where, on 23rd April 1960, they celebrated their golden wedding and received over 40 of the family. They had two sons who helped them run the hotel.

Bob's only sister, Isabel ("Cissy") (1886-1966) married Gordon Smith, a Chester chemical and paint manufacturer; they had seven daughters.

There was also a younger brother, Oscar, born 1889, who died shortly before his second birthday.

At the time of his father's death, Bob was 16. He had to leave Dover College and was taken into the office of one of his father's friends on the Stock Exchange in Liverpool, in which he eventually became a partner.

### Margo's recollections

Margo writes: "Dad once told me he had enlisted to go out to the Boer War and was actually preparing for embarkation when his mother found out or his conscience caught up with him, maybe both, and he got out of it, as he had to support his mother and sister. This continued long after he married. His sister Cissy was off his hands when she married in 1911, but he supported Granny, at least partially, until her death in 1921.

"Before Mum died, she had begun to feel she had tried to make up to Dad for the deprivations of his youth by setting him free to go his own way, but had not accompanied him. She had gone her own way too and she now wanted to rectify this. I wish I had understood and helped her more, but I just did not comprehend the depth and quality of a relationship maturing over 25 years and the shared experience of five children in that relationship. I wanted to have first place in her life, as I



felt she had always loved the boys more than me. She certainly found them easier, and my jealousy made things very difficult. In her last illness, I nursed her and felt she really needed me, but my jealous possessiveness must have made it especially difficult for Dad, who was always most generous and loving to me.

“There was something very soothing and gentle about Dad which probably only Mum and we children knew. My earliest recollection of him is of sitting on his knee by the fire in our nursery. We had just had our bath and he was brushing my hair. I usually hated this, because my hair was very curly and full of knots, but when he did it, it was sheer pleasure. I remember too a night he spent with Ernest and me when we had whooping-cough very badly and kept everyone awake. He took his turn at looking after us. On another occasion I had broken my arm and was in great pain. Mum was expecting a baby and needed her sleep, so she went into my bed and I took her place in Dad’s and he looked after me through a wakeful night.

“He joined the Army when I was about four. I have only a vague recollection of him in khaki. On what was probably his last leave from the front, he arrived home delirious with trench-fever. He sweated through everything, sheets, blankets, mattress. The whole house seemed full of drying bedding. After that, I think he was on home duties. When he came home on leave, he would save up all his meat coupons and bring a joint , a rare gift.

“To me Dad was the one I often turned to when I had a pain, wanted something done or just wanted understanding and sympathy. He never let me down as a child. The sad thing is that I never grew up where he was concerned. Mum said to me one day, ‘The best thing I can do for you is to die’. I knew she meant that I would just go on leaning and never stand on my own feet.

“Dad was a great comfort when we were hurt, but was very accident-prone himself. I remember returning from a picnic when we were staying at the Hut and finding him sitting with his finger in a cup of water and iodine and looking very green. He had cut the end off it and was holding it together until we could get him to a doctor to have it sewn on.

“Twice I can remember him putting his shoulder out of its socket. The first time was during World War II, when we had Lucy Todd, an RAMC officer’s wife, living with us. I had been out when he had been brought home from some Scout do, where he had fallen. Lucy gave me a blow by blow account of what had happened. They had sent for our family doctor, Dr Carlisle, who later saved my arm. He was not a very big man and muscularly was not Dad’s equal. Dad was made to lie on the floor. The doctor put his foot against him and pulled and the shoulder clicked into place. Lucy was still white and trembling, and it took a lot to

upset her. She said the noise Dad made was quite awe-inspiring and the language unrepeatable.

"I have never known anyone with such energy as Dad. I used to say that if he sat down he must be ill and that if he was off his food he was heading for the grave. He loved life to the full and all the good things in it. He was disciplined and fit till his last days. After bursts of temper he was always sorry and very winning in his straightforward simplicity. Latterly, when he was supposed to be careful about what he ate, he would say, when he particularly wanted to eat something he knew he should not, 'It does your inside good to give it a shock now and then.' I am sure we must all have seen him spit out something too hot and say, 'Any other fool would have swallowed that'.

"He had many endearing qualities. Not the least was his ability to convince himself that anything he wanted was to everyone's benefit. 'Haven't had a holiday for years – do me good!' was a prelude to each one he took, however many he had already had that year. Whenever he wanted to get the family together, he would say 'This will probably be the last time; I won't be here much longer'. This happened regularly from his mid-sixties on. We had several death-bed scenes, when we all stood round looking foolish. On one of these occasions we went out into the garden when we were released and spontaneously burst out laughing. Dad overheard and was much offended.

"'Granny' Bigland had an unpopular elder widowed sister and a dear, if rather ineffectual, bachelor brother. He was supposed to have no money, but to everyone's surprise, he left Dad £100 when he died. With it, Dad bought his first car, an ancient Humber; previously he had had motor bikes with side-cars. All our subsequent cars were old crocks. I used to be desperately ashamed when Dad arrived at my school in them. I used to tell the other girls that they were 'just the old cars he uses for shooting' and that they were 'quite good enough to cart my luggage about in'.

"When I was nine, a third brother, Robert, was born. He had a leaking valve in his heart, something for which in those days there was no cure, and he died four days later. I was totally self-centred in my grief and seemed to get most of the attention. Maybe my parents found it a relief from their own grief to centre on me. I had no conception of the shattering blow it must have been to them. He was a really beautiful baby.

### **Tony arrives**

"Some four years later, Mum, then aged 44, was expecting again. She was very upset and felt she could no go through with it. To make matters worse, Dad went away with his cousin Eric, Uncle Alfred's son, who had had a broken engagement and was inconsolable. They went

skiing in Switzerland with all expenses paid by Uncle Alfred. Mum was furious, but Dad was like a little boy going on a marvellous adventure; he had never been skiing before. They postponed sending me to boarding-school, so that I would be at home when the baby arrived, to make up to me for the death of Robert. It meant that Mum would not be on her own while Dad was away. In Switzerland Dad had an innocent love affair and wrote ecstatic letters about the girl; when he got home he hung photos of her in his dressing-room. Mum could not find it in her heart at first to forgive him, but when Tony was born, they were both delighted. Mum recaptured something of her youth with this little boy and made friends with a number of young mothers with babies of the same age. I remember Dad holding him up one evening after Mum had been feeding him. He was totally replete and dribbling with his eyes closed and his head rolling. Dad said, 'If you look like that in twenty years time, my lad, I'll kick you out!'"

## **Dogs**

My earliest recollection of "Greyfriars" was of calling to deliver a message from my mother to Helen Bigland. A dog came out and barked at me, hotly pursued by Bob Bigland, who set about beating it despite my protests that it had done me no harm.

Margo continues: "Dogs played a big part in our family life. My grandmother Hannay in a letter to her sister describes a typical incident: 'I had such a tragedy yesterday. I was at Nelly's and put off my fur coat in the hall. When I went to get it, the puppy had torn chunks out of the collar. I trust it can be repaired. It was rather maddening, but the sequel is the tragedy. Nelly smacked him, then we went out and he followed us. Nelly sent him back several times and finally he went into a field. When I got home I rang Nelly up to tell her I was safely back. Nurse answered the telephone and said Nelly was out. She said how sorry she was about the coat and then added that the puppy had been killed; it must have come out of the field and gone into the village where it was run over by a Motor!! I really felt it was too severe, poor little brute, but I said to Nurse if it was to be killed, I wish it had been yesterday. I am afraid the children will be sorry. Nelly I fancy won't grieve overmuch. It ate a hat and feather of old Mrs Bigland's and a new sweater Bob was returning to the shop, and of course odds and ends as well.'

"When Mum and Dad got married, they had an Aberdeen terrier, known as the 'Andy Pup'. He was a dour Scot and limited his affections to his owners. When Tom was born, he was at first very jealous, but eventually adopted him too and used to sit on guard whenever Tom was out in his pram. I only remember him as a very old grey dog who took no part in our nursery lives. After his death, he was replaced by a female 'Andy Pup', who was a very poor substitute and did not last long.

Perhaps, like the fur-eating puppy, she was run over.

“Dad used to rent a field opposite ‘Dee Royd’ with a stable, part of which he used as a garage. The main road separating them was a danger to dogs and children alike, though there was little traffic in those days. When he came home in the evenings, he would poop his horn, we would let the dog out and they would race each other down the field. We had a mongrel called Jack. Ernest and I used to dress him up in a pair of pants with a hole in the seat for his tail, braces over his shoulders and an old jersey of Ernest’s.

“One evening we had dressed Jack up, not realising it was time for his evening run. When he heard the horn, he took off out of the window across the road and down the field. The braces slipped, the trousers and jersey got entangled with his legs and by the time we caught up with him he was a hysterical yapping ball, bouncing down the field after Dad. We never dressed him up again.

“One of Dad’s tragedies was when his first gun-dog, Paddy, an Irish water spaniel, was killed. He used to exercise him every morning up and down the road on his motor-bike before going to work. One morning a young man in a car ran over him. Paddy had come as a pup and Mum had nursed him through distemper and other puppy ailments. He was a gentle creature, we all loved him. Dad had spent hours trying to train him and had shown him at the Chester Dog Show, although he knew nothing about showing dogs. Paddy had a long whippy tail with hardly any hair on it. This was normal for the breed, but it worried Dad, who used to rub it with hair-restorer. While walking him round the ring, Dad concealed a biscuit in his hand to make him cock up his ears, though they should, in fact, have lain quite flat. Fortunately none of this did any harm, and Paddy won the third prize. Ernest, as usual, felt deeply involved and sat all day in the dog’s compartment to keep him company.

“His successor, Rapper, another Irish water spaniel, was not such a loveable character, but we all grew very fond of him. Dad built a hut and a run for him in the garden, as he was not supposed to be a pet, but we all spoil him.

“Dad had all sorts of theories about training him. To develop in him a soft mouth which would not harm birds, he tried to train him to carry eggs in his mouth. If the egg was rolled along the ground, he would pounce on it and break it. If it was put into his mouth, he would stand with his mouth open, looking stupid and confused, until some one spoke or moved, when he would close his mouth and break the egg. Another exercise was to shut my rabbit Geoff in Rapper’s cage so that he would get used to rabbits and not chase them when out shooting. Geoff was large and placid, and they were supremely indifferent to each other. All orders had to be obeyed immediately, but often no one, least of all the dog, was sure what was expected.

"Once a new puppy who was homesick used to cry in the night; Dad would go down and spank it. After several of these disturbances there was peace, which was explained when Ernest was found asleep with the puppy in its basket in the kitchen.

"At one time we had four dogs. In addition to Rapper for Dad to take shooting, especially wild fowl on the marshes, we each had our own dog. Tom had Henry Esmond, a medium-sized French poodle, who outlived all the others, reaching the good old age of 15, by which time he was blind and rather smelly, but still had an excellent nose. I inherited him when Tom married and he stayed on with Dad when I left home at the end of the war. He was very much a part of the family. He was very intelligent and long-suffering. One very hot summer at the Hut, we thought that his coat was not suited to the weather, so decided to clip him. Armed with scissors of every description, we made a circle around him. The idea was not that he kept still, but that we each snipped any part of his anatomy that came our way. The result was spectacular; he looked as if the moths had been at him. One careless person drew blood and was duly contrite.

"Ernest had an enormously fat and spoiled spaniel, Sam Small; he was so broad in the beam that he waddled. He was supposed to be a gun-dog, but the first time we took him out shooting he buried his head in the nearest tuft of grass and howled every time a gun went off. He was totally brainless, but very amiable, and, as usual, universally adored.

"On the morning of Ernest's wedding, I heard an awful noise going on in his room, so looked in to see what was happening. Ernest was leaping into the air at one end of the bed, while Sam sat with great dignity at the other end. Every time Ernest landed, Sam took off and sailed gracefully up and down with his ears acting as wings. Ernest was singing at the top of his voice, 'Today we're going to be married!'

"I adopted the family wire-haired fox terrier, who nobody loved. He was not really a very civilised member of society and eventually he went to a farmer's wife and lived happily ever after, free to indulge in all his unsocial habits. I was always much more devoted to Henry Esmond.

"As long as Mum was alive, she carried all the real responsibility of our pets, while we were at school or in jobs. She must have been a real animal lover. When I think of all she put up with without complaint, I am amazed. But she never let us neglect any animal we had taken on, which was excellent training.

## **Shooting**

"Dad was not much better with a gun than with dogs, in my opinion. I can remember being sent round a pond to beat up a wounded duck and, having got it off the water, I had to lie flat on my stomach while Dad blazed away at it just over my head. But he certainly got enormous pleasure from his shooting, even if the dogs, people and game all suffered

a certain amount of discomfort of mind and body.

### **“Rathy”**

“One particular quality which many of the Biglands have in common is the deep and lasting friendship which they inspire in those who work with and for them. Paddy Dunn in his address at Ernest’s memorial service (see Appendix 4) describes Ernest’s friendship with his gardener, in whom he seems to have confided more than in anyone else. Dad had a similar relationship with Mr Rathbone. ‘Rathy’, as we all knew him, had been badly gassed in World War I and was partially disabled. He was very badly off and lived with his wife and one or two children in the old stable at the bottom of the field in which Dad kept his motor-bike and sidecar. He was a genius at making children’s toys out of odd bits of wood.

“As the years passed, Rathy and Dad seemed to grow closer, and he became very much one of the family. He certainly never came to us for gain, as Dad could never afford to pay him much and no amount of money could have paid for what he did for us all. He worked tirelessly inside and outside our successive homes. Dad also used to take him to help build log-huts for the Scouts in Wales.

“He played a major part in the building of a double garage and in the rebuilding of the veranda at the back of ‘Greyfriars’ on the first floor. This entailed sinking iron girders in concrete and attaching them to other girders embedded in the side of the house. At the top of the house they had to knock out a panel which divided my bedroom window from that of the boys’ room next door, then pass a rope round the upright post of the window-frames and use it as a pulley to haul the girders into place. We all had to turn out to heave.

“Mum was very sorry for Mrs Rathbone and used to visit her to give what help and comfort she could, but Mrs Rathy never shared the close relationship which her husband had with us all.

“Rathy was officially employed as our part-time gardener, but Dad was always drawing him off on other projects and the garden rarely saw him. In desperation Mum employed a schoolboy to work in the garden on Saturdays. ‘Tom Chockles’, as we christened him, was the son of Fanny Cottrell, who had been Mum and Dad’s first cook after they were married and later became Dad’s housekeeper.”

On our wedding morning I found Rathy dealing with boxes of flowers. He shook his head at me and said gravely, “Poor fellow! Funeral at three!” At the reception, he sat in the front row, laughing and shaking his head at me. When Andrew was about a year old, we called on the Rathbones in their home and he presented Andrew with a wooden doll he had made which turned somersaults.

## Boats

Margo continues: "Dad must have inherited his father's and uncles' love of boats and rowing. We were all taught to row in a lovely old double sculling pleasure boat, which he had inherited from his father and which today is in a museum. We are all proud and grateful to have learned our rowing skills under such a brilliant, if at times ruthless, master of the art. I hated the output of energy needed for this sport, but tears and pleas were of no avail, and I was really a very accomplished performer when I wanted to show off."

## Scouting

Another of his great enthusiasms was for Scouting. As District Commissioner, he inspected The Leas School, Hoylake, Troop on at least one occasion when his cousin Jack Bigland and I were both Assistant Scoutmasters and his youngest son Tony a Scout.

On 11 June 1962, he was awarded the OBE for his services to Scouting and was accompanied to Buckingham Palace by his twin grandsons Robert and John.

He was a personal friend of the Founder, Lord Baden-Powell, and of his successor as Chief Scout, Lord Rowallan. Yvonne, Tony's widow, has a fine wooden bench, table or stool, signed with a hot poker "Bob Bigland, 21.6.36" and countersigned "Rowallan, Chief Scout, 4/8/46".

After his death in 1962, Scout Headquarters presented Tom in his father's memory with a handsome loose-leaf logbook. The beautifully handwritten title page is inscribed: "Handicapped Scouting Log-Book, County of Cheshire (West)" and illustrated with the Scout crest and motto "Jure et Dignitate Gladii".

There follows a page of dedication, which reads:

**"This Logbook is Dedicated**  
with respect and affection to the memory of  
ROBERT TAYLOR BIGLAND  
OBE

Late Deputy Camp Chief for Training of Scouters and  
Assistant County Commissioner for Handicapped Scouts in  
the County of Cheshire West: Holder of **The Silver Wolf** –  
personal award of **The Chief Scout**.

(There follows a picture of the Silver Wolf)

As a true and accurate record of activities in the field of Handicapped Scouting, expressing the hope that 'Uncle Bob's' efforts are being carried on faithfully, with zeal, derived from his example. A practical expression of deep appreciation for his many years of showing us how to play the game of 'Scouting for Boys'."

The next page contains an anonymous tribute from the

Headquarters staff at 25 Buckingham Palace Road:

“On August 26th the Movement lost one of its most devoted members by the death of R.T. Bigland in his 80th year. When he left us Bob or Uncle Bob, as he was known to hundreds of brother Scouts, was a Deputy Camp Chief for West Cheshire.

“Bob first became associated with Scouting in 1910 when he was appointed Secretary of the West Wirral Local Association. Later he was elected Chairman and in 1927 received his first warrant as District Commissioner of that District. It was about this time he became involved in the arrangements for the Coming-of-Age Jamboree and many will remember the outstanding job he did in connection with the Auxiliary Camp at Overchurch, which provided for some of the overflow from Arrowe Park.

“Four years later, Bob Bigland was appointed a Deputy Camp Chief and Assistant County Commissioner for the Training of Scouters. If I may be permitted a personal reminiscence, in that same year – 1931 – I was a member of a Rover Course at Gilwell and had the good fortune to be in the same patrol with him; thus was forged a friendship for which I shall ever be grateful.

“Undoubtedly, Wood Badge Training and Handicapped Scouting – he was Assistant County Commissioner for Handicapped Scouting from 1935 until this year – were his great interests but he would always find time to undertake other jobs; for example, for a period he was County Commissioner for South West Lancashire. He made an outstanding contribution to Scouting which was recognised by the award of the Silver Wolf in 1948 and the O.B.E. in 1960.

“His passing is a great personal loss to hundreds of brother Scouts but his example will long be remembered.

“We offer to his son, Colonel Tom Bigland, County Commissioner West Cheshire and a member of the Committee of the Council, and the other members of his family our warm sympathy in their great loss.”

There follow several pages of press cuttings of obituary notices, which appear at the end of the book as Appendix 1.

The rest of the book contains an account of Handicapped Scouting in West Cheshire over the next eight or nine years, neatly hand-written by George A.J. Begg, the County Commissioner, who retired in 1971 and died in 1972. The book was then handed by “Bo” Bowden to Tom, who sent it in October 1982 to the Scout Association for their Archives.

One entry from this part of the book deserves quoting:

#### *Birchwood Training Camp*

“A memorable event took place at Birchwood on the 28th September 1969 when Lieut. Col. T.S. Bigland, former County Commissioner, opened the *Bob Bigland Hut* which had been erected in



memory of his Father, Mr R.T. Bigland, who was for many years Assistant County Commissioner for Training in the County. Mr Bigland known affectionately as 'Uncle Bob' contributed a very great deal to Scouting; including Assistant County Commissioner for Handicapped Scouting, and nationally and it is fitting that his memory should be honoured in this way. This was an occasion when the many friends of Scouting, including our President, Lord Leverhulme and our Chairman, Lord Rochester, gathered together to see Tom Bigland unveil the plaque which commemorated his Father's lifetime of service to the Movement and which will ensure that his name will for ever be closely associated with one of his chief interests, Leadership Training."

### **Tom's Scouting**

Having seen how much time his father had devoted to the World Jamboree in 1929, Tom was at first determined not to get caught. After the old Heswall Golf Clubhouse had been destroyed by fire and a new Clubhouse had been built, one of the old Army huts which had temporarily housed the Club was given to the Heswall Cub Pack and Tom helped his father and Rathy to move it up to the Puddy Dale next to Dee Royd and to erect it again.

The Cub leaders then enlisted Tom's help to keep a gang of village boys at bay who regularly tried to disrupt the Cub meetings. These boys were eventually enrolled as Scouts and Tom, after resisting for a time, agreed to become a Scoutmaster. He was helped by a local building contractor, who, with his wife, ran an annual summer camp at the Bigland Hut on the Dee. Tom was unable to take a holiday then, as he needed time off each year for Henley Regatta, but he would row up to the Hut with a party of Scouts one weekend, stay the week at the Hut, going to work in Liverpool each day, and row down with the Scouts the next weekend.

As was to be expected, Tom arranged many interesting activities for his Scouts. In February 1935, he organised a weekend camp in Snowdonia in snow conditions and led a party up Tryfan, a 3,000-foot rocky peak. In September 1937, he repeated the ascent of Tryfan, this time enlisting the help of three members of the Climbers' Club from their hut, "Helyg", to lead his Scouts up the Milestone Buttress.

To celebrate the Coronation of King George VI in May 1937, the Scouts built and set alight an enormous beacon, soaked in hundreds of gallons of old sump oil, close to the water tower, the highest point in Heswall.

His greatest achievement was to take a party skiing from a chalet in Kandersteg at Christmas 1938. Two of his friends were enlisted as ski instructors and issued with Scout uniforms for the occasion. To save money, they took as much food as possible, including dozens of mince

pies and a plum-pudding, which Margo had cooked for them, and a turkey. The chalet facilities could not cope with the turkey, so Tom skied a short distance up to a hotel, asked the chef to cook it for them, and he and a friend collected it three hours later and skied back carrying it down between them, gravy and all. The holiday cost the Scouts £5 each.

Tom writes: "At the end of the war I have recorded what I always suspected was a plot by F.O. Paul and Dad to get me first as District Commissioner for West Wirral and then as County Commissioner for West Cheshire. I would not have been able to do it unless Dad had done most of the weekends and visiting for me. Johan Vogt also helped me a great deal as County Treasurer, and I think we had some effect on Scouting, when I was elected to the Scout Executive Committee and he was on the Council. This, I think, worked well, and I carried on until Dad died."

At the World Jamboree at Southwick Park in 1957, three generations of Biglands took part: Bob, Tom and Timothy.

## 5. ROWING

(Much of the information in this chapter is drawn from *The Royal Chester Rowing Club Centenary History 1838-1938* by J.V.S. Glass and J. Max Patrick, from which I have quoted extracts, and from *Henley Records 1919-1938* by C.T. Steward.)

### **Henley and Leander**

Whenever I think of my father-in-law, I see him in a blazer and the pink cap, scarf, tie and socks of the Leander Club. I picture him at Henley Royal Regatta or at the University Boat Race. Jimmie Green, a former Royal Chester boatman, had a boathouse on the Middlesex bank of the Thames just above Barnes Bridge. His friends would assemble on a footbridge which crossed over the railway line to Dukes Meadows. From it there was a splendid view down the river to Chiswick Reach and upstream almost to the finish at Mortlake Brewery. On a portable radio we would listen to the earlier stages of the race. Today, as we watch the whole race on television in the comfort of our home, we sometimes wonder what induced us to go to all the trouble of driving up to Barnes, finding somewhere to park and standing around, often in a bitter March wind. The answer undoubtedly lay in Bob Bigland's enthusiasm for rowing and his determination to use any such event for a family party.

No Bigland home is complete without a properly mounted and framed photograph, headed "HENLEY 1956 – R.C.R.C. & LEANDER", showing the four Bigland members of the Leander Club looking as though they were about to compete in the regatta in a coxless four: Bob, aged 73, Tom 46, Ernest, 42, and Tony 30. Below are listed their achievements at Henley with the occasional spelling mistake – a typical family failing!

Henley Royal Regatta is Britain's leading regatta, drawing competitors from all over the world, and the leading social event in rowing. The Leander Club, based at Henley-on-Thames, is Britain's elite rowing club. Until comparatively recently, only distinguished oarsmen from Oxford and Cambridge and winners of events at Henley were privileged to wear the Club's distinctive pink tie and socks, but in 1920 Bob was elected "for his services to provincial rowing". Tom and Ernest were proposed for membership in 1938 but, despite their outstanding qualifications, it was not until after the war that they were duly elected. Tony was elected in 1951 after winning an event at Henley in a Cambridge crew.

Club supporters at Henley have three options: they can stay in the Stewards' Enclosure to see the finish of the race, then dash round to the boat tents to congratulate or commiserate with their crew; or they can cycle down to the start and follow the race until forced to go round

behind the enclosures to the boat tents. In her booklet on her mother Margo has painted a colourful picture of the effects of this on her father (pp. 18-19) The third alternative is to apply to follow the race on the umpire's launch. This has the disadvantage that silence must be observed. Bob Bigland found this extremely hard and was often in trouble with an umpire for uncontrollably shouting at his crew.

### **Five brothers**

At least five generations of Biglands have achieved varying degrees of distinction on the river and it is now nearly 120 years since the first Biglands were elected to the Royal Chester Rowing Club.

They were the brothers William D. and Charles H. Bigland, "who were elected in 1870 and 1871 respectively, but they did not row in senior crews, and were not particularly active" (p. 85). They were first cousins of Frank Bigland, father and grandfather of the "Leander Quartet". William won for a double sculling scratch race at the Mersey Rowing Club regatta in 1870 a tankard which is now in Guy Bigland's possession.

Frank and his brothers, Alfred and Percy, rowed in 1877 in a Mersey Rowing Club eight which defeated the "Royals" at Chester Regatta. Together with their eldest brother, Ernest, they also formed a family four, coxed by their youngest brother, Walter. In 1883 Frank competed in the Diamond Sculls at Henley Royal Regatta under Mersey colours, but was defeated in the first round. That same year he transferred to Royal Chester and, at the Club regatta, won the Frost Sculling Challenge Plate, which was later won by his son Bob in 1907 and 1908 and by his grandson Ernest in 1931 and 1932. It is believed that the break with Mersey occurred because the Club, which had already formed a senior four, refused to enter the family four for the City of Chester Cup at Chester Regatta.

