

LESLIE NEWTON BROWNFIELD

Much of the information in this chapter is taken from “SEA CYCLE”- a light hearted history of L.N.Brownfield by L.N.Brownfield, where I have quoted from this, with some editing, the text appears in italics.

8. III. **LESLIE NEWTON BROWNFIELD** was born on December 29, 1901 in The Old College, Petersfield¹ where his Father carried out his general medical practice. He was christened on February 21, 1902 in St. Peters Church, Petersfield; his Godfather was E.J.Fry who was his cousin, the son of his great aunt Sarah and Windover Edmund Fry.



**Silver Christening mug inscribed:
“L.N.Brownfield from
his Godfather
E.J.Fry FEB 21st 1902”**

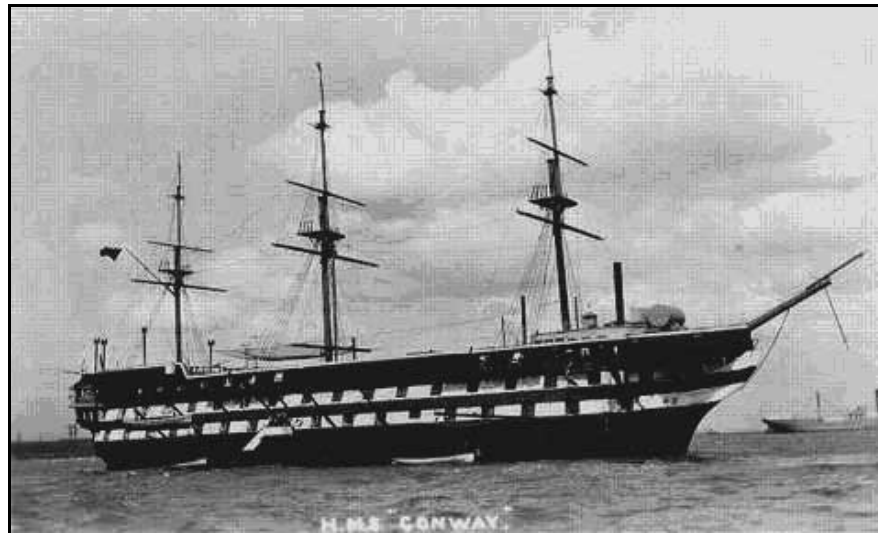


Leslie with his sister Barbara

Leslie’s education started at Dunhurst, the pre-preparatory school for the co-educational Bedales School in Petersfield, where in July 1914 he won a copy of “The Jungle Book” by Rudyard Kipling, which is inscribed inside the front cover:

*L.N.Brownfield
Prize for
Basketwork
Needlework
Netting
July 1914
Bedales Junior House
C.H.B.Epp & M.E.Epp*

He then went on as a boarder at Stubbington House preparatory school near Fareham. “*Stubbington specialized in passing boys into the Navy. They did their best for me and I thought I had a sporting chance of beating the examiners, but it was not to be. Like today, the candidates first had to appear before an interviewing board but the procedure was far less complicated than it is now. First, one had to write a short essay and so far, my luck was in, as my subject was ‘Zeppelins’, which was money for old rope. Then one had to go before a board and answer a series of comparatively simple general knowledge questions, but they were not simple enough for me and I was turned down!*”



“The Conway was moored in the Mersey off Rock Ferry. She was primarily a training ship for the merchant navy and was run by the Mercantile Marine Association. The ship itself was one of the last ‘wooden walls’. Built as H.M.S. Nile she was never put into service but lent by the Admiralty as a training ship. If I had weathered my interview and examination, I should have gone to the Royal Naval College at Osborne for two years before moving on to Dartmouth. In addition to her primary function, the Conway also carried a small number of boys known as the Osborne Class. By joining this, one was given the same instruction as at Osborne and the Admiralty accepted about nine boys each year for direct entry into Dartmouth. There was only a written examination and no interview so it could well be that it was for this reason that I made the grade.

My two years in the Conway, though undoubtedly wonderful training, were of extreme discomfort. Living afloat, of necessity, taught one a lot more practical seamanship than one could ever learn in a shore establishment but one literally had to fight for survival and, in doing so, I learnt to be a skilled thief and a convincing liar. Both these accomplishments are of great value, if used in moderation.

R.N.C. Dartmouth

1917-18

If there is anything in the old idea that one must spend a period in Purgatory before being accepted into Heaven, I felt that this translation will be like my move from Conway to Dartmouth. Owing to the war, our time at Dartmouth was cut short and after one year in the College, we were sent to sea.

H.M.S. Ajax

1918-19



H.M.S Ajax was the fourth ship of the King George V class of 23,000 ton battleships. Armed with 10 13.5 Inch guns she had been completed in 1913. She joined the Grand Fleet in August 1914 and fought at the Battle of Jutland. (1916)

In May 1918, at the advanced age of sixteen years and three months, I joined H.M.S. Ajax as a midshipman. Ajax was a battleship of the Second Battle Squadron, forming part of the Grand Fleet. I joined at Rosyth and it was an incredible sight to see this enormous collection of battleships, battle cruisers, cruisers and destroyers for the first time. There was even one aircraft carrier, H.M.S. Argus the first of her kind.

I regret that I have no startling war experiences to relate. Possibly the fact that I'd come to sea was too much for the German High Sea Fleet, as they remained firmly in harbour and when finally they did come out, it was to surrender. I had the amazing good fortune to be in the foretop of Ajax, which was the second ship in the port line. Our fleet steamed to the eastwards in two lines of battle ships and gradually the German ships appeared out of the mist coming towards us in single line. We were at action stations as it was by no means certain that the Huns might not choose to have one last fling, but in the words of the police, they came quietly. As they came between us, our two lines turned in on either side of them and escorted them to their anchorage off May Island.

January 1919 we spent at Scapa Flow, keeping an eye on the surrendered High Sea Fleet. After a month, we sailed for our home port of Devonport. Though the armistice was, by then, some three months behind us, we had remained on a war footing, but coming to our home port seemed to bring us to the threshold of something mysterious and unknown to us, called "Peace time routine". We remained in Devonport for about three months, giving leave and changing over to our peacetime complement. Strange and unheard of things came into being, such as frock coats and swords for officers and round jackets and dirks for mid-shipmen. No uniform allowances. An officer's wardrobe was his sole responsibility and Messrs. Gieves must have had to extend a great deal of credit. We heard that we were destined for the Mediterranean and this entailed further purchases and investigation into the mysteries of white uniform.

It was a great day for the Gunroom when we left Plymouth bound for foreign parts. First we had to pass through the bay of Biscay with its roaring winds and tumultuous seas, but the Bay of Biscay let us down and was as calm as a mill pond. We could see the coast of Spain dimly in the distance but the first real thrill was sighting Cape Trafalgar before we turned and shaped our course to the westward. Soon we were entering the Straits with the coast of Spain clearly visible on one hand and the coast of North Africa on the other and then "the rock" came looming up ahead.

Alongside at Gib. and the excitement of climbing into white uniform for the first time, but with the attendant sinking feeling of "have I got it right?" No shorts and shirts as today, but the high necked tunic and long trousers as now worn only on ceremonial occasions. Not only had sunbathing not generally been accepted, but it was the firm belief that, even in only subtropical conditions, the human frame was subject the hazards of sun stroke by day and, when the sun had given up its attack, the risk of chill by night. By day, officers and men when working in the open wore sun helmets; when dressed in their best, the sailors wore sennet hats. These are the traditional straw hats only associated with certain unfortunate small boys and the chorus of H.M.S. Pinafore. This extremely smart looking but most impractical headgear disappeared, as an item of naval uniform, a year or so later. At 6 p.m. each day, even though the thermometer was still registering well up the scale, all and sundry must change into their thick blue uniform and remain so dressed until the sailors went to breakfast on the following morning. The only relaxation to this was that officers off duty wore white mess jackets, but blue trousers, a "boiled" shirt and a blue waistcoat supported these

Ajax secured at Gib alongside the South Mole, which is a very good berth since from here, you can walk ashore, and it seemed a very propitious for a spot of sight seeing. In the morning we were all inoculated, after which the surgeon Commander decreed that all the young gentleman should be excused duties for 24 hours to give them time to recover, this was splendid since it would leave us all free for our first expedition on foreign soil, at least this is what we thought! The first lieutenant, who was also the "Snotties Nurse" (or, more properly, the officer particularly responsible for the well-being of the midshipmen) ruled that if we were not fit for duty then we were not fit to go ashore. The ship sailed for Malta and next morning.

Unlike Gibraltar, Malta offers you a very little as you approach. You come up on it suddenly and it is not until your bows are practically between the two breakwaters which form the entrance to the Grand Harbour that, so to speak, the curtain is raised and you see the stage most magnificently set. My appreciation of the beauty of the Grand Harbour comes from my later and very frequent visits for, on this first occasion, I was far too busy looking at everything to see anything. All I definitely remember was a swarm of small brightly coloured gondola type boats that came out to meet us. I soon learnt that these were called dghaisas. They are charming little craft. They have the same high bow and sternposts as a gondola and they are painted all colours of the rainbow. Normally they are propelled by two gentlemen, who look as if they would cut your throat for a halfpenny stamp.

Forty years ago Malta was a wonderful place for an impecunious midshipman. First class bathing and games for a minimum expenditure of cash and much to do and look at for free. Normally a Snottie's leave expired at seven in the evening but there was a junior officers club in the dockyard, with a bar, bowling alley, billiard tables and other amusements, to which one could escape after dinner from a hot and crowded Gunroom. We found this a godsend, so it is a matter of some interest that when, in my capacity as Commodore I offered to start up a similar club in Hong Kong, the modern young gentlemen said that they had no use for one.

Getting ashore in Malta was never a problem. There was always a fleet of dghaisas around the ship waiting for custom and the fare ashore from anywhere in the Grand Harbour, legally, was three pence. If, however, the fair was tendered the dghaisa man invariably threw the coins into the bottom of the boat and spat on them, calling down the curse of the gods on the head of the donor. This implied no lasting ill will, as he was always eager and willing to pick you up for a return journey.

Having made a safe landing the custom House Quay there were then three methods of reaching the bright lights of Valetta. The first was to walk but, though this was no great distance, it was up a very steep hill. Financial considerations often made this method necessary and the best route was to climb up what, for obvious reasons we called Step Street. Halfway up the street one passed "promotion hoop". This was a staple shaped piece of iron let into the wall. The story was that Nelson had been able to climb through it, and if you could do the same, you would follow in his footsteps. Nelson was a very small man and I'm always been what is tactfully described as "of full figure" so that this first wiggle along the road to fame was not for me.

The second of the methods of reaching the objective was to go up in the Barracca Lift. As the fare was only one halfpenny this generally was within financial reach, but it was a hazardous undertaking. This lift had been constructed by some unknown genius from what appeared to be condemned bedstead frames. No one had ever been seen to repair it since it had been constructed, and no living person appeared to know when it had made its first ascent. Someone must, however have tightened up some of the looser bolts from time to time as it has never been known to fail to reach the top and it is still running today.

The third and lordly method was to hire a carrozin. These are the local cabs and to obtain one you hail "Karotzi". A carrozin resembles a four-poster bed, complete with canopy, mounted on four wheels. The motive power is a horse, which, though reasonably cared for, always looked as if it were about to fall down dead.

The carrozin man, like his opposite number afloat, had a formula on receiving his fare. Irrespective of what was proffered, this ran "Oh Senior, something for the poor horse, no mother, no father, poor bastard!"

Malta was known as the island of bells and smells, for then the Church bells used to ring continuously and the smells, which equally well might be called goats, were everywhere. Down even the main thoroughfare of Valetta would come a herd of goats led by their senior member, sporting a bell, and followed by a gentleman chanting "Halibe, halibe". At any moment an upper window would be thrown open emitting a scream of Maltese and a receptacle, almost invariably an old naval tobacco tin was lowered on a string. The herd would halt and a gentleman would first empty a few coppers from the tin and then fill it with milk from the duty goat. As the tin was hauled up the goats would march on, to the accompaniment of "dong, dong, halibe, halibe", eating delectable cigarette ends on their way.

My first visit to Malta was not of long duration. Ajax was due for a long refit and we midshipmen was sent home to join her sister ship, HMS Centurion, at Devonport. We took passage

in an ancient cruiser HMS St George that had been the depot ship at Mudross for a large part of the war, and was manned by a scratch crew, most of whom were on their way home to be demobilised.

Nobody troubled much about us and we took good care to be no trouble in return, which resulted in a very comfortable passage. The ship stayed several days at Gibraltar so we were able to have our deferred run ashore. A party of us went across the frontier to La Linea in Spain and saw a bullfight and as this was a special occasion, I believe that the standard was very high. The colour and pageantry were magnificent and the skill of the fighters beyond question so I'm very glad to have seen it, but never have been tempted to repeat the experience.

H.M.S. Zinnia

1919

Having joined forces with Centurion's Snotties and collected a few odd bodies, we commissioned HMS Zinnia. Zinnia was a Flower Class sloop. The minimum number of officers to ensure her safety and a skeleton crew to do the heavy and technical work manned her and we Snotties made up the balance. During the summer and autumn we cruised up and down the south coast between Torquay and Falmouth in the most wonderful weather. I can think of no more pleasant and practical way of learning one's job. In the forenoon one might be down below stoking the boiler and then be moved up topsides to be leadsmen in the chains when entering harbour. In the afternoon one might come up in the world and be officer of the watch in charge of the ship. We had to live a bit rough, in improvised quarters, but this brought no tears to the eyes of an ex-Conway.

H.M.S. Ajax

1920-22

Early in 1920 Centurion sailed for Malta and, on arrival, we returned to Ajax. Then started what still remains in my memory as a fabulous two years. The chief factor that made them so, was our commander, Commander J F Somerville, afterwards to be Admiral of the Fleet Sir James. More of him later.

The commission started somewhat on a war footing. Our first duty was to proceed to Constantinople, not yet known as Istanbul, to join the Allied Occupation Force. The passage there was, in itself, a great experience. First the journey through the Aegean, past islands whose names previously had only been connected in our minds with Greek mythology. Then steaming through the Dardanelles, still with many signs of the bloody struggle, which had taken place on Gallipoli; finally the approach to Constantinople with its minarets, which, due to the mirage in the early morning, looked like a fairy city floating in the air.

After a short stay we went up through the Bosphorus into the Black Sea. Officially we were not at war with Russia but we were not on entirely friendly terms with the Bolsheviks. Our first job was to go to Odessa to assist with the evacuation of the White Russians. Here we anchored outside in pancake ice as the harbour was completely frozen. I was running a picket boat and it was only possible to enter the harbour behind an icebreaker and then one had to get out pretty quickly. A number of merchant ships were lying off the port and embarking refugees and I was ordered to board them to try and find out what assistance they might require. I say "try" to find out, as few if any, I encountered spoke any English and, though there was generally somebody who spoke French, my grip of that language started and finished with "la plume de ma tante". By the end of the week I do not know what language I was speaking but I was getting the answers.

During this period, truly a proud boast, I had been under fire. Several rifle shots had fallen near enough to my boat for them to be identified as such!

When the Red troops entered Odessa there was nothing more that we could do there, so we moved across to the east side of the Black Sea and bombarded the Bolsheviks as they advanced down the coast road. This was generally very dull, because as we appeared our target disappeared; but on one occasion sport looked up, as we were rewarded with a train that made a spirited attempt to avoid our 13.5in. shells. After this we steamed south down the coast keeping ahead of the hostilities and calling at both Gagri and Poti. These charming little places are frozen up at the height of winter but in summer they blossom out into a sub tropical climate, with palm trees and flowers, to become the Russian Riviera.

