

WENDY'S STORY
AN ACCOUNT OF SURVIVAL
PLUS PLUS
BY
WENDY EVANS



As told to Cyprian Thorpe

A GRACEY COURT PRODUCTION

Percy Rathbone (1874-1926)
& Elsie Hooper (1876-1956)

Christopher Percy Rathbone (1908-1980)
& Phyllis Brice

John Rathbone (1910-1985)
1. Roddy Ogilvie
2. Pamela Stuart

Michael Rathbone (1912-1994)
& Peggy Standard

Marv Elizabeth (Wendy) Rathbone (1916-2002)
& John Mascal Evans, Reverend (1915-1996)

Angela Margaret Rathbone (1918-)
& Robert Warburg

FOREWORD

When I first suggested to Mrs. Evans that she should record her life-story, she was most reluctant to do so. However, with some encouragement from her family, she not only agreed to do it, but gave her utmost co-operation.

It is a story well worth telling. At the age of nineteen, whilst on a camping holiday with friends, she had a grievous accident, in which she suffered multiple injuries including a broken neck. One of her friends died beside her during the night. She made a miraculous recovery and nine months later was back at her teaching work in Epsom.

She then became the able wife of a very dedicated priest, had five children, including twins, lived throughout the war in areas that were frequently bombed, and coped successfully with parish life in three parishes, and finally became a gracious and helpful archdeacon's wife.

Although all the parishes in which the Evans worked came within what is known as the commuter-belt, Wendy's story is a far cry from the 'Gin and Jaguar' society that this description often conjures up.

Lastly it portrays a more genuine and typical life of a parson's wife than that given in some recent works of fiction, and even in some biographies

Gracey Court
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Cyprian Thorpe

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1 CHILDHOOD

Born in Epsom in 1916, the child of Percy and Elsie Rathbone, I had a very happy, easy, and sheltered childhood. There were three older brothers, Christopher, John and Michael, and my sister Angela followed two years later.

My parents had an immensely happy marriage. Father commuted to London everyday where he worked at the Corn Exchange. Both were active church people. My father had a lovely tenor voice and sang in the choir. He was also Treasurer of the Sick and Poor Fund, a thing you don't hear much about these days.

My mother was the strong one who kept the family going; father was sick on an off for some time. She herself came from a large family. We had nannies and maids to cope with most of the housework but mother always seemed to be busy.

Each night father would come from the City in time to say good night to us, and then he would change for dinner, putting on a very smart smoking jacket. I remember being taken to some houses in East Street in the poor end of town: it was an entirely different world.

I was cared for by my nanny until I was four and then used to go to a little class nearby. Both mother and father read to us. Nanny washed our clothes and took us for walks. After tea we used to go down to the drawing room and play games until we were sent up to bed.

There was a four year gap between me and my

youngest brother and two years between each of the boys. They all went to a local prep school and then Christopher and Michael went on to Charterhouse whilst John, who was destined for the navy, went to Dartmouth.

When my father died in 1926 we were all told that we had to be very careful because there was not going to be so much money so my brother Michael used to cycle home from Charterhouse, some twenty miles away, in order to save the train fare. We had no car. We also used to have a Swiss Mademoiselle but she left at this time.

I remember the day that Daddy died my mother took Angela and me by taxi to stay with friends for a few days. She sat with us on a sofa and told us about it but somehow I already knew. I was ten by then.

Christopher had just left Charterhouse. The idea was that he should go into father's business but soon afterwards the firm closed down. He then got a job with a firm of grain importers.

We had another governess at home whom we shared with about a dozen other children including Anne Monier-Williams who now, with her husband, Philip Isdell Carpenter, lives in the same retirement home at Broadclyst in Devon. She was to figure significantly in the most dramatic incident of my life.

At the age of thirteen I went to school at Downe House in Berkshire. We had a very good teaching and a fine headmistress. The music was also very good which I enjoyed especially. The headmistress wanted me to try for Oxford but my mother was very much against it. I always wanted to teach so when I left school I intended

to go to a PNEU college. A friend of mine, who had taught me when I was about six, asked me to help in running a small private school so I did this and also started a Froebel course. Before I was half way through it I had the accident, but I think I did enough to help me afterwards.

2 ACCIDENT

During the long summer holidays, Anne and I thought it would be lovely to go camping and our parents were quite happy about it. She had the use of a car and we bought a little tent. I had another friend, Elaine Ogilvy, whom we asked to go with us but as she was working she could only join us a few days after we had started.