### **The old pleasure boat**

It was Frank who purchased about 1872 from fellow-members of the RCRC the magnificent double sculling pleasure boat, in which subsequent generations of Biglands were taught to row. Built by Searl Brothers of Putney and Oxford in 1854, she won 14 prizes or medals for her design at exhibitions in London, Paris, Brussels and elsewhere. On Frank's death in 1900 it passed to his eldest son, Leonard, on whose marriage in 1905 Bob joined him as part owner. On Leonard's moving to Ilkley in 1918, Bob took over the ownership completely. For many years she was used to transport the whole family with their luggage the ten miles up the Dee from Chester to the family Hut in Trevalyn Meadows near Rossett. Margo gives a graphic description of holidays at the Hut and of the journeys up the river in her booklet on her mother (pp. 12-14). Until 1966 the boat was used every year, carefully looked after by John

Bigland, who lived nearest to the Hut.

In 1982, when it was known that the Amateur Rowing Association were organising a centenary procession on the Thames, Tom suggested that John should enter the "old boat" for it. A programme of restoration was carried out with the help of the Shrewsbury School boatman. The structure was repaired, a new back-rest and a complete set of cushions made. The boat was then taken on the RCRC trailer to Putney. There, on 11th September in beautiful weather and crewed by John Bigland, David Evans and David Parker, she set off for Greenwich at the head of the procession as the oldest boat present. As she went under the central arch of London Bridge, a huge wave came straight over the bows and sank her. She alone had been built as a racing boat and was therefore very much lower in the water than the other boats, which all survived. The crew were rescued and taken to Greenwich, while the boat was towed back to Putney. She is now housed in the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum.

## **Bob**

Bob joined the "Royals" in 1905. As a sculler, he won the Championship of the Dee for five successive years from 1909 to 1913 and reached the final of the Diamonds at Henley in 1913. His most successful year was 1921, when the RCRC senior four won the Grand Challenge Cup at Marlow Regatta. "This Cup was given for the Senior Four race this year for the first and only time, as there were not enough senior eight crews in practice. The crew rowed at Henley in the boat in which the Club had won the Stewards' Cup in 1892; and during training it broke all records. By beating successively Auriol R. C., Trinity Hall and Lady Margaret B. C., all with ease, the four reached the final of the Wyfold Cup event against Jesus. They were leading the College boat slightly just below Fawley, when, during a spurt, they crashed into the booms, 2's blade becoming jammed under a punt. Before this could be extricated, Jesus went past and won easily in record time. Victories were naturally recorded at the principal provincial regattas. In particular, at Chester Regatta the four won the City of Chester Challenge Cup, last held by the Club in 1907" (pp. 67-68).

Tom and I were at that time at The Leas School, Hoylake. We were in a dormitory of 14, known as the "Long Dorm" and notorious for bullying. Each evening in regatta time, the Headmaster, "Skinny" Dealtry, used to visit the dormitory and announce for Tom's benefit the results of the day's racing. With the typical unpleasantness of schoolboys, we showed Tom our indifference to rowing as a sport by giving him the Latin name "Remex" ("Rower").

Perhaps Bob's most remarkable achievement occurred in 1934, when he was aged 52. In the Tideway Head of the River Race over the Mortlake-Putney course, he replaced Tom, who had been taken ill just

before the race. The crew nevertheless finished 32nd, seven places up on the previous year. When I questioned my father-in-law about this, he replied modestly: "With my experience, I knew what to do; I just kept swinging and didn't exhaust myself".

Bob's services to the Club were immense. "He was Secretary from 1910 to 1918, though during the last three years of the War he was away on war service. Then, from 1919 to 1922, he was Captain and was largely instrumental in launching the appeal fund which set the Club going again after the War. He was again Captain in 1925 and 1926, and Vice-President from 1923" (p. 85). He was President of the Club from 1954 until his death in 1962. He also represented the Club on the Council of the Amateur Rowing Association until 1956, when, on amalgamation with the National Amateur Rowing Association, the Club lost the right to representation. "He has been an indefatigable and selfless coach to many crews, often under winter conditions, when only the keenest enthusiasm could furnish the effort. His work on the Committee for the past thirty years has been invaluable. No one in the history of the Club has been more active" (p.85).

### **Tom and Ernest**

Tom and Ernest, who joined the Club as schoolboys in 1923 and 1925 respectively, followed in their father's footsteps. Tom was Champion of the Dee in 1933. Rowing in the Club's senior four, the brothers won many events at provincial regattas and twice reached the final of the Wyfold Cup at Henley. But it was as a pair, rowing in the Silver Goblets and Nickalls' Challenge Cup at Henley that they will be remembered in the rowing world.

The Thames Challenge Cup (for eights) and the Wyfold Challenge Cup (for coxless fours), in which many RCRC crews have competed, are subsidiary events to the Grand Challenge Cup and the Stewards Challenge Cup respectively and do not normally attract high class crews from overseas. The Goblets, by contrast, is an international event in which some of the world's best pairs compete. Coxless events were at that time rare in the provinces; the technique of one of the crew steering by operating the rudder with his feet needed to be learnt. Many a coxless race is lost by faulty steering resulting in a collision with the booms.

For Tom and Ernest to be launched in 1933 into the Goblets as their first Henley event was certainly a "baptism of fire". No RCRC crew had competed at Henley since 1925. The brothers were in some ways a most unlikely pair. Ernest had had experience of rowing as a schoolboy at St Edward's, Oxford, but Tom was a late developer, had left Shrewsbury early, as he was making little progress, having never done more than cox his house first boat. Until they levelled out in 1938 at 11 stone each, Ernest was several pounds heavier than Tom and they

invariably found themselves racing against heavier pairs. No provincial regatta included a pair-oared event, so they had never before raced as a pair. Very well coached by their father, they had practised hard on the Dee in an ancient craft, the only one available, which was quite unsuitable for racing. It was not until after their arrival at Henley that they succeeded in obtaining a suitable boat. They did, however, derive great advantage from the support of their family. Not only were they coached by their father, but their mother arranged each year for the family to spend the whole regatta together. Ernest's fiancée Mary Dalzell, was also always with them.

### **Henley 1933**

In 1933 Bob's Aunt Edith Bigland, widow of his Uncle Percy, lent them "Stone Dean", her beautiful old 16th century house near Beaconsfield. She herself was abroad, but her cook looked after them magnificently. They were also able to entertain a number of Club supporters. Not being entered for other events, the brothers were able to concentrate on rowing as a pair, but such concentration naturally caused tension. Margo even remembers one brother giving the other a black eye. When they reached Henley, they were coached by R.C. Sheriff, author of *Journey's End*.

On the first day, Wednesday, they had a bye. On the Thursday they met de Col and Bianchi, an Italian pair about whom little was known and beat them by two lengths, having led all the way. On the Friday they met H.R.A. Edwards and L. Clive, who had won the pairs at the Olympic Games the previous year. "The race was rowed in a headwind, and the Biglands, by rowing a consistently higher stroke, and by sheer endurance, managed to pass the finishing post a length ahead, after a grim and ding-dong struggle" (p. 72). In the final on the Saturday, they met the Eton Vikings, J.H.C. Powell and J.E. Gilmour, who later became Member of Parliament for and Lord Lieutenant of Fife. Sadly, the Biglands lost the race by running into the booms.

### **Henley 1934**

In 1934, the family rented a house in St. Mark's Road, Henley, taking domestic staff with them. There they were joined by Jock MacGregor and Donald Bailey, who were rowing with Tom and Ernest in the Wyfold Cup four, and other Club supporters. With a greater number competing, tensions were not so great, but as they were involved in two events, they were liable to row races each day. Each evening their temporary home provided a suitably relaxed atmosphere. Margo has described some of the hilarious happenings in her booklet (pp. 17-18).

On the Wednesday morning, they won their Wyfold race against Worcester College, Oxford, easily. In the Silver Goblets in the evening,

they were giving away nearly three stone per man against Couchman and Bankes of Christ Church, Oxford, but were leading by three-quarters of a length at the mile-post, when the Oxford men hit the booms and capsized. This gave the Biglands a clear run into the final on the Saturday.

Their Wyfold heat against London Rowing Club on the Thursday was again won easily, as London hit the booms shortly after Fawley. On the Friday too they won easily against Westminster Bank.

Saturday was their big day of the finals, In the morning they met in the Goblets Braun and Moller of the Wiking Club, Berlin, who were nearly two stone per man heavier and led them throughout, but the Biglands pressed them all the way, losing by about one length. The Germans were only one second outside the record for the course. In the evening, Bob Bigland and Keith Wilson took Tom and Ernest's place to save them the paddle down the river to the start of the Wyfold final against Reading R. C., who outweighed RCRC by almost two stone per man. Reading won fairly comfortably by a length and three quarters.

### **Henley 1935**

In 1935 they entered again for the Wyfold and the Goblets. They drew a bye in the first round of the Wyfold. In the Goblets it was generally reckoned that the Biglands and J.H.T. Wilson and W.G.R.M. Laurie of Leander were the two fastest pairs. Sadly, they were drawn together in the first round, due to be rowed on the Thursday. As Wilson was also rowing for Pembroke College, Cambridge, in the Grand and in the Stewards', and Laurie for Selwyn College, Cambridge, in the Ladies' Plate, the stewards agreed that they might hold the Goblets race on the Wednesday. Wilson and Laurie won comfortably. On the Thursday, Wilson's College won both their races and, faced with three races on the Friday, he agreed with Laurie to withdraw from the Goblets. He went on to win both the Grand and the Stewards' while both his partner and the Biglands were deprived of a very good chance of winning the Goblets. The RCRC Wyfold four beat their old rivals, Mersey, on the Thursday, but succumbed to First Trinity in the semi-finals on the Friday.

### **Henley 1938**

In 1936, Helen Bigland died of cancer, having lived just long enough to see Ernest and Mary happily married. Her loss was greatly felt by all the crews at Henley and other regattas.

In 1936 and 1937 Ernest was suffering from a bad back and did not row. In 1938 he tried rowing again in a coxless four, which went well and was entered for the Wyfold. He was then persuaded also to row at 7 in the eight, which was entered for the Thames and which did not go well without him. It was only at the last moment that he and Tom entered for the Goblets, since there seemed to be a good chance of winning. In the



end he courageously rowed two races each day with his back strapped up. It turned out to be one of their most successful Henleys.

The four was made up by Walter Todd and "Buster" Graesser and the eight by Roddy Reynier, Lionel Peel, Peter Allnutt, Ian Robb, Jock MacGregor and "Buster" Graesser. The crew stayed together at a guest house in Nettlebed.

On the Wednesday morning the Wyfold four beat Downing College, Cambridge, by three lengths. In the evening, the eight lost a good heat of the Thames against Reading University by half a length. This must, in some ways, have been a relief. Had they won, they would have been faced with three races on the Thursday and would have had to make the difficult choice of withdrawing from one event. As it was, the four and the pair were given a better chance of winning.

Thursday provided them with two easy races, the four beating Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in the morning by two lengths and the pair winning easily in the evening against Bradburne and Langrishe of Pembroke College, Cambridge.

On Friday the four had another easy morning race, beating Westminster Bank by four lengths. The pair had a very much tougher race in the evening against the much heavier Edwards and Tarbuck of Liverpool Victoria, eventually winning by three-quarters of a length.

In the finals on the Saturday, they lost the Wyfold to London and the Goblets to their 1935 rivals, Laurie and Wilson, who were on leave from the Civil Service in the Sudan.

(In 1948, Laurie and Wilson returned to Henley to win both the Goblets and the Olympic pairs.)

## **Tom**

In 1935 Tom played a big part in launching the first provincial Head of the River Race, which was held on the Dee at Chester and has thrived ever since. On that occasion, Bob Bigland, stroking Royal Chester 2nd VIII, and I, stroking the Mersey 2nd VIII, battled against each other down the long straight to the finish.

Tom had been elected Captain in 1934, a post which he retained until 1938. An anonymous typewritten *History of the Royal Chester Rowing Club 1939-1948*, written in fact by J.V.S. Glass, states of him: "His services to the Club during those five years had been immense. He had taken over when the fortunes of the Club were at a low ebb. Under his leadership summer rowing had been restored to a high level of activity and winter rowing had been firmly established, to the advantage not only of Royal Chester but of many other rowing clubs in the provinces."

## **Tom and Ernest after the war**

At the end of the war, Tom and Ernest were able to organise some Army rowing in Hamburg. Thanks to friendships made by Tom during the war, the Club was invited in August 1946 to take part in the Namur International Regatta. They were so well entertained that their rowing was not of a high order! The typewritten *History* already quoted states: "Morale was not improved when it was learnt that a female cox was to be provided. In fact, stroke suddenly vanished and amid general consternation could not be found for some time. He later reappeared after having attended to the buttons of his rowing shorts ..... Contrary to all forebodings, the lady cox performed excellently. Not only could she steer, she could also dance, and was in great request at the evening party."

Tom and Ernest rowed at Henley for the last time in 1947. Between 1928 and 1956 Tom won 28 cups at open regattas and 18 at RCRC regattas. He has continued to serve the Club well first as Vice-President and later as President. Ernest served as Secretary in 1947 and 1948. After moving to London, he rowed as a veteran with Thames Rowing Club.

Tom has done a considerable amount of coaching and was largely responsible for King's School, Chester, appearing at Henley for the first time.

## **Tony**

Tony, like his elder brothers, learned to row at the Hut at a very early age. Tom remembers seeing him row in the St Edward's School, Oxford, Trial VIII's in March 1944. He later became Captain of Boats there. He stroked the RCRC third eight in the Northern Head of the River Race in 1948. In 1949 at Chester he won the Junior Sculls and, with Tom, the Senior Double Sculls; he also won the Senior Sculls at Worcester. In 1950, he emulated his father and eldest brother by winning the Championship of the Dee. From 1949 to 1951 he rowed each year at Henley for Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in the two College events, the Ladies' Plate (for eights) and the Visitors' Cup (for coxless fours). They reached the semi-final in each event twice, and finally, in 1951, they won the Visitors'. That year Keith Wilson, who had rowed with Bob Bigland in the 1921 four which won at Marlow, and his wife came to Henley. He and I went down to the start to encourage the four and followed the race on bicycles along the tow-path as far as the enclosures. Tony and another member of the crew, R.M.S. Gubbins, also won the Cambridge University Lowe Double Sculls.

Each year, Margo and I were happy to be able to entertain at White Cottage Tony and some of the crew on the Sunday before the regatta. They would bring their dirty clothes for Margo to wash and generally

make themselves at home.

In his last year Tony suffered two disappointments: after winning a trial cap, he lost the place in the Cambridge boat which he had held for a time; and he failed to be elected Captain of the Trinity Hall Boat Club. His own disappointments were increased by the knowledge of those of his father. He told us how he had decided that, as Vice-Captain, he would back his Captain, Robin Woodhouse, in every way possible, a decision which undoubtedly had a great effect on the morale of the crew.

A few years after he had gone down, Tony and his wife Yvonne spent some weeks in Cambridge, where he coached his old College crews.

### **Gordon Bigland Wood**

A cousin of the Bigland brothers has achieved fame, not only as an oarsman, but also as a coach. Gordon joined the Mersey Rowing Club in 1927 and won the Senior Fours at Nottingham Regatta in 1930. He then moved to London and joined London Rowing Club, winning the Thames in 1931, the Wyfold in 1932 and the Grand in 1933. His VIII won the European Championships at Paris in 1932 and 1933 and the Tideway Head of the River Race in 1932, 1933 and 1934. At Cambridge he coached the Mays Head of the River Crews in 1946 and 1947 (Jesus College), 1948 and 1949 (Clare College), 1951 (Pembroke College) and 1956 (Magdalene College). He also coached the winning Cambridge University crew in 1955.

Gordon's younger brother, Terence Bigland Wood, stroked Mersey in the Thames in 1934. Sadly, as I stated earlier, he died the following year as a result of a rugby football accident.

### **Robert and John**

Of the fourth generation of Biglands, Ernest's son Robert rowed in the 2nd VIII and in the winning house IV at "Bumpers" at St Edward's, Oxford. He and his twin brother John rowed for Thames RC and later for Walton RC with some success at local regattas.

John then moved north, joined RCRC, winning senior events in 1963 and rowing in the 1st VIII in 1964-65. He was a founder of veteran rowing in the Club, has rowed in veteran crews in Nottingham, Heidelberg and Amsterdam and is still rowing at the age of 50. He was Captain in 1969.

Of John's Captaincy of the RCRC in 1969, Walter Todd writes: "In 1968 the Club was in difficulties: the Captain elected in April had found himself unable to devote the time required and had resigned. For a period of some months the Club had no Captain. Eventually John Bigland, who had no committee experience, was persuaded to take on the job and, at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 7 December 1968, he was elected Captain with immediate effect. He was re-elected at the normal General Meeting on 28 April 1969, but resigned with immediate effect at the

Committee Meeting on 3 November 1969 owing to 'pressure of work and particularly the need to travel to all parts of the country during the week'. Tribute was paid to his willingness to take on the Captaincy at an extraordinarily difficult time and to his success in producing wins in the North of England Head of the River Race and for the Team Prize in the County of Chester Long Distance Sculling Championship.

"He re-joined the Committee in September 1983, but in June 1987 was obliged to resign again on account of pressure of work. Whether as a Committee Member or as an 'outsider' he constantly took part in running the Club's Open Events, Club Dances and other social and fund-raising events."

### **The younger generations**

Tom's elder son, Timothy, won his 2nd VIII and house rowing colours at Shrewsbury. Margo and I added "Bigland" to our sons' Christian names in the hope of fame on the river, the credit for which my father-in-law would be able to claim. At Shrewsbury Andrew's only distinction was to row over at the bottom of the river in his third house boat all four evenings of "Bumpers". His housemaster once reported of him: "Andrew plays all games with a maximum of enthusiasm and a minimum of skill." Peter achieved the unusual feat of being awarded his house rowing colours without ever having rowed. Bent on an academic career, he refused to be tied down to regular training, but surreptitiously practised for the Senior Sculls, which, to everyone's surprise, he won, bringing the house its only "pot" that year.

One year seven fathers who had been together as boys and now had sons in the house were invited to the house bump supper. Tom, David Russell and I were among them.

It seems appropriate to the present age that the first of the fifth generation of rowing Biglands to gain distinction on the river should be a girl. Emma Bigland, Robert's elder daughter, in the 6th form of her father's old school, St. Edward's, Oxford, stroked the girls' four to victory in all their races in 1986.

### **150th Anniversary of RCRC**

On 9 July 1838 the Chester Victoria Rowing Club was formed. Two years later it was granted a Royal charter and became Royal Chester Rowing Club.

On 9 July 1988 the Annual General Meeting of the Club was held as part of the 150th anniversary celebrations. Walter Todd was elected President. Tom Bigland, who had served as President since 1977, was presented with a water-colour, specially commissioned from the local artist George Thompson, showing the Club and the stretch of river down to the Suspension Bridge and beyond.

The Stewards of Henley Royal Regatta marked the occasion by

arranging for a special display in the Trophies Tent and a ceremonial row past the enclosure during the tea interval of Saturday 2 July. An VIII with cox was formed entirely by the Captain and past Captains of the Club, the oldest being Roger Buckley (1950-3); John Bigland (1968-9) also rowed. Following in a launch provided by the Stewards were three even older former Captains: Tom Bigland (1934-9), Walter Todd (1939 and 1946-9) and E. M. Noyes (1940-44).

Walter Todd reports: "The crew, heralded by a public address announcement, came up the Course very impressively at a good firm paddle to the warm applause of spectators in the Enclosures. Perhaps the significance of this operation lies in the facts that those 'on parade' covered periods of Captaincy extending over no less than 54 years, and that all were in 'working order' (to varying degrees) or else still actively involved in the Club's affairs."

A video film, made by Roger Buckley's two sons, confirms the high standard of oarsmanship shown on this occasion.

On 1 October 1988 a Sesqui-Centenary Dinner was held in Chester City Hall. Lord Leverhulme, Lord Lieutenant of the County, as guest of honour, sat between Walter Todd and Tom Bigland. On Tom's right was the Earl of Halsbury, who at the Centenary Dinner 50 years previously had sat on Bob Bigland's right and had replied wittily to the toast of the guests. He was then Viscount Tiverton and was working for Lever Brothers at Port Sunlight. Now, 50 years later, he amazed Club members by being the only person present to remember the words and music of *The Boatmen of the Dee*, a song specially written for the former occasion.

## 6. SHOCKED?

In 1935, after graduating at Liverpool University with honours in German and taking a Diploma in Education, I was invited by Tim Dealtry, the Headmaster of The Leas, Hoylake, to take on the teaching of French in the School. Tom, Ernest, my two brothers Robin and Andrew and I had all been boys there together under his father. A Bigland cousin was on the staff. My youngest brother Oliver was among my pupils. Later Tom's two sons Timothy and Guy went there too and the Biglands' cousin Tom Hannay was for a time assistant Headmaster.

In September 1936, very shortly after his mother's death, Tony came to The Leas as a new boy. I had always greatly admired Helen Bigland, but knew nothing about her experience at Oxford in 1934; nor did I know that through her both Margo and Tony had found a faith. Tim Dealtry asked us all at the staff meeting on the first night of term to be especially sensitive to any possible emotional upset which Tony might suffer. I was greatly intrigued by a certain quality of life which I saw in him and, thinking that there might perhaps be more to his sister Margo than I had discovered in our times of acting together, I added her name to a somewhat lengthy list of girl friends. She was the only one with whom I never tried to flirt. I was unwilling to risk the comradeship which she gave me and which generated a sense of uplift in place of the downdrag of evenings out with other girls.

After three years at The Leas, I was appointed assistant master at the Johnston Grammar School, Durham City. A few weeks before leaving, I overturned my car while drunk and dressed only in pyjamas; by running barefoot away from the scene of the accident I was lucky to avoid the police until I had sobered up. Knowing that local tongues were wagging, I was too ashamed to take Margo out again.

At Easter 1939, after being involved in a climbing accident, I was lying alone and despondent in a tent in Glen Nevis, listening to the heavy rain and brooding over the purposelessness of my life. Suddenly, like sunshine breaking through storm-clouds, came the thought "See Margo again".

The day before taking her out, I visited a mutual friend. "Have you heard what's happened to Margo?" she asked; "she's gone all religious and joined the Oxford Group." "How terrible!" I replied: "I'm told they ..... etc., etc ..... Never mind! Leave her to me! I'll change her back!"

The evening started with a round of pubs and finished in a flat full of artistic friends of mine whose ways were totally strange to her. It belonged to a woman who had left her drunken husband for another man; his wife was at the party too; he occasionally took her away for a weekend as a change from his mistress. When someone told a dirty story, I decided the time had come to take Margo home. I had been deeply

moved by the care and sensitivity which she had shown to my friends, about whom I myself couldn't have cared less. I longed to find the key to her way of life for myself and, on the way home, I surprised myself and her by asking her to marry me.

Months later, I learned that, on the morning of that day, Margo had prayed to be shown how best to help me. Her one thought had been, "Don't be shocked at anything!" It was I who had been shocked at the way I had tried to undermine her faith.

Margo describes what happened after I proposed to her: "We drove home and I reported to Dad that I was in. He always kept his light on until I had said good night; I found it very comforting and caring. I told him Bill had asked me to marry him. He shot up in bed and said, 'You can't do that!' 'Why not?' I asked. He thought for a moment and then said, 'You're both too emotionally immature'. How right he was! Bill had fallen in love with me because of the quality he had seen in Tony and me which we had inherited from our mother, but when I began to use it for myself it lost its charm. It is only recently that I discovered how difficult I made it for everybody."

All my girl friends were subjected to two tests; if they failed to show an interest in music or in rock-climbing, they were promptly dropped. At an early stage in our friendship, I had invited Margo to a Liverpool Philharmonic concert. The first part consisted of a Bruckner symphony lasting over an hour. As we went out for the interval, she asked, "When does the next movement begin?" I reckoned she had passed with flying colours!

The climbing test she imposed on herself. Just after I had proposed to her, she took Tony, who had been ill, away for a holiday in Eskdale, where I joined them for a weekend. On the Saturday we drove round to Wasdale and climbed Scafell Pike via Mickledore and down by the Corridor Route. At one point, we had to descend a short, steep rocky section with a ledge in the middle. We had Sam Small, Ernest's fat spaniel, with us. Tony climbed down first, I stationed myself on the ledge, ready to catch Sam half way down and Margo pushed him off from the top. He was too heavy for me to catch, shot past me and landed on his nose beside Tony, who checked his further descent. Sam was none the worse for his adventures.

On the Sunday Tony and Sam had a well-earned rest day. Margo had rightly diagnosed that what I most needed was the friendship of the right sort of man and had invited Heaton Cooper, the Lakeland artist, to join us for a day's climbing. Led by Heaton, we climbed Scafell by the Broad Stand, which, though easy, ranks as a genuine rock climb. Once again she passed with flying colours.

The weekend marked a turning-point in my life. I had become disillusioned and regarded my career as a teacher merely as a means of

making enough money to live on. I reckoned only really to come alive at weekends and in the holidays, when I filled every moment of my time with activity of various sorts. A talk with Heaton sent me back with a new level of care for my pupils which never again left me.

A fortnight later we became officially engaged.

The outbreak of war was for me a shattering experience. I had visited Germany every year from 1930 until 1938 and had formed many close friendships there. As an exchange student in 1933-4, I had been impressed, coming from Merseyside, by the way National Socialism was answering the problem of unemployment. I had returned professing to believe that dictatorship was better than enfeebled democracy as a means of putting things right. I had clung to the vain hope that war would never come. It was some time before I saw it as my duty to fight, not only to defend my own country, but also to overcome the evil that dominated the Germany that I loved.