Naturally things were far from normal in the Black Sea ports. The White Russians were intent on getting out and literally with throwing their possessions away before they left and ships

were offered all manner of things. Several grand pianos came away as deck cargoes and, it is told, one destroyer reluctantly had to refuse a Rolls Royce, as they had no room to stow it.

Ajax only collected one thing of note in Russia. The ship was presented with a very small brown bear cub, which was named Trotski. When he came aboard he was delightful to look at, but highly dangerous to handle. I was always bear minded and was determined to make friends with him and though this took some time, eventually I was able to do almost anything with him. We had three other pets in the ship, a bulldog, a small wirehaired terrier called "chunky" and a goat. Trotski loathed the bulldog who heartily reciprocated the feeling.

Trotski and chunky soon became fast friends. Nobody loved the goat, he had a mean character.

A Royal Marine called Hickman, volunteered as a bear leader and handled Trotski very well. When the bear was small Hickman used to take him ashore on a lead and this, in Malta gave rise to a pretty piece knavery. In those happy days there was a pub about every five yards and Trotski, with Hickman in tow, would approach one of these. On arrival, Hickman would let Trotski off the lead and Trotski would enter showing every sign of hostile intent. The patrons, not being used to bears with their beer, would beat a hasty retreat and Trotski from one end and Hickman from the other would finish off all the abandoned refreshment. They would then move on to the next port of call with the result that, when they finally returned on board, it would be touch and go as to who was leading who.

We'd been told that Trotski was a honey bear and that he would grow to no great size but nobody can have let his mother into the secret, as in a short space of time, he became enormous and developed into a very strong swimmer. If Trotski became a bit bored in harbour he would slip over the side and either go ship visiting or for a run ashore. He had very pleasant character and if greeted as a friend would behave impeccably. People are funny however and it is not everybody who welcomes a full size Russian brown bear as a visitor, so often we would receive rather pained messages that our bear had just eaten some other wardroom's lunch. One day Trotski escaped and made his way to the Naval Rifle Range and finding a nice comfortable spot on the sun he went to sleep. The place he had chosen was one of the firing points and as it was required for its legitimate purpose, one of the instructors tried to induce Trotski to move by prodding him with a bayonet. This was a liberty that no self-respecting bear would take lying down so Trotski bit the instructor and the instructor shot Trotski. We were very sad, but our mourning had an undercurrent of relief. He had become a very big bear.

After our canter in the Black Sea we started to settle down to proper peacetime routine and Commander Somerville came into his own. He had only one standard and that was perfection but what was even more important, he had the drive and ability to convince all those serving under him that this was the only right and proper thing. In peacetime the routine work of keeping a ship fighting fit is apt to become dull and somewhat wearisome, so to offset this, these tasks must be given some extra purpose. This is done, or was done when large fleets were working together, by making everything competitive. To discharge one's guns at the battle practice target is not particularly exciting but try and do this better than anybody else at once gives the party a kick.

At the risk of causing an uproar from those who served in other ships in the Mediterranean at the time in question, I am prepared to say that Ajax rapidly worked up to be the cleanest, smartest and most efficient battleship in the fleet. A smart and efficient ship invariably is a happy ship and happy we were and we won practically every competition that there was to be won.

The two-year commission went only too fast. We spent most of our time either at Malta or Constantinople but did occasional cruises into the Eastern Mediterranean. On one of these I was able to spend a couple of days leave in Jerusalem. On the way to or from Constantinople we frequently anchored for a day or two in the Dardanelles and were able to walk over the Gallipoli peninsular and have a look at the battle fields. These were still littered with arms and ammunition. In addition to the residue of war there was a limited supply of quail, red-legged partridge and hare. Officers generally landed with a scattergun but, initially, I had no such sporting weapon and counted this as a setback. By good fortune and early in the commission I was detailed to join a party, which landed to confiscate the arms from a village, which had been indulging in a little amateur banditry. The spoils were a collection of museum pieces and among them was the relic of a 16 bore double barrel shotgun; it had engraved on its barrels the magic words "Damasco Turco Fino" and amid the mockery of my mates I obtained permission to impound this rare find. Damasco then retired from the world for a considerable period but when it emerged once again I'd removed

most of corrosion from the barrels, blued them externally, French polished the butt and refitted the mechanism. It was a thing of beauty and more valuable in my eyes than the most perfect gun unobtainable. I was a very bad shot and so was Damasco so the fact that between us we frequently hit something, proves without doubt the fallacy of the old saying that two wrongs do not make a right. My fouling piece had only one failing. If you did not know it intimately it was apt to discharge prematurely when cocking the hammers. When on loan to one of my mates this habit resulted in a near miss on the Principal Medical Officer and it took major diplomacy to avert Damasco being impounded by higher authority.

When there were only about six months of the commission still to run, seven of us midshipmen were due to take examinations in seamanship, navigation, gunnery and torpedo. If we weathered these we would be promoted to acting sub lieutenants and, for a period prior to this ordeal we were excused routine duties in order to work up.

One day I was sitting on the gunroom, surrounded by manuals when a messenger arrived to say that the Commander wanted volunteers to sail a square rigged ship. This seemed a God sent chance to put my books away so I went along and knocked on the Commander's cabin door. Then started a delightful period. Commander Somerville was planning to build a replica of the Ajax of 1840 on the hull of a skiff and when I was signed on, building and rigging had only just commenced so I was able to take some small part in her construction. She was complete soon after I got my first ring as an acting Sub and from then on I became the Commander's assistant dog's body. I spent a great deal of time in Ajax II either acting as crew for the commander or sailing her with a very fine seaman Petty Officer Roberts crewing for me.



Colin Robinson Collection

Ajax II was a beautiful little ship. She was correct in every detail but what was still more important she sailed really well. Naturally a full rigged ship with a crew of two took a bit of handling and we did have some hectic moments.

After two wonderful years we were due to re-commission and a new crew was sent out to Malta in the battleship Emperor of India to take over. We all transferred to the Emperor of India to sail home again, but for some reason our sailing was delayed. The seven acting Subs, of which I was one, were all due to start the usual series of technical courses to fit as for the rank of lieutenant, soon after we got home. We had a brain wave. We submitted that if we remained to return on the Emperor of India we should not have time to complete our foreign service leave before taking up our next appointment and requested to be allowed to proceed overland. To our amazement this was approved and we were able to spend two most interesting days in Rome, but our even more ambitious plans for Paris, had to be curtailed, as we ran out of money.



Cambridge University

1922-23

The first of our courses was at Cambridge University. This was a post-war innovation. Their Lordships had decreed that those of us who had had our cadets time shortened, owing to the war, should go to Cambridge, for a period of six months for a mental brush up and looking back this was obviously a very wise move. All the officers concerned, though only aged from 20 to 22, had served four or more years at sea, some of it under war conditions and, during this period, had been expected to shoulder responsibility. As a result of this, we were old beyond our years and a few months away from the Navy and among our contemporaries was obviously an excellent antidote. As we saw it at the time, it was a most entertaining interlude, which called for very little personal effort other than to enjoy ourselves. We had to pass an examination at the end of the period but the examiners must have been very long suffering.

The first officers who were sent to Cambridge wore uniform and were not subject to a university discipline. This caused certain complications and the authorities asked if we might be placed under their wing, so by the time that I arrived, we wore plain clothes with a cap and gown. We signed on as under graduates and, as I was neither thrown out or took a degree, presumably I am still a member of the University. We lived in college in pairs, sharing the rooms normally occupied by one undergraduate and I was very lucky to be sent to Pembroke and share it with one of my mates from the Ajax. My only criticism of this great college is that the bathing facilities were still the same as the day on which the college was founded - non-existent.

Halfway through the period we went on leave, due to return to Cambridge for the second half of our course some three weeks later. Having reached the age of 21, I had come by a small sum of money, left by my grandfather, and this I invested in a motor bicycle.

I have never claimed to be anything of a trick cyclist and on this occasion, fate allowed me little time and in which to improve my technique, since, at the start of my leave, I ran into the front of a motor charabanc, bursting a kneecap and telescoping a femur. This was not quite as careless as it sounds. Returning home after dark, I met four charabancs in line ahead on a bend in the road. This was before the days of dipping and they were equipped with brilliant acetylene headlamps, so completely blinded, I hit the fourth one bows on. The charabancs were returning a party of naval friendly wives from an outing and they could not have been more friendly. They picked me up and offered me sustenance to ease my lot, but this was not what I fancied at that moment and of water, they had none.

The Petersfield cottage hospital made a first-class job patching me up and I moved on to the Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar. Here I not only spent a very happy time but also, due to their most excellent treatment, I was back in circulation in a very short time. Nobody could do the like for my bicycle, which was a complete write off and, as I was uninsured, this terminated my short period as an owner rider.

This interlude had made me miss my second period at Cambridge, so I thought that I had had that, but my room mate went along to the Admiralty to ask about his future and the officer that he had to see was Captain Somerville, who was now Naval assistant to the Second Sea Lord. Captain Somerville on hearing of my adventures asked what I hoped to do on my recovery and my chum without any briefing from me said that I should like to go back and finish my time at Cambridge. Back I went and this meant doing a complete new course. To do the first period over

again did not impose very great mental strain and, for the second period, my chum had taken the seamanlike precaution of saving all his paperwork, which was turned over to me. By copying out his essays in a slightly fairer hand and correcting the more obvious spelling mistakes I never failed to get higher mark than he had for the original. The only fly in the ointment was that I was not yet fit enough to play any games.

After Cambridge we moved on to do our technical courses at the various "schools" in Portsmouth. Pompey was a very good spot, so in spite of the necessity to do quite a bit of hard work and a chronic state of bankruptcy, which was a normal occupational hazard for a sub lieutenant, it was possible to have a lot of fun. My home was still in Petersfield and this looked after most weekends, not only for me, but also for a number of my shipmates, as my parents delighted in keeping open house. Though we were thankful to have the examinations behind us, I think that we were little sad when courses came to an end and our groups broke up as he went on leave before going back to sea.

Owing to my stay in hospital and my second visit Cambridge, I was getting rather long in the tooth as a sub lieutenant. I could not be promoted to lieutenant until I had obtained a sea watch-keeping certificate and as obviously this necessitated being at sea, I was keen to get back. I represented my case to the powers that be and was given an appointment to HMS Royal Sovereign without any hanging about.



H.M.S. Royal Sovereign entering The Grand Harbour at Malta

H.M.S. Royal Sovereign

1924-25

The Royal Sovereign was one of the five (with Ramillies, Resolution, and Royal Oak) of the Revenge Class, 28,000 ton battleships, armed with 8 15inch guns and completed in 1916 and 1917.

Royal Sovereign, or "Tiddley Quid" as the sailors called her was undoubtedly the happiest ship I ever have served in and I've had more than my share of good luck in this direction. Some three months after I joined Captain Napier saw fit to judge me "competent to take charge of a watch at sea" and I was promoted to lieutenant. This was a big step, as not only did it translate me from the Gunroom to the Wardroom but also in addition, it meant quite a considerable rise in pay.

The Royal Sovereign was one of the battle ships forming the Home Fleet and the routine of the fleet was to divide the year into three cruises with a leave period at our homeports, between each cruise. The spring cruise took us out to Gibraltar to do combined exercises with the Mediterranean Fleet and en route, we would visit ports in Spain and Portugal and if our luck was in, we might slip along to spend a few days on the French Riviera. The summer cruise was mostly spent in the south of England and devoted to competitive drills and athletic sports. We used to pop into seaside resorts and then the ships would be "open to visitors". As Navy Days had not then been invented, this used to bring big crowds on board and, as a result, I'm able fully to sympathize with those in the aristocracy who find it necessary to throw open their ancestral homes to the public. The winter cruise was dedicated to weapon training and spent mostly at Rosyth, Invergordon and Scapa Flow.

During one of the cruises, I met my brother, who was serving as a Surgeon Commander in HMS Bryony with the Mediterranean fleet. My brother was 11 years older than I, so by the time that I had stopped sucking my thumb, he was away at his public school and then at St Thomas' Hospital. In 1914 he had just qualified as a doctor so joined the Navy as a temporary lieutenant with the

intention of serving for "hostilities only" but, as things turned out, he left the service 40 years later with the rank of Surgeon Rear Admiral. Though we both had been serving in the Navy for a considerable time, our paths had gone in different directions and this was virtually the first time that we had met since I had reached an age to be worthy of his consideration. I'm happy to report that we "took to each other" and, from this time until his unhappily early death, we remained very firm friends and playmates. This friendship was unrestrained as we never served alongside each other and only meeting at fairly infrequent intervals, we always had much to celebrate and never neglected the opportunity.

H.M.S. Torres

1925

At the end of my time in Royal Sovereign I was accepted to qualify as a specialist in gunnery, but instead of leaving me where I was, until I was required for my long gunnery course, which would have seemed a reasonable thing to do, I was appointed as First Lieutenant and navigating officer of HMS Forres. Forres was a twin screw minesweeper running as a tender to HMS Impregnable, which was a group of hulks, moored at Devonport forming a training establishment for seaman boys. Forres' role was to go to sea four times a week, with groups of these boys, to give them practical instruction in seamanship.

I left Royal Sovereign not only with great regret but also with considerable misgivings. I have to admit that I've gone through my time in the Navy with only the barest minimum knowledge of navigation necessary to get away with it and here I was appointed as a navigating officer. I need not have worried however, as Forres never normally went out of sight of Plymouth breakwater.

One day, however, we were billed for greater things. Forres had to go out to test her main engines at full power and this necessitated a voyage of some 70 miles. Fortunately, this long sea passage would consist of steaming for 35 miles in one direction and then returning on the opposite course and as we should never be out of sight of the coast, I felt there was a sporting chance that I should not get lost.

All went well until we had almost completed our outward journey. The captain had just gone below for his lunch and while I held the fort, the ship suddenly veered off course and slowed down. The engineer officer came hurrying on to the bridge and reported that the starboard main bearing had 'run' which in plain language meant that our starboard engine was out for the count. I suggested to him that he should go down and break the glad news to the Captain and, just as he was leaving, the ship came to a grinding halt. The port engine had followed the starboard engine's example.

Here we were stopped and helpless on the high seas and help had to be sought, but it was necessary to tell our rescuers where we were. I was in luck for we had broken down hard by an old friend of mine, Start Point, so that I was able to pinpoint our position with amazing accuracy. We returned to harbour in the tow of a destroyer, which called for no further contribution from me in my capacity as navigator.

R.N.C. Greenwich

1925-26

After some six months in the Forres, it was back to school again. With 15 other lieutenants, I joined the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, to form a long gunnery course. Greenwich College is a most beautiful collection of buildings originally designed as a Royal Palace and later converted into a hospital for seamen pensioners. When put to its first two purposes it may well have been considered to be in the height of luxury, but as a seat of learning, it lacked certain amenities. The most noticeable of these shortcomings was a most inefficient heating system. We had to do a lot of "homework" and a problem in advanced mathematics, when faced in an ice-cold cabin wrapped in a great coat, became even less attractive.

In spite of its slight discomforts Greenwich was a splendid place in which to serve. It's situation brought the bright lights within easy reach, but owing to the necessity to work and the usual shortage of cash, these were of less importance than the first-class games of rugby, which we played against all the leading London clubs. The Royal artillery at Woolwich laid on riding classes for us in their riding school. The instructors were both excellent and painstaking but in spite of all their efforts, I never advanced beyond the point of being convinced of the truth of the sailor's saying that "a horse is dangerous at both ends and uncomfortable in the middle".