We travelled around for a few days visiting friends and then settled down at a place near Swanage. One or two nights we spent in a school because it was so wet. Then Elaine came and we began camping. We had a few days walking along the shore, cooking our sausages, and doing all the things one does when camping.

One day we went to a place called Worbarrow Bay, which I knew quite well, and Elaine and I decided to walk along the cliffs to Lulworth Cove. We hoped to return to Worbarrow Bay along the beach but the tide was too high so we decided to climb the grassy cliff. We both thought it a good thing to do at the time. I thought Elaine was behind me and suddenly discovered that she wasn't. I went to look for her and also fell, landing quite close to her.

We were side by side. Anne, of course, did not have a clue as to where we were, and when we did not arrive back she told the police. It was the beginning of September so it was getting cold. Both of us were in a good deal of pain but we talked together. We thought we were both going to die. We talked about our loves and our hopes, and left messages for our mothers.

I eventually dropped off to sleep and when I

awoke I realised that Elaine was dead. The morning was grey and wet, and as I was lying there I could hear footsteps along the shingle which was quite a distance below us. I thought to myself that it would be very easy to die there but then I said "No! I must let Elaine's mother know that she died loving her as much as ever".

I called out and a policeman climbed up: he was with Anne. He sent her back to Lulworth whilst he stayed with us.

A lifeboat came out from Lulworth Cove, and they must have lifted me down into it. I can remember that I was only in a cotton dress and a lifeboatman took off his jersey and put it over me. I can't remember very much else but they told me afterwards that the sea was very rough and they had to make three attempts to get into Lulworth harbour before they were successful.

Anne was standing on the beach with a very dear friend, Nora Ford, whom she had telephoned. She was a very good music teacher. I had left a pair of shoes behind when we had stayed with her and when I saw her I said "I'm sorry I left those shoes behind". Anne said she wondered whether I had left a bit of my head behind on the cliff.

I was taken to Dorchester Hospital. They were having an open day or something and all was a bit chaotic. They took me into a general ward and a thorough examination was made and the surgeon said "I'm going to stitch your head up first".

By this time my mother had arrived, driven by Michael from Cornwall where she was staying. On the way she said to him "Don't drive so fast; one accident in a day is enough".

After my head had been stitched up, I was moved into an empty ward and they said I would need a lot of nursing. The surgeon was very good, and they put me on to a waterbed. Besides the gash on my head I had broken my neck and one or two minor things like my collarbone. My mother was pleased about the waterbed because her grandfather had invented it. It was wonderful because it kept me rigid.

I used to have nightmares because I thought I was on a boat. They gave me painkillers and I always had a sleeping pill. I had some good moments but could only move one hand. The funny thing was I can remember being quite cheerful. I would recall the music of the St. Matthew Passion, and we also used to sing silly Cicely Courtneige songs like 'Things are getting better every day'. My mother was marvellous. She had been caravanning in Cornwall but she brought her caravan to Dorchester, parked it in the Vicarage drive and spent most of the day with me. She wrote letters for me, and, as I had to be fed with a teaspoon, she helped with that.

Because of the gash in my head I had all my hair shaved off. All the time I was looked after splendidly by Nurse John. They stuck pins into me on various occasions and gave me frequent blanket baths. After six weeks they gave me a very thorough X-ray and said that as soon as I could get going I could go home. I had to have a few days getting on to my feet because I had been on my back all this time.

It was the beginning of November when I went home. I was able to walk but getting up stairs was more of a problem, so my bed was brought down to the Morning Room. Sadly, Nurse John left and I felt abso-

lutely lost without her. She was an Australian who was working for an agency.

By Christmas I was walking around and by the following June I was back teaching again and had even restarted riding a bicycle. During the winter of 36/37 I was able to go to dances and so on, dancing not being so energetic then as it is today.