The first year of the war was the most difficult period of my life. Alone in Durham City, many miles away from Margo and no longer able, owing to petrol restrictions, to spend weekends at home, I started to drift apart from her and to resent her attempts to help me. Marriage amid the uncertainties of war seemed foolish and I broke off our engagement in a cold and brutal letter. This brought estrangement from my own family, who had come to love her and could not understand, far less approve, what they saw as a change for the worse in me.

I now disappear from the story of the Biglands to re-emerge after the end of the war.



## 7. WORLD WAR II

The year 1939 brought about traumatic changes in the lives of all at "Greyfriars". In July Tom married Rosalind Castle and went to live in Willaston, only to be separated a few weeks later by war. Their home, "Hadlow Wood Cottage", had originally been two separate semi-detached cottages; in one of them lived a gardener, Mr Freeman, whose daughter Nellie had been by youngest brother's "Nanny" for many years. During the war, Rosalind lived with her parents in Willaston and worked in the Headquarters of the Motor Transport Corps in Liverpool in what had been Tom's office. Both Tom and Ernest as Territorial Officers were called up even before the outbreak of war.

### **Tom — Britain — 1939-41**

Of all the family Tom had by far the most colourful experiences during the war. His part in the first three years is covered by a privately printed book: *SHABASH — 149: The war story of the 149th Regiment RA 1939-1945* by Battery Sergeant-Major E.W. Capleton. All quotes until further stated are from this book. "SHABASH — 149" ("Well done!") was part of a message from the Indian Regiments of the 4th Indian Division when 149 Regiment was finally disbanded in Athens in July 1945.

In April 1939 the 106th Regiment Royal Artillery (Lancashire Yeomanry) started to raise in Hoylake a Battery which very quickly grew into a Regiment, designated the 149th Regiment Royal Horse Artillery (Territorial Army). The Regiment's first Commanding Officer was Rosalind Bigland's father, Lieut-Colonel Godfrey E. Castle, MC.

"He was an obvious choice. Colonel Castle had seen considerable service in France during the 1914-18 War; he had commanded a battery of the 3rd West Lancs. Brigade RFA, and, in addition had experience as a Training Instructor.

"Within the Regiment the CO was well-loved. A small, somewhat dapper man, with a silver military moustache, and blue twinkling eyes, he had a keen sense of fun — a quality most necessary in a Commander of a TA Unit." (p.1)

In May 1940, "we were saddened to hear that Colonel Castle had to retire from active service on the grounds of ill health. We had looked upon Colonel Castle as the father of the Regiment, a man from whom we had both affection and respect. His loss to us at this early stage was a blow to the Unit." (p. 20)

From Hoylake the Regiment moved in June 1940 to Ingestre Park near Stafford and in August to Blackmore Camp, Great Malvern.

In 1938 Tom had joined an Anti-Aircraft unit of the Territorial Army in Chester and was serving as a Lance-Bombadier when 149 Regiment was formed. He had been transferred with a commission and,

within a very short time, was a Captain. During the first year of the war he qualified as an Instructor at the Army School of Physical Training in Aldershot.

He is first mentioned in the Regimental History in an amusing incident: "*September 8 [1940]. At 0100 hours this morning received code signal 'CROMWELL' – invasion imminent and probable within twelve hours. In complete darkness there was a scramble to pack equipment and stores. The only lights allowed were cycle lamps, and, in the haste to get things done quickly, a mild panic ensued. 432 was the Duty Battery and 'A' Troop was called to move to a previously chosen position. Battery Commanders and Troop Captains most energetic. Captain Bigland called for one of his sergeants to follow him and rushed off into the dark holding a torch – sergeant hot on his heels. Suddenly T.S. Bigland vanished without warning or sound into thin air, the only clue to his disappearance being a faintly luminous dust cloud. Closer inspection showed that he had accidentally dropped into a deep trench. He climbed slowly out, without comment, and moved off at a steadier pace.*" (p. 33)

In October 1940 the Regiment moved to Stourbridge. In March 1941 they embarked at Avonmouth on the *Reina del Pacifico*, which sailed to the Clyde. A collision with an underwater object, probably a wreck, caused serious damage to a propeller. The planned convoy sailed from the Clyde without them and the *Reina* sailed for repairs to Liverpool, where they spent the next few weeks in billets, helping the fire-fighting services in the Bootle area.

### **Tom – by sea to the Middle East – 1941**

In April 1941 they boarded the *Reina del Pacifico* once more, this time joining a convoy in the Clyde. At the end of May, they disembarked in Durban, where they spent what almost amounted to a fortnight's leave, at first in Clairwood Camp, then on board the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, which eventually landed them on 22nd June at Port Tewfik.

"An officer brought Colonel Robinson some bad news – he learnt that the guns and equipment which had preceded the Regiment some months before had been issued to another Regiment, and that 149th Regiment (Cheshire RHA) was to be re-formed into an Anti-Tank Regiment RA. This was a disaster. We had taken great pride in our 25-pounder equipment, and even supplemented it out of our own funds, but the loss of the equipment was nothing in comparison with the throwing away of eighteen months' hard training and a very high standard of efficiency." (p. 57)

The Regiment was then transported by rail and road to Mena Camp, twelve miles north of Cairo, where the next three weeks were spent reforming and training. It was then possible to enjoy the pleasures of Cairo, but on 18 September 1941 they boarded two destroyers, HMS

*Jarvis* and HMS *Hasty*, at Alexandria and sailed for Tobruk.

Before boarding the destroyers, "a considerable amount of kit had to be discarded. Tom Bigland threw away a map case. Weeks later he was reported as killed in Tobruk because an officer had been blown up on a minefield, and all that was salvaged was a tin hat and a map case – bearing Bigland's name." (p. 69, Note 1)

### **Tom – Tobruk – 1941**

By 21 September 1941 the Regiment, commanded by Lieut-Colonel W.P.A. Robinson, whose son Guy now lives opposite us in West Dulwich, was occupying the front line in besieged Tobruk.

The author quotes Tom's description of a violent storm on 17-18 November 1941: "On the 18th it was raining heavier, and many of the gun positions were flooded out. The 432 Headquarters in the wadi was washed out into the plain, and the wadi became a river. My truck was carried several hundred yards, and the cookhouse sailed past us in the night, but I never quite believed the story that Penton, the cook, was sitting on the top!" (p. 90)

On 21 November the break out from Tobruk was launched. To achieve success it was necessary to capture Ed Duda, a feature on the summit of a ridge. "This job was given to 14th Infantry Brigade and 149th was asked to support. Colonel Robinson only had 'A' Troop in reserve and six manned anti-tank guns. The ten were placed under command of Major Bigland who wrote as follows:-

"We moved out of the perimeter at 0230 hours [25 November] and formed up in the corridor. The tanks, with a company of machine-gunners from 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, ahead of us: then the Carriers of 1st Essex, followed by Battalion HQ and ourselves. This was the first time any of us had met each other or seen anything of the ground over which we had to attack. "Crasher" Nichols (then CO 1st Essex, later Major-General) and I did a "recce" and selected a forming up area just behind the farthest point of the corridor and from where we could, at least, see Ed Duda – which lay about five miles farther south. I then met the six infantry guns. They were all captured guns of enemy origin and had spent some months in Tobruk during the siege. As the infantry knew nothing about them they had not been maintained. BSM Penn and I decided that there were only two which might be safe to fire, so much to the relief of the officers and men, we arranged with "Crasher" to send the other four back.

"About mid-morning (November 25) the tanks and NF Carriers broke out and drove straight for Ed Duda. We then moved to our "forming up" area. The attack proved heavy shelling; but as we were pretty adept by now at digging (I and my driver and batman had our bottoms below ground level in nine minutes) and as we were dispersed there was little damage, but I lost one valuable vehicle. It was planned

that when the tanks had got on to the objective they would send back an armoured car to lead us in; and about 1215 hours, when we had just decided to have something to eat, we were off; we were to drive as fast as possible to just under the escarpment where it was thought that shells could not be dropped. The infantry were then to attack on foot and we had to get our guns up the best way we could; there was only one track shown on air photographs.

“The dash to Ed Duda was really thrilling and I never met anyone who did not find it exciting. Two things, however, were not according to plan. First, a mass of our own medium bombers (Marylands), more than we had ever seen before, came towards us from the south, then to our horror, we saw a hail of bombs released above us. They fell amongst the carriers causing heavy casualties – but we could only drive on through them. Then we saw that the position, below the escarpment where the trucks were to be left, not only could be shelled but was already being shelled from east and west, as well as from the south. In fact, there was a complete curtain of shell bursts and smoke. It hardly seemed possible that a formation like ours would get through. I was, however, driving next to “Crasher” and we had noticed what looked like a second track to the right. I decided to take the Troop straight up on to the top and “Crasher” ordered the remainder of his carriers to do the same. BSM Penn took the right section straight for where the second track lay and I took the left section for the centre track – we all got on top without a casualty except for burst tyres on trucks and guns.

“On top there was a wonderful view but not much time to enjoy it. The tanks had started to withdraw off the top. There were very few machine-gunners left alive (they were not at the conference when I refused to go out with the tanks – we were not equipped to attack a dug-in enemy and I thought we should be alive if possible, to protect the infantry) but with them and the leading infantry we formed a quick defence line on the front of the hill. The ground was all rock but we had some sandbags and our Mena training paid dividends, for when the first counter-attack came in from the south, about fifteen minutes later, we were able to discourage them sufficiently at 1,000 yards range to keep them out.”.....(pp. 110-112)

“.....With the news that 70th Division had captured Ed Duda, a battalion of Kiwis with tank support were ordered to advance that night and link up with the men from Tobruk. Two companies and about ten tanks came into our lines just after 2200 hours, and later a mass of transport appeared in front of ‘A’ Troop. Tom Bigland writes:

“I had completed one of my walks around the guns, and gone to sleep for an hour or two, when my batman woke me up. I could not believe my eyes as the track was full of vehicles nose to tail with the head of the column turned back and meeting the rest. There was only about an

hour to dawn, when they would have made a skyline target for over a hundred enemy guns. As they could not all get down the tracks, we collected a few officers and NCOs who broke the column up and we told them to drive in small groups over the escarpment down into the corridor.” (p. 113)

Three days later, on 29 November, the Germans counter-attacked Ed Duda in strength. “Shortly after 1350 hours about fifty German tanks started moving cautiously towards Ed Duda. As if to confirm the intention, enemy artillery started to lay down a heavy barrage. 1st RHA opened up in reply firing into the tank mass. The attack came in slowly, very slowly, as if they wanted to be sure that in the final rush the sun would be low behind them. Two companies of Essex held the forward defence localities, behind them the four 2 pounder-guns of ‘A’ Troop and in the rear the tanks. An eyewitness states that the tanks opened up at 1,000 yards firing over the heads of the anti-tank gunners. Brigadier Willison tends to confirm this for he said it was pitiful to see our small 2 -pounder shells bouncing off the enemy tanks. Meanwhile ‘A’ Troop lay low. The German Mark IVs, using their 75mm. guns, shelled accurately any of the defensive works they could see. They took their time about it. Some tanks moved while others stood stationary, and all the time the anti-tank gunners and infantry sweated it out as only those who have faced a tank attack can realise.

“For a few minutes the Panzers were hidden to view by dead ground then suddenly they lurched up over the edge of the depression and drove straight for the position, scattering the Essex before them. At little more than 100 yards, Tom Bigland spat out the order to fire. Four gallant little guns answered as one. Sheets of flame leapt from their muzzles. Red hot spots glowed on the tank hulls as the solid shot bored home. Tiny globes of coloured tracer fizzed about before leaping skywards. The whole position a dust bowl, filled with explosions and streaked with vapour trails of machine-gun fire. Cartridge cases were hardly slammed home before they were ejected; the ear-splitting crack of the muzzle flash indistinguishable from the explosion of tank shell on gun shield. ‘A’ Troop’s battle was one of doomed men. Sergeant Cheshire’s gun was enveloped in the smoke of two direct hits, before bursting into flames. A little farther away, on another gun, Sergeant Joe Young and ‘Bim’ Harrison died at their posts – three tanks crippled by the accuracy of their shooting – whilst Tom Sowerby lay across the trail of the gun mortally wounded. Soon, within the space of time that it takes a mass of tanks to cover a couple of hundred yards, the guns fell silent.

“When the smoke lifted, a great semi-circle of Panzers sat on the position, with German infantry of Rifle Regiment 115 digging in feverishly alongside them. It was only then that the handful of survivors realized that the incredible had happened – the Germans had stopped

just short of Tom Bigland's HQ, a bare 200 yards away. Five men, including himself, lay low in his scrape in the ground. They waited for darkness, hoping their position would not be spotted. Shortly afterwards a mortar opened up behind, then gradually as they extended its range, the bombs fell in front. As each bomb exploded, one by one the men rushed back into the dusk.

"Bigland managed to contact John Goshen of 1st RHA (who was trying to get his wounded crew out of his tank observation post). Using their wireless, he got through to 'Crasher' Nichols and Tobruk; fully explained the position, and received the promise of a counter-attack.

"By now the Tobruk garrison was fully extended. One battalion of 'Aussies' (the 2/13th Battalion – not to be used unless essential), the only available troops, came up full of fight during the night. A quick plan was prepared. Survivors of the Essex plus 'Aussies' and a mere handful of 4th RTR assembled in the darkness. At a given signal, the tanks advanced track to track into the Panzers, shooting as they advanced. The German armour withdrew from the position in confusion. Australians then charged bayonets fixed, yelling their heads off, with the Essex on their right. By 0200 hours all the enemy on Ed Duda had been either killed, captured or had fled.

"Whilst the battle raged on Ed Duda, Colonel Robinson was busy.....Major Waller was given urgent orders to withdraw some guns..... and to take them to Ed Duda. Fifty minutes later Waller had assembled seven guns and was on his way. They contacted Major Bigland just after 1400 hours. With his help the guns were taken to their positions, a slow job because the ground was cratered with shell holes. By 0500 hours the troops stood ready to meet the next attack. Captain 'Gerry' Jones had come up with Waller's party in a 15-cwt truck. He took back Bigland (who was just about all in) and his batman.

"A tribute to 'A' Troop, written in pencil just after the battle, came in the form of a letter from Lieut.-Colonel Nichols – addressed to Major Bigland.

"I know that there were several very gallant acts carried out by personnel of the troops which you originally brought up in support of us – I can probably collect evidence from my Rifle Companies, if you want any, but I should be very pleased to back any awards which you may make. I know from many sources that your chaps were absolutely first-class both on the day of the attack and during the enemy tank attack. Please show this to Colonel Robinson – and lastly, thank you for all your help and support. J.S. Nichols" (pp.114-117)

For his part in this action Tom was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. According to an official statement, "Officers awarded the D.S.O. particularly those of the rank of Captain or below in the Army, or equivalent rank in the other services, have often just 'missed' the award

of the V.C.” The citation reads: “149th A/Tank Regiment, R.A. W/s [War substantive] Captain (T) [Temporary] Major THOMAS SCOTT BIGLAND. For outstanding bravery and devotion to duty during the capture and defence of ED DUDA (TOBRUCH). Taking command of one of his troops himself (the troop commander having been killed) he led them through intense shell fire up the escarpment and into action. During forty-eight hours of intense shelling and attacks by tanks, he was an inspiration to his men (and, as their CO told me himself, to the infantry as well). After all his guns had been destroyed by direct hits, he reported for duty to the infantry, with whom he stayed till the end of the action. Before being knocked out, his troop accounted for five German tanks. W.P.A. Robinson, Lt-Col, R.A.”

### **Tom – Cairo – 1942**

In May 1942 149 Regiment was ordered to the Delta for reforming. The CO having left with an advance party, Tom took over as Acting CO. After months of fighting, they arrived at Cowley Camp on the Alexandria-Cairo road in the late afternoon of 20 May 1942 to find it a shambles.

“What does one do with the main body of a Regiment that has just come out of the wilderness; when the time is six o’ clock in the evening; when the bright lights of the Mena House Hotel beckon; when the Auberge des Pyramids, with its tables laid for dinner, lies a quarter of a mile down the road? Pay the men and let them go out or start getting the camp into shape? Luckily, Tom Bigland was in a belligerent mood. His orders for the move from Gazala had been, in his own words ‘impossible’ (amongst other things some bright boy had expected the Regiment to tow ‘old crocks’ back to the Delta, which he had refused to do). Now finding the camp barely ready for occupation and faced with several days’ work before reorganizing, he made one of the best decisions of his life – he decided to let the main party go into Cairo. Tomorrow would be time enough to start work.

“The news was greeted with cheers ..... That night was one of the most enjoyable of the war.” (p. 148)

### **Tom – Staff Colleges – 1942-44**

Tom continued to serve with 149th Regiment at Benghazi, Gazala and El Alamein. In November 1942 he was posted to the Staff College at Haifa. At Christmas, he visited Jerusalem. On completing the course in March 1942, he was posted as an Instructor on three successive courses at the Junior Staff College, Sarafand.

In October 1943 he was posted as an instructor to the Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; he also passed the course there and was awarded the diploma of a graduate on 20 January 1944. In the spring of 1944 he returned to the HQ of 21st Army Group in

London, where he drafted Standing Operations Instructions for the Invasion of Europe.

Margo writes: "During Tom's stay in America he sent us some most interesting letters describing their enthusiastic reception. On one occasion when he and his fellow British officers were eating out at a restaurant, the manager refused to accept payment. On Christmas Day he decided to go to a cinema to get some rest from the overwhelming hospitality.

"He sent us an unforgettable food parcel, full of good things which we had not seen for years: a tin of ham, unbelievably rich chocolates and a 2-lb tin of Lyle's Golden Syrup, which had been shipped from Liverpool to America as part of our 'Lease-lend' agreement."

### **Tom — Normandy — 1944**

During the campaign of 1944-45 in France, Tom was based at TAC HQ 21st Army Group as "Monty"'s Liaison Officer with Bradley's 12th Army Group. He left Plymouth on 5th June with American staff officers, arrived off Omaha beach on the afternoon of D-Day, but could not land until 8th June. On 12th June he was able to meet up with the jeep and driver allotted to him and on 13th June he reported to "Monty".

Volume 3 of Nigel Hamilton's biography of "Monty" contains many quotations from Tom's diaries and a number of vivid descriptions of the work of Monty's team. Hamilton himself writes: "Monty kept in close touch with the situation by means of his famous team of young Liaison Officers trained to report in person back to him without the use of telephone or signals equipment." (p. 186).

He quotes Lt-General Sir Brian Horrocks, Commanding 30 Corps: "Monty's liaison officers, or gallopers,.....consisted of hand-picked, intelligent, tough young staff officers who lived at his tactical headquarters. Every day they were despatched to the different formations fighting the battle. In the evening after dinner each in turn would report to Monty on what he had seen and heard. As a result of their reports Monty was probably the only man who had a completely up-to-date picture of the whole battle front. The only way I could keep in touch with what was going on was to send my intelligence officer daily to study Monty's own operational map." (p.222).

Hamilton also quotes Colonel Peter Earle, one of these LOs: "This job is not unlike that of a fighter pilot. Each day one goes out on a sortie — probably 200 miles in a jeep. This is quite a severe physical strain; forcing one's way through columns of tanks, driving on the pavements of towns, forcing the pace everywhere, heeding no signs from the Military Police of 'NO ENTRY' notices. In the battle areas experiences are exhausting. I was held up yesterday in a column of tanks, near UELZEN. The woods were ablaze; the noise of tanks, the bark of A Tk guns, the



sweet stench of dead cows and here and there a dead horse, swollen and bloated with its legs jutting stiffly into space like an overturned wooden horse; the air filled with smoke and impenetrable dust. All this is tiring: then nearer the battle: that special silence that means danger and the absence of vehicles; or perhaps tanks deployed along edges of woods and the savage clatter of gunfire; huddled corpses, shattered lorries and tanks with clothing and litter hanging on the trees as though a Christmas tree decorated with death .....

"Then home again black with dust. A wash outside one's tent in the field; very difficult to get clean, marking the Field-Marshal's map is the first priority and if there is time marking the 'ops' maps and dictating a 'log'. Dinner may be before or after seeing the C-in-C.

"In the peace of the caravan one relates to Monty ..... what one has done ..... Monty sits back in his chair facing the map on which you are demonstrating. He wears a grey zip-jacket and a duffle coat. He emits high pitched grunts ..... At the end he says, 'Very good, very clear. I think I have got that quite clearly.'" (pp.497-8).

Setting off on 25th August to collect information about troops who were reported to be held up 12 miles short of Paris, Tom found himself the first British officer to enter the City.

After the crossing of the Seine and the rapid advance to the frontiers of Germany, Monty's and Bradley's headquarters became progressively further apart. Tom was then given the use of a light aircraft.

Amongst Monty's visitors whom Tom met in the course of his briefings were His Majesty King George VI, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and A.P. Herbert.

After the battle of Arnhem, the advance slowed down and there was little for the Liaison Officers to report. From mid-October onwards, Tom was able to spend a considerable amount of time with a delightful family in Luxembourg, with whom he used his experience of game-shooting and of the French language to good effect. The family had suffered considerably under the German occupation and Tom's friendship was a valuable contribution towards the unity of Europe. At this time too he was able to see something of his brother Ernest and of his cousin, Richey Bigland, who was an officer in the Royal Corps of Signals.

### **Tom — Ardennes — 1944**

This comparatively peaceful period came to a rude end in December with the German attack in the Ardennes. In this Monty's LOs played an outstanding part and Tom gained what was probably a unique insight into what went on. Hamilton comments: "Unlike American LOs who were in essence merely messengers between commanders, Monty's team of young officers were trained to bring back their own reports on the

battle situation – dispositions, morale and plans.” (p. 246).

It was Tom’s experience on 19 December 1944 that led to the US First and Ninth Armies (Generals Hodges and Simpson) being put under Monty’s command next day. “ ..... Monty had been confident that, despite the confusion and lack of up-to-date information, the Americans would be able to run their own battle in the Ardennes. But during the morning of 19 December he received alarming news. Two of his Liaison Officers had driven to Hodges’ headquarters at Spa – and found the cupboard bare! As Major Tom Bigland recorded in his diary: ‘Find HQ deserted & b’fast laid!’ In a letter to the American author Ralph Ingersoll after the war Bigland described his arrival in greater detail:

“Another of the Field-Marshal’s Liaison Officers came with me so that he could report back to him while I went on to Eagle Tac [Bradley’s headquarters in Luxembourg] with details of his [Monty’s] plans. We found no Army M.P.s in Spa and walked into the H.Q. to find literally not one single person there except a German woman. Breakfast was laid and the Christmas tree was decorated in the dining room, telephones were in all the offices, papers were all over the place but there was no one left to tell visitors where they had gone to. Germans in the town said that they had gone suddenly and quickly down the road at 3 a.m. I found them again at their rear H.Q. and here they had even less control of the battle than the day before.’

“Bigland had been detailed to speak to Hodges, obtain an up-to-date situation report and send it back to Monty via Major Carol Mather while he, Bigland, continued to Bradley’s headquarters at Luxembourg. The empty headquarters at Spa – ‘abandoned more or less intact’ as Mather afterwards recalled – ‘was what set the panic off.’” (pp.195-6).

It is clear that Tom was in a unique position to see things clearly both from the British and from the American point of view and Hamilton appears to have been impressed by the fairness of his views, which he quotes at length:

“Colonel Bigland’s version of what went wrong in the Ardennes is important, for he alone travelled between the two Army Group Commanders, bearing their plans, noting their points of view, as well as the feeling of their respective headquarters.

“Appointed by Monty as LO to Bradley’s headquarters a week before D-Day, Bigland had witnessed the skill and dexterity with which Monty had handled the landings and the subsequent battle, surprising even those hostile to the British on Bradley’s staff.

“At first, in the Ardennes, Bigland was impressed by the clarity and grip, which Monty imposed..... Bradley’s communications with Hodges were indisputably severed: meanwhile Bradley’s 12th Army Group team of Liaison Officers was incapable of substituting for telecommunications, since the officers had never been more than ‘messengers’. ‘You see, their

system of liaison was carrying sealed envelopes at least twenty-four hours old.' With the danger of being captured by German advanced columns or paratroops, the American LO's were not permitted to carry information – hence 'their American system didn't work – they were entirely messengers'. On 20 December Bigland managed by driving first south and then west to 'get round Americans. First and Ninth Armies come under Monty. Wonderful conception of the battle,' Bigland noted with admiration in his diary. 'Difficult now,' he added, 'I can carry *nothing* written.'

"Bigland's admiration for Monty's performance began to pall, however in the ensuing days, as Patton's 'first real counter-stroke' found no matrix in the north. What was holding Monty up? Bigland was asked with growing disquiet and frustration in Luxembourg. His explanations that Monty was 'reforming' and 're-grouping' began to ring very hollow in a headquarters that had, only days previously, been in a position to *order* Hodges to attack.

"As the battle progressed, Bigland came to see that, for the first time in the war, a dangerous chasm was growing between the British and American Commanders. With Patton's own attack starting on 22 December, ..... Bradley was hoping for news from Monty of a reciprocal attack from the north – and was desolated by Monty's negative response ..... Bigland was frankly sceptical whether the Americans *could* carry out Monty's vision of a classic defensive battle ..... As Bigland afterwards explained, the Americans really had no idea how to fight a defensive battle, for which they had never been trained .....

"In Bigland's view – reflecting the view of most Americans in Luxembourg – Monty did not understand this, or if he did, he failed to alter his own conception of Allied tactics to suit it .....

..... "Monty had sought first to parry the German onslaught, then to corral it, aiming to inflict maximum destruction by air, artillery and co-ordinated infantry/tank assaults prior to the *real* resumption of offensive .....

"Such a conception, Bigland recognized, did *not* accord with American ideas of war .....

"..... Bradley's expectation rose that Monty would match Patton's offensive – making Bigland's position daily the more intolerable, caught between two profoundly professional soldiers, each with his own obstinate view of how to conduct the remainder of the battle ..... Elaborating on this some forty years later, Colonel Bigland sighed:

"They were poles apart! I couldn't get across to either of them the idea of the other.

"And as I was living probably more with the Americans I shared more of Bradley's and Patton's and his staff's opinion than probably I did Monty's.