H.M.S. Excellent

1926-28

At the end of the course we were all judged competent to move on to Whale Island for the second and practical part of our course. HMS Excellent, the gunnery school, was built at the head of Portsmouth Harbour on land reclaimed around a small island called Whale Island and it is from this that the establishment gets the name by which it is generally called. One of the rules of the island is that movement from one place to another is never done at walking pace but always at the "double" and time moved by at the same pace, so that once again we were faced with examinations. After nearly two years at the grindstone all of us were told that we had made the grade and now were qualified gunnery officers. Before we were let loose at sea we had to do a years apprenticeship as junior staff officers and for this we were split up between the three gunnery schools at Portsmouth, Devonport and Chatham. I was lucky and stayed on at Whaley.

Each junior staff officer had a section of the gunnery school, which is his particular responsibility, and I was given the fire control section and was very pleased, but shortly I was shifted to the parade. With this I was delighted, as parade ground officer was the most sought-after job of all. Though perhaps a little soul destroying in its day-to-day activity it carried with it the duty of training the Royal Guard and the field gun crews and taking them up to the Royal Tournament, then held at Olympia.

Training the Olympia field gun crew was a fascinating business. The crews where all volunteers and hand picked men, which latter they certainly needed to be, for they had to work up to a very high standard of skill and fitness. When training started, in slow time, the casualties were enormous and almost all of them would have an arm in a sling or be limping around. As training progressed, and the tempo worked up to competition speed, the crews seemed to become impervious to death and destruction. A man would take a knock that would be lethal to an ordinary mortal, get up and shake himself and carry on with the run.

Training for the royal guard was equally interesting. There was no lack of volunteers and whittling these down to 100 with 20 spares, who actually would go up to Olympia resulted in a very high standard, but many sad and disappointed customers. When we had worked up, I had a film taken to show the Guard how they looked in action. I thought that they looked pretty good and in particular, the smart young lieutenant at their head, swinging his arms fit to burst. During the showing of the film my pride and future arm swinging were both somewhat reduced by a voice from the back of the audience which remarked, "Look at the flipping seagull".

The tournament itself was most exciting, but for the performers very hard work indeed. The field gun competition then was between eight crews, two each from Portsmouth, Chatham, Devonport and the Royal Marines. Four crews appeared at every performance, two running and two rigging the arena, so that the crews did get a well earned stand-off, but the officers all appeared at every performance, either acting as judges or standing by their own crews when running. My crews did not win the competition for Chatham had two outstanding crews, who swept the board.

On July 13, 1928, the day before his younger sister Barbara's wedding, an announcement appeared in the Times:

"The engagement is announced between Lieutenant L.N.Brownfield, Royal Navy and Eileen (Molly) Caesar of 30 Harrington Gardens, S.W.7. daughter of the late Dr and Mrs Caesar of Godalming".²

Leslie and Molly gave Barbara and Charles Woodhouse silver salt cellars as a wedding present.

H.M.S. Resolution

1928-29

Back to sea again after three years on the beach. I was appointed as assistant gunnery officer to HMS Resolution and travelled out overland to join her in Malta. After a very hot journey, in the height of summer, I joined in the very early morning and wanted a cup of tea more than anything else. Owing to an error, the drinking water had been given twice the proper dose of chlorine with the result that it tasted revolting and was practically undrinkable, even when disguised with tea or coffee. A bad start typical of the Resolution, as she was a dirty, inefficient and unhappy ship. Soon after I joined, there was an Admiral's inspection and the flag officer left the ship, when it was only partly completed, saying that he would return when there was something worthwhile for him to look at. As a result of this several of the more senior officers were replaced and we settled down to cleanliness and happiness.

REVENGE class battleships					
Displacement:	28,000t load; 31,000t deep load				
Dimensions:	624ft 3in oa × 88ft 6in × 28ft 6in load 190.3m × 27.0m × 8.7m				
Machinery:	4-shaft Parsons turbines, 18 Babcock & Wilcox or Yarrow boilers, 40,000shp = 23kts. Oil 3400t. Range 4200nm at 10kts				
Armour:	Belt 13in-1in (330mm-25mm), bulkheads 6in-4in (150mm-100mm), barbettes 10in-4in (250mm-100mm), turret faces 13in (330mm), CT 11in (280mm), decks 2in-1in (50mm-25mm)				
Armament:	8-15in (38.1cm)/42cal Mk I (4×2), 14-6in (15.2cm)/45cal BL Mk XII, 2-3in (76mm)/20cwt AA Mk I, 4-3pdr (47mm), 4-21in (53.3cm) TT sub (beam)				
Complement:	908-997				
Name	Builder	Laid down	Launched	Comp	Fate
RAMILLIES	Beardmore	12.11.13	12.9.16	9.17	Sold for BU 2.48
RESOLUTION	Palmers	29.11.13	14.1.15	12.16	Sold for BU 5.48
REVENGE (ex-Renown)	Vickers	22.12.13	29.5.15	3.16	Sold for BU 9.48
ROYAL OAK	Devonport DYd	15.1.14	17.11.14	5.16	Torpedoed 14.10.39
ROYAL SOVEREIGN	Portsmouth DYd	15.1.14	29.4.15	5.16	Sold for BU 2.49
RENOWN	Palmers	-	-	-	Suspended 26.8.14
REPULSE	John Brown	-	-	-	Suspended 26.8.14
RESISTANCE	Devonport DYd	-	-	-	Cancelled 26.8.14

Malta seemed much the same, although now that I was a lieutenant of some five years seniority, I viewed it from a different angle than I had as snottie. With war a thing of the past, wives and families had come to join their husbands on the island and the social life was very active. The Carnival Balls, held in the opera house at Mi-Careme, were very much the highlight of the social season and some of the fancy dresses were truly magnificent. One evening our Principal Medical Officer, Surgeon Commander Griffiths, a two and a half stripe engineer, Gordon Lyle, and I decided to grace the party. We all were much of a figure so we arranged to go as identical seamen of Nelson's day complete with very full sets of red whiskers, which we hoped would make it difficult to sort us out. Every normal male need some Dutch courage before he gladly can climb into fancy dress, so with this in view, we described ourselves as drunken sailors and by the time we arrived at the party we were in extremely good heart. All of us were friends of an Engineer Commander Peter Seccombe, and his wife Phyllis. Peter had a shore job in the dockyard and they lived in a very charming house in Sliema. Being most hospitable folk they had asked us to join them in their box at the opera house and we found ourselves part of large and very cheerful party, which included a young lady dressed as a blue columbine. By introduction I learnt that she was a Miss Sylvia Dore and by discreet inquiry that she was the sister of Phyllis Seccombe. I could see no better course of action than to monopolise her for the evening, to which I'm happy to say, she showed no marked objection. I regaled her with a graphic description of the hardship of a young army officer's life in Malta, which she received with remarkable sympathy, considering that she had been briefed as to who and what I was. With this attraction I pursued the party to the bitter end and only arrived back, just in time to dodge "hands fall in".

Some two hours later, when I should have been up and about my business, I felt a marked reluctance so to do. Considerably later one of my colleagues, by the name of Honniwill, noticed my absence from the active affairs of life and finding me flat out in my bunk, attempted to bring me to life. Personally I'm not able to vouch for the truth of the following interlude but Honniwill insists that, opening one eye, I grunted "Honey, last night I met a lovely blue fluffy thing and I'm going to marry it", and then collapsed into a coma.

My suit prospered and by the time that Sylvia was due to leave Malta, we had come to what is generally known as "an understanding". No official announcement was to be made until Sylvia had broken the news to her parents and paid off a boyfriend who thought that he was in the running. I gather that my mother in law to be, on hearing the glad news, remarked that she hoped that I was not in the Navy or a Roman Catholic. Sylvia regretted that I was in the Navy and that she had omitted to question me on my religious convictions.

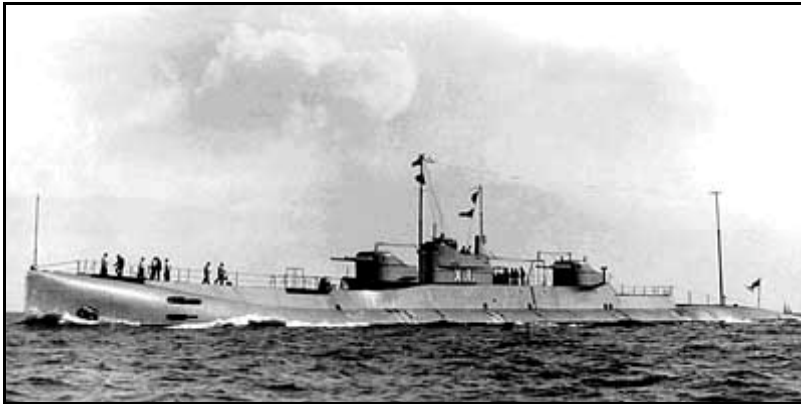
By happy chance Resolution was shortly due to visit San Raphael, on the French Riviera. Mrs. Dore had only recently returned from Cannes but, nothing daunted, she decided that she must

come out and have a look at me. In keeping with her thoughtful and charming manner, which I was to appreciate so much in years to come, Mrs. Dore brought a friend with her so that they could play together and leave Sylvia free to play with me. Owing to her seniority it would have been impertinent to refer to this lady as the "girl friend" so she was christened the "Lady Friend" and this led to Mrs. Dore being styled the "Lady Mother", a title with some charm, which became my permanent name for her.

The Lady Mother was a born gambler; she and the Lady Friend spent most of their time in the casino. Sylvia and I joined them there from time to time but otherwise we were free to go our own way. I was approved, but no definite plans could be made, owing to the uncertainty of my future movements, but it was generally accepted that we should be married in London when I returned home, which was which I was due to do in just over a years time.

On May 2, 1929, ten months after his engagement to Molly Caesar, another announcement appeared in the Times:

“The engagement is announced between Lieutenant Leslie Newton Brownfield, Royal Navy, son of Dr and Mrs H.M.Brownfield and Sylvia Kathleen, Younger daughter of Mr and Mrs J.A.Lammas Dore of 6, Hanover Terrace, Regent’s Park.”³



A photograph of the submarine HMS X1 at sea. In 1921, the Royal Navy commissioned HMS X1. It was the largest submarine to have been built so far, carrying a crew of 110. Her heavy guns meant that she could fight destroyers, but her surface speed of only 18 knots made her useless as a fleet submarine. X1 was too large to carry out coastal patrols but was capable of a 12 000 mile range, making her best suited to being a long range commerce raider. The submarine did not prove successful and was eventually scrapped in 1937

H.M.S/M XI

1929-30

My time in Resolution was coming to an end but I had another job lined up which would keep me in the Mediterranean. Normally I believe in leaving things to fate, but on this occasion I'd asked for the appointment and this had been approved. I was to go as the gunnery officer of XI, which was the largest submarine that has ever been built and carried four 5.1-inch guns mounted in two twin turrets. I had asked to be sent here as I thought that the most interesting to see some service in submarines and it had the added attraction of quite a large increase in pay. This latter seemed to be most desirable in order that I might re-establish diplomatic relations with my bank manager, before contemplating matrimony.

XI was such an enormous craft that every officer had a cabin and we boasted a long bath, but in exchange for these luxuries we lived permanently on board, instead of moving over to a depot ship in harbour as was the case with the smaller submarines. Living on board a submarine in the Mediterranean in summer is a trifle cosy but taking the rough with the smooth, I felt that I was on to a really good thing. Life would never be dull as XI was experimental and had a will of her own.

One day Eli Elison an old friend and the gunnery officer of a destroyer flotilla asked if he could come for a trip to sea in XI. This was simple to arrange, so one morning at crack of dawn, he came on board and off we went. Obviously this was a great opportunity to

demonstrate my vast knowledge of submarines to a fellow gunnery officer, so for our first dive I took him along with me to my diving station, which was in the after end of the ship. A showed Eli the depth gauge and explained that as we dived, at first he would see the bubble in the spirit level just leave the centre, then the needle, showing our depth would go round until the required depth had been reached and the bubble would return to its centre as we returned to an even keel. The bubble moved as predicted but not quite according to plan, as it continued to move on until it disappeared altogether. XI decided to try and stand on her nose and Eli and I found ourselves almost horizontal, flattened against the bulkhead and looking down what appeared to be a vertical submarine. All I could find to say was "we don't always do this, we don't always do this!" Having regained the surface and sorted things out, we then did two perfectly ordinary dives but in spite of this, Eli always described his day with us as his first and last trip in a submarine. Most days had a little excitement though not on this grand scale. The next happening came along very shortly and this was to change the pattern of my life. As usual we started very early in the morning and as cable officer I had to turn out

to weigh the anchor. We then had a long trip to our practice area and as I had no immediate duties, went back and lay down on my bunk. No sooner had I relaxed than I was awoken by a loud "wump". The cause of this disturbance was that the foremost battery had blown up. Nobody had been hurt and the ship was still sea worthy but the internal damage was extensive and we were out of action for diving. There was nothing that merited us



telling our next of kin but the press got hold of it. Not long before a submarine had been lost and because of this we were news. The first thing that Sylvia knew about it was a poster saying "explosion in British submarine. XI blows up". When she came too again, I got a cable saying, "are you all right?" And this could be economically answered by the single word "yes". Hot foot, another cable arrived asking where we were going to and for how long, so this needed a greater expenditure to reply that it was Malta and for least three months. Presumably Sylvia considered that it was better to be a widow than an also ran. I received a third cable asking me if it would be convenient for me to marry her in Malta on a given date. I was able to revert to my original monosyllabic reply. Phyllis and Peter Seccombe very nobly offered their house for the wedding reception and Sylvia arrived out in good order complete with mother and father. Eli, who had forgiven me for his experiences XI, was my best man and we married on August 27th 1929 in Holy Trinity, Sliema. August in Malta can be very hot indeed and our wedding day was no exception.

H.M.S. Champion

1930-31

Following her repairs in Malta, XI underwent trials but during this suffered further damage and it was decided that she should return to Chatham for a major refit. Leslie was appointed to HMS Champion, a cruiser attached to Whale Island as gunnery firing ship. In this capacity they took all the various classes to sea to provide them with practical experience in firing and controlling the guns.

H.M.S. Wallace

1931-32

After about a year in Champion I was promoted to lieutenant commander. Captain Watkins, captain of Champion, was appointed to command the 5th destroyer flotilla and he invited me to come as his squadron gunnery officer and senior staff officer.

The 5th destroyer flotilla consisted of the leader, HMS Wallace, in which I was to serve, and eight destroyers of the 'V' and 'W' class. We were one of three similar flotillas attached to the Home Fleet and the somewhat elderly destroyers were certainly a wonderful advertisement for British ship building. Mass produced during the First World War and intended just to see the war through, they were still going strong and were to fight another war before they were finally retired.

Home fleet routine was unchanged, so in January we started off to Gibraltar on the spring cruise and ran into the worst weather that I'd ever met in the Bay of Biscay. Exercises had to be abandoned and the fleet was hove-to for 24 hours. We were all extremely glad when we made land and anchored at the mouth of the Tagus, just inside the bar.

After Lisbon we paid a short visit to Huelva in Spain and then on to Gibraltar. After I had served a year in Wallace the flotilla was due to pay-off and re-commission and, for the first and only occasion during my time in the Navy I was offered a choice of two jobs. The alternatives were either stay in Wallace for further two years or spend a year in Devonport Gunnery School and then go to the Naval Staff College as a student. Though sorely tempted by the former, I chose the latter.