3 LOVE AND WAR

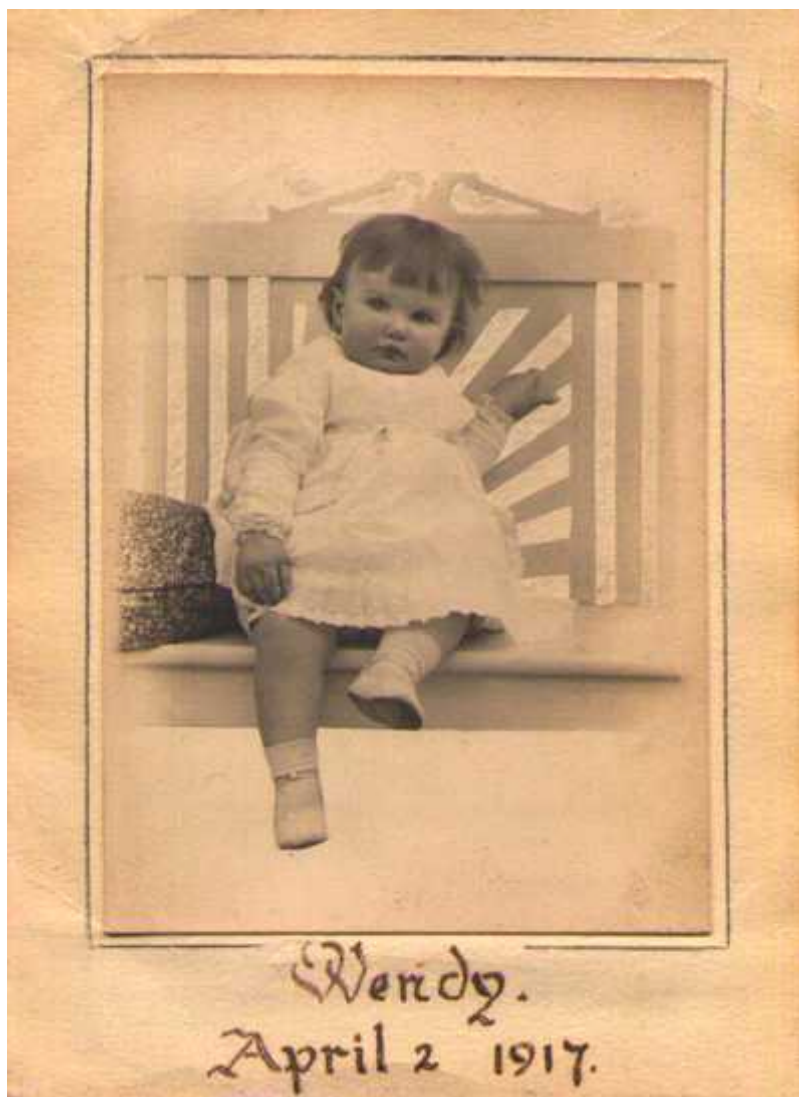
In 1938 one had to be a fool not to realise there was going to be a war. All our school children's parents were worried and wanted to get them out of Surrey. The following summer I met a friend who lived near Tewkesbury who suggested we might go there. My mother was taking in lodgers, first a curate and then medical students and Jewish refugees.

So I moved with some of our pupils to the manor house at Twynning near Tewkesbury. It was a lovely autumn. I taught children of various ages. After school we played games and I gave them tea, and when they had all gone to bed I had dinner with the family.

Because nothing was happening on the war front, at the end of term we all went back to Epsom. I carried on teaching and in 1941 John and I got engaged.

John was the son of a priest who had worked in a dockland parish in the East End of London. When John was five they had moved to a country parish in Essex. John always said he had a very happy childhood. He went, helped by bursaries, to St Johns School, Leatherhead and from there to Brasenose College, Oxford and Wells Theological College. His father was ill for some years and died on the day he left school where he had been head boy.

His two older brothers helped finance his education. Cecil, who by this time was a headmaster, helped pay his fees though he did get a scholarship. Arthur, who ran a prep school and was always in London, gave him a holiday home.



Wendy.
April 2 1917.



When John first came to Epsom he lived in digs and we first met him at a Parish Fellowship meeting. The great idea of the Fellowship, which the Vicar started, was to provide a meeting place for "us" and "them". It was very well supported. Sometimes we had serious talks and at others social events, whist drives and suchlike.

We met soon after his ordination. John said he had liked parish life from that day. I remember talking about him to my sister. When we first knew him we thought he was a bit stuck up. He was always very suitably dressed, very correct, and very much the curate. He used to visit us and play tennis with my brother.

When war broke out, as I have said, I went with my pupils to Twyning Manor and John was busy in the parish but by Christmas I was back home again. I then went back to teaching in the Sunday School at Langley Bottom. Some of the children were from the families employed in the racing stables on Epsom Downs.

John wrote me a letter asking me to take the children's service there, and I wrote back and said it would be absurd for me to take the service and I would only do so in an emergency and there was no-one else to take it, but I would be willing to help whoever did.