“By delaying we were allowing the Germans to form a defensive front – they were so very quick to put down minefields, etc. If Monty’d attacked earlier, the Germans wouldn’t have had *time* to make a front.

“I was beginning to feel we [the British] were underestimating what the Americans could do – and that feeling has developed over the years since.

“I wouldn’t dream of taking credit away from what Monty did. But by then the capability of the American Army compared to ours, the way we looked at war ..... Ours was quite different from four years before. Over those four years we had got new weapons, artillery, tanks: we’d begun to find ways of staying alive, and we went more slowly. There is no doubt that we British were more cautious, more tired, we’d had many more people killed. We’d been fighting since 1940/1 when fighting the Italians – they [the Americans in the Ardennes on the northern flank] could have counterattacked within forty-eight hours and successfully.” (pp. 307-311).

After the battle, Monty’s tactless press conference of 7 January 1945 caused further division, which Tom did his utmost to bridge.

In a letter to Nigel Hamilton of 16th July 1986, congratulating him on Volume 3 of *Monty*, Tom sums up his opinions: “The two big difficulties were that Monty was not the easiest of people to get on with – no one is who is nearly always right and gets things done – and the Americans had such a preponderance of power – and knew so little about war. When I was at the American Command and Staff College only just before the Invasion they were just rewriting their text books from their Civil War .....

“The real trouble was that to carry out Monty’s ideas & plans he had to have American troops. They could not accept this either in Europe or in America. America was a long way away and they had the Pacific as well. We also had the Press and Radio to cope with & in America they did not really know what was going on. It was all rather sad but are all human – and we won.”

### **Tom – end of the war – 1945**

For his liaison work between “Monty” and Bradley, Tom was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) and awarded the Legion of Merit (Degree of Officer) by the United States Army. The citation of the latter reads: “Major Thomas S. Bigland, Royal Artillery, British Army, for meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service as resident liaison officer with Headquarters Twelfth Army Group from British 21 Army Group from 1 August to 1 November 1944. His accurate, detailed, and energetic reports, under difficult conditions, made available to Headquarters Twelfth Army Group complete information on current British operations. Major Bigland’s tact, energy, and knowledge

of British and American military organisation and procedure contributed markedly to the promotion of understanding and cooperation between the two headquarters." (signed Harry Truman)

Tom was also twice "mentioned in a Despatch for distinguished service", on 24 February 1942 and on 10 May 1945. When hostilities ended, he was posted to the Control Commission for Germany as General Staff Officer Grade 1 in the Public Relations and Information Services Control Division. He was responsible for recruitment of Services and civilian staff as well as for the publication of newspapers, books and music and for performances in cinemas, theatres and radio. He was demobilised in the rank of Lt-Colonel in November 1945 and was later awarded the Territorial Efficiency Decoration (TD).

### **Ernest**

Like Tom, Ernest joined a Royal Artillery unit of the Territorial Army in 1938. He was commissioned and posted to 309/70th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery on 3 May 1939. He served in Northern Ireland from November 1940 to October 1941 with 365/115 HAA Regt and in Orkney from October 1941 to January 1945 with 3rd Anti-Aircraft Corps, being appointed Second in Command in November 1942.

Of his time in Northern Ireland, Margo writes: "On the evening of pay day most of the troops celebrated, methylated spirits being the cheapest and most popular tippie. On one such night, when live ammunition had been issued, Ernest was in charge of the Guard. He viewed his responsibilities with a certain nervousness, but was assured by one of his men: 'Sure, your Honour, you've nothing to worry about; we've no grievance against the officers!'"

On 13 January 1945, he was posted as Second in Command to 107 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, which formed part of 2nd Army under General Dempsey and was then stationed in the Roermond/Venlo area, close to the border between the Netherlands and Germany. The adjutant was Captain E.R.G. Heath, later to become Prime Minister. The Regiment was equipped with versatile 3.7 inch guns, had used them throughout the campaign in Normandy almost exclusively in a field role and had taken part in the heavy artillery concentrations ranged on German positions defending Caen.

The Regiment had already achieved the unusual distinction for the normally static Heavy AA of taking part in the liberation of Antwerp, reaching the town at the same time as the tanks and 48 hours ahead of the Infantry and Supply Columns. They had been moved rapidly forward to protect the vital Antwerp airfield against attack by the Luftwaffe. They had been stationed in the suburb of Wilryck, which had adopted them from the start.

Two factors made Ernest's task more difficult: as Second in

Command he was succeeding a man who had been extremely popular with the Regiment; and having hitherto served in static units, he had no experience of the mobility to which 107 had become accustomed.

These points were illustrated for me some 43 years later by some of the officers and men of the Regiment who remembered "our Ernie" with great affection. I had been kindly invited to their annual reunion by their reunion secretary, Dan Dannan.

Joe Forrest, a former Battery Commander, described how Ernest "played himself in steadily and sensibly". Ted Minty, a former Troop Leader, told me how his Troop had had to move out of an extremely boggy field. When Ernest, arriving on the scene, had started to issue orders over his head Ted had walked away and left him to it. Shortly afterwards Ted's Sergeant-Major had informed him that one of his guns was in a ditch. He had replied, "That's Major Bigland's concern." Ted had later been reprimanded by the Colonel, but Ernest had apologised to him for his interference, had admitted his lack of experience of such moves and they had become good friends.

Sandy Pearce, another former Battery Commander, remembered Ernest organising rowing games on mess dinner nights.

Joe Forrest was grateful to Ernest for helping to launch him on his post-war career. He was keen to secure a position in Germany enabling him to see at first hand problems facing its recovery and return to civilisation. Shortly before demobilisation, Ernest had introduced him to Tom, who at that time held a responsible position with Public Relations Information Services Control in Herford. This led to a meeting with the well-known foreign correspondent, Sefton Delmer, and within a fortnight of leaving the Army, Forrest was working for the British controlled German News Service in Hamburg. Three months later he was reporting the Nuremberg trials of top Nazi war criminals.

Ernest was able to see Tom occasionally. One day they set off on a "recce" together in Tom's jeep. They were driving, deep in conversation along a typical Dutch road, raised high above the fields. Suddenly Ernest noticed that the troops they were overtaking were crawling along the edges of the ditches on their stomachs. Ahead was a village in which they could spot no signs of life. They turned round and beat a hasty retreat. Back in Tom's HQ, they consulted the war map, which showed the village still in enemy hands. They wondered whether they might have liberated it or whether they would have ended up as prisoners of war.

Tom Cawte, the Regiment's historian, kindly gave me a copy of his account of the campaign in North West Europe, from which I quote.

Three days before Ernest's arrival, the Regiment, which had been in the Roermond/Venlo area, had received the order to move "right back to the Channel coast, to a Practice Firing Camp at Nieupoort, nr. Ostende, to receive instruction in new AA equipt.



*At Isabel ("Cissy")'s wedding, 1911  
Percy; Walter; Mrs Percy (Edith); Alfred; Ada  
Mrs Walter (Gertrude); Mrs Alfred (Emily); Mrs Frank (Rosa);  
Mrs Ernest (Fanny); Ernest.*



*Aunt Flo*



*Bob Bigland, OBE, at Buckingham Palace with Robert and John, 1962*





*Three Generations at Southwick Park, 1957, World Jamboree  
Bob; Timothy; Tom*



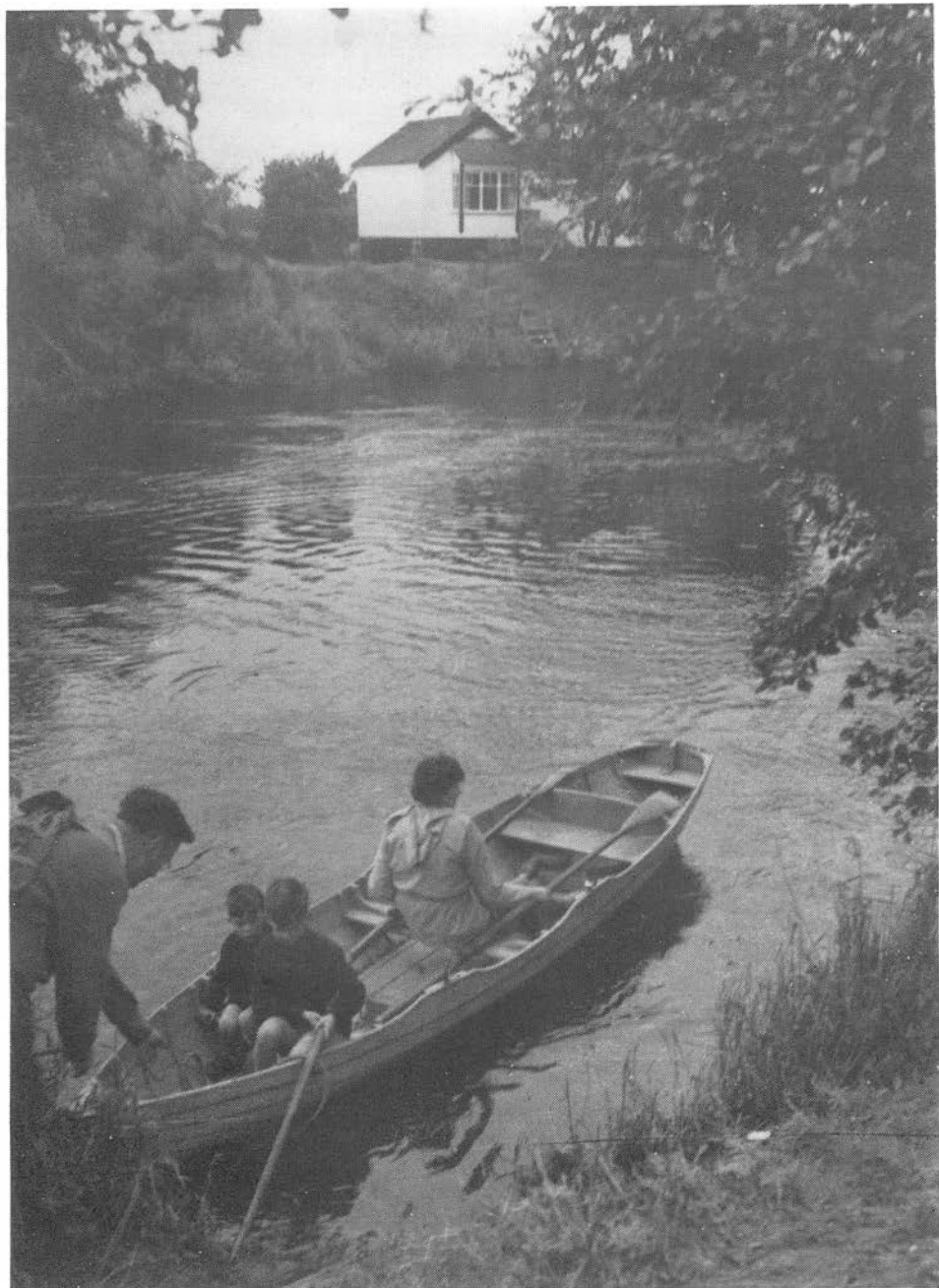
*Tom with Jeep in the Western Desert*



*Ernest receiving Queen's Award for  
Industry*



*At Margo and Bill's Wedding, 1947  
Tony; Ernest  
Bill; Margo; Bob; Tom*



*The Hut on the Dee from the Cheshire Bank*



*Tony the "Bodger"*



*Bob at a regatta in 1960*



*Tom and Ernest at Henley Royal Regatta 1933*



*Henley 1956  
Stroke Ernest (42); 3 Tony (30); 2 Bob (73); Bow Tom (46)*

“It was the most intensely cold spell that anyone had ever experienced. They said it was 30 below and could well have been. It was too cold and risky for the motor cycles, so they and their riders travelled by truck. The whole countryside was frozen solid.” (p. 38).

On 28th January the Regiment was “recalled to Antwerp to participate in its AA Defence against the concentrated Doodlebug attacks being made upon it. We had to test our new equipment and our skill in using it – the Report on our Course at the Practice Camp was highly satisfactory. (p. 39).

“The new AA Equipt. was the 7th wonder of the world – the RADAR had such a long field of search and pick-up that a target was located long before it came within range of the guns. This enabled the predictor and the guns to be automatically laid on the target so that it could be fired on immediately it came within range. (p. 43).

“The Regt. remained in the region of Antwerp for a few weeks situated on various farms out in the country and was almost continuously in action against a veritable deluge of Doodlebugs despatched by a desperate enemy in a vain effort to regain control of those vital docks. For this phase in the history of the Regt. it was attached to the 50th American Anti-Aircraft Brigade ..... With its ultimate supporting artillery the strength of this Brigade reached the proportions of more than a Division of AA!

“This operation lasted in all 154 days and 22,000 of the world’s finest anti-aircraft artillerymen were engaged in it.” (pp.39-40).

It was reckoned that this international team of gunners, known as “Antwerp X”, raised the percentage of “kills” from 65% to over 97%. According to Joe Forrest, “they fired a grand total of 532,000 rounds of ammunition. Against that hail of steel, not more that 211 V-1s fell in the docks, 2,394 being destroyed en route. The port we defended was some target. It included 30 miles of wharves, 632 operating hoists, 186 acres of covered shed space and oil storage facilities for handling over 100 million gallons. The heaviest assault, on the port took place on 8 March 1945 when 111 V-1s and 9 V-2s entered the defensive zone.”

*The Story of Antwerp X*, published by 50 AAA Brigade, US Army, gives a colourful description of this phase of the campaign: “Bald facts and figures will never convey the full story of endless hours in freezing gun pits, the sweat and strain of endless ‘digging in’, the constant roar of firing guns, the deeper and deathly roar of V1’s in flight, the burning eyes from constantly seeking after that last small margin of error.

“ ..... In the words of Major General Revell-Smith, 21st Army Group; This is a great victory; perhaps not heralded or understood by the world at large in the same way as they would appreciate a victory by other arms. The victories of other arms have territorial gains to show. You have not, but nevertheless this does not make it less important than

any other form of major military success on the final outcome of the war.”

“Antwerp X” was congratulated on this achievement by Field-Marshal Montgomery. On 8 February 1945 Ernest was mentioned in Despatches.

On 5th/6th April, 107 crossed the frontier into Germany and from 9th April was stationed in the area of Kleve. “We folded up our guns, put our eqpt. on its wheels and ..... did traffic control and police duty and anything else that was required of us ..... This situation continued in a more or less static way while the rest of Germany was inexorably overrun by the invading forces and until the eventual cessation of hostilities on May 8th.” (p. 46).

“The Day of Triumph for the Regiment was Sunday, 13 May. Amidst the shattered buildings of Calcar, in the central square of what had been a thriving German market town, officers and men of the Regiment paraded to commemorate Victory over Nazi Germany.” (p. 48).

On 23rd May the Regiment returned to Wilryck to hand in its guns and all its equipment. After a short stay there, they started back into Germany on 2nd June, arriving at Hanover on the 4th.

Joe Forrest writes : “The Regiment’s tasks as an occupying force in Hanover called both for resource and common sense. There was ‘Operation Barleycorn’, concerned with German POWs selected for agricultural work in particular *Länder*; these men were kept in wire compounds, exposed to the weather, which the Regiment had to guard until orders came through for lorries to remove them in batches to areas where the newly constituted German authorities needed help with field work. So many farms were shattered, impoverished or robbed; and such were people’s needs that often a field planted with potatoes had half its seed crop stolen overnight.

“Units of the Regiment also had charge of a specific number of DP (Displaced Persons) camps. Such teams with officers in charge faced problems in selecting reliable camp leaders. They needed to ensure that each camp — these were of great variety, in numbers and nationalities — received a proper allocation of rations, soap, razor blades, cleaning and other materials, and, of equal importance, that these items were fairly distributed. Camps, too, had periodically to be searched for weapons. For several weeks, DPs carried out raids on local farms, slaughtering and carrying away whatever stock they found, and this had to be stopped, even though they complained that here were the British defending the Germans.

“Apart from checking such outbreaks, the Regiment also had surveillance duties, since a curfew was imposed; and neither people nor unauthorised vehicles allowed on the roads and streets. So we put out patrols to pick up offenders, who were brought back in three tonners to



battery headquarters. The next day, they came before the battery Commander. Most, after a night in the cells, were released.

“Ernest, like Lt-Colonel F.M. Slater, whom he succeeded as Commanding Officer on 24th July 1945, knew the importance of preventing after-battle lethargy from stultifying the Regiment. It never happened. There was ample provision for recreation, cricket and football matches, regimental sports, with batteries and RHQ in hot contention, and swimming matches. Also, the 30 Corps Rest Centre at Bad Harzburg provided many with the first real holiday of their lives. At the same time, with a return to ‘civvies’ on the horizon, many men seized the chance of getting training in particular crafts. A few, myself among them, started taking German lessons.”

Quoting again from Tom Cawte’s history: “On Saturday 8th Sept. the Regt. received what was almost certainly its highest award. The municipality of WILRYCK decided to honour it, and to mark its liberation by it, by renaming its main square after Lt. Col. Slater and calling it ‘Kolonel Slater Plein’. Accordingly a large party of officers and men was returned there for a weekend of celebrating and remembrance. It was a very memorable weekend indeed, parades, tableaux, speech-making and general jollification. The town was gay with bunting and cheering people and a special Visitors’ Book, called the Golden Book, was brought into use for every member of the regimental party to sign. This was to permanently repose at the Town Hall and any member of the Regt. finding himself in Wilryck at any time in the future could go to the Town Hall, ask for this book to be produced and sign his name in it. It was unfortunate that Col Slater was unable to take his due part in this ceremony. Col. Bigland acted in his stead of course.” (pp. 59-60).

On 8 November 1945 Ernest was again Mentioned in Despatches. From 30 October 1945 till 17 January 1946, when he was released, he served with the Control Commission for Germany in Bad Oeynhausen. Margo writes: “One evening on leave from the Control Commission, Ernest offered to put his twin sons to bed. Chaos reigned, and a pathetic voice could be heard pleading in vain, ‘Please get into bed!’ Mary, listening below, remarked, ‘If he’s as useless as that with his family, God help the Control Commission!’”

On 24 January 1946 he was awarded the decoration of “Additional Member of the Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE). In July 1962 he was awarded the Territorial Efficiency Decoration (TD).

“Early in the year [1946] the Regt. finally disintegrated, what few men were left were absorbed by other Units – but the spirit of the Regt. still lived on.

“After their release the majority of the men [of 107] maintained close contact with each other and periodic Re-unions of varying sizes

were held. However shortly after Mr Heath entered the Houses of Parliament he suggested to Major W. Harrington MBE (then Regtl., Capt. Q.M.) that annual Reunions be staged at the House of Commons." (p. 61). Ernest chaired the 6th, 8th, 9th and 11th of these dinners in 1957, 59, 60 and 62.

## **Tony**

Margo writes: "War and his first term at St Edward's Oxford, coincided for Tony. When we were threatened with invasion, I was afraid we would be cut off from him and tried to persuade Dad to keep him at home; he, wisely, did not listen to me.

"I used to go down to Oxford to take him out from school. Because of transport difficulties, I used to take my bicycle by train with my luggage strapped on the back, so that I could pedal to my destination at the other end. On my early visits I stayed with friends. When Tony became a 'figure' in the rowing world, he arranged for me to stay with the School Boatman and his wife.

"We rode everywhere on our bicycles, enjoying each other and the countryside. I discovered that two elderly sisters, who had lived in Heswall and had been active in the Presbyterian Church with Mum, had moved to Oxford and opened a café close to the School. We would have one meal each day there and picnic for our other meals.

"He was in the Officer's Training Corps and went straight from school into the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. He came home for his first leave a man and we became companions. I had decided to make it the best leave possible and had planned all sorts of entertainments, such as ballet, concerts and plays. After he had gone back, I wrote to say how grateful I had been to be able to do things together as equals and friends.

"Before coming home on embarkation leave, he wrote to say he was bringing a girl with him; she worked in a shop in Oxford and used to come down to the river to watch him row when he was Captain of Boats. He was then 18 and was going we knew not where nor for how long. Some friends older and wiser than myself helped me to see how lucky we were that Tony wanted to bring her home and that the best way he could find out more about her was to see her against the background of his own home and family.

"The wisdom of this was indisputable, but there was another crucial factor: he would react if he felt I was disapproving. I decided to transfer to her all the time, thought and energy I had been longing to spend in making it a good time for him.

"She was a nice, chocolate-boxy, pretty, fair-haired little thing. The more fuss I made of her, the more uneasy and irritable he became. I noticed on her arrival that she was wearing a ring, but not on the usual

engagement finger. On their last day, they took me out to lunch, thanked me for all I had done for them and told me that they were engaged. I expressed no surprise and they both left, he for unknown destination.

"A few days later, he phoned from London to ask me to go up at once, as there was something he must tell me before he went away; he would meet every train from Liverpool until I arrived. A friend gave me the key of her empty London flat. I took the first available train and Tony was on the platform at Euston to meet me. Over dinner he told me he was taking me on to a show, but would not give me his news until later, as he was afraid it might spoil the super evening he was planning. I said that the evening would be spoiled unless he told me at once. Haltingly and shamefacedly he told me that he had broken off the engagement. He said it was a terrible thing to have done and he expected me to think him a cad. I gripped the table-leg to stop myself leaping to my feet and hugging him with joy. I kept a straight face and said that it was a very serious matter, but that we must trust that it would turn out for the best. We then had a marvellous evening together and said good-bye. It was to be nearly two years before I saw him again."

In May 1945, shortly after V.E. Day, Tony sailed from Greenock in *The Monarch of Bermuda* for Bombay with other young men bound for various Officer Cadets Training Units. It was planned that they would take part in the final phase of the war against Japan, but the atom bombs dropped in August of that year changed everything. He was commissioned on 13th January 1946 in the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, but as there was no battalion of the Regiment in India at the time, he was attached to the 1st Battalion, The Somerset Light Infantry.

Tony found himself involved in a number of unpleasant incidents in connection with Independence and the separation of India and Pakistan. According to the official history of the Somerset Light Infantry: "While they were there, [at Shargarh in the Central Provinces], a mutiny of Indian troops occurred at Jubbalpore. Sudden orders to move were received at 4 p.m. and by 10 p.m. the Battalion had left Shargarh, never to return. On arrival at Jubbalpore it was found that the mutineers were quite out of hand and were rioting in the town. Luckily they had no firearms, and the Battalion was at once deployed to round them up and clear the streets. This was at length successfully accomplished with no more bloodshed than a few bayonet wounds."

David Grimshaw, who sailed as an Officer-Cadet with Tony and was subsequently commissioned in the Royal Artillery, writes: "I remember Tony telling me what a testing experience it had been for him when he and his men had to contain a pre-independence demonstration. The Indians were pressing their chests against his men's fixed bayonets. Somehow the matter was concluded without opening fire but it was tense

while it lasted." In a letter home, he described meeting a train full of massacred and mutilated bodies.

David Channer was a Captain at the Bombay Sappers Training Centre in Kirkee, Poona. He recalls: "Tony was tireless in keeping in touch with his friends across the subcontinent and South East Asia.

"It was a blisteringly hot Sunday afternoon when the sentry of our Indian unit reported an unusual vehicle at the gate; an armoured scout car with British regimental markings, and an officer asking for me. Out squeezed a sweating and grinning Tony. He had made the hundred mile journey from Deolali in the north for tea and a chat.

"The war was ending. Home and demob was the aim for all of us. But for Tony there was something more. He had an inner twinkle. 'What was the war really all about? How will we be different from what we were before?' Asked in humour, and awkward to answer. Perhaps no answer was called for. 'Another cup of tea?'

"He invited me to be a guest of his unit, then stationed in Colaba, Bombay, and we witnessed the ceremonial departure from India Gate of Mountbatten and the first British regiments.

"Soon it was our turn and we sailed in different troopships for home.

"It was then as one stood alone on the deck watching the white spray, the heaving ocean of the star-studded skies, that Tony's questions stopped the train of endless thoughts. And, if one watched and listened, one discerned, as I did, my own inner twinkle – just the faintest glimmer. Brightening gradually over the years and becoming a guide for life. That was Tony, for me"

Tony left for demobilisation shortly before the Somersets, the last British Regiment to leave India, held their farewell parade in Bombay. By then he had acquired a deep love for India. He returned there for several years in the 1950s and again in 1974-5 with his wife Yvonne, who received many letters from their old friends there after his death.

## **Greyfriars**

Margo describes life at "Greyfriars" during the war: "The outbreak of war was followed by a large scale evacuation into the country of people from the built-up areas of Merseyside which were liable to bombing. In our big four-storeyed house we had a succession of evacuees for periods varying from weeks to years. They included a family of seven, the wife of a medical officer who, after being stationed in the area, was sent to Singapore and taken prisoner by the Japs, the wife of an Australian Naval officer with their two children and a butcher's wife who used to give me meat 'for the dog' which fed the whole family.

"I heard Churchill's announcement about Dunkirk, his 'Blood, sweat and tears' speech on the radio while cooking in the kitchen. My

first reaction was that my fear of being cut off from Tony at school in Oxford would come true if we were invaded, which we all expected to happen within days.

“When the bombing started, we used our bottom room, where all Ernest and Mary’s furniture was stored, as an air-raid shelter. A mile or two away in the fields alongside the Dee dummy docks had been built to confuse enemy bombers and attract them away from the Mersey. During air-raids we slept on Ernest and Mary’s mattresses on the floor or in their armchairs. An old couple from across the road used to join us. Their son was a fighter pilot. His sister-in-law lost two husbands in as many years in the RAF. As they crossed the road to our house, the old lady was bothered by the shrapnel from the anti-aircraft guns, so her son recommended her to wear a colander on her head, which she did from then on.

“Mary and the twins joined her mother, Mrs Dalzell, in a rented cottage at Llanarmon Dyffrin Ceiriog, where Dad had had a rough shoot for some years. Her husband, who was running his family business in Liverpool, went down at weekends. I went with Tony during his school holidays and very occasionally Dad came. When Mary could join Ernest, I would go to help Mrs Dalzell with the twins. They went to the local Welsh-speaking school, where they did not understand much of what went on. They made up their own language to confuse us and, when questioned, said it was Welsh.