H.M.S. Vivid

1933

We packed up our flat in Portsmouth and found another one in Devonport. Here our son John was born and as a direct result of this we were joined by Nannie. After my year in Devonport I returned to school once again at the Royal Naval College Greenwich.

R.N. Staff College (Greenwich)

1934

We took a flat in Blackheath and nurse dressed in black and white, pushing a large black pram with white trimmings and closely escorted by a black and white collie dog called Ben, soon became a familiar sight on the Heath. The staff course was interesting but not over exacting as we then did in 12 months, what the modern officer is expected to do in six. In the summer we were given a long period of leave and Sylvia's parents took us with them to Monte Carlo. We drove down to the south in my in-laws big Humber. I earned my keep by acting as the chauffeur while Sylvia, who speaks good French, did duty as courier and though we enjoyed every minute, our duties proved to be somewhat exhausting. The Lady Mother was a big time gambler and my father in law was an enthusiastic sunbather. We would stay with the Lady Mother at the casino until something approaching breakfast time and having returned her to the hotel, we would just have time to swallow a roll and a cup of coffee before Pa-in law wanted to be taken down to the beach. Almost the only sleep we could snatch was during the short period after lunch when having done our trip to the beach, we could relax for an hour or so before the Lady Mother required to be taken to the casino for her pre-dinner session.

Having completed the staff course I was asked if I would be prepared to go to Australia on "exchange" to the Royal Australian Navy. This needed a little consideration as at that time no fares were paid for dependants and to move wife and nurse and child to the other side of the world called for a very large expenditure. However after consideration I accepted.

H.M.S. Pembroke

1935

As I had some time to fill in I was sent to Chatham and took over the duties of trials officer. This entailed a lot of travelling around the country to visit the various shipbuilding firms to check up on the guns and equipment of the ships under construction. It was while I was in Chatham that we learnt the terrible news that our son John had an incurable kidney disease and had only a short time to live. We were faced with the problem of Australia. Should I try to get out of it or should I go alone and leave Sylvia and the boy behind? The medical opinion was that, though there was no hope of a cure, it would probably do John more good than harm, so we decided to carry on together.

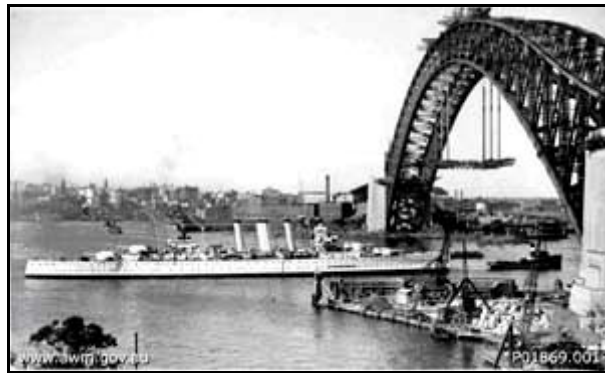
H.M.A.S. Canberra

1935-37

We sailed in SS Orsova, an ancient member of the Orient Line, rapidly approaching the end of her life and running "one class" to Australia. She was a coal burner, very hot and lacking in many modern conveniences, but it was the first long trip that we had done together and we thought that she was fine. Accommodation in Sydney was something of a problem but we fell on our feet, for Sylvia found a delightful flat for us. It was part of an old house, very well converted, and right down by the waters edge at Double Bay. I was to serve on the flagship, H.M.A.S. Canberra, as Squadron Gunnery Officer. The Australian Squadron kept a very nice routine. We spent Christmas in Sydney, which of course occurs in midsummer "Down Under". In January, Sydney starts to become very hot and sticky so the squadron moved off to the south and cooler conditions, including a visit to Tasmania and the Hobart Regatta, returning to

Sydney, when it cooled off, to give leave. After the leave period the weather would start to become a trifle chilly so the squadron headed north, calling at Brisbane for "Show Week" and then cruising up the Great Barrier Reef. After basking in the sun, the ships would hurry south again for the Melbourne Cup, which is equivalent of our Derby, and then back to Sydney for a spot of Christmas leave. This sounds too good to be true and it certainly could not have been much better; what I have left out of this program is the long periods of intensive training, generally spent at Jervis Bay, which resulted in a most efficient squadron.

While we were at Port Moresby, what is now remembered as the Abyssinian crisis boiled up. Off we went through the Torres Strait to Port Darwin and thence to Freemantle where we stored and started to work up to war footing. However the crisis fizzled out, so we went on to Melbourne, but arrived just too late for the Melbourne cup!



HMAS Canberra sailing under the construction site of the Sydney Harbour Bridge 1930

Back to Sydney for the leave period. Sylvia's parents came out to pay us a visit and it was great fun to introduce them to all our friends. In order to provide himself with transport, Mr. Dore bought an elderly, but otherwise excellent "A" model Ford and when their visit was over, he most generously presented it to me.

Later in the year we made a cruise to New Zealand. Our first port of call was Wellington, right in the south of the North Island. I had the Ford on board with me, which we unloaded here. We then moved on to Christchurch. Our visit all too soon came to an end, but for me this marked the beginning of an adventure. With two other officers I had been given four days leave. We planned to leave the Canberra at Christ Church, cross by steamer to Wellington, pick up the Ford and drive the full length of the North Island to rejoin Canberra in Auckland. During this journey we visited Wairaki in the centre of the geyser country, which lives on its tourist trade but we were very lucky to have struck it out of season. The geysers were incredible and varied from enormous gushes of steam blowing into the air, to pools of boiling mud. Everything was most attractive, except that the air is so charged with sulphur that one lives in a permanent smell reminiscent of very bad eggs. For our last night we moved on to Rotorua, which was very similar to Wairaki, but if anything a little more bad eggish. The last leg of the journey took us back on board Canberra at Auckland in time for tea.

I had one more cruise to do before my time in Australia would be up and Sylvia decided she would like to join us for Show Week in Brisbane. Sylvia recruited three other wives and set out in the Ford. She been warned that the going would be rough and it was. The hotels along the route were perhaps not of the highest standard though they certainly gave value for money. The charge at one of these was three shillings sixpence for bed and breakfast, which consisted of as much steak and as many eggs as you care to put away. The trip was over several hundred miles of dirt roads, with a surface consisting of ruts and dust, but both Sylvia and the Ford made it and arrived in one piece.

When I returned to Sydney for my last leave period, our happy two years were marred by the tragedy, which we knew to be hanging over us. Our small son, John died.

I was promoted commander and soon after this we sailed for England in S.S. Strathnaver.



H.M.S. Royal Oak

1937-39

We had an uneventful passage home and then went and stayed with Sylvia's parents, who now had a delightful house in St John's Wood. I was appointed as Squadron Gunnery Officer to the second battle Squadron, to serve on the staff of Rear Admiral Mackinnon, who was flying his flag in HMS Royal Oak. Royal Oak was a Devonport ship, but as she only returned there for leave periods, we decided to make our headquarters in London and found a reasonable flat in Maida Vale. While the ship was in Portland the Munich crisis occurred and just as Mr. Chamberlain took a firm grip of his umbrella, our son Richard Newton made his entry into the world in our flat in London. Business in the fleet was pretty brisk, but Admiral Mackinnon had occasion to send me to the Admiralty to obtain some information. Though my journey was strictly necessary on service grounds, the Admiral was aware of my circumstances and was very kind to tell me that if I got held up for a day in London he would not take it amiss. On the way to Maida Vale I was confronted with newspaper posters saying "British Navy to mobilise". I saw Sylvia for about an hour and then beat it back to Portland. After a hectic period, working up newly commissioned ships, which had been brought forward from reserve, we reverted to what we were told was to be a lasting peace.

When we got back to Devonport, I asked if Richard might be christened on board and Admiral Mackinnon most kindly lent me his quarters for the event. The day started a little trickily for me, as non-brat minded as I am, a wriggling bundle was suddenly thrust into my arms and I was told to carry it on board, but after this, things looked up. I told the Wardroom that the christening was on and if in any of them cared to come along it would be all right, but on this invitation, they turned up in force and the celebration afterwards turned into quite a party. My brother was the medical officer of the Royal Naval College Dartmouth. He came over for the christening, and stood as godfather.

I had expected to stay in Royal Oak for the normal two years but when I had done just over one, our flag captain, Captain T B Drew, told me he was going to Singapore, as flag officer Malaya, and asked me if I would like to go with him as his staff officer operations. I was keen to go with him on the job carried with it the additional appointment as naval attaché to Siam, or Thailand as it was starting to be called.

H.M.S. Terror

1939-40

Sylvia, Richard, Nannie (who had never left us) and I embarked on the P&O, S.S. Canton. Canton was only on her second voyage and was very comfortable. The journey was made even more desirable by the fact that our fares were now paid for us. In Singapore, we moved in to our official quarters Naval Bungalow. It was comparatively old, built of wood and mounted on stilts. The drawing room, in common with the day nursery, was a veranda, open to the world except for

rattan blinds which let down at night. There was no glass and the windows were filled with latticework and as intended this let in the maximum amount of air, inevitably it also let in the equivalent amount of noise. Naval Bungalow was in the part of Singapore called Alexandra. It was some 12 miles from the naval base where I worked and entirely surrounded by army officers quarters. Pre-war life in Singapore certainly was luxurious, everything was very expensive and the standard very high, but the allowances were good so that we got by. For the first time in our lives, we employed a domestic staff of four and a gardener and owned two cars with a driver.

My duties as naval attaché used to take me to Bangkok three times a year and I could either go by train or fly. Flying boats used to leave Singapore in the afternoon and after a night at Penang and a very early start, I would be my office in time to start work next morning. Each of my visits started with a heavy round of calls and owing to the language problem, finding my way for a place to place presented something of a problem. Siamese is most difficult as it is entirely tonal and to the uneducated ear, the same noise, with undetectable variations, may have several meanings. This makes it impossible just pick up a few words and phrases as one can in other countries. Bangkok is a fascinating place. It has been called the Venice of the East since it is intersected with canals called Kongs. A large portion of the population lives permanently afloat in boats, which resemble the Chinese sampans. Having so much water about the place inevitably breeds mosquitoes and the Bangkok variety are the size of humming birds and as hungry as a wolf, at least that is how I found them. At dinner parties the ladies would find large bags, folded over the back of their chairs, into these they would wriggle before venturing their legs under the dining table. The gentlemen were expected to provide their own protection in the shape of mosquito boots. The Siamese people are delightful, nearly all those, both men and women, I had to meet officially, either spoke excellent English or French and I found my visits to Bangkok very enjoyable.

(Sylvia accompanied him on a visit from 28th November to 13th December 1939, following which Leslie wrote a report on the naval situation which is in the National Archive at Kew "Report by Commander Brownfield, Naval Attaché at Bangkok, of his visit to Thailand" FO 371/24755)

During our first year in Singapore, we lived a very happy and carefree life. War clouds were gathering but, somehow it was difficult to fully realise how serious was the situation. Then came the blow for at teatime one Sunday afternoon, we had a message that we were at war with Germany. I felt that I should do something so changed into uniform and drove out the naval base and when I arrived, I found that all the staff, from the Admiral down had exactly the same idea. Having congregated we tried to decide what there was to be done and the answer was nothing. Our war plan was ready and was automatically put into operation, so feeling both worried and deflated we all went home again.

When the war was a year old, we sailed for England in the S.S. Duchess of York. Though her official standing was that of a hired transport, she was still in peacetime trim and very comfortable. In time of war, the first consideration must be the fighting efficiency of the ship and in the case of a merchant ship this boils down to her ability to survive. The Duchess was an army controlled Transport and as such, there was an army officer who was in overall command of the service personnel. I approached "O.C. troops" who gave us his blessing to improve our defences. The Duchess mounted a six-inch gun and three-inch anti-aircraft gun, so naval crews, together with the necessary lookouts and control parties, were provided for them and we started to train up army personnel to augment them. From Colombo a cruiser escorted us across the Indian Ocean and during the passage the Duchess of York carried out a 6 in firing at a target towed by the cruiser and the cruiser carried out what is technically known as throw off firing, with the Duchess acting as her target. We called at Mombassa and then went on to Durban. On the next leg of the journey to Cape Town, I learnt that the Duchess had been ordered to call at Trinidad and Halifax in Nova Scotia on her way home to England. This meant two crossings of the Atlantic at a time when this ocean particularly to the North was extremely unhealthy due to enemy submarines and aircraft. As Richard was only two and half it seemed a bit unfair to expect him to swim for it, so Sylvia and I and decided most reluctantly the family should disembark at Cape Town and remain there, until some safe opportunity of getting home presented itself.

We spent three days in Cape Town and during this period we rented a flat, furnished it, bought Sylvia small car and got her a full-time job with naval intelligence. This latter presented little difficulty as Sylvia had been working for the Navy since the start of the war. Our reason for calling in at Halifax was to embark Canadian troops for passage to England and when they were

on board, the ship was filled to capacity. I had approached the officer commanding the Canadian troops and he had agreed to make his Bren guns available together with their crews. We mounted 50 of these guns, on improvised mountings, round the upper deck as a short-range anti-aircraft defence. We then started to teach the soldiers how to fire at aircraft, since their previous training had only been concerned with their opposite numbers on the ground. We also embarked number of naval officers and ratings so that our defence teams were considerably strengthened. We sailed from Halifax in the large convoy formed up in the usual square formation and in the middle of the square was the battleship HMS Valiant. This gave most people a great sense of security but an exception to these, were the naval officers who knew the Valliant had been re-fitting in America, was manned by a skeleton passage crew, and had been placed on the convoy for her protection and not for ours. As the Duchess was now something of a floating arsenal we were almost sorry that the voyage passed without incident and we would have liked to have had a crack at some unsuspecting aircraft that had approached a bit too close.



H.M.S. Ramillies

1941-43

After my return to England I was offered the command of the escort vessel HMS Pelican. She was at the time refitting and I was therefore sent on leave. As the Pelican was to return to the East coast convoys in the North Sea I started to muster my winter woollies with the inevitable result that I got a sudden appointment as executive officer, which is second in command, of the battleship HMS Ramillies. Ramillies was destined to go to the Far East and was re-fitting at Camel Lairds so I joined her at Birkenhead. This was the fourth (of the five) of this class of battleship on which I had served, and to those who did not know me, I must have appeared as something of a wonder boy since naturally after a day or two to get my eye in again, I knew her from stem to stern. We moved into the Gladstone Dock and this was the signal to the Hun to start his air blitz on Liverpool. In dry dock we were a sitting duck and a very attractive target, but although a great deal of iron fell all round us, we escaped without a scratch. When we undocked we sailed for Scapa Flow to work up. When we left Scapa we learnt that we were to be the flagship of the second in command of a new Far Eastern Fleet, which was about to be formed, and that we would fly the flag of Rear Admiral Bonham Carter. We sailed for Freetown and on passage we learned the grim news of the loss of the Prince of Wales and the Repulse. This tragedy upset any plans for forming a far Eastern Fleet and on arrival, Bonham was ordered to haul down his flag and return to England. We then sailed on to Cape Town where I spent four happy days with Sylvia, Richard and Nannie. We refuelled at Durban and then went on to Killindini.