We used to cycle over to Langley together. The curates were given bikes with little engines; I rode a push bike whilst he had the automatic. One day he took off his long scarf and tied it to my bike to pull me up a hill, but unfortunately the scarf grew longer and longer! It was snowing at the time.

Afterwards I was asked to do the Sunday School at the parish church. It must have been 1940 when John first helped me pick the snowdrops for Mothering Sunday. Leap Year has always meant something special to me. We got engaged in Leap Year 1940, though not on February 29th. Our first son was born on February 29th four years later, and dear John died on February 29th, 1996, John always said that I proposed to him in Leap Year.

That summer, whilst we were engaged, John went to Canada as chaplain on an evacuee ship, taking children to escape the war in Europe - one of the first ships to do this.

Going through John's things after he had died, I found three letters I had written to him. The first was to thank him for taking me to the theatre before we were engaged, the second was when we had all gone to Scotland and I asked him to send mother some petrol coupons, and the third was when all the girls were getting married to their boy friends because of the war.

Some had said to me "Why don't you and John get married?" My mother thought it would be very nice and John could come and live with us, but I said "No, that would be wrong." I wanted to do more than just get married. I hoped that when we were married we would have a home of our own and not be lodgers in my mother's house. In those days you didn't just move in with your boy friend.

So we married in 1941. I think John had a very small rise in stipend and I was still teaching. We got a sort of flat in the downstairs of a house in the middle of Epsom and we had some happy months there.

We stayed there until 1943 when we moved to Stoneleigh.

I think at this point I should say something about my brothers and sister. They were all involved in the war. Throughout our time at Epsom and Stoneleigh, we were always aware that the greatest war of all time was going on, and the little privations we had were nothing in comparison to what was happening elsewhere.

Before the war Christopher had joined a firm of grain importers and for a few years worked in India, which I think he enjoyed. When he came home, my mother and I met him, at Victoria, I think. My mother had taken great care to look her best, but Christopher, who had got quite plump said "Oh mother, you do look old". With the best will in the world, he had a way of saying the wrong thing.

He then lived at home, commuting to London. He would arrange dances and parties for us. Although he had not got the polish that John had, or the brain that Michael had, he was a very kind and fatherly elder brother.

John was very much the naval officer and did well at Dartmouth. Before the war he was lent to the Australian Navy for two years. He came home on leave shortly before war broke out but when it came he had to rejoin his own unit.

Michael, when he left Oxford, taught at a grammar school and then had plans to teach in China but the war prevented that.

After John came home, my mother took us all to the theatre. We went to see Edith Evans and John

Gielgud in 'The Importance of Being Ernest'. It was a marvellous production. We all dressed up in evening dress, the boys in boiled shirts. Half way through the boys went out to get the evening papers and came back to say that there was general mobilisation which meant that they all had to go where they were needed. Christopher said to John, "What do you think we ought to do?" John, in true Drake style, replied "We will see the end of the play first."

They were all doing different things and they didn't have to go for ages because this was just before the beginning of the war. During the war they were all wounded but not seriously. Christopher came back from Dunkirk and was eventually posted to India where he was wounded in the shoulder.

John had the toughest war of the lot. He was in the evacuation of the army from Crete and his captain was killed by his side. Twice he was torpedoed but would talk very little about it. I spoke to him during his last illness when he couldn't talk much because of emphysema. He said he kept thinking he was drowning in the Mediterranean.

Michael started in the ranks. He became a Sergeant-Major and was eventually persuaded to take a commission. He wasn't in the original invasion of Europe but afterwards went all through the Normandy campaign with the Tank Corps. Once his tank was blown up and his hearing was never the same again. Strangely enough he seemed to have enjoyed the war. He'd always been a good boy scout and I think the excitement and the camaraderie suited him.

My sister Angela and I were, and still are,

very good friends. She was the sensible practical one. When she left Downe House she studied poultry farming. In the war she became a FANY and a good driver/mechanic. She drove ambulances in Southampton during the blitz.

After the war she did a course at St. Thomas's as an almoner. She also joined a discussion group in the vicarage where she met Bob Warburg. He had lost a leg in the war from our own anti-aircraft fire. They were married in 1947.

4 FIRST PARISH

We moved to Stoneleigh, a railway suburb between Epsom and Waterloo, in 1943. There were lots of new Stations for the estates that had developed along that line.