“The pub across the road from the cottage was the scene of many happy social gatherings. At weekends it was full to overflowing. Bomb stories superseded the weather as the most popular topic of conversation. I remember a Merchant Navy officer home on leave listening to us one day. Suddenly he could take it no longer and burst out: ‘If any of you get hit, it’s an accident. What do you think it’s like being the target?’ There was an awkward silence. To me the Merchant Navy men were the real heroes. They were sitting ducks, and we depended on them for our very bread and small ration of butter. As for the risks taken by men on tankers, they were too horrible to contemplate.

“After the bombing stopped, Mary and the twins came to live at Greyfriars for a time. Dad and I were delighted to have them. We were both inordinately proud of the twins and loved them. I was very difficult to live with and eventually Mary took them back to her own home.

“The call-up left Dad with a heavy load on the home front, in the office, in the Scouts, in which he was a District Commissioner in charge of training, and in the Home Guard. The TV series *Dad’s Army* recaptured for me much of what he and I lived through. When it was announced on the radio that able-bodied men not already called up could volunteer for this unpaid force at the nearest police station, Dad leapt onto his bike and rushed off to be the first on the list. He was

beaten by a short head, but was second. Almost all the elderly men and youths in the village were doing the same thing. They eventually had uniforms but were seldom properly armed. At the start everyone who had any sort of firearm was asked to hand it in; this produced a wonderful selection of weapons. In the local quarry they experimented with Molotov cocktails: bottles, as many as we housewives could provide, were filled with petrol and corked up with bits of rag. The idea was to light the rag and then lob the bottle into the turret of an advancing tank.

"I once made fun of the Home Guard in Tom's presence and he took me to task, saying that they were very brave men and would be our first line of defence if there were an invasion. It is only since reading the first volume of Nigel Hamilton's *Monty* that I realise how true this was. After Dunkirk, Monty realised the importance of training if we were to match the professionalism of the German army and the impossibility of defending our whole coastline against invasion, so he withdrew regular fighting troops and started creating aggressive mobile forces which could quickly be moved to danger spots and he looked to the Home Guard to hold the beaches until these forces could reach them.

"One of the Home Guard's tasks was to look out for parachutists. 'Greyfriars' being a tall building near the top of the hill, was chosen as a suitable look-out post and Dad allocated to the Home Guard two rooms on the top floor. Four men reported for duty each night, two doing a two-hour shift while the other two slept in the adjoining room. After a few sleepless nights with hobnailed boots clumping over our heads, Dad bought four pairs of gym shoes. Another hazard was inspections during the night; if the inspecting officer was not acquainted with the lay-out of the house, I was liable to be woken by a strange man marching into my room. I eventually hung a rude notice on my door and was left in peace.

"On one occasion a parachutist was seen descending somewhere near, having baled out of a burning bomber, and Dad and his men were called out. As he disappeared through the door, he yelled at me, 'If he comes here while I'm out, keep him till I get back'. Tony, who had been woken up by the noise, and I laid our plans. I was to meet the enemy at the door with a hatchet and a dustbin-lid, whilst Tony and my terrier Kim sneaked round the back of the house to block his retreat. Fortunately we never had to put this manoeuvre into practice.

"Whenever the air-raid siren went, Dad would leap out of bed and put on his uniform. His worst fear was that the Germans would catch him without his trousers. He would then shepherd us all down into the bottom room, where we would stay until the 'all clear' sounded.

"One night when the alarm went Dad started shouting. I was fed up with having to get up in the middle of the night and stayed in bed. Then I heard the whistle of a bomb. I decided against trying to get under the bed and pulled the bedclothes over my head. There was a mighty bang

and I felt two heavy weights fall on to of me. Then there was silence. I thought, 'I wonder if I'm dead?' I wiggled my toes and realised I wasn't. Then I heard Dad frantically shouting our names and poor old Nanny crying and calling out. Dad had gone to her first and I could picture the scene: he had got her out of bed and was trying to hurry her down the stairs without her shoes; she was crying and protesting as broken glass was thick on the floors. After a time Dad got everyone else down and came to look for me. The bedroom door had fallen across my bed on one side and a large bookcase on the other, but they had left me unharmed. Dad got me out and we joined the others. We had just assembled when we heard another bomb whistling down. Dad shouted, 'Quick – under the table!' The table was not very big and the dog's basket lay in the middle under it. Poor Nan was old and rheumatically and could not get down, so Dad took her by the scruff of the neck and shoved. She landed head first beside the dog, who took a dim view of the whole affair. As we crouched under the table, I saw something white moving behind me and turned to find Dad crawling around looking for a space. He had been struggling into his trousers when the first bomb fell and blew them away in the blast.

"When the 'all clear' sounded, we all went back to bed except Dad, who started clearing up the mess. The bombs had landed on the sandstone outcrops a short distance below the house. There was soot and broken glass everywhere; furniture and carpets had been blown into corners, but in the drawing-room pictures still hung straight on the walls and on a table in a corner stood a huge vase of flowers intact.

"Next morning I was woken by one of our household in a state of agitation asking me to have a word with my father. I found him sitting in the bath in full view of anyone coming down stairs. He had carefully locked the door, but its glass panels had disappeared in the blast. I put my hand through the door, unlocked it and handed him his towel, while he bellowed.

"As well as many air-raid tragedies, there are many stories of miraculous near-misses such as ours. No one had as much as a scratch. Even poor old Nan was more frightened than hurt.

"We had one of the merriest weeks of the war after our bombs. The whole village seemed to want to commiserate and to see the damage. We had countless parties on our balcony in glorious weather. Later, things became more dreary. Glass was scarce and we were issued with black tar-treated material on frames to keep out the worst of the weather and lived in semi-darkness for some months.

"After the worst blitz on Liverpool, I went in with Dad the next day. Guessing what we would find, he took tools and materials with him to replace windows. We crossed the Mersey on the ferry and walked up to his office. There was no transport and there were bombed buildings.

bricks and rubble everywhere. Two pictures stand out vividly in my memory: a small black cat sitting on the pavement with a saucer of milk that someone had put down for it; and a typist sitting on the kerb with her typewriter on her knee taking down a letter at her boss's dictation. Dad's office building was standing, but he had guessed right about the windows.

"My main task was looking after the home and family, but I also worked part time in the Heswall branch of the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital. Every child that could be moved from Liverpool had been evacuated, the building was very over-crowded and the wards all mixed up. We were also very short-handed. Each afternoon I was in charge of a small ward of children up to 14, of 'wasting babies' a few months old, orthopedic cases, children with cleft palates and two spastics. It was very hard work.

"My time at the hospital came to an abrupt end when, through my own carelessness, I nearly had my arm severed by heavy iron lift gates. That I lost neither my arm nor my life was due to brilliant surgery by our family doctor, Dr Carlisle. My parents, who had been among his first patients, told me that his life's ambition had been to be a surgeon. In World War I he had had plenty of experience, but on returning in 1918 he could not afford to specialise and had gone into general practice. It had nearly broken his heart. In me that day he achieved his ambition and did a spectacular job.

"He was working in his garden in shirt and shorts when he was called to attend me. He had already finished work on me when a specialist arrived from Liverpool, examined his work and decided there was nothing more he could do.

"When I was about to leave hospital, the Matron told me that anyone else would have amputated my arm, but that Dr Carlisle had said: 'I brought this girl into the world and I know what it would mean to her to lose her arm, so I'm risking everything in trying to save it.' When I was better, I went to thank him and told him what the Matron had said. He went very red in the face, turned his back on me and said, 'Don't be such a bloody fool! You know as well as I do that it was a miracle.'

"I was very accident prone. On one occasion when I had fallen down two flights of stairs in the black-out and broken both feet I came home to find that Dad had moved my bed downstairs and attached a dog-collar and chain to the head of it.

"After my accident I was exempted from official war work, but this did not stop me from being a fire-fighter in our road and driving an ambulance; and once a week I drove a refuse-van round the village, collecting bones, paper, rubber, pots and pans for the war effort. In hot weather the bones stank. I used to give children a ride until the police stopped it as being illegal.



“Tom came home from the Middle East not long after the break-out from Tobruk, for his part in which he had been awarded the DSO. We had a celebration party at the Grosvenor Hotel in Chester and, after a few drinks, we got Tom talking. Dad and I looked at each other in astonishment. At the actual time of the battle, although I had no means of knowing what was going on, I had seen in a dream Tom’s part and his danger and I knew of the death of some of our friends, although I had no idea where it was taking place. The next morning at breakfast I had recounted my dream to Dad. It tallied in detail with Tom’s account.

“When Tom went to Buckingham Palace to receive his medal, the whole family assembled in a London hotel to celebrate. In the midst of wartime rationing and shortages, the hotel breakfast was beyond our wildest imaginings. The very sight of the menu was too much for me, but I ordered a full breakfast, which the others divided between them.

“Tom took Rosalind and me to the Palace with him. It was a moving experience. I was struck by the thought and care given to everyone. A court official came in as we were waiting for the ceremony and noticed that it was difficult for the children to see, so had forms brought in and placed on top of each other against the wall on one side with rugs to make them less hard. When the King arrived, the medallists walked past him one by one. He knew what each had done and had a personal remark to make to each.

“As we spectators moved out of the gallery after the presentations we were funnelled through a narrow archway with a Beefeater standing at each side. A small boy in front of me was squeezed up against one of them. Pointing to his halberd and gazing up into his face, he asked, ‘What do you use that thing for?’ Without the flicker of an eyelid the Beefeater replied, ‘I poke the fire with it.’”

## 8. "GA BIGGIE"

### **After the war**

To his seven grandchildren Bob Bigland was always known as "Ga Biggie", the name originally given him by Robert and John to distinguish him from their Dalzell grandfather, who was known as "Ga".

Margo takes up the story of the post-war years: "When the war ended, I went to work in London and for a time Dad shared 'Greyfriars' with Douglas Bigland's widow, who kept house for him and her two daughters.

"Before I could leave, arrangements had to be made for 'Old Nan'. We had inherited her from Mum's brother, Uncle 'Buddy' Hannay. His children having grown beyond her, she had come to help Mum look after Tony. She had spent her life looking after other people's children and helping to support a distant relative who had fallen on hard times. Even after Tony no longer needed her, Dad had provided a home for her. She was now over 80 and partially bed-ridden. The distant relative took her in for a time, but soon after she went into an old people's home in Birkenhead, where she died. Dad never gave up his care for her, visiting her regularly and seeing to all her needs as far as he could. It was a sad and thankless task, which he cheerfully and unstintingly accepted as part of normal living — so like him!

### **The new "Greyfriars"**

"Dad then sold the big house and bought from the old couple who used to come to our air-raid shelter the bungalow on the other side of the road, taking the name 'Greyfriars' with him. It was a compact little home and he obtained permission to build on a sun-room in front, which gave him the same lovely view we had had in our old home. He lived the rest of his life there with a succession of housekeepers. His first and most loyal one was Fanny Cottrell, who had been his and Mum's cook when they were first married. She had married a gardener and had settled in Heswall. By this time her only son had married and left home; she was a widow living alone. She came in daily until she was too old to continue. She was the same age as Dad and was one of the family."

### **Bill reappears**

In the autumn of 1946 I went back to teach in the Durham Johnston School. The breaking of my engagement to Margo six years previously had killed something in my heart at the time, but early in 1945 several of my friends in the 8th US Army Air Force had met in my room in Versailles. One of them told us how he had recently become engaged. I told them about Margo and admitted to myself and to them that I was still in love with her. Later they went on leave to Britain and

looked her up in Cheshire and encouraged her to write to me. As she asked the postman, calling with the morning mail, to take her letter, he handed her one from me, the first for four and a half years.

Back in Durham, I faced a future of uncertainty. I intended to leave at the end of the academic year and had started to look for a better post. I was living in bachelor digs and saw no hope of finding suitable accommodation for a married couple. Yet I kept feeling that I should ask Margo to marry me and to face the uncertainty together. My decision seemed mad in the light of reality and in the eyes of more practical friends, but neither Margo nor I have ever regretted that I followed my heart rather than my head. If I had not, we might have missed the most wonderful gift in our lives. Taking decisions jointly has been the hallmark of our relationship, in which her Bigland courage and wholeheartedness have played a great part.

### **Margo at 48 Pont Street**

Margo was then living at 48 Pont Street, the home of an old lady, Mrs Kerr, and her daughter Norah. Mrs Kerr had taken up painting at the age of 60 and had had her work exhibited at the *Salon* in Paris. Two of her paintings are among our most precious possessions. Norah had taught music and physical training at Benenden School. Mary Garrod (née Hannay) had been one of her pupils and has shown us a group photograph with Norah in it. Norah later came down regularly to our home at her own expense to teach our boys music and swimming. She also taught a number of other children and there is little doubt that this was for her a healing experience after the effects of having been buried in a bombing attack on Sloane Square Station. Our sons owe their love of music largely to her, and we remained close friends for the rest of her life.

The Kerrs had invited as their guests a number of musicians from different countries who were appearing each evening at the Westminster Theatre. Margo was at that time cooking for them and sharing a fourth floor flat with Lady (Maisie) Fletcher, herself a fine musician. She was the widow of Sir Walter Fletcher of Trinity College, Cambridge, who had been the first Secretary of the Medical Research Council. Their son, Professor Charles Fletcher, had rowed No.7 in the 1933 winning Cambridge University VIII and was a well-known radio and TV personality, having been the first "Radio Doctor".

### **A re-engagement**

I had been the cause of much unhappiness in the Bigland family and thought it only right to talk to Margo's father before proposing again. I phoned and arranged to see him on the first morning of the Christmas holidays. The moment I had rung off, he phoned Margo in a great state of excitement: "Bill Stallybrass is coming to see me on Saturday!" "What about?" she asked. "You, you fool" he answered. (I had never mentioned

her!). By the time I got through to Maisie to arrange to stay the weekend, she and Margo were both high with the news of my coming, and Maisie wickedly told Margo to listen in on another line.

I found "Pop", as I was soon to call him, on the lawn in front of his bungalow, breaking down an enormous packing case. It was one of a consignment which had been used to import glider parts from America and which were being sold off cheap; Pop had bought it for the wood. "Come on Bill, help me with this", he said. It was some time before I found the right moment to raise the purpose of my visit, which he had known all along.

That evening, Margo never let on that she too knew my purpose, but, to my great joy, she said "Yes".

The winter of 1946-7 was one of the worst in living memory. Many people's pipes were frozen and there was very little heating available. Pop, who had had no hot water for weeks, persuaded himself that if he lit a very small fire in his kitchen grate it might thaw things out. In the middle of the night there was a colossal explosion as the boiler burst and the side of the house fell down. Margo's old black poodle, Henry Esmond, whom Pop had inherited, had been in his basket under the kitchen table; he disappeared for the next few days. There was only a fortnight to go until our wedding. The head of a local building firm, who had been a Scout in Tom's Troop, undertook to have the damage repaired in time. Twenty-four hours before the deadline, they were scrubbing the kitchen floor and moving the furniture back with the plaster still wet.

### **Bill and Margo marry**

We were married in Heswall Parish Church in March 1947. Margo's cousin Anne was the wife of Viscount Leverhulme, who for many years has been the Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire and who was recently made a Knight of the Garter. They had encouraged Margo when she left home for London, and Lady Leverhulme now kindly arranged for the reception to be held in the Thornton Hough Hall. Another cousin, Tom Hannay, and his wife Doe kindly let us use their home to change and to park the car out of harm's way. I was fortunate to have all three Bigland brothers as groomsmen. Tom was working in his father's stockbroking firm and he and Rosalind were back in Hadlow Wood Cottage. Ernest was with the Guardian Assurance Co in Liverpool and he and Mary were living in Heswall. Tony was on demobilisation leave from India. He had brought with him shoes specially made for Margo, material for her trousseau and dried fruit for the wedding cake. For our honeymoon we were lent "Mountain Cottage" in Braemar by Helen Bigland's cousins, Gladdy and Dolly Hannay.

We made our first home in my bachelor "digs" in Durham. It very soon became apparent that Andrew was on the way. When Margo broke

the news to our landlady, she gave us notice. I came home to find Margo in tears, but the very same day I received a summons to an interview at the War Office which led to my appointment as a Lecturer at The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. As soon as he knew he could expect his fourth grandchild, Pop wrote me a long letter, full of fatherly advice heavily underlined and concluding, "..... and work her to the end, like a horse!"

At Sandhurst, we were at the bottom of a long waiting-list for quarters, there was a great shortage of housing and it was over a year before we had a home of our own. "Greyfriars" and "Dinglefield" were still very much home for us. I lived for a time as a bachelor in the mess. Margo found accommodation with friends wherever she could and I would join her when I was free.

### **Andrew arrives**

As the time of Andrew's birth approached, Margo went to live with Pop at "Greyfriars", as she was under a Liverpool gynaecologist, Mr Datnow, who gave us his services out of regard for my stepfather/uncle. "Pater", as we called him, was Deputy Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool, Lecturer in Public Health at Liverpool University and co-author of the standard textbook on public health. My mother was on the Council of the University.

We spent Christmas 1947 at Heswall. It was the only time after the war that we were all together at "Greyfriars". Tom and Rosalind's son Tim was 17 months old. Ernest and Mary's twin sons Robert and John were ten; they were intrigued by the number of presents for "Little Willy", as Andrew was known before his arrival. After Christmas, Tony and his friend Ian Carlisle, son of our family doctor, who was himself studying medicine, joined me in driving her to the Liverpool Maternity Hospital, where Andrew was born on 2 January 1948. We were delighted that one of his first visitors was Rosalind, who afterwards came to tea with me in my Liverpool club.

### **"White Cottage"**

In June 1948, with generous help from our families on both sides, we bought our first home, "White Cottage", on Frimley Ridges above Camberley. It had been the gardener's cottage of a big estate and stood in a hollow in the old walled garden, half of which we bought with the cottage. It was approached through woods with a water-splash by a muddy lane, known as "Goldney Road". It had had additions built onto it at various times and we later added another wing with my mother's help. It was a perfect home for us, three and a half miles from Sandhurst, and I was able to cycle to work.

Peter was born in Frimley Hospital on 22nd December 1949, eleven months after his cousin Guy and seven months before his cousin

Josephine. Pop greeted the arrival of his sixth grandson with the remark, "Another blasted boy! Nothing but blasted boys in our family!", but I think he was really delighted to be one step nearer to a family VIII.

Tony moved in with us to "White Cottage" and stayed for nearly a month to help us before going up to Cambridge. Two days later Ga Biggie came for a weekend, bringing with him his housekeeper Fanny Cottrell, who also stayed on ten days to help us.

### **The woodcutters**

The woods the other side of the lane formed part of the Goldney estate and had long been neglected. At one time a number of trees had been cut down and left to rot. Ga Biggie and Tony, who shared a passion for wood, at once set to work carrying in dead trees and sawing them up for firewood. Over the next years, Tony was a regular and welcome visitor. Andrew and Peter remember with great affection his care and generosity at that time. He often brought with him university and other friends who would help him to keep up our supply of firewood. When the dead wood ran out, he set about systematically thinning out the pine and birch trees.

One day, when he and a friend were hurling lengths of tree over the fence to be towed by car up the lane and sawn into logs, they narrowly missed a policeman on a bicycle. A short time previously this man had been found unconscious after being knocked off his bike and he took this new incident as a direct affront. He returned a little later with a colleague, "impounded" such wood as had not already been sawn up by tying rope around it and informed me, on my return from work, that they would consult Sir Henry Goldney about prosecuting me.

Next day I called on Goldney's local agent with the draft of a letter, explaining that I regarded myself as a wise steward of his property, thinning out the overgrown forest, which, I thought, constituted a fire risk. The agent approved and gave me Goldney's home address. A few days later the policeman returned to say that there would be no prosecution, but that I should be more careful in future.

Some months later, Margo was invited to a showing of a film for the Police. A tap on the shoulder brought her face to face with our old friend, who said somewhat ominously, "I think I know you, Mrs Stallybrass!"

### **Tony at Cambridge**

Tony went up to Cambridge in 1948. I have already written of his rowing in Chapter 5. Brian Lightowler, a freshman at Peterhouse, when Tony was in his third and last year at Trinity Hall, writes from Queensland, Australia, where he now lives and works:

"We met when he dropped in to see Bob, a climbing friend of mine whom I was visiting in his room in Trinity Hall. Tony lent Bob a book. I assumed he was a supervisor or tutor as he had come to lend a book –

something which undergraduates didn't do, at least in my circle. However Tony was no tutor. He was, as I learnt from Bob, their rowing coach. A couple of weeks later Bob persuaded me, against my youthful cynicism, to read the book. It grabbed my attention from its opening chapter on answering class war in the South Wales mining valleys. I read it through until the early hours. After breakfast that morning I went round to see Bob and together we went to see Tony in his digs to ask him more about Moral Re-Armament.

"Shortly after that, Tony and a friend arranged a large public meeting in the Union Society and he invited me to come. Several hundred undergraduates and graduates turned up; the debating chamber of the Union was packed. Outside, university communists were distributing leaflets and inside they tried to break up the meeting by turning the lights off at the main switch in the basement. Unfortunately for them they chose the wrong moment – right in the middle of a speech by a militant docker who had been responsible for organising a national strike costing the country £217,000,000. An extremely powerful speaker, he thundered on without stopping for a moment, as if nothing had happened. He was spelling out an answer to class war in industry, and he held everyone's attention. The would-be disrupters were silenced and the lights were restored.

"Tony and I, who were both reading History, met each day for a disciplined time of study in the Seeley History Library, where we helped each other maintain concentration.

"Tony's going-down party attracted a good crowd from the rowing fraternity, the Hall and other colleges. The drinks were exciting but non-alcoholic and that added to the interest of this occasion, where Tony surprised some of his friends by saying he intended to work full-time with Moral Re-Armament after graduation. Some naturally expressed concern, but most gave Tony their support and backing. Perhaps not fully understanding the decision, they appreciated the courage involved."

It was indeed a courageous decision. Pop, Margo, Andrew, Peter and I were all at that party, which took place the day after the last night of the "Mays". We had watched the rowing from Gordon Wood's house at Ditton Corner. Margo had baked a cake for the occasion, decorated with a model racing VIII.

### **Ga Biggie's visits**

Pop enjoyed his visits to Sandhurst, especially the services in the Royal Military Memorial Chapel on Sundays. Sometimes there would be a Church Parade before and a cocktail party after the service. We on the staff had special places near the altar. With the Academy Band and the organ going full blast, he used to open his mouth and let fly, to the astonishment of those sitting near us. He also enjoyed meeting officers of

the 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment who spotted that he was wearing the appropriate regimental tie.

After Ernest and Mary came to live in Woking, there was more incentive for Pop to come south. He often spent Christmas with us and we would all drive over to Ernest and Mary for tea. He was a much loved grandfather. We all enjoyed going to "Greyfriars" to stay with him and, until my mother moved south, we could alternate between the two homes. As long as Fanny was with him, taking the boys to Heswall was like going home for us all.

The Biglands are a powerful clan; I jokingly call myself "Founder and President of the Society for the Protection of Spouses of Biglands". On one occasion when we had arranged to pick Ernest up in our car, Pop, who was staying with us, said, "You'll have to let Ernest drive; he always does!" That was one time when he didn't!

When we first had a home of our own, we often had rows when Pop came to stay. He would go round the house saying, "Bill, why haven't you done that since I was last here?" It made me feel terribly inadequate; he was a handyman and I was not. Like his friend "Rathy", he would make marvellous toys for the boys, forts and lay-outs for their model railway, and then spend happy hours playing while they watched. After talking things over, Margo and I started to keep a list of things that needed doing. Each time he came to stay we would tackle them together. It worked like a charm; he loved showing me and things got done. One year he gave Margo a scythe as a birthday present and spent many happy hours cutting down the bracken in our wild jungle of a garden.

Our worst row took place one summer when Pop was to spend a weekend with us after Marlow Regatta before going on to Henley. After lunch on the Saturday we drove over to Marlow with the boys and with Fanny, who was staying with us at the time. The cost of tickets into the enclosure was an extravagance I was not prepared to accept, but Margo was determined to get Pop to pay for the party. I was furious and took off for home without saying a word to anyone. She was scared stiff by my disappearance, but managed to keep up some sort of pretence in front of her father. Driving home that evening they overtook me walking. Margo stopped and took me aboard in stony silence. The incidence left a deep soreness in us both and it was some years before we were able to face it honestly together. She then realised the hurt to my pride when she turned to her family to get what I could not give her; and I saw how difficult my pride made things for her.

### **Ga Biggie's illness**

Early in 1962, Pop was taken ill with shingles, from which he never fully recovered. Margo found it difficult, as his housekeeper did not want her in the house and she had to stay in a hotel and sit with him between



meals. At the end of her first two-day visit, he burst into tears and said, "There's nothing like having your own to look after you when you're ill". She decided then that she must visit him regularly as long as he needed her. The housekeeper relented to the point of giving her meals and a friend who lived near gave her a bed. Margo encouraged him to watch his favourite TV programmes with her, at first in his dressing-gown. Soon, however, he started to get up and was well on the way to recovery.

During the Easter holidays of 1962, we were staying at the family Hut and made arrangements for me to pick him up and bring him over for a day. When I arrived to collect him, he began by saying that his car had been lying idle in the garage and that an outing would do it good. I agreed to drive him in his own car. As soon as we reached a narrow lane off the main road, he said: "Let me just see if I can drive for a minute; it's perfectly safe here; there's no traffic about." I knew that he was never "perfectly safe" and that, as a result of his long illness, he had lost the sight of one eye, but I gave in. At the first bend we met a farm lorry and he drove into the bank to avoid it. No harm was done and he had learned his lesson.