By this time Singapore had fallen and we marked time for 10 very pleasant days but wondered if our journey had been really necessary; after which we sailed for Colombo. We only stayed a few days in Colombo and then went round to Trincomolee. The hospital ship, the Vita was at Trinco and my brother, now a surgeon captain, was the medical officer in charge. From Trinco we sailed to join a force which was so short lived that I am unable to remember for certain if it ever had a name, I believe we called ourselves The Third Battle Squadron. It consisted of the Warspite, flying the flag of Admiral Sir James Somerville, the four elderly "R" class battle ships, Revenge, Royal Sovereign, Resolution and Ramillies, two aircraft carriers and a job lot of destroyers. We assembled at Addu Atoll, which is a ring of coral islands surrounding a considerable deep-water anchorage, and situated roughly in the centre of the Indian Ocean and just south of the equator. Though our force looked quite imposing on paper, we were, in fact, a pretty good collection of 'Old Ming'. Our function was to keep the Japanese fleet out of the Indian Ocean and this was a pretty tough proposition so that we were something of a 'thin red line'. For the next three weeks we

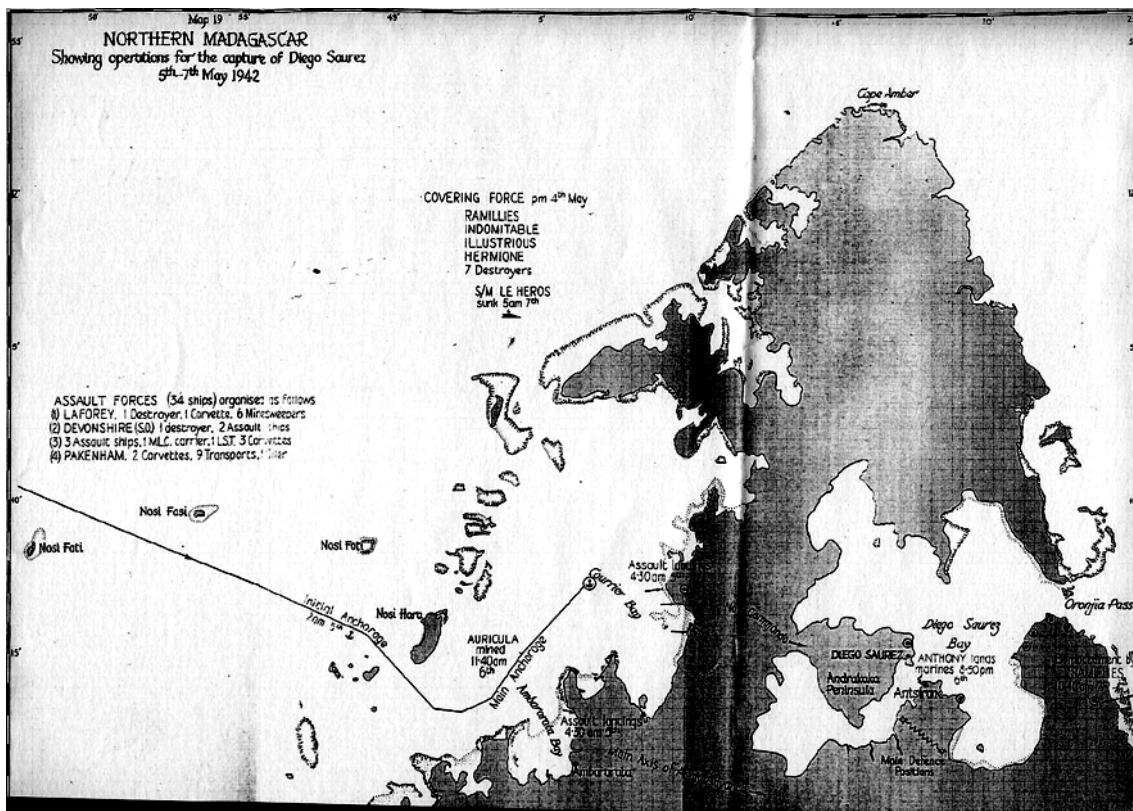
steamed backwards and forwards across the equator, only returning to Addu Atoll to refuel. The old "Rs" had only been designed for short trips in the North Sea and, in this climate they were no bed of roses. In spite of the uncomfortable conditions I thoroughly enjoyed these weeks, as it was great to be back with the fleet again and keep station and manoeuvre as a battle squadron.

The Japanese staged a big air attack on Ceylon in which the aircraft carrier Hermes was sunk just off Trincomalee. This attack was carried out by Japanese naval airmen, who for once played by the rules and left the hospital ship Vita unmolested to pick up survivors. The cruisers Cornwall and Dorsetshire, who were on their way to join us, were also intercepted and sunk, but the Japs did not make contact with us, in the main force.

In March 1942 Admiral Sir James Somerville had been appointed Commander in Chief Eastern Fleet with his HQ at Kilindi in East Africa. The fleet consisted of two large carriers and the small carrier Hermes, The battleship Warspite, Resolution, Ramillies, Royal Sovereign and Revenge, two heavy and five light cruisers, sixteen destroyers and seven submarines The R class battleships were old slow and ill protected and might prove more of a liability than an asset. He decided to divide his fleet into a fast division consisting of Indomitable, Formidable, Warspite and the cruisers Cornwall, Emerald, and Enterprise; and a slow division consisting of the R class battleships and the remaining cruisers. The destroyers were shared equally between the two divisions. The aircraft carrier Hermes and two of the cruisers were in Trincomalee, when two large Japanese fleets entered the Indian Ocean. The first Japanese fleet steamed north and attacked merchant shipping in the Bay of Bengal, the second under Admiral Yamamoto with his aircraft carriers, which had made the attack on Pearl Harbour, approached Ceylon and made air attacks on Colombo and Trincomalee. Hermes and the cruisers had gone to sea but were caught off the east coast of Ceylon and sunk by repeated attacks from the air. The survivors being rescued by the hospital ship Vita. The Japanese fleets failed to make contact with either of the British divisions which were to the south west of Ceylon and withdrew to the east.

What happened then to change the situation I do not know, but our force was disbanded. This was as well for the old battleships were beginning to feel a bit shaky. Ramillies had enjoyed a rather easier life than her sisters and was in rather better trim and we received a signal ordering us to sail for Durban. We were to be the headquarters ship for an expedition to capture the French naval base at Diego Suarez in Madagascar. This was necessary since the French in Madagascar were "Vichy" and in consequence, it was feared that the base might become available to the Japanese. We were to hoist the flag of Admiral Syfret and our mission explained why we needed so large a staff.

We sailed on 25th April 1942 with a veritable armada of troopships, destroyers, frigates and minesweepers. In command of the landside of the operation was Major-General Bob Sturgis of the Royal Marines. We planned to land our troops on the East coast of Madagascar and from there, they were to advance across the country and take the Diego Suarez from landward. As we approached the coast, we stood by at action stations all night, but we met with no trouble. The troops landed unopposed at dawn on and went right ahead towards their objective. When it seemed to be all over bar the shouting, our troops ran up against the French, dug in, in a very strong defensive position. This could have been forced but it would have meant some stiff fighting and, probably heavy casualties on both sides. Normally in war, the object of the exercise is to survive yourself and to destroy as many of the enemy as possible, but on this occasion the briefing was, for diplomatic reasons, that we should kill as few Frenchmen as possible. For this reason the advance was halted. The General decided to lay on a diversion. He embarked the Marine detachment from Ramillies in a destroyer, HMS Anthony, with orders to land in Diego Suarez itself under cover of darkness and go through the motions of taking the place by storm. The detachment was only 120 strong and it seemed that they might be up against something. The Anthony sneaked in under the



French batteries, made its way up an unknown harbour in pitch dark, backed her stern against a jetty and the Marines jumped ashore. The major first led his gallant band to surround the telephone exchange, without actually molesting it, and the French not entirely without reason, panicked and broadcast that they were being overrun by the hordes of Attila. The French capitulated.

The fine harbour of Diego Suarez could only be approached through the narrow Oronjii Pass three quarters of a mile wide and heavily defended. The Naval base of Antsirane, the principal objective lies on a peninsular between two of the four of the small bays enclosed within the main harbour. The bay cuts deeply into the northern tip of Madagascar and forms an isthmus which is between two and a half to six miles wide and to the west of it lie several bays which although very difficult to access through reefs and islands, could accommodate a large fleet. On 4th May the two convoys of transports and the protecting warships met up. The transports including the large liners Winchester Castle, Sobieski, Duchess of Athol and Oransay covered the last 90 miles under the cover of darkness under the protection of the cruiser Devonshire, while the destroyers and mine sweepers cleared a passage into the bay. At 3.30 am the assault flotillas moved inshore to the three appointed beaches. By 5.00pm the Andrakaka peninsular had been seized, but the army was held up by strong defences three miles short of Antsirane. In consequence the warships which had been waiting off Oronjia Pass since early in the afternoon were unable to enter the bay. Soon after 8.00pm the Anthony steamed through the pass with 50 marines from the Ramillies on board. The first attempt to get alongside was frustrated by a strong offshore wind. She then made a stern board and by extremely skilful ship handling in darkness, in a strange harbour and under fire managed to hold the ship's stern against the quay long enough for the marines to scramble ashore. Their effect on the garrison was such that the main attack from the west was completely successful and by 3.00am the army was able to report the complete occupation of the town. At 10.40 on the 7th the Ramillies, Devonshire and Hermione started to bombard the defences but after 10 minutes it was learnt that the Orinjia peninsula and the harbour defences had surrendered. By 4.30 the minesweepers had swept the channel and the main fleet entered Diego Suarez bay. In 60 hours from the first landing the operation was completed for the loss of a corvette which struck a mine. There was good inter service co-operation and the ability to take troops over thousands of miles of ocean and land them with carrier borne air cover was well demonstrated.

These things took rather longer to happen than it takes to tell them and by the time the French surrendered, Ramillies was pounding the batteries, at the entrance to Diego Suarez harbour with her 15-inch guns. This was a most spectacular proceeding but when our gunners took over the

battery, they reported somewhat peevishly, that the only real damage that we had done was to totally destroy the lavatories.

We entered Diego Suarez harbour at about noon on the same day and as soon as we were anchored, our Royal Marines returned on-board. They were unscathed but practically unrecognisable, being covered with a layer of red dust, which is one of the local features. Then started a period of getting the naval base back into working order. The South African Air Force had done a bit of softening up and their bombs had done quite a lot of damage. There were large quantities of army stores to land. The French still held a major portion of the island but for the moment, hostilities were halted.

On 29th May a calm and delightful evening we were happily at anchor and the cruiser Frobisher was lying close alongside us in the next billet. A small seaplane suddenly appeared over the hills and glided down as if to land between Frobisher and ourselves. As she came down, she flashed a signalling lantern as if trying to attract our attention. Our anti-aircraft guns were closed up, but we did not open fire for two reasons. The first of these was that the aircraft showed no hostile intent and as she had no distinguishing marks might well be a privately owned French machine, the second and even more compelling reason was that she was flying so low that had we fired, we should have plastered Frobisher and the other ships in

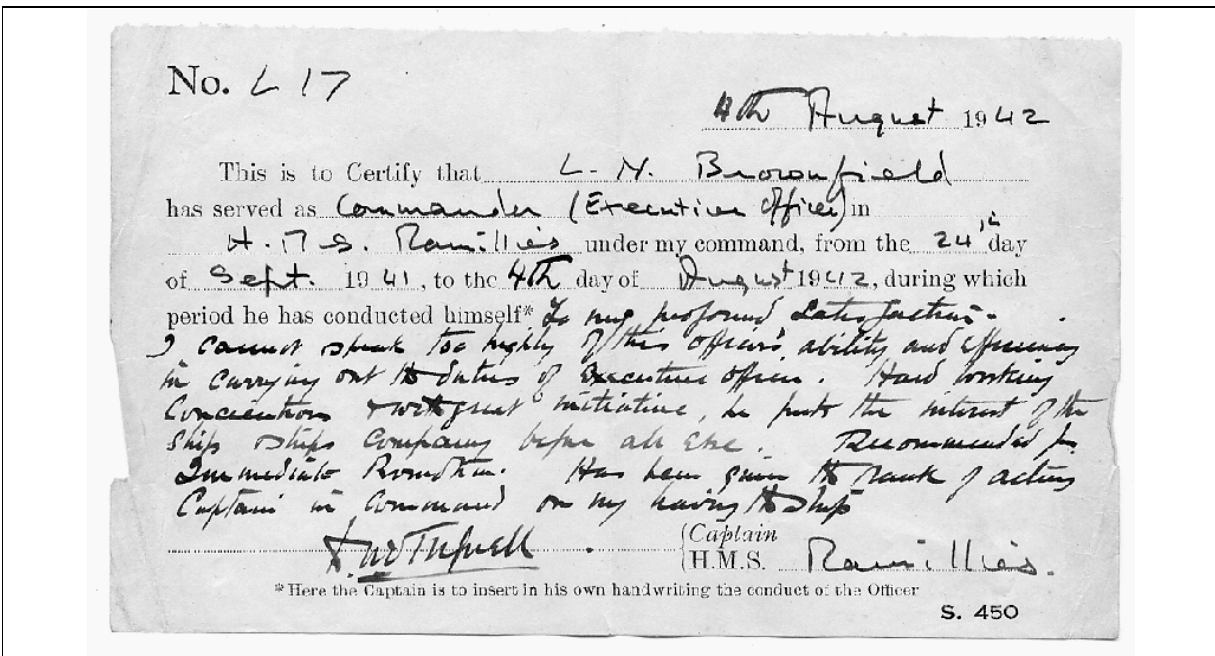
the anchorage. Just as she was about touch down the aircraft opened up the throttle and flipped out of sight behind a hill. The whole episode lasted little over a minute. When you do not know what is in the bottle the only safe thing to do is to assume that it is poison, so Ramillies and Frobisher weighed anchor and put to sea. The Air Force did a search all round, to a depth of 200 miles, but sighted nothing so Ramillies returned the anchorage but Frobisher went on her way. That evening, just as I sat down to supper, there was a very considerable bump, all the lights went out and, almost immediately, the ship started to list. Having the aircraft in mind, I thought that we had been bombed and nipped up forward to see if I could locate the damage. We were going down by the bows and listing to port. The lower boom was just going underwater with a picket boat made fast to it. I called away the boat and got her to safety, but the only thing that could be established was that we had been holed in the port side forward and there must be a considerable amount of flooding. The ship now seemed to reach equilibrium, although she was still at a nasty angle. Things looked hopeful, providing that we could control the flooding. A tanker, which was anchored in the berth that Frobisher had vacated now blew up and sank. From this it was pretty obvious that we had both been torpedoed, but the trouble was, that we had no means of knowing how many more torpedoes there might be sculling around. Our picket boat which I ordered to patrol around the ship, now added to the gaiety by dropping two depth charges with which she was armed, on an unidentified target. Having established that the flooding was under control, we weighed anchor and moved to a narrow arm of the harbour and moored head and stern and with our bows to seaward in order to present the least possible target to any further attack. Then started an intensive period of making the ship seaworthy. The fleet constructor officer was flown up to advise us and we shored and pumped and counter flooded. We put two of our heavy bower anchors, and all their cable, together with a great many stores from forward, right aft on the quarterdeck to lighten our bows and in four days we had the ship back on an even keel and as watertight as she could be made.

While we were engaged with this, we learnt what had hit us. The commandos found two strangers ashore who promptly opened fire when challenged. By the time that the commandos had registered their displeasure at this unfriendly act, there wasn't much left of the visitors but they had on them a notebook written up in a kind of Japanese shorthand. Captain Tufnell was a Japanese interpreter and with the help of some illustrations, he was able to unravel enough to establish that our assailant had been a midget submarine. This midget, together with the seaplane, must have been brought to the vicinity by parent submarines but whether our picket boat had damaged the midget or if their parent had just abandoned them, we were unable to find out. A little later, the Japanese issued a communiqué, claiming that they had sunk a cruiser of the Frobisher class and torpedoed a battleship of the Queen Elizabeth class, which they had left on fire and sinking. Our Admiralty were able to counter this with complete truth, by saying that no cruiser of the Frobisher class had been sunk and that no battleship of the Queen Elizabeth class had been at Diego Suarez. On June 3rd the ship was sufficiently patched up and we sailed for Durban with a destroyer escort and though the passage was made in perfect weather and we met with no opposition, there was a general feeling of relief when we were safely in harbour and secured alongside. When we were

moved into dry dock, it was possible to inspect the damage and it was evident that Ramillies was destined to finish up in a scrappers yard and not in action. We had a very large hole in our side and two magazines had been penetrated. Fifteen-inch cordite was skulking around in one and mangled four-inch ammunition in the other; why neither of them blew up, is happily an unsolved mystery.

The following appears in an article about HMS Ramillies on Wikipedia:
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Ramillies_\(07\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Ramillies_(07))

“Ramillies was a part of a British fleet put together hurriedly in March of 1942 under Admiral [James Somerville](#) in an attempt to prevent [Japanese](#) naval forces from cutting the sea lanes to [India](#). The scratch fleet consisted of two aircraft carriers and three old battleships of the [Revenge Class](#). Fortunately the main part of the British fleet did not meet this crack Japanese fleet. After causing great destruction to Allied shipping, sinking an aircraft carrier and several other smaller warships, the Japanese withdrew. In May 1942 Ramillies was still in the [Indian Ocean](#) and was sent to cover the [Allied invasion of Madagascar](#). On [29 May 1942](#), a reconnaissance plane from the Japanese submarine [I-10](#) spotted Ramillies at anchor in [Diego Suarez](#) harbour. Ramillies changed berth after the plane was seen. However, the Japanese submarines [I-16](#) and [I-20](#) launched two [midget submarines](#), one of which, commanded by Lieutenant Saburo Akieda, managed to penetrate the harbour and to fire its two torpedoes. The first torpedo severely damaged Ramillies at about 20:25; the second sank the oil tanker *British Loyalty* at 21:20. Lieutenant Akieda came under [depth charge](#) attack from the [corvettes](#) [Genista](#) and [Thyme](#) but managed to beach his submarine and flee inland with Petty Officer Masami Takemoto. Both were killed in a fire fight with [Royal Marines](#) three days later. Ramillies was reported sunk by the Japanese, but in fact was merely severely damaged. She was towed to [Durban](#) for temporary repairs, then in August 1942 she returned to [Plymouth](#) under her own steam and was back in service in June 1943.”



The dockyard got down to patching us up and we had a great deal to sort out. This still left us with time to enjoy the joys of Durban. Sylvia was in Cape Town, but I had the good fortune to run into an old friend I had known in Australia and he arranged for us to have the use of his Secretary's flat. Sylvia arrived and we settled in although the flat was extremely small. Richard and Nannie had been left in Cape Town and we had no thought of getting them up but we became very friendly with the caretaker of the block, who thought that we should do something about it and in spite of the rule that no children were allowed, offered us the loan of a vacant flat. Richard and Nannie joined us. The three weeks together, which was the extent of Sylvia's leave from her job, raced by. When Sylvia had to go back to Cape Town, I sadly went back to live on-board. However owing to a crisis, Captain Tufnell was taken away from us and appointed to command HMS Royal Sovereign. Tuffy was a grand captain, we were all very sorry to see him go, but I had little time to

mourn his departure, as I was promoted to acting captain and appointed to command Ramillies in his place. To be promoted from commander to captain, and to assume command in the same ship, is a most unusual and somewhat upsetting experience. The commander lives in the wardroom and in close contact with the other officers with whom in leisure moments, he hopes to be on backslapping terms. He has a finger in every pie and if he's any good at his job, will be known, liked and trusted by the ship's company. The captain on the other hand is of necessity, rather a remote figure. He lives by himself and though responsible for everything in his command, delegates the detailed conduct of day-to-day affairs to his officers. I need not have worried however, the loyalty of the officers was wonderful and they treated me as if I was the most senior captain in the Royal Navy. Living by yourself after living in a crowd, takes a bit of getting used to and the novelty of gazing adoringly at my four stripes was beginning to wear a bit thin, when the Vita, with Owen on board came into Durban. Durban dockyard made a good job of patching us up, but they could not work miracles. When we sailed, the ship was seaworthy but due to the extensive internal damage that we had suffered, we had no method of controlling either our 15-inch or a six-inch guns, which rendered them virtually useless. Our anti-aircraft armament was intact and this we hoped was all we might require.

At Cape Town, I spent four happy days with Sylvia and then received my orders. Ramillies was to sail for Freetown and then on to Gibraltar and Devonport. The first leg of our passage was not without incident. One night we were steaming along, with two escorting destroyers when we picked up an echo on our radar of something right astern. Owing to the length of the passage I was steaming at only 12 knots, in order to save fuel and the echo gradually started to creep up on us. From its sudden appearance and behaviour we consider that this might well be a U-boat, which had surfaced and now was steaming on the same course as we were, which suggested that they had spotted us. Right astern she was comparatively harmless, so I called up the destroyers on a shaded signalling a lamp, to tell them of my deductions and intentions. My plan was to allow the U-boat to close until she was within range my four-inch guns and then fire star shells to illuminate her. The firing of the star shell was to be the signal for me to increase to full speed and for the destroyers to detach and try and do their stuff. We waited patiently as the range gradually decreased but just as I was about to give the order to fire, the echo disappeared. I increased speed and detached one destroyer to hunt but she found nothing. Freetown to Gibraltar was uneventful but at Gib, the ship had to turn inside the harbour and berth alongside the detached mole. To a newly-promoted captain, Gib. harbour looked very small and Ramillies very big, but all went well and I felt very grateful to Captain Collard, who in the long past Royal Sovereign days, had made his two-stripers practise handling the ship. At Gib, we embarked what seemed like the entire British army who required to be taken to England and we sailed for Devonport escorted by three destroyers. Owing to the submarine and air menace, we were routed right out into the Atlantic and north of the Scilly Isles. In wartime, all lights to assist with navigation are normally extinguished but on request, they are lit up for a short period. I asked for this to be down, but just as I was rounding the Scillies, before shaping a course to the eastward, error crept in and they were put out again. This left us with destroyers spread out on either side careering along at 18 knots straight for the Wolf Rock. We then ran into an unscheduled flotilla of motor torpedo boats, but succeeded in avoiding any argument with either them or the rock. I heaved a sigh of relief when we sighted Plymouth breakwater, there we were greeted with a long signal telling me not to steer on a certain course owing to the danger of magnetic mines. Again we triumphed, and shortly were berthed safely alongside the wall in the dockyard.

We were now to be in the dockyard hands for a long time so after about two months, when we had completed all leave giving, we were reduced to a maintenance crew. This meant that I lost my 4th stripe, though I remained as commander in command, but this was not for long, as at the end of the year, I was promoted to captain. This meant I had to leave Ramillies. This I did with great regret. She was a splendid ship and I was very proud to have had command of her for eight months.

I went along to the Admiralty and in my newly acquired and exalted rank no longer queued in the Second Sea Lord's office but was interviewed by the naval secretary to the first Lord. I was offered the post of chief staff officer Freetown and the next step was for me to wait on Admiral HB Rawlings who was about to take over as Flag Officer West Africa, in order that he might give me the once over. The interview was most informal, dealing with what I did in my spare time rather

than regarding my professional qualifications. Apparently, I passed muster for I was fixed for the job and this was the start of a happy period from which I emerged, not only a great admirer of "HB", but also his personal friend. I joined HMS Sussex at Greenock for the trip out. Whilst on passage Sussex received orders to intercept and destroy the German ship Herborg, a tanker, which was attempting to run our blockade, I volunteered to take charge of the navigational plot while we searched for her. The intelligence was good and it is not for me to say if it was due to good luck or good management but we picked her up at the place and time, which the plot predicted. The difficulty now was to positively identify her before taking offensive action, but in this we were *greatly assisted by a Focker Wolf, who by her conduct, made it clear that they were both on the same side. It was the Herborg, and after a long and spirited, but one-sided action, the Sussex sank her by gunfire.*

H.M.S. Eland

1943

Freetown was not an attractive tourist centre. The town itself, which consisted mainly of corrugated iron shanties, was smelly, dusty and extremely hot. The mosquitoes were ravenous and highly qualified to distribute malaria. There were a variety of highly poisonous insects, including scorpions, which used to hide in one's shoes and such of the natives with which I came in contact were dirty, untrustworthy and expert thieves. In the rainy season and it poured almost without ceasing for two months.

We were very busy in Freetown but before the year was out Admiral Rawlings was appointed as Flag Officer Levant and Eastern Mediterranean, with his headquarters in Alexandria and I was to go with him. I arrived in Cairo at 11 o'clock on Christmas night 1943.

H.M.S. Nile

1943-45

Sylvia was still in Cape Town and I wondered if he would not be possible for us to get together. On investigation, I found that as the family were living in South Africa of their own freewill, there was no objection to them entering Egypt and I was able to arrange a passage. One fine day, I collected Sylvia, Richard and Nannie at Suez and motored them across the desert to Alexandria. I had rented a very charming little villa, in easy walking distance of the office, and surrounded by a rose garden. Each month, when I paid the rent, I felt that I must have bought the place outright but this was typical of Alexandria in those days, there was nothing that you could not obtain, providing that you were prepared to pay for it and essentials and luxuries were equally expensive.

We settled down to a very happy time and Sylvia joined-up with our intelligence department. Business was brisk, but not nearly as arduous as in Freetown; the war seemed a very long way away. An occasional enemy plane used to come over at night, but the chief menace was from our own anti-aircraft guns, due to the well-known truth that what goes up must come down. In the course of our wanderings, we frequently met the late King of Greece. He was then the Crown Prince and with the Crown Princess Fredericka, was resident in Alexandria, until the Hun could be removed from Greece and he could return to his own country. They had three young children, one of whom is the present King of Greece, who were guarded by an English nanny and she and our Nannie got in touch with each other, so the children used to play together and have tea in each other's houses. This presented a slight complication to us as Richard had another firm friend in Ali, who was the son of our Egyptian cook. Since Richard had not yet acquired any very strong sense of social distinction, it sometimes required considerable tact to ensure that Ali was not about the place, when royalty came to tea. When we left Alexandria, I sold Richard's bicycle to the present King, gave the children a slippery slide, which they had much appreciated when in our garden and Princess Fredericka presented Richard with a wrist watch.

Towards the end of the year, the Germans were being forced to pull their forces out of Greece. I had the good fortune to be able to accompany HB when he sailed in the cruiser HMS Ajax, now fully repaired after being commanded by my brother in law, at the battle of the River Plate, for the reoccupation of Athens.

HB was appointed as second-in-command of the British Pacific Fleet and he asked to take me with him, but this could not be arranged. About a month after he left, I turned over to a new chief staff officer and we started on our way back to England. While we were on passage home, Germany capitulated and we actually arrived in London to stay with Mr Dore, on "V.E." day.



H.M.S. Apollo

1945-6

I was appointed to command HMS Apollo, a fast minelayer, who with her sister ships Manxman and Ariadne were to join the British Pacific Fleet. I joined Apollo at Southampton, where she had been refitting. Ariadne had been delayed, so taking Manxman under my wing; we set out on our long journey. Apollo was a lovely little ship, designed with a speed of 40 knots and beautiful to handle. We sailed through the Suez Canal, refuelled at Aden and then had a rather sticky passage in the monsoon to Columbo. Here we stayed for three days and my brother, who was in charge of the Naval Hospital at Trincomalee, was able to fly over and spend them with me. After Singapore we had expected to be back at war again, but were ordered to go to Melbourne and there to land all our mines. We had to remain at Melbourne for 10 days, while we cleaned our boilers and during this period, Japan capitulated. This explained why we should not want our mines, and shortly afterwards, we were told there we were to act as fast despatch vessels to the fleet. This meant that we should be carrying V.I.Ps, mails and important stores from place to place and we could not help feeling that this was a bit of a comedown, as it reduced us from fighting ship to the role of fleet auxiliary. From Melbourne we went to Sydney. Entering Sydney Harbour is always a thrill, however many times you may have done it. Turning in through the heads - the high promontories on either side of the entrance - this beautiful harbour suddenly opens up with the bridge as a backcloth. It was grand seeing it again and I felt almost as if I were coming home. We secured alongside

at Garden Island, which is the naval dockyard, and here I found the first big change, as it is no longer an island, as a very large dry dock has been built and the island has been joined up to the mainland. During the next week, we loaded the ship with stores and embarked personnel that were to be taken up to the fleet. On our way north, the Japanese signed the surrender and we headed for Hong Kong, arriving there just too late for the actual reoccupation. Hong Kong is another wonderful harbour, which like Sydney, is entered through a narrow passage between high ground so that you come on it suddenly.

To function as a dispatch vessel turned out to be a wonderful job. The next year we spent most of our time at sea and provided I arrived at my next port of call with reasonable expedition, nobody seemed to mind how I got there or how fast I went. Our turn of speed gave considerable latitude I was able to do a virtual tour of the Western Pacific.

After a few days in Hong Kong, we were off again to Yokohama. We missed the signing of the surrender, but I knew that Admiral Rawlings was up there, flying his flag in the battleship King George VI and I was keen to see him again. As soon as we put our nose into the harbour, we got a signal ordering us to secure alongside the flagship. The next day HB waved a magic wand and with three of my officers I went ashore and found a "self-drive" Jeep waiting for us, so with me at the wheel, we set off to tour Japan. As we only had six hours at our disposal, the tour had to be a bit limited; we started off to Tokyo. Our route first took us through what had been a mainly industrial area but the American air force had dealt with it with firebombs and made a very thorough job of it. All that was left were dozens of factory chimneys, with no factories buttoned on to them; this was varied by an occasional safe, standing lonely on its plinth in a field of weeds. Tokyo did not seem to have been much damaged and was very crowded and busy. A large number of advertisements, in English or near English, offered a variety of attractions which indicated that the population had wasted no time in getting down to the task of relieving the American occupation force of its dollars. We had a look round and then had a picnic lunch in a park adjacent to the Imperial Palace. After lunch we struck out into the country, without any particular objective but we covered a good many miles. The scenery was most attractive but what particularly caught my eye were the small children. These had gone into business in a big way, lining all vantage points. As we passed they cheered, waved American flags and made the "V" sign, so we must have been a sad disappointment to them since we had neither dollars nor occupational currency.