The day at the Hut was one of the happiest and most peaceful we had ever had with him. We sat quietly together and he said: "You know, I was becoming a drug-addict." We knew that he had been sending for the doctor at all hours of the day and night to give him pain-killing injections. Now he could relax and rejoice in his new-found health. This was the last time we saw him.

That August Ernest had arranged a shoot in Scotland and naturally Pop wanted to go too. Mary was very worried and felt he could not and should not. However, they arranged for him to spend the first week and for a chauffeur-driven car to take him home after his time with them. On the way back he spent a night in a hotel in Stirling with his grandson John, who had lived with him for a time while working in Liverpool and was on his way to the shoot for the second week. They had a meal and spent a happy evening together. Next morning, Pop failed to turn up for breakfast and John found him dead in bed.

The responsibilities for his declining years were carried by Tom and Ernest. They saw to his needs and cared for him unstintingly.

## 9. THE HUT

The Bigland Hut on the Welsh bank of the Dee was the scene of many happy holidays. It is situated about ten miles upstream from Chester in Trevalyn Meadows on land belonging to the Goodwins, the owners of Almere Ferry Farm.

In 1919 the Biglands rented it for the summer, as the rooms which they had occupied the previous summer in Churton, on the Cheshire side of the river, were no longer available. Hearing that the owner was leaving the neighbourhood, they made him an offer of £100, which he accepted; for a further £10 he gave them all the contents and immediate possession.

The Hut at that time consisted of a single room and an open verandah which could be closed in with a canvas sheet. During the winter of 1919-20, Tom and Jimmy Green, the Royal Chester boatmen, built in Chester an extension for the verandah together with glass windows. These were taken up in sections by launch in March 1920 and erected during one weekend. In 1923 an extra room was built on by Tom Green, the wood being delivered by lorry; the new room was divided into a bedroom and two bunk-rooms.

The old pleasure boat, which I have already described (pp. 36-7), was found to be very awkward to handle for crossing the river to go up to Churton, and in 1920 a dinghy was bought from Mr Brown, a Chester friend. In 1925 a beautiful Canadian canoe was added to the collection of boats. Peter writes: "This was not a craft for the unskilled, and if one sat anywhere but in the exact centre of the boat, it started to lurch. Rapid movements to the other side of the boat to correct the lurch were usually followed by a drastic see-sawing back and forth and a slow and inevitable capsizing to the horror of the uninitiated canoeists and the delight of the back-seat (or at least back-bank) experts. They, of course, were extravagantly generous in their advice which came much too late, but enabled the experts to spend many cheerful hours saying, 'well what they should have done was .....', and finally to agree that the 'idiots' should never have gone out in the canoe in the first place." On two occasions when parties had come up for the day, a beginner sank in it directly opposite the Hut to the cheers of the spectators. Not having any spare clothes, they had to face the embarrassment of dressing up in the weirdest assortment of odd garments kept for the purpose while their own dried in front of the fire.

By our time, life at the Hut as described by Margo in the story of her mother had eased in many ways. Cars had replaced boats as the means of access. We could drive through the meadows to the Hut except when the fields were flooded. Shopping expeditions across the river and over the fields to Churton often gave way to drives into Rossett with its

greater selection of shops. The following lines, written in the Hut log book at the end of our summer holiday in 1956, when Andrew was eight and Peter six, give a picture of our life there:

After weeks of bad weather the stream was in flood  
And we didn't dare risk getting stuck in the mud,  
So we first of all got all our vessels afloat  
And ferried the luggage and cornflakes by boat.  
(For some unknown reason, we had six packets of cornflakes.)

On Sunday we welcomed a visit from Pop  
Who managed to drive through the mud by the cop.  
We enjoyed the day hugely and didn't much mind  
Getting mouthfuls of mud as we pushed from behind.

Then the days seemed to fly and the river subsided  
And the boys could play down by the water, provided  
They wore rubber rings that would keep them afloat  
Till someone could hook them back into the boat.  
Under Tony's fine coaching their rowing grew stronger  
And trips on the river grew longer and longer.  
Each day before breakfast they walked to the farm  
To bring back the milk and to keep out of harm,  
While fanatical grown-ups plunged into the river  
And risked the effects of the shock to the liver.  
The children, less mad, had a "Pudgeribath"\*  
Each evening, while everyone gathered to laugh  
At the reading aloud of *The Wind in the Willows*,  
Which soon had the children asleep on their pillows.

One day Mary Williams came round in a state;  
Their dinghy had broken away in the spate.  
We located her, baled her and put a man in  
Who found she'd a rowlock with only one pin.  
But while we were struggling vainly to row  
And longing for someone to take her in tow,  
The motor launch *Gladys* (J. Alderson, Master)  
Provided a fortunate end to disaster.

\* ("Pudgeribath" — an old-fashioned metal tub, named after "Pudge", Rosalind Bigland, who introduced a little civilisation into the primitive life of the Hut.)

All good things have an end. Now it's time to depart  
Fresh in body and mind, but an ache in each heart  
For the Hut by the cop which we'll never forget.  
It has given us all our best holiday yet.

Ga Biggie would come over to join us for longer or shorter periods. These were very happy times on what was his own ground. He helped to make the river and boats as much a part of his grandson's lives as they had been of his own children's. He laid down strict safety rules to which we always adhered. No child was allowed in a boat without an adult until he or she had passed the test of swimming across the river and back fully clothed. Until then we spent much of the day with them in the dinghy, the Canadian canoe or the old double sculler. The day when both boys passed their test was a great relief to us parents, who could then relax and leave them to it.

A favourite expedition was to Mr and Mrs Huxley in Churton. He was a retired forester on the Duke of Westminster's estate and had won countless prizes at shows for his vegetables. He would sell us a single potato that would feed the whole family, onions the size of cannon balls and runner beans metres long which were never stringy.

There was always work to be done, repainting the Hut, mowing the grass and clipping the privet hedges. One year we joined Ga Biggie and Tom in fixing new wooden steps down to the river. On two occasions Ga Biggie recruited us to help cut down trees. The first was a poplar on the cop just outside the Hut which came dangerously near to falling on the roof. With Old Ned from the next hut as anchor man, we all heaved on a rope to steer it into the meadow as it fell. The rope broke and we all shot backwards, collapsing in a heap on top of Ned.

We had become so accustomed to regard all motor-boats as "the enemy" that we found it quite a shock when Ga Biggie was presented with *Bob*, which David Russell and Tom had built for him. When he cut down another poplar tree growing on the bank, we spent an hour bringing it down into the river with a rope attached to *Bob* and Ga Biggie bellowing out directions. At one point a cleat broke and Peter, who was holding the rope tight, was pulled out of the boat and had his hand badly squeezed. I lost a pair of glasses in the river which were never recovered.

That year we also used *Bob* for water-skiing. After watching all the others landing on their noses before they had even got up, I leaned well back and held on for dear life. Peter writes: "At first we were all smitten with admiration. After our disasters, here was Bill showing us how it should really be done. But our admiration soon collapsed into mirth since, although Bill was still presumably at the end of the rope, he was nowhere to be seen. What we could see were the very tips of two skis shooting through the water followed by a cloud of spray. But our mirth

turned to alarm as it became clear that Bill was so impressed by his achievement that he wasn't going to let go. We shouted to the motor-boat to stop, which it eventually did, whereupon a dazed but triumphant Bill floated to the surface." It was the nearest I have been to drowning, but I consoled myself by claiming a record for underwater-skiing.

One year Tom lent us a double sculler and Andrew and Peter sculled the ten miles up from Chester. Shortly after their arrival, George Goodwin, the farmer, came across with an urgent phone message: they had taken someone else's boat from the Royal Chester Rowing Club by mistake. Next morning they had to scull twenty miles, returning the wrong boat and collecting the right one. Another year, John Bigland and a friend arrived in a pair-oar, which they left with us for a few days and in which we all had a go. On one occasion, when Andrew was not with us, Tom lent us a single sculler, a "toothpick", which Peter and I took turns to scull.

One year, when Andrew was again not with us, we were joined by a young Sandhurst instructor, Roger Chapman of the Green Howards. He brought with him on the roof of his mini two canoes, one a very professional slalom boat made of fibreglass, the other a leaking wood-and-canvas affair which Roger unselfishly claimed as his own. After he had given Peter a few lessons, they spent three days descending the Dee from Lake Bala to the Hut. Margo and I acted as support party, launching them, meeting them at previously selected spots for picnic meals and taking them back for the night.

We spent an hour of considerable anxiety on Llangollen Bridge waiting for them to appear after the traumatic experience of shooting the Berwyn rapids. Peter writes: "Our first crisis of the day was caused by a retired colonel who was fishing for trout and had just got a bite. After waiting for half an hour upstream of him, we finally decided to carry our boats around him (and through several barbed-wire fences). We went on to negotiate the first part of the rapids with some success, although to the consternation and horror of some guests at a very posh hotel who were seated on a terrace on the rocks high above us. After I had crashed into every rock in sight, I gracefully capsized into a minor whirlpool. Roger meanwhile had expertly found his way through all the obstacles only to become waterlogged and sink beside me. Accepting that wisdom was the better part of valour, we carried our boats up to the road to find Mum and Dad peering over the bridge in a state of total despair as they scanned the water for broken paddles, floating gym shoes or drowned bodies."

Roger was later selected to lead the White Water Team in the Blue Nile Expedition under the leadership of a Sandhurst colleague, Colonel John Blashford-Snell, and chose this stretch of water to train his team. Their story is told by another Sandhurst colleague, Richard Snailham, in

*The Blue Nile Revealed* (Chatto & Windus, 1970). Today Major Roger Chapman, MBE, is Director of Plans for *Operation Raleigh*, once again under John Blashford-Snell.

In the evenings we would often go out in the Canadian canoe, gliding quietly close to the bank. Peter writes: "There was always so much to see: in summer, bee-humming banks of cow-parsley, willow-herb and purple loosestrife, moorhens (which we called ferry boats) whose sedate passage from bank to bank we tried not to disturb, swans to which we gave a wide berth (particularly after hearing how Tim had wrapped the neck of one around a scull at Shrewsbury), and the occasional sight of a little brown face with bright eyes peering at us inquisitively as we passed – the water-vole."

On one occasion we congregated on the bank outside the Hut to watch a mother water-vole evacuate her family from a flooded nest. We first spotted her swimming across a little bay with a youngster in her mouth and depositing it on the bank below us. She would then swim back, disappear in the bushes and reappear with another youngster. One of them was obstreperous and kept on wriggling in her mouth. We could imagine her saying, "Well, you can damned well swim, you little brat!" as she spat it out and turned back. Only after she had deposited the next one did she go back to rescue it, still struggling in the water.

Once in the floods we canoed over the meadows on the far side of the river. We often had the boys' friends to stay and one year Tim and a friend joined us in a tent in the garden. Occasionally we would drive to Snowdonia for a day's climbing.

While the boys were at Shrewsbury, we used the Hut as a base for attending functions at the School and for taking them out at weekends. On occasions the Hut witnessed the strange sight of men in dinner jackets and women in long evening dresses. Tony, Andrew's godfather, and Yvonne came with us one year for Speech Day. Tom was by then a Governor and appeared on the platform. There was only room in the hall for parents of prizewinners and our two usually contrived that one of them should win some obscure prize. We could see Tom proudly pointing out his nephew to his fellow Governors.

One year we joined Tom and Rosalind for a fortnight's summer holiday in a rented house in Trearddur Bay, Anglesey, then a centre for many families from the Wirral. I could only go for the second week, but Ga Biggie spent the first week with them. Margo drove the boys to Heswall, where they spent a night or two with him before driving down in a convoy of three cars (Ga Biggie's, Tom's, and Margo's), an experience which Peter describes as follows: "It was probably the most terrifying journey of my life. Ga Biggie's driving was always an 'experience' (a euphemistic way of saying that one took one's life in one's hands – or rather put it in *his* hands – every time he was behind the wheel). Andrew

and I had added our little mite to Ga Biggie's career as a latter-day Toad, 'the Terror of the Highways', by sitting in the back of the car some years before and ecstatically crying 'faster, Grandpa, faster', while Mum and Dad alternated between trying to shut us up and using the usual magical means – shutting their eyes, stamping their feet on the floor, clutching at imaginary hand brakes – in order to evade what seemed like inevitable disaster. In fact, Ga Biggie's speed was matched by his skill, and the nearest he ever came to a serious accident was when he was nearly punched by an irate motorist. Ga Biggie had added insult to injury by first overtaking this other 'Terror' and then rolling down his window at a traffic light to inform him that he wasn't fit to push a pram with a petrol can in it because the smell of petrol went to his head.

"The trip to Trearddur Bay, though, made other drives with Ga Biggie look like Sunday afternoon potterings. In the first place, it wasn't Ga Biggie but Mum who was driving us – and a Mum, at that, who was determined to show that she could take, and outdo, anything that Ga Biggie might be capable of. We once christened her 'Mrs Stally Moss'. Two main memories of this journey survive, and both have the power to wake me up in a cold sweat at three or four in the morning. The first is of Ga Biggie overtaking just before a sharp bend where the road drastically narrowed; Mum, in hot pursuit, overtook on the bend, sending a car coming in the other direction into the ditch and bringing the car we were overtaking to a complete stand-still. The second is of driving through a town with an endless succession of traffic lights. Ga Biggie would accelerate through on the yellow, while Mum charged through on the red, leaving behind a wake of bemused or infuriated drivers, some sitting dazed and comatose, others leaning on their horns and waving their fists. The effect was something like a royal procession, with the difference that the spectators didn't seem to appreciate it".

The holiday was a mixed success. Peter extorted sixpence from Tim to side with him against Andrew and Guy, and murderous warfare developed. On one occasion we stopped one gang from hurling boulders from the top of a cliff onto the other gang below. The rivalry was finally ended when Tim got his finger caught in the spokes of a moving wheel. He was in considerable pain, and one would have thought that this would have gained him sympathy. Not a bit of it. Such is the heartlessness of youth that after Tim had been given a extra ration of Lucozade, *all* the boys turned against him.

My chief memory is of shiveringly cold bathes in the Irish Sea. Tom is (or was) an enthusiastic all-weather bather and would include me in taking on the children of parents less hardy than himself. This meant being first into the water and last out and, even when out, we had first to rub circulation back into those children who had seized up before attending to our own needs. On the whole, we preferred the luxury of the Hut!

First prize as a "Hutter" goes to Yvonne, who writes: "To be

accepted into the Bigland Clan one has to go through the serious initiation of being observed closely while being introduced to the Hut. To pass with flying colours may take considerable endurance.

"My introduction to it was on the second day of our honeymoon in January 1962. The weather soggy, the river high. The boat tied to the front step to afford a safe getaway. I was ceremoniously carried over the threshold of my new abode simply because it was so wet that that was the accepted way to enter!

"Tony had stacked the wood bins to bursting with great dry logs. Within moments of our arrival we had a roaring fire and welcome mugs of scalding tea and chunks of wedding cake.

"That first night the wind howled, the water slashed against the foundations, but we were snug, reading *The Wind in the Willows*.

"There were many memorable events. One day we ventured out in the canoe, a beautifully balanced Canadian craft, created for shooting the rapids. The watery sun winked at us as we paddled happily with the current, watching for Ratty and his friends on the river bank. When the time came for our return, despite both of us being strong and brought up on the water, we could make no headway against the spate of water. We reluctantly carried that canoe what seemed like everlasting miles along the winding river bank until we got to a quieter reach where we battled our way back exhausted.

"The canoe also had a glorious red sail with a little black boy being chased by a lion. On balmy days to sit and be wafted downstream was sheer bliss.

"Dad Bigland was never happier than when he was renovating or painting the Hut. We loved our visits when he was there, but they were never peaceful. Every pleasure launch that passed, causing the wake to wash away the bank, was bellowed at until he went puce. You simply couldn't help catching his love of the place.

"There were certain unwritten laws at the Hut which had to be obeyed. You never left without refilling all the wood bins, polishing the pots and pans until your reflection could be seen peering back at you and the log book had to be brought up to date.

"On another occasion, Tony and I were responsible for five Asian children aged 6 to 12, while their parents were away. They adored the freedom and fun of the place after living in London. We mucked about in boats, we swam, we picnicked. As night fell, they all snuggled into sleeping-bags round the fire and Tony read the enchanting chapter about the Dawn Piper from *The Wind in the Willows* until, one by one, they fell asleep dreaming of the river and its inhabitants."

The Hut is still greatly appreciated by John and his family, who live nearest to it. They have recently had it repainted inside and out and equipped with new furniture. On 4 October 1987, 120 guests gathered in a marquee on the lawn to celebrate John's 50th birthday.



## 10. THE EXPANDING FAMILY

It is now about 175 years since Amos Bigland established the firm of Bigland Sons & Jeffreys in Liverpool and, though the family has spread, at least one of each subsequent generation has lived in Cheshire.

### **Tom and Rosalind and their sons**

Of Bob and Helen Bigland's children, Tom alone has continued to live in Cheshire. Since his father's death he has done much to keep the family united, especially through annual parties at Henley Royal Regatta. He has continued to follow a successful business career in Liverpool. In 1951 he gave up his partnership in the thriving stockbroking business of James McLaren & Bigland to become an Executive Director of several wine and spirit companies. He also held directorships in a number of other companies. After taking a correspondence course, he passed the examinations of the Institute of Personnel Management. Despite being partially paralysed by a stroke, he took over from Ernest and still manages the Hilbre Wine & Spirit Company on Liverpool Docks, assisted by a friend from the RCRC, Roger Buckley. Unable to use his right hand, he has learned to write with his left and has written his war memoirs, which he hopes shortly to have published.

Neither of Tom and Rosalind's two sons stayed in Cheshire. Tim, a qualified estate surveyor, lived for a time in the County of Durham and now lives in Berkshire. Guy, an advertising agent, has lived mostly in London.

### **Ernest and Mary at Woking**

After Ernest was promoted from the Liverpool to the London office of the Guardian, he and Mary came to live in Woking. Only a few months separated Peter from their daughter Josephine and they became good friends.

A witty friend of mine who had been lunching with Ernest in the City mischievously reported to me the following conversation: "How do you get on with your brother-in-law Bill?" "We have very little in common; we find very little to talk about." "What do you like talking about?" (After some thought) "Stocks and shares." "Right! I'll encourage Bill to do just that!" Very shortly afterwards, a relative died leaving me his executor and responsible for administering investments for two other relatives. A man nominated as joint trustee had by then also died and I was left feeling very conscious of my own lack of expertise. Ernest very kindly accepted to act as joint trustee with me and from then on we talked stocks and shares together.

Shortly afterwards he appointed me an agent of the Guardian Royal Exchange and, while I was teaching in Germany from 1973 to 1975

he arranged for me to act as an agent for his corresponding German company, Albingia, so that I could fix the very complicated business of German car insurance for a number of my British colleagues – my first foray into the world of business.

Our two years in Germany, incidentally, brought out the best Bigland qualities in Margo. During World War I, when anti-German feeling was very strong, she had taken great care to hide the fact that she had a German grandmother. To accept to live in Germany cost her a great deal. Yet she backed me fully, even coming with me to spend several days in a youth hostel looking after my class of 38 teenage girls, some of whom were very naughty. Thanks to her care, we still, 13 years later, receive visits from former parents, colleagues and pupils of the *Märktisches Gymnasium*, Schwelm.

In October 1984, as a former Albingia agent, I was delighted to be invited to the German Embassy in London when Ernest was presented with the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany as a tribute to his furthering of Anglo-German relations.

From the spring of 1960 till the autumn of 1961 I was seconded from Sandhurst for 19 months as the first Director of Studies of the newly founded Ghana Military Academy. I would have found it very difficult without Margo to make a home where I could meet people unofficially and do a lot of the vital personal side of my work. Andrew and Peter were then boarding at Papplewick School, Ascot, but Margo could not have come with me without the backing of our families. Ernest and Mary undertook to act as guardians to the boys and to give them a home during our absence. We can never be grateful enough to them for this. The government paid for the boys to fly out to us for their two summer holidays, but Ernest and Mary took overall responsibility for their Christmas and Easter holidays.

### **Robert and John's 21st birthday**

In October 1959, Robert and John celebrated their 21st birthday in their parent's home in Woking. I was away at the time, taking a Sandhurst cross-country team to run against Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth and Andrew was already at boarding-school. Margo writes: "I took Peter, then aged nine, over to the party so that he might keep Josephine company. Towards midnight, the two of them suddenly burst in on a number of us adults looking very peculiar. Asked what they had been up to, they said they had been thirsty, so had drunk the remains from every glass they could find. I took Peter home protesting loudly; he was just beginning to enjoy the party. Next morning he came down looking distinctly pale and announced: 'I feel that if anyone says anything to me I will burst into tears. I've come to the conclusion I don't like alcohol.' "

## **Robert marries Carole Seymour-Jones**

In October 1963 Robert married Carole Seymour-Jones in Portsmouth Cathedral. Carole interrupted an academic career at Oxford to marry, but has since graduated and become a distinguished teacher and is at present working on a book. Carole's father, Tony, was an ear, nose and throat surgeon. He had won a scholarship to Shrewsbury in the same year as myself and his son Nick, a brilliant artist, was a contemporary of Tim and Andrew at Shrewsbury. Tony very kindly removed Andrew's tonsils for him privately and free of charge after a vain wait of years for an operation on the National Health Service.

An unhappy incident at Shrewsbury in which Tony was involved is vivid in my memory. Lessons started at 7.45 before breakfast, usually with what was known as "Strue": we would be called out in turn to stand beside the "Brusher"'s desk to translate a passage from Latin or Greek which had been set for preparation the previous evening. Seymour-Jones was in the middle of translating, when the form-master, "Joe" Whitfield, was seen to leap on him from his desk and land on top of him on the floor in a vain attempt to catch the poor boy as he fainted on an empty stomach.

## **Ernest and Mary at Lucas Green Manor**

From Woking Ernest and Mary moved to Lucas Green Manor, a lovely Elizabethan country house near Bisley which had once been a monastery. They had a large garden, the proceeds of which they generously shared with their friends, including ourselves. This was their last joint home and the setting for many memorable occasions. It was always a joy to walk round the garden and fields at all times of the year or to sit by the big log-fire in their little sitting-room and chat. There were also larger functions which could overflow into the refectory and the barn.

The accidental death of Robert and Carole's second daughter, Sophie, shortly before Josephine's wedding to David Holt was a very real reminder of the many unseen strands that weave themselves into family life and make it a unique unit in society.

One of the twins, Robert qualified as a stockbroker and lives in Surrey; John manages, with the help of his wife Pat, his maternal grandfather's firm of A.B. Dalzell & Co and is the only Bigland of his generation to live in Cheshire.

Josephine and David Holt, a wine and spirit merchant, live in Barnes. Josephine, like her father, has proved her skill in business. From 1969 to 1974 she worked with Browns of South Molton Street first as Assistant Press Officer and later as Press Officer. From 1974 to 1978 she was Press Officer at Jaeger, responsible for all UK press relations and opening of new Jaeger branches in Europe. After the birth of her first

child, Katie, she started in 1979 and ran until 1981 a Public Relations Company, Franklin Holt Pritchard, dealing with fashion accounts and exhibitions. After the birth of Jonathan, she retrained as a beauty therapist at Harrow College of Higher Education from 1982 to 1984, then set up a small business from home. She also worked one day a week at The Priory, Roehampton, a private psychiatric hospital. She has since trained as a colour analyst and is currently working from home, setting up promotions with various companies and as colour consultant to the Jaeger design team.

### **Ernest and the Guardian Royal Exchange**

Miss H.M. Dickinson joined Guardian Assurance Group in 1966 as Ernest's private secretary and worked for him until his retirement in June 1978. She writes: "In 1966 the Group was quite large, Mr Bigland having encouraged expansion by acquiring other insurance companies, and two years later the opportunity arose to negotiate a merger with Royal Exchange Assurance. This was my first experience of such a transaction and I was greatly impressed by the manner in which Mr Bigland and his senior management team set about the task of bringing about the merger of the two companies. I had a very close connection with all that happened during the negotiations, and much hard work and many late nights were involved. At the same time, the day to day running of the company needed attention, but however great the pressure Mr Bigland took it all in his stride.

"The amalgamation of the staff of the two companies was a major task, and especially in the senior appointments Mr Bigland endeavoured to ensure that these were fairly shared. Through the judicious use of some joint appointments and willingness on the part of those concerned to work amicably together, the reorganisation necessary to bring the two groups together went smoothly.

"The merger also meant a good deal of travelling to enable Mr Bigland to visit the many branches, regions and overseas territories in which the groups operated. The merger laid the foundation for what is now Guardian Royal Exchange plc.

"Whilst I was Mr Bigland's secretary, he served as a Deputy Chairman and then Chairman of the industry's association – British Insurance Association (now Association of British Insurers) – and in those six years there was an additional work-load, with many meetings and lunches to be attended during the day and receptions and dinners in the evening.

"During Mr Bigland's period of office there were two major events – Government legislation on Protection of Policyholders, following the collapse of certain motor insurance companies, and the setting up of Equity Capital for Industry to provide finance. Again I was aware of the

effort Mr Bigland put into achieving a successful outcome and the perseverance he showed in the face of difficulties.

“Because of his many interests apart from insurance, my work was more varied than in any other of my secretarial positions. There were shoots to be organised and correspondence about the family business in Liverpool and the several house moves that took place.

“In addition to being Managing Director of Guardian Royal Exchange, Mr Bigland was also a Deputy Chairman and following his retirement as Managing Director he continued in that capacity on the Board of Directors until he reached the statutory age of retirement from the Board at 70.

“I found Mr Bigland an easy person to work for, as he was even-tempered and left me to do my work without checking up or harrying as some men do. He was very generous and would always have responded willingly to a request of help of any kind.”