On our way south from Japan we went to Shanghai and the first time up the Yangtze and Wangpoo was a great experience. Shanghai, which had once been one of the brightest spots, was very drab and dull. After a short breather in Hong Kong, we started off once again to Shanghai, with our final destination as Kobe. The trip through the Inland Sea up to Kobe was most interesting and at one moment rather too exciting, as we ran into a thick bank of fog while going through a narrow swept channel through the mine fields. From Kobe I took a party of officers to have a look at Hiroshima, which was just clear of contamination from the atom bomb. After this we returned again to Hong Kong and here had to enter dry dock for some minor repairs. While in dry dock we gave four performances of a pantomime, which I had written and which we had been rehearsing called "King Cola of Rum and Coca" this was a great success, though we were not able to give further performances because the "leading lady" an ordinary signalman called Niblet, left the ship. Perhaps this was just as well. From Hong Kong we were ordered to go to Sydney for a rest period. We refuelled at Darwin and then went down inside the barrier Reef, in slow time, so that everyone might have a good look at this beautiful spot. While we were in Sydney our second engineer Lieutenant-Commander Tim Thomas, became engaged to an Australian girl and we arranged the wedding for them. This was followed by a reception for about 200 guests and made a wonderful last event, before our final departure from Australia. We embarked our usual load of passengers and stores and started up north again for Hong Kong. The weather was perfect and we had a very easy passage, which was as well, as some of us had not found the rest period quite as restful as it might have been. As we were trotting along, we came up with one of our cruisers and her captain asked if we could keep company with him for a couple of days and do some exercises together. This offer I was delighted to accept, but as we were about to turn to on the second day, news was brought to me on the bridge that a carboy of sulphuric acid, which we were carrying as part of our cargo, had burst and emptied its contents over a quantity of small arms ammunition. This was not a good thing, so I decided to get rid of the contaminated ammunition. I made a signal to the cruiser saying, "regret exercises must be delayed while I turn into wind to dump some dangerous explosives" and added as a waggish afterthought, "take no notice if my stern blows off". Like a flash I got a reply "of course we shall overlook your social indiscretions". The days the British Pacific Fleet were fast drawing to a close. Most the major units had already sailed for home and as the need for us was getting less and less, we were ordered to return to the United Kingdom. We sailed for England, crowded with passengers who wanted the trip home. First we went in to Devonport, to land the West countrymen, then on to Portsmouth. We left Portsmouth at 6 o'clock in the evening and almost as we cleared the harbour, we ran into a thick fog, so we spent the night groping our way along chiefly by radar. The fog lifted just as we got to Sheerness and Garrison point was a welcome sight. After disembarking ammunition, we went up the Medway and secured alongside in Chatham dockyard. Sylvia brought Richard down to see me and this started something of a party.

Royal Naval College, Greenwich

1946-49



Both to my amazement and delight, since I considered it to be a most outstanding job, I was appointed as captain of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. Greenwich had been running at reduced power during the war and it was now necessary to open it up again and put it back on its pre-war footing. Bomb damage to the college had not been extensive but one part that had taken a knock was the end of the block which contained both the admiral's and the captain's houses. The captain's house is part of a very beautiful building and is right down beside the river. As was the custom when the palace was built, all principal rooms face north and are inclined to be as cold as charity; despite this it is still a lovely house and a joy to live in. By the time that I had got down to inspect the house, the greater part of the damage was being made good but I was told that, as there was no furniture available, all

that could be immediately made ready for my use, would be a bachelor quarter. This might have been catastrophic, but Sylvia had just inherited a large amount of very fine furniture, so at my urgent request, the decoration of the house was completed and we moved in with our own bits-and-pieces, which might have been made for it.

By far the most intriguing part of my duties was to get the sub lieutenants course going again. The subs came along in batches of about 100 and each batch stayed for two terms, so that in all there were 200 in residence. Beside mathematical and scientific subjects and a junior war course, that I used to run, the subs did a general course of education grouped in a tutorial system on the lines of a University. There were many out-of-school activities and of these, amateur dramatics were very popular. Commander Peter Osborne was our producer and his skill was far above anything that an amateur might hope for and beside his natural flair, he had been on the professional stage. His first effort at Greenwich was to produce the play within the play from "The Midsummer Night's Dream" dressed in modern naval uniform; all the mortals were in blue and the fairy folk in white, a brilliant concept that fitted exactly. This show was the college's entry for the Royal Naval drama Festival and it walked it. Seeing all the talent available gave me ideas.

Now it is time to introduce George, though chronologically he should have appeared much earlier. Captain George Duncan OBE, MC., came to Petersfield in 1914 as a second lieutenant with the first Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders, who were billeted in the town, while forming up and training. My father was a doctor and as such, immune from billeting, but George and his roommates were rather uncomfortably situated, so we invited them to live with us. From this beginning, George became a valued and lifelong friend of our family. After the war George retired from the army and settled in a most delightful house in Hassocks in Sussex. Besides being very interested in the theatre, George was a very good pianist and more than something of a composer. I suggested that we should pool our resources and if I could scratch up a suitable book of lyrics, he should compose the necessary music and we would see if we could get the College to perform it as a Christmas show. The show was to take the form of a pantomime and we soon found a name for it "King Arenci of Esseten" derived from the initial letters of the Royal Naval College and its postal address S.E.10. We put it on at the College for four nights at the end of the Christmas term and though I say so, it was an unqualified success. The mayor of Greenwich asked us to repeat it for the general public in the town hall and the BBC were prepared to televise it, but unfortunately, it was impractical to do either, as at the end of term the cast disintegrated about its lawful occasion.

While we were at the college our house was used on several occasions for weddings, in particular when the President of the College, Admiral Brind, who had been a widower for some years, married Mrs. Blagrove, the widow of the Flag Officer who had lost his life when HMS Royal Oak was sunk early in the war. We also held a party for the christening of the infant son of Yehudi Menuhin, whose wife was the stepdaughter of the commander-in-chief at the Nore. While I was in command of the college, Prince Philip was a student at the staff College and due to this I had the honour to meet our present Queen then Princess Elizabeth, on several occasions. One of the most delightful of these was when the Princess dined with us in the painted Hall, before we all went along together to see Prince Philip receive the freedom of the borough of Greenwich in the town hall. Another royal occasion was when the Board of Admiralty entertained the King of and Queen of Denmark to dinner in the painted Hall.



**Princess Elizabeth and The Duke Of Edinburgh visit Greenwich College 1948
(Leslie is on the left)**

Admiral Brind was appointed as commander in chief of the Far Eastern station and he asked me to go with him as the Commodore in charge, Hong Kong. I jumped at the idea both because it would be a very delightful job and also that it would mean that I should continue to serve under him. Sylvia was equally keen, but it started up a slight family brawl as to what we should do with Richard.

Richard was at Stubbington House and was entered for Wellington. The Common entrance examination was not all that far off and had to be considered. So I thought that he should be left at home, to get on with his schooling, but Sylvia was all in favour of taking him with us. Finally, with rather gloomy prophecies from his headmaster, we compromised that he should come out with us for six months and then return to Stubbington. As usual Sylvia was right, for Richard came out with us and stayed for over a year, which not only did him a power of good but, when the great day came, he passed into Wellington very near to the top the list.

H.M.S.Tamar

1949-51

We were told there we were to take passage to Hong Kong in the troopship Lancashire and after a night in the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool, Sylvia, Richard, Nanny and I went aboard. As my only other experience of a trooper had been the Duchess of York, I had no misgivings but I was due for a very rude awakening for the Lancashire was filthy and very overcrowded with a mixed bag of army and Navy, with their wives and families. The accommodation was poor and the food was of low-quality, being terribly badly served, on tables covered with American cloth. There was little or no discipline and screaming children ran everywhere. Loudspeakers brayed continuously, either with announcements or untuneful music, and the noise level had to be heard to be believed.

George had been very sad that our theatrical partnership had to be temporally suspended, so I thought I would try to do something to cheer him up. There was a small lounge in the Lancashire in which children were not allowed and, by a little weight throwing, I succeeded in getting this enforced. After bribing the electrician to disconnect the loudspeaker, I set myself up in here with my typewriter. My terrible surroundings prompted me to write a musical comedy of which most the action took place on board a luxury liner during a pleasure cruise. I called it "Dangerous Waters" and at each port, I sent one act off to George, so that by the end of the journey we had a complete book.

Hong Kong looked as beautiful as ever as we entered through the Lyemun Pass and most welcoming since it meant release from the Lancashire. Ashore it was a very different place to that which I had seen when last here, at the lower levels all traces of war-damaged had vanished, but higher up on the peak there was still a good deal of wreckage. This included the old Commodore's bungalow, which had been totally destroyed, so a new house had been provided, halfway up the peak, at Bowen Road. After three rather hot and uncomfortable days in a hotel, my predecessor sailed for home and the moved into our house.

I had to wear two "hats" as Commodore in charge and as Commodore Superintendent looking after the dockyard, but prior to my taking over a neither of these duties had been over demanding. On form it seemed to be most probable that this would be my last job in the Navy so it had been my intention to enjoy it to the full, without exerting myself unduly, but this attractive programme soon came unbuttoned.

Shortly before we had arrived in Hong Kong the war in Korea had started up and there had also been the Yangtze incident, leading to the Amethyst being imprisoned up river. Almost as soon as I got into the chair, the full repercussions of these made themselves felt. The Chinese Communists menaced the colony by massing their troops on the border, so that the defence problem became very real and reinforcements were hurried out. As a result the dockyard started to work to capacity and with business brisk, my dreams of a rest cure went up in smoke. In spite of this we enjoyed ourselves more than somewhat and there were some exciting moments thrown in.



**The commodore's Residence, Hong Kong – 5, Bowen Road
The Peak Tramway can be seen on the right**

The commander-in-chief was paying one of his periodical visits to Hong Kong and with Lady Brind was on board his "yacht" HMS Alert. As was their custom they gave a series a dinner parties, to one of which we were invited. Soon after the guests had assembled the Admiral disappeared and after a very brief appearance for dinner he deserted us again. I passed the word round the party, that as there was obviously something important "cooking" and the most helpful thing we could do, would be to take our leave. When the goodbyes were underway the Admiral rejoined us and told us that as the world would know in the morning, he could give us the advance news that the Amethyst was breaking out from the Yangtze. He invited me to stay on board and we spent a most thrilling night as the Amethyst reported her progress step-by-step, by wireless. Two days later Amethyst arrived in Hong Kong. I went on board and invited her commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Kerens, to come and stay with me in Bowen Road and as I had expected this became a very useful place of refuge for him to escape from his admirers.

One of the highlights of the period in Hong Kong was an official visit made to the Portuguese colony of Macau:

After two hectic but most pleasant years we were due to move on once again and this time I am happy to say there was no nonsense about a hired transport for we were to go home in the P & O, S.S. Corfu. Our last two weeks in the colony were terrific as we had made many good friends and the all gave farewell parties for us. One happening made us particularly proud and happy when Sir Alexander and Lady Grantham invited us to dine privately with them at Government House. It is general knowledge that Sir Alex was an outstanding governor and it been a great privilege to have served as his Naval Adviser.

When the Corfu arrived, bringing my relief, I asked my secretary Commander Fred Stoy, to go on board and check-up that we had been given a reasonable cabin. I also asked him if he could see if we could wangle an odd corner in which we could say goodbye to such friends that came on board to see us of. Fred never did things by halves; he obtained the use of a complete lounge, laid on champagne, and had also looked into the matter of the cabin. On our arrival on-board it was

apparent that having obtained a lounge, Fred was determined to fill it. It seemed that the entire colony had come down to see us off. When finally the ship was under way we were invited up onto the bridge and, as we passed down harbour, the ships manned and cheered and we were escorted by a flotilla of dockyard craft, firing firecrackers, while the fire floats sprayed their jets in "feathers" in the air. We were just about to leave the bridge with the Royal Air Force staged a fly-past in salute, with everything that they could force off the ground. To say that we were touched and honoured, by this most friendly gesture from our sister service, is a gross understatement. When finally we had time to inspect our cabin we found that Fred had been really busy and we were in the number one suite.

Leslie was awarded the C.B.E. (Commander of the British Empire) decoration for his work in Hong Kong.

The passage home was uneventful and very dull which did us no lasting harm. When I went along to the Admiralty I was told to go away and play, but this did not surprise me it as I only had about six months left to serve unless I was to be promoted. This period of leisure was enlivened by a spirited correspondence with the Admiralty as to why I had travelled home in such state, but finally, an amicable agreement was reached. I was appointed to a Land Air warfare course and then in temporary command of the aircraft carrier Implacable. This latter was only for two months, while her genuine captain was on sick leave, but it was an enjoyable interlude and took me to the end of the year and I expected that to be the end of my time.

When the half-yearly promotions to flag rank were announced the two most junior captains to be considered, of whom I was the second, were held over. This was a most unusual procedure and the reason for it did not concern me personally, but I felt that it offered no particular promise for the future. It had a great advantage that I should remain on full pay for a further six months and as I wanted something to keep me out of mischief, I applied to do a tactical course and this was approved.

While I'd been at Greenwich the tactical school had been transferred from the college, to a wing of the old military Academy at Woolwich and it is here that I was to study. The remainder of the Academy had been made into a mess to house army officers working at the War Office and the tactical School shared this accommodation.

While I was at the War College we had the sad news of the death of his Majesty King George VI. As the second senior serving captain in the Royal Navy, I was an ADC to his Majesty and as such, I was bidden to walk in the procession of the royal funeral on Friday February 15, 1952. Having assembled at the Cenotaph, it seemed a very long way to Paddington, doing the slow march and dressed in a heavy uniform greatcoat. Those in the procession saw little, other than the crowds lining the route, but I was able to make good this deficiency, arriving home in time to see the fine film broadcast by the BBC on television.

July 1952 brought the next list of promotions, but I honestly can say that I thought my chances to be included were non-existent. The first intimation that nothing is impossible was a telegram of congratulations from the King's harbour master at Sheerness and this was followed by a telephone call from a patient at the Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar. Later in the forenoon came the official confirmation from the Admiralty that I had caught the selector's eye.

President Admiralty Interview Board

1952-53

I went along to see the naval secretary and he asked if I would like to go as the President of the Admiralty interview board. As its name implies, this board interviews all the candidates who wish to enter the Royal Navy as officers, grades them and recommends their acceptance or otherwise. I was surprised that this appointment was offered to me rather apologetically and I was told that it would only be for one year, for I thought then and it is still my opinion, that this is a most important job and I had no hesitation in accepting it. Before being given the appointment, my name, as is the custom was submitted to the first Sea Lord and I am creditably informed that he remarked "I think we he would be just the chap for the job, but won't his face frighten the candidates?" I felt that there was some reason in this and that some antidote should be found. Shortly this presented itself, as Sylvia gave me a charming little Pekinese puppy "to keep me company". This I felt to be the answer, for any boy seeing a corpulent gentleman (we wore plain clothes during the interviews), being towed along by a Pekinese puppy could only feel that, however unprepossessing his exterior, he must have a spark of humanity in his soul.

The interview board used to sit at Dartmouth, in very pleasant quarters adapted from a wing of what had been the cadet's sick quarters and though we were entirely separate from the College, in their kindness we used to enjoy all their amenities, including their sailing boats on the River Dart. We dealt with two groups of boys, 16 and 18 year-olds and also with "upper yardmen". These last were young seamen, specially selected and "groomed" to be officers. I liked interviewing these, least of all, but for purely personal reasons. If one was failed, I had to send for him and tell him why, and this was a most difficult, and frequently heart rending, operation.

The schoolboys used to come to us in groups of four to ten, depending on their availability, and spent two nights and a very full day under our wing. The day would start in the gymnasium where the boys would be set practical tasks to carry out, taking charge of the group as a test of initiative and leadership. When this was completed we would move up to the boardroom, where the candidates would hold a debate and each would give a short lecture, for which they had a choice of subjects and 10 minutes in which to prepare the talk. Finally the psychologist and then the board had a personal interview with each candidate.

Just before I took over, the interview board, it had fallen foul of the daily press and this had resulted in some very bad uninformed articles being published. Their complaint was that we were a lot of snobs and that while a public school boy would pass with flying colours, a grammar-school boy didn't stand a chance. Nothing was further from the truth. We all agreed that the boys that had been away from home, either to boarding school, to camps or on organised trips, all tended to show up much better than a lad who'd been "tied to his mother's apron strings," apart from this we could not find a regular pattern. With the idea of scotching this adverse criticism I asked the Admiralty if I might invite representatives from all the national newspapers to come down a see for themselves how we made our choice. The Admiralty were a little nervous as to how this would work, but finally, they gave their permission and invitations were issued and accepted. They came, they saw, we conquered. Before we started off each day the representatives would come along to see us and I would have a yarn with them. I would tell them that they should be with us throughout the entire day, they should see and hear everything and, at the end of proceedings, would be invited to hear the board summing up and giving its findings. In exchange for this I asked them to give me one assurance and promise that they would never publish anything, which might embarrass any candidate. They gave this promise and honoured it most faithfully. Their visits lasted over a period of three weeks and over and above our normal duties it was a bit of a strain, but it proved to have been very worthwhile. When the board met at the end the day I used to ask our guests would they care to give their opinion on the boys, before we gave our final summing up and, on practically every occasion, they were far harsher than we were. All the papers published most favourable articles. They were unanimous that the selection was entirely without any bias or class distinction. And after the shouting and tumult had died down, I received a very cordial letter of appreciation from the first Lord of the Admiralty.

While still in Hong Kong I had become very stiff. I consulted the medical officer at the College and after examination and X-ray, he told me that I had osteo-arthritis in both hips. This was most annoying but at this stage nothing more, as it slowed me down very little.

THE ROYAL NAVY REVEALS HOW IT CHOOSES ITS FUTURE LEADERS

That Dartmouth exam is tough —but fair and square

CLASS DOES NOT COUNT, CHARACTER DOES

- For the first time since it was founded in 1905, the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, has been the scene of an open Admiralty Interview Board.
- Noel Manks, Daily Mail Services Correspondent, spent two days with the board, following the fortunes of seven 16-year-old hopefuls before the men who decide whether or not a lad is fit to become an officer in the Royal Navy.
- His verdict, given in full below: "The fairest and squarest means of picking out a lad for gunption, future leadership, and responsibility that could possibly be devised."

THE admiral with the deep voice said: "Come and sit beside me here, sonny. I see you are interested in model aeroplanes. So am I." Could there be a more friendly opening for the Great Interview, the be-all or end-all of a chap's dreams of becoming another Nelson or at least an admiral? I doubt it.

This was Candidate No. 1, wearing his number on his arm. And this was the room he'd heard all about. The eight men sitting round the polished table were the "tyrants" who were going to make a fool of him, trip him up with trick questions, shudder at his accent, choke at his discomfiture, and finally scupper him because he said "Yes" when he should have said "No."

'Torture chamber'
Half an hour later, when the admiral said: "That's all, sonny. Thank you for coming along." Candidate No. 1 and the six who followed him into the "torture chamber" must have felt someone had been spoofing

last interview is concluded at 8 p.m., the lads are only out of the board's sight for two short "stand easy" periods. The first thing Rear-Admiral L. N. Brownfield, president of the board, said to the seven lads lined up before him in the gym was: "Welcome to Dartmouth. Forget any ideas you may have that we are here to ask you trick questions. There will be no trick questions. We just want to find out if you are the right sort of chaps we want to be officers in the Royal Navy."

Poles apart

No man could be better qualified—certainly no politician—to judge what makes an R.N. officer tick than Rear-Admiral Brownfield, with his life-time of service behind him.

And if he were wrong there are the votes of the schoolmaster, the psychologist, and the Man from the Admiralty, poles apart in outlook, to safeguard the chances of the candidates.

In the gym the seven candidates were put through a number of "exercises" to test (1) their intelligence, (2) their ingenuity, and (3) leadership qualities.

As a group they were given practical problems involving the transferring of a cumbersome object across an imaginary river. They were given planks, ropes, poles, pulleys to assist



Rear-Admiral L. N. Brownfield

of you has to be dropped overboard. Choose your own names and discuss among yourselves who goes over the side," the boys were told.

The candidates chose Shakespeare Nelson, James Watt, the Man Who Invented Braces, Dickens, Trolleyrand and General Gordon. There followed a lively discussion that would outclass some of the B.U.C. parlor games. The board, sitting round the room, soaked in every word, made notes on their pads. In the end it was generally agreed that the Man Who Invented Braces was the most useless person aboard.

The psychologists then tossed two subjects among the lads for a five-minute discussion: "Should all schoolboys wear kilts?" "What is the best age for entry into the Navy, 13 or 16?"

High standard

Here again the standard was high. It was hard to believe that you were listening to 16-year-olds.

Next, each lad was given a choice of three subjects and three minutes in which to prepare a speech.

supersonic flight. "Now supersonic flight is here to stay," from No. 7 raised a loud laugh. (7) Favourite travel book, camping out, radio. "I was a Boy Scout, and I loved being in camp," said No. 6.

On the whole, the addresses were good. Each boy spoke for three minutes, but it must have seemed an hour to them.

Another "stand easy" for tea followed, then came the last—and greatest—hurdle, the personal interview.

While the boys were at tea the board read through their "crime sheets," the records of their whole background from the time they first went to school right up to their arrival in Dartmouth. They were written mainly by their headmasters. Then, one by one, they were called in to face the board. To each was given half an hour's intensive questioning.

Rear-Admiral Brownfield always asked: "Why do you want to join the Navy?" and, believe it or not, one candidate, a public school boy, didn't quite know.

After the admiral, the boys were passed on round the table to the six other members of the board. I heard no trick questions.

All fair

The interviews over, the board discussed each boy among themselves. I listened in to the full discussions and never heard the word "accents" or "school" mentioned.

Finally, the board members go to their "cabins" to work out their marks, and round about 7 p.m. we assemble again. Beginning with the admiral, each member of the board calls out his percentage marks. All are then added together—and another batch of candidates for entry into the Royal Navy has been dealt with.

Of the seven boys I saw go before the board, four were passed—two public school and two grammar school boys—and three failed.

If it's any comfort to the lads who didn't make it—I thought the board tough, mighty tough. But they knew what they wanted and nothing could have been fairer.

Part of Daily Mail Article Thursday October 15 1953



I was on leave in Petersfield when Sylvia and I received an invitation to be present in Westminster Abbey for the Coronation of her Majesty the Queen. We went up to London on the previous night as we had a very early start and had been lent a flat for the occasion. We were up at five in the morning and it was a remarkable sight to see Sylvia cooking bacon and eggs, dressed in full evening dress and tiara. From where we were sitting in the Abbey we could see nothing of the actual ceremony, but we had a wonderful view of the coming and goings with its attendant music and colour. As on the previous but not so happy, Royal occasion, we arrived home in time to see the film on television and this seemed even more alive since we'd been on the fringes of the real thing.

Admiral Superintendent, Devonport Dockyard

1954-57

Once again I consulted the naval secretary and was offered the job as Admiral Superintendent at Devonport dockyard. Being an Admiral Superintendent is not everybody's cup of tea, so the naval secretary sugared the pill by pointing out that the appointment would be for four years and providing that I held it down, I might expect to be promoted Vice-Admiral in due course and on retirement, receive the rank of full admiral and the customary award of a knighthood. He need not have troubled to tempt me as having had experience in Hong Kong, I knew how interesting it was being in charge of a Royal Dockyard. Before actually being appointed, I went to see the third Sea Lord who having had several upsets in his department, asked my assurance that if was given the job, I would be prepared to serve the full four years. This I was most willing to give as I hoped to remain on the active list as long as anybody would let me.

Admiral Sir Philip Enwright was in charge of the Devonport Dockyard and the arrangements for taking over from him were most gentlemanly. We were told, given broad limits, to arrange a date to our mutual satisfaction. We decided that the end of March 1954 would be the suitable moment. Leaving the interview board was not quite such a break as it might have been, as I did not leave alone. Naturally I asked my valet, Leading Steward Hannaford, if he would come with me, but shortly before I left, Chief Petty Officer Turner, who was in charge of the candidates, told me that his time with the Board was up and asked if I would consider taking him with me as my coxswain. Turner was a most outstanding character and his handling of the candidates contributed considerably to the smooth running of the Board, so I was delighted with this idea. Soon after this the Chief Steward in charge of our mess Chief Petty Officer Evans came to me with the same story and a request to come as my Chief Steward and as in his own line, Evans was the equal of Turner, I felt that I was in clover. The Chief Cook did not go in for such niceties but just as I was getting into my car for my final departure he emerged and said "see you in Devonport" and did. It was great to arrive and find so many old friends waiting to receive me.

Devonport Dockyard had been very badly bombed and one thing that had been flattened was the original Admiral Superintendent's house. Enwright had been living in what originally had been the Chaplin's house and as a bachelor had found it all that he needed, but it was much too small for the entertaining that we would have to carry out. There was no chance of the original house being rebuilt, so we had to look around for an alternative. The Captain of the dockyard lived in the end house of a terrace that been designed by Vanbrough. Externally the house was charming, inside side it left much to be desired. When the captain was due for relief, I obtained the Admiralty's permission to swap houses and to carry out some structural alterations and a complete modernisation. The dockyard carried out the work splendidly and we were able to move into a very delightful house.

Ever since I had returned from Hong Kong, George and I had been working away at our musical. It was now called "Dancing Waters" and we felt that it was about as good as we could make it, so the problem was to try and find some means of trying it out. The Plymouth Amateur Operatic And Dramatic Society used to do a musical show each year, so George and I went along to have a look at them and found them excellent, way above the average of such companies. We approached them and suggested that they might consider producing "Dancing Waters" and when they had read the book and George had played the music, they agreed that this would be a good thing up.

There was also a thriving theatrical company in the dockyards who called themselves the "The Dockyard Players" and who were led by a Mr. Harvey Crane of the naval stores department. To date, this company had confined themselves to straight plays, so I was rather surprised when Harvey Crane told me that they were very hurt that I had not considered them for "Dancing Waters". He asked me to write a show for them and with George's support we set to work. The outcome of our efforts was "King Oggie of Guz" which was described as a fairy tale of the West Country. This name was derived from the sailors named for the Cornish pasty, which is a "Tiddy Oggie" and their name for Devonport, which is Guz. Harvey Crane produced the show and collected together a very strong cast. I had written a song for it called "Devon Born" and this in common with the rest of the show, was not intended to be taken too seriously but the leading man Kenneth Casey, a boilermaker from the dockyard, sang it so beautifully, that it had to be rated up as a serious ballad and afterwards HMS Cambridge the gunnery firing school, adopted it as a ceremonial march. One scene was supposed to be in the boardroom where the senior dockyard

officers were in deliberation and a dockyard Detective John Broad played the part of the Admiral Superintendent; his performance was not only brilliant but also cruel in the extreme. Having suffered under this, I just gave a hollow laugh, when Harvey Crane asked if I would object to having my leg pulled. At the dress rehearsal there appeared on the boardroom wall a very large oil painting, which was programmed as a past Admiral Superintendent. It had been painted by one of the dockyard painters, Desmond Ellis, on a sheet of plywood with ordinary paint and really was an old master; unmistakable my face, with the uniform of Admiral Byng taken from an old colour print. It was presented to me after the show and now hangs in my train room to the entertainment of all my friends

To produce King Oggie before "Dancing Waters" was something of a gamble for if it had flopped, it would have provided poor publicity for the coming attraction, but it never faltered and ran for a week to full houses. Not a little of this success was due to the Royal Marine orchestra who provided the music.

"Dancing Waters" was played in the Palace Theatre in Plymouth and though this is a very large theatre, the Plymouth amateurs were up to our expectations and filled it to capacity at all performances. The press including some London papers gave us a very good write up and we were full of hope, but the show never got any further.

After having served for the requisite time as a Flag Officer it is usual to be made a Companion of the order of the Bath and in due course this came my way. I only mention this because it led to what was for me a most delightful happening. Owing to my duties I obtained permission to attend the last investiture of the season. Due to this I was the senior recipient and had to lead the procession. When I made my bow, her Majesty greeted me and held up proceedings for quite a long time while she spoke of the days at Greenwich and asked after my well-being. I felt a most important person.

Leslie was promoted to Vice Admiral in April 1955

The Royal Naval Barracks at Devonport holds a very special dinner each year, to celebrate the victory over the Spanish Armada, and after this dinner it is the custom to present a pageant on the lawn in front of the Wardroom. For several years they had been performing virtually the same pageant and this was wearing a bit thin, so the Commodore asked me if I would write a new one for them. I was keen to do this for a very special reason. Many years before, when I was serving as a two-and-a-half striper in the Gunnery School at Devonport, after dinner, a party of us had got together in the mess. In those days the depot was called HMS Vivid and our talk turned to how little this name meant to anybody.

Somebody suggested that we should be called HMS Drake and this was heartily approved, if only for the reason that we then should have the excuse to celebrate Armada Night in the same manner as Portsmouth Barracks in their capacity as HMS Victory celebrated Trafalgar night. With us after dinner had been the Commodore's secretary. The following morning he told the Commodore what had been suggested, the Commodore thought this was an excellent idea and reported it to the Admiralty and they were equally impressed and HMS Drake we became.

Following hot on this, the mess committee fixed a night for the first armada dinner and it was agreed that the Commander-in-Chief and the Lord Mayor of Plymouth should be the principal guests. By default I found myself charged with organising the pageant. The first armada dinner was a great success and we were blessed with a lovely evening so after dinner the Lord mayor was invited play a game of bowls on a floodlit portion of the lawn, as he picked up his wood he was plunged into darkness and an Elizabethan sailor came running down a searchlight beam to fall at his feet and cry "My Lord, the Armada, the Armada!" this was the signal for warning fires to burst out on all the surrounding hills and for the main stage lights to come on to show the actors posed as in the well-known picture of Drake on Plymouth Hoe the picture came to life and, after a short scene, terminating with Drake "stooping to finish the game" the stage blacked out and the Lord Mayor found himself back at his game. I received considerable congratulations for the composition of the few words that the actors had spoken, but as these were taken almost straight from Kingsley's "Westward Ho" I wondered if I was really entitled to the credit. From this small beginning the pageant continued through the years and became increasingly ambitious. To have an opportunity to revitalise this with a completely new show, was not to be missed and in the event turned out to be another great success.

Leslie and Sylvia returned to 'Westmark', a large house and garden on the A272 Rogate Road, just outside the village of Sheet, north of Petersfield. They had bought the house in 1952 soon after their return from Hong Kong but had only lived there for short periods. This eventually proved too much for them to cope with, as Leslie's health was deteriorating and they converted the barn, which was part of the property, calling the new house 'Brownfields'. They sold off most of the garden with the main house and moved into Brownfields in about 1962. In retirement, he became Church Warden at St Mary's, Sheet, a daughter church to St Peter's, Petersfield where his father had been warden 50 years before. He was also treasurer of Catherington House a Church of England Retreat. Unhappily, many of his plans for retirement were impossible to fulfil due to his health problems. Apart from his acromegaly, which accounted for his forbidding appearance, towards the end of his career he started to suffer with severe pain in his hips. The pain in his hips proved to be due to osteo-arthritis, but when the operation to replace the joints was underway, he was also found to have Paget's Disease of the bone, which made it too soft to accept the prosthesis. Mr Osmond Clark, a renowned surgeon, had to take the decision to cut off the heads of both Femurs, which left Leslie pain free, but with unstable joints, confined to a wheelchair or short distances on crutches. A cruel blow for so active a man, but he always remained cheerful, even through the eight months he spent in Hospital, first at the King Edward VII and then at Haslar.

He died of bowel cancer on July 28, 1968 at "Brownfields", Sheet, Petersfield. His ashes were interred at St Peter's Church in Petersfield, where he had been christened.

Sources

Leslie Newton Brownfield

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