Mr W.D. Harrington, son of Major W. Harrington, MBE, the late Regimental Quartermaster of 107 HAA Regiment, writes:

“I first met Mr Bigland in September 1955 when I joined the GRE as an employee. In all the years up to his retirement when he reached the age of 70 he was very fair to me and I regarded him as a ‘second father’ to me and my family. He knew nearly everybody by name in the early days at the Guardian and built that Company from a small beginning to the multi-national company we are today. I was involved through my father quite a lot with Mr Bigland through the services of their old regiment. Some staff in the early days of the Guardian were involved as reservists in the Armed Services, so when the Government called me back to serve at Suez in 1956 I was granted leave of absence for four months until I returned. My job was still waiting for me and no loss of pension rights was incurred whilst I was away. This was one example of the generosity showed by the company through the efforts of Mr Bigland. We were one big happy family at Guardian where everybody knew everybody else, and I would like to remember ‘Ernest’ as a man with great affection for the welfare of his staff. ‘God bless you, Sir’ for giving me the chance to work for such a great company as the GRE.”

### **Tony and Yvonne**

In January 1962, while Ga Biggie was ill in bed with shingles, Tony married Yvonne Bowerman of Swanage, Dorset, whose father had been a leading agricultural expert and adviser to the Government during and after the war.

Together Tony and Yvonne created a beautiful home for themselves out of a workman's cottage in the village of Horton Kirby, near Dartford, Kent. A huge stone fireplace and panelling and many imaginative gadgets are Tony's work. He used oars and sculls, usually very difficult trophies

to house, as stair-rails and as standard-lamps. A large and productive garden has supplied their own needs and those of others. A friend who lived in their home during their absence told us he had never been in a house where everything was so well arranged.

Tony had inherited his father's love of woodwork and handicrafts, taking over all his tools and adding to them over the years. His wooden bowls are exquisite. The famous Piccadilly firm of Fortnum and Mason offered to take all he could supply, but he hesitated to be tied down by such an order. His woodwork and Yvonne's carvings and paintings have been shown and sold at fairs all over the country. Our garden fence, which he put up for us with a little help from me one weekend and which Yvonne and Margo painted with creosote, is a memorial to his craft. Tony also followed in his father's footsteps in building not merely one, but a row of garages on unproductive land which he bought from the local Council; these are now let at a profit.

The story of Tony's work with Aldersgate Productions and of their remarkable visits together to Jamaica will be found in the appendices at the end of this chapter.

### **Our sons**

At the age of 18, just after leaving Shrewsbury, Andrew became the fifth member of the family to have an experience similar to that of his grandmother 32 years previously at Oxford. His work has taken him to all five continents and he now lives with his Swiss wife Eliane in Geneva. She is on the board of management of the Moral Re-Armament Centre at Caux, where they both take responsibility for the running of the conferences. He is a member of the Institute of Journalists and is on the editorial board of the recently launched magazine *For a Change*. They both do a considerable amount of writing and of translating from and into French.

Peter, our youngest son, is Associate Professor of English at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, and will shortly take up a post as full Professor at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. His first book, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, written in conjunction with his former Sussex University colleague, Allon White, was published by Methuen in 1986. His wife, Ann Rosalind Jones, is Chair of Comparative Literature at Smith College, Massachusetts, and specialises in Italian women poets. They live in an old farmhouse in Montague, Massachusetts.

### **Time moves on**

1985 was a sad year for the family. On 30 December 1984 at a party in Robert and Carole's home on Albury Heath to celebrate the 18th birthday of their eldest daughter, Emma, Ernest announced for the first

time that he was suffering from leukaemia. Barely a fortnight later, he and Mary were discovered at Lucas Green Manor, both desperately ill with pneumonia. Ernest died in Guildford Hospital on 14th January. Mary was taken to the Brompton Hospital, where she recovered in time to take part in the memorial service at St Michael's, Cornhill; the address was given by Air Marshal Sir Patrick Dunn, whose wife Di was a niece of Helen Bigland (see Appendix 4).

By then Rosalind was ill with cancer, but this did not prevent her and Tom from holding a large party in their home in May. Courageous to the end, she went ahead with her annual visit to Wimbeldon with a friend while Tom went to Henley. On her return, she retired to bed and died on 14 July. For Guy especially, who had gone to Singapore, it was a very heavy blow.

On 25 March 1987, shortly after their Silver Wedding, Tony died of an unexpected and massive heart-attack in Victoria Station, the third death in the family in little more than two years.

Better tributes to them than I could myself give appear in the appendices at the end of the book.

Since Ernest's death, Mary has been living in Parkgate. Once the main port for Ireland before the rise of Liverpool, it lies some two miles from our old home in Heswall and five miles from Tom's home in Willaston. Over the past three years, Margo and I have been privileged to stay both with her and with Tom on a number of occasions and to meet again many friends and relatives in the Wirral, a number of whom still remember with affection and respect Bob and Helen Bigland.

## **Conclusion**

"Gratitudo spes labor levis" ("Gratitude and hope don't cost much"). My researches have left me with gratitude for the fascinating discoveries I have made of the way so many Biglands have applied effective action to issues arising in many different spheres; and with hope that some future "in-law" will write a similar study of the actions of future generations, especially of the eleven great-grandchildren of Bob and Helen Bigland, to whom this book is dedicated.

## APPENDIX 1

### R. T. BIGLAND — PRESS NOTICES

The following press cuttings together with photographs are included in the memorial logbook in the Archives of Baden-Powell House, but without any indication of the papers in which they appeared:

Mr John Dudleston, Birkenhead Town Scout Commissioner, pays tribute to Captain Robert T. Bigland, a pioneer of the Boy Scout Movement in Cheshire, who died in Stirling on Sunday night while on his way home from holiday. Captain Bigland, Chief Assistant County Commissioner of Scouts, was born in Oxton, and lived at Oldfield Way, Heswall.

#### “UNCLE BOB” RETAINED YOUTHFUL SPIRIT, PERSONAL MAGNETISM

Any man who reaches the age of 79 years and still retains the youthful spirit and personal magnetism which enables him to attract and lead the virile and active young men who swell the ranks of the Rover Scouts of today, who at the same time has the simplicity to attract the youngsters of Cub age, and the patient sympathy to pal up with the boy who, through physical handicap, cannot join in with the pursuits of his comrades, must be a remarkable man.

#### HAPPY SMILE

Such a man was Robert T. Bigland, O.B.E., affectionately known as “Uncle Bob” to a vast number of Scouts and Scouters of all ranks, over a very wide area.

For many years Scouting had been life to “Uncle Bob”. He loved judging the handicraft exhibitions staged by the Cub Section and discussing the models, as a fellow craftsman, with the Cub competitors.

The training of Scout officers was almost a fetish with him for many years, both as a member of the Gilwell team and as Assistant County Commissioner for Training, and the ever-widening repercussions of the foundations he laid will be felt for many years.

Having enjoyed personal prowess by his physical ability, he enjoyed and followed with keen interest all forms of physical endeavour, whether in the swimming pool or on the sports field, and his happy smile portrayed his appreciation of the amateur entertainment of a Scout Camp Fire Show.

He held the admiration of the Rover Scout Crews of Birkenhead and was due to open the Fourth Rover Moot next month at Ogwen in Snowdonia, when Rovers from many countries will join together for a “he man’s” week-end.

“Uncle Bob” was the holder of the Chief Scout’s highest decoration,



the "Silver Wolf", and he was awarded the O.B.E. for his very distinguished services to the Scout Movement.

#### GREAT MAN

This great man has invested a vast wealth of interest and experience into the Scout Movement during his long and active life and, whilst his absence from Scouting functions will long be greatly missed, his work will live on.

We rejoice that his son, Lieut-Colonel Tom Bigland, D.S.O., M.B.E., carries on the tradition of Scout leadership; to him and his family all ranks of Birkenhead's Scouting fraternity express their deepest sympathy, together with the promise of their fullest support to the future Scouting.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### PRACTICAL SCOUTER

The death in Scotland on Sunday of Capt R.T. Bigland has deprived three generations of Scouts and former Scouts of one of the best known and most popular figures in Scouting in Cheshire. Affectionately known as 'Uncle Bob' to everybody in the movement down to the smallest Wolf Cub, he was essentially a practical man and was never so happy as when he was engaged on some pioneering project. He was very largely responsible for building the log cabin on the Scouts' camp site at Overchurch, constructing a large part of it with his own hands. The camping ground at Bryn Bach, which was given by the late Mr F.O. Paul, with whom he was closely associated, also bears evidence of his handiwork in a log cabin and an altar. His greatest interest was in handicapped children, particularly in the Scout Group at Leasowe Hospital, and he also devoted much time to training Scout leaders. A fearless man with an influential way of persuading committees to his point of view, he nevertheless preferred the practical open-air aspects of Scouting to the administrative ones.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### SCOUT LEADER DIES AT 79

#### WAS CITY STOCKBROKER

Known to thousands of Boy Scouts and former Scouts throughout Cheshire as "Uncle Bob", Mr R.T. Bigland, of Oldfield Road, Heswall, died last night while on holiday in Stirling. He was 79.

Mr Bigland was Assistant County Commissioner for Handicapped Scouts and a former County Commissioner for South West Lancashire. He was also Deputy Camp Chief for Training in Cheshire.

In the 1960 Birthday Honours he was awarded the O.B.E. for his services to Scouting and rowing.

He was connected with the 1st Heswall Boy Scout Group since its inception in 1920 and attended the World Jamboree at Arrowe Park in 1929.

#### STOCKBROKER

Mr Bigland was a Liverpool stockbroker, had been a member of the Liverpool Stock Exchange since 1900, and had been on the committee for the past 26 years.

He was also the President of the Royal Chester Rowing Club. He won the Dee championship for five years in succession from 1908 to 1913 and rowed at Henley between 1908 and 1921. In 1956, at the age of 73, he and his three sons manned a coxless four at Henley, all being members of Leander.

One of his sons is Lieutenant Colonel T.S. Bigland, of Hadlow Wood Cottage, Willaston, County Scout Commissioner for Cheshire West. Another is Mr Ernest Bigland, general manager of the Guardian Assurance Company.

Mr Bigland, a widower, leaves three sons and a daughter.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **SCOUTS' PIONEER DIES ON HOLIDAY IN SCOTLAND**

A leading pioneer of the Boy Scout Movement in Cheshire, Captain Robert T. Bigland of Oldfield Road, Heswall, died in Stirling on Sunday night while on his way back from a holiday in Scotland. He was 79. Familiarly known as "Uncle Bob" to thousands of Scouts and former Scouts throughout Cheshire, Captain Bigland was born in Oxton and educated at Dover College. A stockbroker he had been a member of the Liverpool Stock Exchange since 1900 and had served on the committee for the past 26 years.

During the First World War he served as a Captain in the Cheshire Regiment in France being invalided home, after which he worked in Western Command.

#### BEGAN IN HESWALL

His interest in Scouting began with the formation of the 1st Heswall Boy Scout Group in 1920 and he soon became District Commissioner and subsequently Assistant County Commissioner, a post he held for the rest of his life. He also served as County Commissioner for South West Lancashire for a period. He was latterly Assistant County Commissioner for Handicapped Scouts and Deputy Camp Chief for Training in Cheshire.

He held the Scouts' decorations of the Silver Acorn and Silver Wolf, the highest award in Scouting, and in 1960 his services received national recognition when he was awarded the O.B.E. in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

## KNEW BADEN-POWELL

Captain Bigland, with the late Mr F.O. Paul, of Upton, pioneered Scouting in Cheshire and was personally acquainted with Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the movement. He attended the World Jamboree at Arrowe Park in 1929.

A keen oarsman nearly all his life, he was president of the Royal Chester Rowing Club. He won the championship of the Dee for five years in succession from 1908 to 1913 and rowed at Henley Regatta between 1908 and 1921. In 1956, at the age of 73, he and his three sons, all members of Leander, manned a coxless four at Henley.

Captain Bigland had a grave illness early this year but made a good recovery and was able to resume his Scouting activities in the Spring.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **E. F. BIGLAND — PRESS NOTICES**

From *The Times*, 17th January 1985:

#### **MR. E. F. BIGLAND**

Mr Ernest Frank Bigland, MBE, who died on January 14 at the age of 71, was managing director of the Guardian Group of insurance companies from 1966 to 1968 and, after the merger, of Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance Ltd from 1968 to 1978.

Born on December 7, 1913, and educated at St Edward's School, Oxford, he joined the Guardian Assurance Company in 1930. Apart from war service with the Royal Artillery, when he reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel and was appointed MBE, he remained with the company for the rest of his career.

In the 1950s he saw that the days of smaller insurance companies were numbered, and was one of the main architects, with Lord Blackford, the chairman of the Guardian Group, of the merger with the Royal Exchange company. He served as deputy chairman, after giving up the position of managing director, from 1978 to 1983.

\* \* \* \* \*

From *The Daily Telegraph*, 17th January 1985:

#### **E. F. BIGLAND**

Ernest Frank Bigland who has died aged 71, was one of the pioneers of the modern insurance industry. He realised in the 1950s that the pre-war structure of insurance by a large number of small companies would have to give way to the creation of large groups.

Today about seven major groups undertake most of the nation's insurance and Bigland, who retired in 1983 as deputy chairman of Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance, took the leading part in creating one of them.

He joined Guardian Assurance in 1930 after leaving St Edward's School, Oxford. He was managing director from 1966 to 1978 and vice-chairman from 1973 until 1978.

In 1967 Guardian became the first major insurance office to enter the unit trust field in conjunction with Hill Samuel, merchant bankers. Bigland became chairman of the management company. He guided the merger between Guardian and Royal Exchange in 1968 and also took over as managing director of Caledonian.

\* \* \* \* \*

From *The Times*, 18th January 1985:

**MR. E. F. BIGLAND**

A correspondent writes:

Ernest Bigland was throughout his life an untiring supporter of rowing in Chester. Though never weighing above 11 stones, he rowed with his brother, Tom, in the final of the Silver Goblets at Henley Regatta in 1933, having beaten Britain's Olympic gold medal pair of the previous year, Lewis Clive and Jumbo Edwards.

In 1934 the Biglands again reached the Goblets final, and helped Royal Chester Rowing Club to the final of the Wyfold Cup. They tried the double again unsuccessfully in 1935 and in 1938 they attempted three events, the Thames Cup, Wyfold Cup and Goblets, reaching the finals of the last two.

In 1975 Bigland was instrumental in introducing Amateur Rowing Association to Guardian Royal Exchange, who sponsored Great Britain's first World Championship rowing event at Nottingham, when Bigland served on the Championship Committee.

So successful was this venture that Guardian Royal Exchange subsequently sponsored the 1979 World Championship in New Zealand.

\* \* \* \* \*

From *The Daily Telegraph*, 6th February 1985.

**IN MEMORIAM**

**Mr. E. F. Bigland**

A memorial service for Mr Ernest Frank Bigland was held yesterday at St Michael's, Cornhill. The Rev John Scott officiated and gave a reading. The lessons were read by Mr Peter Dugdale, Managing Director, Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance, and Miss Emma Bigland (granddaughter). The address was given by Air Marshal Sir Patrick Dunn. Among those present were:

Mrs Bigland (widow), Mr and Mrs Robert Bigland, Mr and Mrs John Bigland (sons and daughters in-law), Mr and Mrs David Holt (son-in-law and daughter), Mr and Mrs Tom Bigland, Mr and Mrs Tony Bigland (brothers and sisters-in-law), Mr and Mrs William Stallybrass (brother-in-law and sister), Mr Guy Bigland, Mr and Mrs Oscar Bigland, Mr Robin Bigland, Mr and Mrs Ritchie Bigland, Mr and Mrs K. Bigland, Col. N.R. Bigland, Mr Peter Stallybrass, Mr Derek Holt, Miss B.S. Hannay, Miss M. Miller, Miss R.A. Dalzell, Miss P. Handfield-Jones, Miss Emma Handfield-Jones, Mrs V. Tinnie, Mr and Mrs Kenneth Jones, Mr and Mrs A. Seymour-Jones, Mr. N. Seymour -Jones, and other members of the family.

Lt-Col Philip L. Bradfer-Lawrence, Vice-Chairman Guardian Royal Exchange, with Sir David Burnett, Mr Peter Greenfield, the Earl of Inchcape, Mr Norman E. Shepherd, Mr George L. Williams and Prince

Casimir Wittgenstein (directors) and many other members of staff, past and present.

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, representing the National Motor Museum, Baroness Robson of Kiddington, Sir Alex Alexander, Sir Donald Gosling, Col Sir Alastair and Lady Graesser, Sir John Paul, Sir Derrick Holden-Brown, Sir Eric St Johnston, Mr John Phillips, Trade Indemnity, Mr Martin O'Neill, Managing Director, Bigland Holdings, Mrs P.R. Dugdale, Mr Terence W. Higgins, representing the Chairman of Lloyd's, Maj.-Gen. G.R. Turner Cain, also representing F. & G. Smith and Crisp Maltings, Mr R.C.W. Pardell, Secretary General British Insurance Association, Mr D.R.B. Mynors, Deputy Chairman, National Provident Institution, Mr Francis Showering, Mr B.C. Hines, General Manager, Insurance & Investments, ICI, Mr G. Bowler, Chief General Manager, Sun Alliance and London Insurance Group, Brig. C.E. Tryon-Wilson, Mr and Mrs Patrick Colvin, Mr Ian Findlay.

Mr Kenneth M. Bevins, Mr P.B. Hunter, Mr J. Douglas Hamilton, Mrs T. Kennington, Mrs G. Webster, Miss E.M. Noyes, Mrs P.B. Hunter, Mr R.A. Wain, Senior Vice-President and General Manager for Great Britain, Imperial Life Assurance Company of Canada, and Mrs Wain, Mr Edgar R.H. Bowring, Mr Allan Grant, President, Ecclesiastical Insurance Office, Mr Richard N.B. Gubbins, Director, Streets Financial Ltd, Mr Stephen Masefield, representing the Motor Insurers' Bureau and the Council of Bureaux, Mr W. Godfrey Haslam, Prudential Corporation.

Mr David Lansdowne, representing the Banking Insurance and Finance Union, Mr J. Hubert Green, Vice-Chairman, Guardian Royal Exchange Pensioners, Mr A. Barrett, South-Essex Pensioners, Guardian Royal Exchange, Mr A.G.C. Parish, British Insurance Society and Insurance Chess Club, Mr K. Worden, representing the Captain, Royal Chester Rowing Club, and Mrs Worden, together with many other business associates and friends.

### **APPENDIX 3**

## **MARGO ON ERNEST**

The night Ernest died I lay awake thinking of all the time we had known each other, 71 years and 35 days. They were such happy thoughts there was no room for sadness; that came later.

We met shortly after his birth. He was lying snugly in Mum's arms. I took one look and screamed at the interloper. That of course is hearsay.

My own first recollections are of a fair, curly-haired, blue-eyed little boy, not so very different from the one we all knew over the years. No one else really existed for me until he fell in love with Mary, my old school-mate and best friend. Mary and I kept each other company on weekday evenings whilst he studied. He took her out on Saturday evenings and for a walk on Sunday afternoons. At 22 he married her. I remember walking down the aisle behind them at their wedding and thinking there had never been a marriage built on surer foundations.

No matter what has come and gone since those beginnings, nothing has ever been able to quench the light, the love and the deep compassion in those blue eyes and generous heart.

When we were little, we believed Dad went to work every day to make pennies for us. We sometimes wondered, when there weren't enough, why he didn't make more. I believe this was the basis and inspiration of all Ernest's business interests.

M. R. S.  
16 January 1985

## APPENDIX 4

### **Address at Memorial Service for Ernest Bigland by Air Marshal Sir Patrick Dunn, KBE, CB, DFC, FRAS at St. Michael's Church, Cornhill, 5 February 1985.**

Throughout his life Ernest Bigland's family came first. It was his unambiguous priority. Its unity and happiness was his prime objective, success in business a means to that end.

He himself was born into a close-knit happy family, well known in Liverpool and the Wirral in Cheshire, which suffered like so many in the dreadful depression of the thirties, causing some moderation to their way of life.

I am certain that it was this circumstance which spurred Ernest to an absolute determination to build himself a position which could never suffer a similar setback.

In 1930, the Branch Manager of the Guardian Assurance at Liverpool, a friend of his father, suggested that Ernest, then almost 17, might try for the post of junior clerk becoming vacant. No indecision was possible in those days; jobs were scarce, very scarce.

Ernest therefore left school at once, four weeks before the end of his last term at St. Edward's, Oxford, on a Saturday, presented himself on the Monday, was taken on provisionally and set to work that very day. From schoolboy to office boy in 48 hours.

In lieu of interview he was invited to write a letter on a general subject, and I have recently read it – in a Guardian file. He describes his arrival at St. Edward's at 13: "Dumped down, feeling as awkward as I was, ..... just left to fend for myself" ..... Of course he fended for himself successfully then, which stood him in good stead thereafter ..... Lesson No. 1.

About games he said: "I didn't get asked if I had ever played rugger before and so was put in the bottom game ..... a blow because all my friends had been asked and were in higher games, but by striving I was soon put up to Junior Game ..... a great honour." He was learning how things drift if left, and so must not be left, but be made to happen. Lesson No. 2.

"In rowing", he said, "where favouritism is still practised, people who came before me got on, but I managed to stick to it and got into the School second four." Lesson No. 3.

"But all this was a speck of dust to winning my weight in the school boxing after obtaining two black eyes and putting my finger out."

He then went on to put his neck out by declaring he had had no intention of going into insurance, preferring shipping or cotton, but his father had told him insurance was doing well and was a good business to



get into ..... and for his own part he thought the work ought to be very interesting after the first bit and with the Guardian ought not to be such a boring business as people make out.

On these indications Mr. Kenneth Graham, the Liverpool branch Manager, appointed him Junior Clerk at £50 p.a. – how right he was!

Ernest's rowing career was taking off and he and brother Tom, coached by Father Bigland, defeated the 1932 Olympic gold medallists in the Silver Goblets at Henley, only to be beaten in the final, after hitting the booms, by Powell and a future Lord Privy Seal, Sir Ian Gilmour to be.\* The Bigland family was bringing the Royal Chester Rowing Club back into prominence after a longish eclipse.

The brothers rowed, between 1933 and outbreak of war, in the finals of the Silver Goblets at Henley three times, in the Wyfold finals twice and in many other important races for the Royal Chester Rowing Club.

From the age of 16 Ernest had had his eye on Mary Dalzell, a school friend of his sister, and he never had eyes for anyone else. His youthful interest was gently and kindly smiled at by the family, but he took no notice; he had made up his mind. Six years later he had passed all his insurance exams, removed the opposition who had been engaged to Mary and married her in 1936. Never was a marriage built on surer foundations.

When the war came, he was a Territorial subaltern in the Royal Artillery, trained and ready to go. He was of course promoted rapidly: in 1942 a Major and Second-in Command of his Regiment. He served in Orkney and Northern Ireland and, in command of his Regiment, went to France with the Canadian Army soon after D-Day and on through Belgium, Holland and Germany, ending up as Lieutenant-Colonel in the Control Commission and awarded the MBE and Territorial Decoration.

And then back to work, after four days' leave, as Joint Branch Manager at Liverpool. By 1949, Lord Blackford, the Chairman, had spotted that Ernest was star material and told him what pattern his career was going to follow: he would be Secretary of the Company in 1950 – London of course – Assistant General Manager 1952, Deputy General Manager 1957, and General Manager 1960; and he was.

His job would be to expand the Guardian and make it one of the biggest; and he did. By a series of mergers and take-overs, culminating in the merger of the Guardian with the Royal Exchange to form the Guardian Royal Exchange, of which he became Managing Director in 1968.

In the post-war years, he put a great deal of far-sighted, practical effort into helping the German insurance industry to get going. For this

\*Powell's partner was NOT Sir Ian Gilmour, but J.E. Gilmour, later MP for and Lord Lieutenant of Fife.

he was awarded the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Embassy last October, where his furthering of Anglo-German relations was highly praised.

Among the top echelons of business, where it could be expected that his strong opinions and success might have generated conflict and jealousies, I have come across no one who did not like him. Indeed, many acquaintances he first made in business became true friends, caring friends, and enduring part of his private life.

Ernest Bigland, at a distance, looked like a tycoon: handsome, a strong face, well tailored, piercing blue eyes, majestic.

A junior man doing the journey from the Managing Director's door across the carpet to his desk for the first time might well have made it with unease. Once close enough to see the play of expression on his face, the twinkle, unease would slip away.

Ernest allowed himself the mental reservation that he could be wrong and the other person have a point, in agreeable contrast to the many who never doubt they are right.

Since he knew the business from bottom to top, he had no need to be brusque or to keep up his guard, as some bosses occasionally have to do. He was compassionate and above all a natural leader with great respect for City tradition, who led in the right direction and took his Company with him.

His gardener, who certainly had no idea I would quote him, wrote that he was more than an employer, he was a friend, who never left the hard and dirty jobs to him, but got down to it and shared them. He spoke truth from the heart when he described him as a person who would never do an unkind or unjust act to anyone.

You may be asking, if you can hear me, how it is I know so much about Ernest's character. I will tell you:

I first met him in 1933, 52 years ago, when three members of the Royal Chester Rowing Club were invited to a guest night at the station where I was serving.

With hindsight I realise that three senior office bearers of the Club had been expected for the top table. Instead, three handsome youths appeared in white tie and tails, the prescribed garb for a dinner party even in the depression: Ernest, slim, with fair wavy hair and very blue eyes, alert, intelligent; David Russell, whom many of you know; and a gatecrasher who had no connection with the Royal Chester, but had been at my prep school in Scotland with me and had persuaded Ernest to bring him along on the free ticket.

They therefore had to sit, not at the top table, but where the seniority of an Acting Pilot Officer under probation dictated, and we had a splendid evening, far from the austere presence of the Group Captain. That was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

About this time, the three worst risks in motor insurance were deemed to be actors and actresses, bookmakers and junior Royal Air Force officers. A sports car made the risk almost unwritable, and for under twenties there were no takers at all.

I had committed myself some weeks before reaching 21 to buy a sports car capable of 80mph – a breathtaking speed in those days. I needed someone high up in the insurance world with influence to help.

Junior Inspector Ernest Bigland seemed just the right man; indeed, he volunteered and managed, provided I wait until I was 21 to get me comprehensive cover. When 21 years and 13 days, I had to advise, by telephone, because I feared to break the news face to face, that my beautiful MG 18/80 had passed backwards through a dry stone wall and would need attention.

There was a two-second sepulchral silence, and then a courageous, but not very convincing “Don’t worry; that is what we are here for”. I was certain I had wrecked his career at its outset.

But in 1975-76 we find him Chairman of the British Insurance Association, in short, at the top in all respects. So I can’t have done too much harm.

It was natural that his interest in rowing should lead him to introduce the Amateur Rowing Association to the Guardian Royal Exchange, which sponsored Britain’s first World Championship rowing event at Nottingham in 1975. Ernest served on the Championship Committee. So successful was the venture that GRE subsequently sponsored the World Championship in New Zealand in 1978.

Shooting and fishing were his principal post-war relaxations, in which he took an active part and continued into retirement. He was the only man, the ghillies declared, who tried to hook and land a salmon in one motion. He never succeeded, though he did land a trout that way. However, he was a skilful dry-fly fisherman and took many good trout from the Test.

He was among the best shots in the land, was much sought after as a guest and welcomed as a gun by ambitious keepers. Only last December I watched him shoot brilliantly, scarcely missing a bird; his explanation – he was not feeling too grand and was concentrating harder.

We had a shoot arranged for New Year’s Day which had to be cancelled because the beaters did not like the idea, nor did the guns – being unlikely to dispel evil humours of the night before! I volunteered to do the re-arranging, but Ernest would not let me, although by then he was very ill, just out of hospital after a blood transfusion and running a high temperature. He did it all by phone himself to make certain the members of his shoot would have a good day without hitch.

He knew for a long time that he had leukaemia, but kept it to

himself and Mary, who showed no sign of her distress, which must have been acute and desperately hard to bear and to conceal.

Ernest himself treated his illness with disdain and went on as usual until he could no longer. Only the day before he died, he was actively concerning himself with the case of a keeper becoming redundant, on whose behalf he required Robert to send a note to the Guardian to argue for adequate compensation and help find another position.

Ernest's loving protection of his family can never be matched, nor his concern for friends. But his absence can be made less painful by our recalling many happy memories of a kind, caring husband, father, father-in-law, grandfather and brother, and a good companion to us all.

## APPENDIX 5

### **Address at Funeral Service for Rosalind Bigland by David Russell at Burton Parish Church, 18 July 1985**

We are all here this afternoon to give thanks for the life of Rosalind Constance Bigland or Ros as we all knew her.

I have enjoyed a very long friendship with Tom and Ros and have the happiest memories of their parents Bob and Helen Bigland and Godfrey and Rony Castle; both were friends of my father and mother also.

I only go to know Ros, however, a few years before the war, but more closely when she and Tom were married just before the outbreak of hostilities. To say that in those days we were all living our lives to the full would be a gross understatement, but then we did not know what fate held in store for us all. In fact fate scattered us everywhere, but Ros it took across the Mersey to Liverpool, where she worked in the headquarters of the Motor Transport Corps, which fate had placed in what was previously Tom's office. So she did indeed sit in his chair for the duration.

After the war we were all trying to pick up threads where we had dropped them and resume our former interests. Ros had been in charge of the Willaston Brownie Troop before the war and carried on after it and then went on to be Secretary of the District Girl Guides. She also took on the secretaryship of the Liverpool Ladies Work Society, of which she later became Chairman, a post that she held until the Society finally gave up. In this she was following in the footsteps of her mother, who had been a leading figure in the Society for many years.

I have always felt that her first interest lay in her family and many friends. To me she was the complete perfectionist. Only the best was good enough for Ros and I remember the tales of the exotic contents of the tuck boxes that accompanied Tim and Guy to school. Many of you will remember her as the vivacious hostess of parties that were perfection to the last detail. She just was not interested in anything less. She had little time for malingerers and did not suffer fools gladly, but if anyone was in real need of help, it was there – by the ton.

If you were to ask me what it is that I associate most of all with Ros, I should answer without hesitation "Laughter". She was one of the most amusing people that I have ever met, whether in conversation or the written word – a little naughty perhaps, but that was our Ros. She was jolly good company.

We last saw her some weeks ago when Noreen and I called to see her and Tom. She was about to undergo one of her formidable treatments later that day, but she had an encouraging report from her doctors and

was in great form. Putting a magnificently brave face on her illness, she was, as always, full of local news and her future plans and determined that she would pull through in the end.

Sadly we now know that it was not to be, but I shall always remember that day and the merry twinkle in her eye as she wished us farewell.

## APPENDIX 6

### **Address by Ronald Mann at Memorial Service for Tony Bigland at Horton Kirby Parish Church 3/4/87**

Last Thursday, the day after Tony died, I read quite by chance a sentence from the Psalms: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints".

Tony may not fit our conventional image of a saint, as we think of him in his much loved Leander colours at Henley or riding at great speed his beloved motorbike. I think that the most fitting description is the one given in a letter to Yvonne: "He was like a Viking in his bearing and like a Viking he died when fully in the fight. Like a Viking he conquered for his Lord in many lands and leaves a memorial of his care and skill. He leaves a memory of one all out, fearless, committed, unafraid, one whose zest for living and adventure will be missed by all."

Someone who has laboured all his adult life in many lands to do the will of God and to bring change to the world, often in very rough conditions in tropical countries, without salary, without honour, through difficulties as well as successes, and has steadfastly gone on and on, never giving up, is certainly "Precious in the sight of the Lord".

We worked together for twenty-four years, and for at least sixteen of those years day in and day out. Firstly in the task of making the Westminster Theatre the centre of a battle to bring God's truth to our country, and to make it the centre of a Christian renaissance that it is increasingly becoming.

I picture him in those days with his bowler hat visiting the personnel officers in all the big factories around London and persuading them or, as he saw it, giving them the opportunity and privilege of bringing their employees and families to see the children's musical *Give a Dog a Bone* or other plays, and what is more getting them to book parties, sometimes the whole circle and occasionally the whole house.

This went on day after day and generally including Saturdays and Sundays as well, because parties used to come down from all over Britain for Saturday performances and we would then meet with them on the Sunday morning.

He used to delight in getting out the London maps and planning the maximum number of visits for a day. He would come back the next day and say with great glee. "I covered six factories, three coach companies, three hotels and four ticket agencies, and what is more I booked so many seats".

Then eleven years ago, when this large offspring of the Westminster Theatre, the ecumenical theatre company Aldersgate, came to birth, Tony eagerly joined in the task of establishing that company as the voice

of the Christian Churches in the theatre world and became a director of the company.

Again I have a vivid memory of him dressed in that bright pink shirt and bow tie standing in the foyers of the theatres with Yvonne greeting people, the crowds who packed to capacity the major theatres of the country for this musical about John Wesley, *Ride, Ride*, – talking with them, selling them the souvenir brochures, the records and looking after them.

All this for twenty-one weeks continuously up and down the country: Nottingham, Leeds, Newcastle, Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol, Southampton and then the Westminster Theatre, hardly ever missing a performance of matinee or evening. They welcomed over 100,000 people in those months.

His life, as most of you know, was transformed from meeting the Oxford Group as a schoolboy. He never turned back from that original decision to let God run his life and he applied his new way of life with his fellow schoolboys and the masters; also at Cambridge, where in addition he devoted himself to rowing and history, in that order!; in the army in India and then travelling with Peter Howard and MRA in many countries.

It wasn't always easy to go on unheralded when he saw his contemporaries and others having great material success and honour, not easy when not everyone understood what he was doing. But with Yvonne at his side for these last twenty-five years he went on and on.

I think that these last two years have been the most fulfilled, because many of his loves and skills came together in the work that he and Yvonne have done in Jamaica. I picture them living in a very simple one-bedroomed house with a primus to cook on and with encounters with spiders, rats, mosquitoes and other nuisances, and winning the hearts and developing the skills of young men and women there, unemployed and with no great hope of employment without the skills that Tony and Yvonne have taught them.

Suffice it to say that when they left at the end of February more than a hundred people came to their farewell party, and four telegrams have come to Yvonne in these last days from the Post Office, the Woodworkers and the Community Development Foundation. These are the phrases they used: "We remember his indomitable spirit, and irreplaceable loss for the entire community. The whole community saddened. May God provide you Yvonne with the strength needed." A memorial service is being held in the village next week.

This was such a fulfilment because it brought together his love of wood turning, his dream of a world remade through remade people, and his concern for the Third World born in him during his times in India.

A week last Wednesday, the day he died, he was telling some of us that the greatest joy of the last year or so was the wonder of a deep



friendship and understanding that has grown up with his own family, and we were able to celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary at Bill and Margo's home just a few weeks ago.

Tony rejoiced too and, I believe, is rejoicing now, at the fruits of the work with the theatre, the hard slog which he and others did for twenty years and the reaching out now into video and TV. I think especially of the C.S. Lewis plays. Tony was the company manager for *The Song of the Lion*, the play about C.S. Lewis' life. He took it round the country and, as a result, we were given the rights for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the last two and a half years about half a million children and families have been thrilled and inspired by these wonderful Christian allegories. As we sit here over a thousand children are sitting in the Hexagon Theatre in Reading for one of these plays.

It's wonderful to have a memorial service in this church and village which he so loved and to think of the living memorial of these plays going on and on. They are booked right through until February next year and will probably go on for years and years, feeding young people and others with the Truth he lived to pass on.

Now I want to read something Tony wrote on the 5th February 1950, thirty-seven years ago as a young man: "This morning is exquisitely beautiful and has stirred deep longings in me. It is, I think, the first smell of Spring and I have just now been dreaming of long hot days basking by the river, of picnics and punting, boat club blazers and Henley Royal Regatta. I was saying thank you to God this morning for this lovely day, I woke up to the song of birds, a room flooded with sunlight and a soft cool breeze blowing through my open windows. Life is a very very sweet and dear person. I want to put both my arms round her and hold her tight, I want to feel the warm pulse of her body and to give her the fibre of my being. I want to live life, with all the joy and colour and laughter, happiness and tears that she can bring. I want to share life and have her in common with all men. I want to take all life has to offer and build with it, create and make new life. I want if possible to capture the eternal and express it for all time, something that will never perish but help men through ages on their road to God. For isn't that what true art really is, the capturing of some aspect of the eternal and expressing it? That surely is why it lives through the ages no matter what nationality, colour or creed the fellow was who caught the spark. Isn't this the job of us who wish to build a new world? Isn't there an essence we seek, the catching of the truth we know and using the media of the modern world so that it is intelligible, and give it to the people? A creative minority leading through toil and suffering if necessary, a world which our modern art so clearly portrays – twisted, deformed and striving, yet with a heart and such wealth of richness. If we can but only top it, paint it, sing it, dance it and live it."

That is going on in the plays in which Tony played a large part, and he expressed it himself in his wood. The love of wood was the centre of his artistic feeling. Yvonne tells me he so often said how much he would have loved to see Jesus the carpenter at work. His nephew wrote, "So often my memories of him are concerned with wood." Now a great tree has been felled, but only then can the wood be brought to perfection by the master craftsman, who is the master of craftsmen too.

A week last Wednesday, Tony bounced in and out of our office at the theatre, with a great grin and warm greeting on his way to Victoria Station where he collapsed. We feel sadness and grief that we won't see that ebullient figure again in that way and our hearts go out to Yvonne, Margo and Tom, because the gap is there, the sorrow and anguish are there, but we know that "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **Extract from the Memorial Service for Tony Bigland, Walkerswood, 8.4.87.**

**Tribute by Armon Llewelyn**

My friends, it was in this very church in June of 1984 that I had the pleasure and indeed the good fortune of meeting Tony Bigland and his gracious wife, Yvonne. They had come to share in our morning worship service. From our very brief encounter then, I gathered he had come from England to Walkerswood, not to enjoy a vacation or to renew acquaintances or for personal business, although these might have been incidental. He had come especially on a mission of goodwill. As a master craftsman of wood turning, he was willing to pass this fine skill to the youth of this community who might be desirous of learning a worthwhile trade.

Prior to his leaving England, he had shipped tools and equipment, without which he could not have started his training. Unfortunately delayed shipping coupled with customs clearance drastically reduced the time he scheduled for his training. In spite of this, however, when time was running out, Tony succeeded in setting up a temporary workshop in an unused chicken-house at Bromley and started to train four youngsters from the village in the art of wood turning. The high quality of the products turned out created much interest and there was a ready market for the various items offered for sale. This certainly must have been a source of inspiration to the young men he was training. For, within a surprisingly short time, they were emulating their teacher in producing workmanship of a comparable high standard.

This, indeed, was an accomplishment of a no mean order, as what was intended to be done in four months was done in half the time.

It was now time for Tony's departure. But, before he left, he drew up a plan of a model workshop to be built on lands already reserved for that purpose. He also bequeathed to the newly named Walkerswood Woodturners all the equipment and tools he had brought with him free of cost. This very cherished asset is now installed in the newly built workshop and will remain a monument to his memory.

The Walkerswood Development Foundation was so impressed with Tony's initial achievements that they invited both he and his wife to pay Walkerswood another visit at their earliest opportunity. This invitation they accepted and on 29th October 1986, true to their promise, as always, they were both here with us until their departure on Saturday 21st February last.

It was during these four latter months that I was closely associated with Tony and had the opportunity of not only working with him but also

knowing him as an individual. I found Tony a very sincere man. And this could never be better demonstrated than for him to sell much of his prized possessions and personal possessions as well to raise the money to meet his travelling and many expenses here in Jamaica. The tools he donated to the workshop project valued approximately fifty thousand dollars. He selflessly solicited help and support from various organisations and individuals to promote the establishment of a proper workshop which could provide a source of employment and hope for a few disillusioned youth.

Anyone who had a passing acquaintance with Tony can testify that he was a very hard worker. He was impatient with idleness and sloppiness. His motto was "Strive for Excellence".

Tony was caring. This was a philosophy to which he was mostly committed, to the extent that it grew and brought unfavourable reactions from some of his peers and even within his own family itself. They could not understand him. How could he have given up what could have been a famous career in exchange for one of service, service devoted to the unfortunates? Surely it can be said of Tony that he could have been rich, but, for the sake of others, he remained poor.

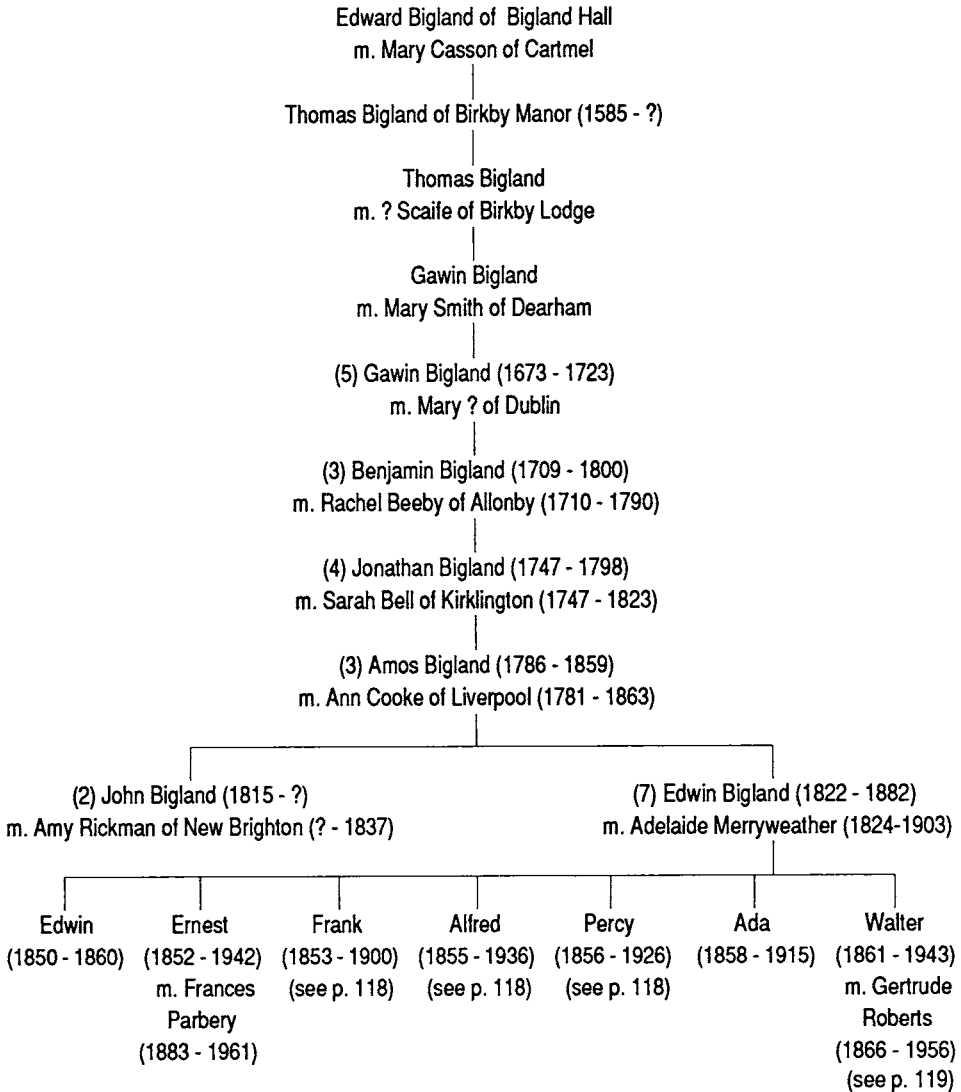
I could go on indefinitely extolling the fine qualities of this remarkable man, but suffice it to say that to me his life was dominated by a deep spiritual conviction and commitment. He was a prolific writer and each morning, before he and his wife undertook any chores, they would meditate and pray together. He assured me that after this daily silence his mind became clear and he was able to discern what the Lord wanted him to do that day. This he would note in his notebook and he would read it to me whenever we met later in the day. And so his actions were guided by the Spirit as he sought to do the will of God.

To Tony we say farewell and thanks for the life he has lived. He has given and not counted the cost; he has fought and not heeded the wounds; he has toiled without resting; he has laboured without asking for any reward save that of knowing that he has done his Master's will.

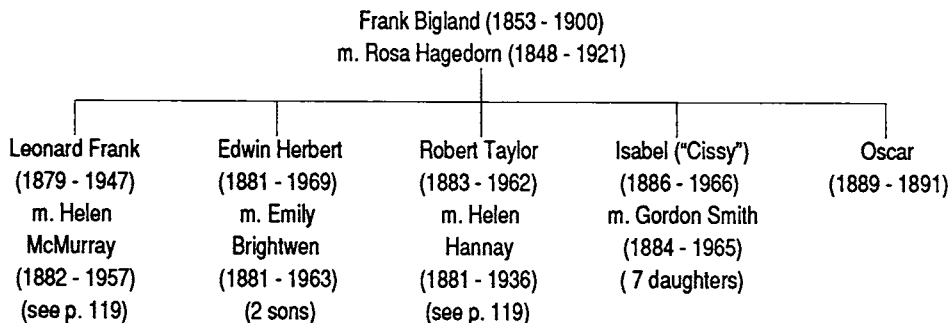
With his gracious wife, Yvonne, we pray that in this moment of grief and anguish God will strengthen her so that she can appreciate His purpose and accept His will through pain.

# FAMILY TREES

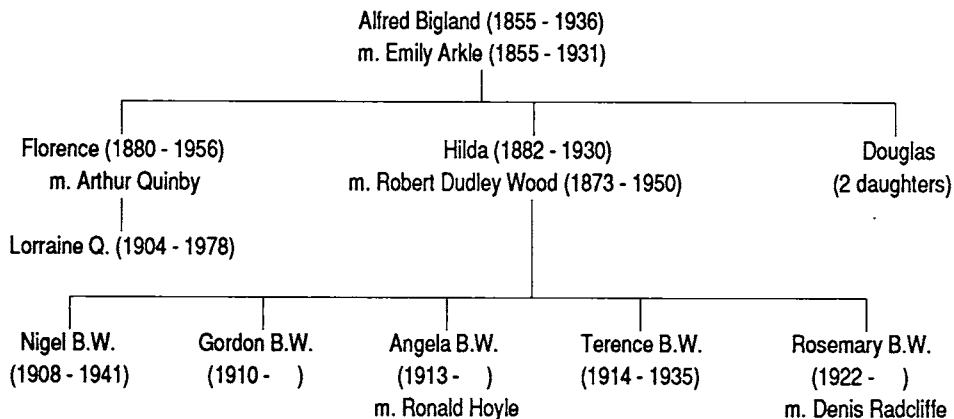
## BIGLAND ANCESTORS



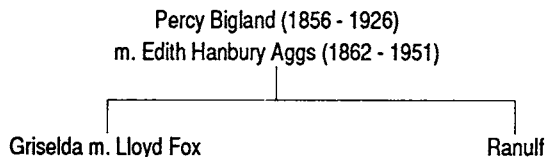
## FAMILY OF FRANK BIGLAND



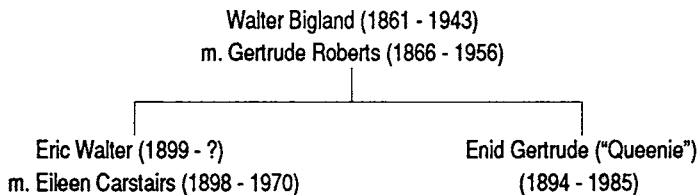
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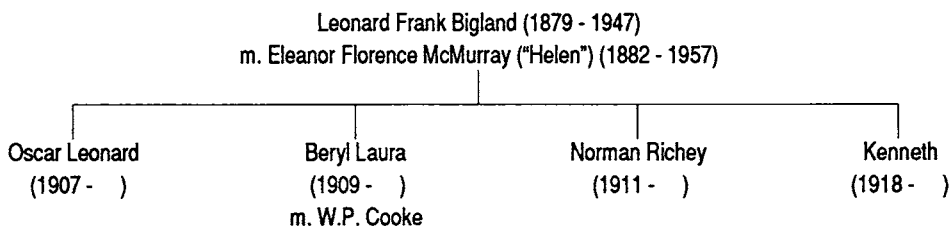
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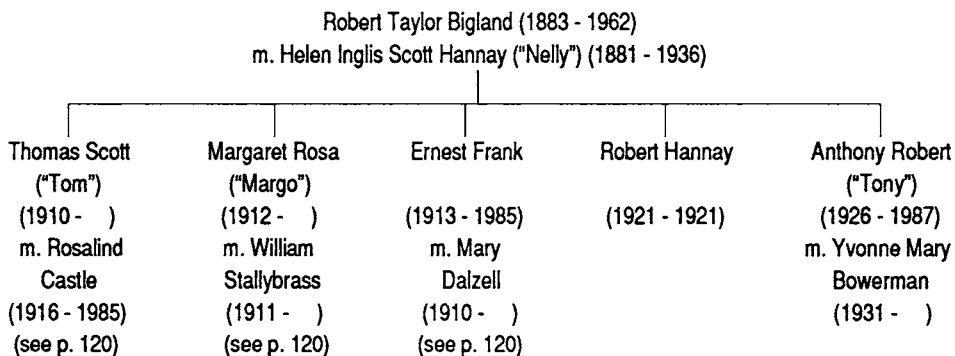
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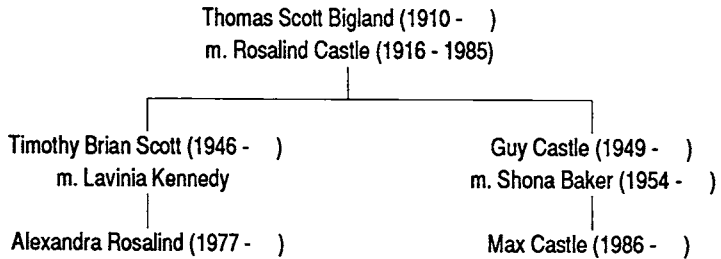
## FAMILY OF LEONARD FRANK BIGLAND



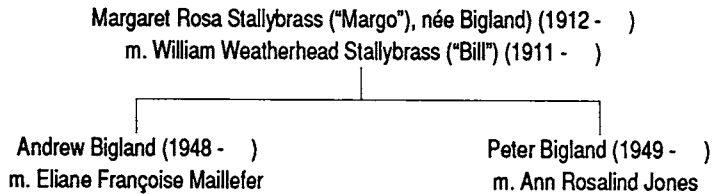
## FAMILY OF ROBERT TAYLOR BIGLAND



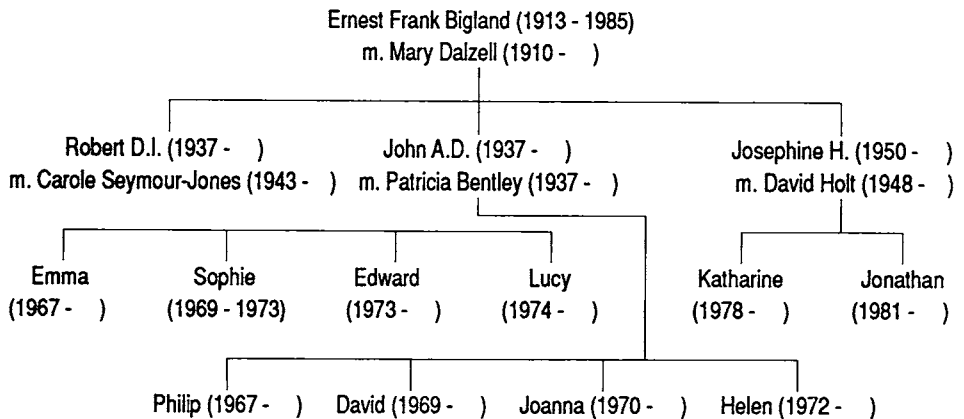
## FAMILY OF THOMAS SCOTT BIGLAND



## FAMILY OF MARGARET ROSA STALLYBRASS



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