It was a wonderful place for us and consisted of practically all semi-detached three bedroomed houses. Nearly all the families had moved from South London and they were very enterprising and full of go.

The church was a lovely modern one, and we had many children; there was obviously nothing else for them to do on a Sunday. After Holy Communion at 8 a. m. and a 9.15 a.m. sung Eucharist, it was Children's Church, more children in the afternoon followed by baptisms at 4 p.m., and a packed Evensong later.

After Evensong we used to let the keen youngsters come back to the house to tell John how the world should be run. We would sit around in the study and we really were building a new world. I remember being so tired at 10 o'clock when we had to push them off. Four of the boys eventually became priests, one of the girls a Church Army officer and two others married clergymen. It was an exciting time.

John went there as priest-in-charge because, as there was no vicarage, it could not be a parish. Fortunately the corner house across from the church came onto the market for £2,000. At that time I was staying with the baby at John's brother's, and John told me "I think we have found just the right house; it has no study but a garage that can be made into a study". It was a requirement that you had to have four bedrooms and a study.

All our efforts went into collecting money for the vicarage. I remember John insisting, and the PCC agreeing, that we were not going to cut down on our missionary giving. After one of our sales of work, a little girl called Eveline, who had had a tray of posies which she sold for button-holes, wrote a letter to John, sending about 15 shillings and saying "It is for your vicarage". He wrote back and said "It is not my vicarage; it is yours and will be yours long after I have gone". We always felt it was theirs.

Martin, our first child was born in 1944 before we moved into the new vicarage. Before we married, Mother and I had ascertained that there would be no difficulty in having children as the result of my accident as a 19 year old. The only permanent disability was a limp and a useless right hand.

The church and the station were side by side which was rather appropriate as most of the parish went to work by train. Unfortunately there was no road access across the railway; you had to go over steps from one part of the town to the other. It was alright for younger people but not so good for the others.

I remember John going to celebrate Holy Communion for Mrs Dixon and her friends at the other side of the railway. There was a parish hall on the other side of the railway which, during the air-raids, was used to house people who had been bombed.

In 1944, a few months after Martin was born, the buzz bombs started and that was much worse than the previous raids. A lot of people left but I resisted until mother asked me to go and stay with her at Epsom. I slept in the cellar with the baby. Then John's brother,

Arthur, and his wife Madge, wrote saying we should go and stay with them at Bishop's Stortford where he was a headmaster. So John and I went up with Martin in a karricot and he left us there.

They were terribly good to me. They had four children of their own; their son was at prep school and the girls went to the local grammar school. They gave me their spare room and we stayed there until they themselves started having bombs.

I remember us all sleeping in the study and one night there was an enormous crash. Next morning Arthur said "Do you realise that if that bomb had hit the bathroom, the lead floor would have come down and hit us. I think we would be better off in the bedrooms". So we all went back.

John used to come out once a fortnight to see us and spend the night, but as it was evident that we were no safer in one place than another, we went back to Stoneleigh.

After the V1s came the V2s and the difficulty about them was that you could not hear them until they had exploded because they travelled faster than sound. They used to happen about every five hours. My sister called them the flying "gas-mains" because we were told that the first one was a gas main that had exploded. Miraculously, they got the better of the V2s and life returned to normal, or as normal as possible.

We moved into the new vicarage at the end of the war. The movers left most of the work to John, added to which the house was cold and damp.

The following year the twins were born. I recall the doctor saying to me "I'm awfully sorry, Mrs.

Evans, I think you are going to have twins". We had expected that long before, and they were born in the summer of 1946. Utterly unlike each other, Stephen was fair and Angela dark.

My dear mother arranged for us to have a maternity nurse when I first came home to get things running smoothly. We had some money saved from our wedding presents, which we used to pay for a young girl called Norli. She was German Jewish I think. She had been trained as a nursery nurse, had already done a job, and a friend of mine knew her.

We offered her a little more than she had been getting, 37/6d a week, which wasn't very handsome, to help with the home. She was devoted to the children and splendid about her duties but not easy to live with. After about six months she found another job and the children were all ours.

The following winter, 46/47 was the coldest, hardest you could ever experience. Everything was short, electricity was cut, fuel was scarce and everything frozen stiff. Somehow or other we got through it and the children were all marvellously healthy, so we more than survived.

John was inducted as first vicar in 1948. Someone asked him what difference being vicar made and he told them that it would not make any difference to his ministry "but you will have to pay me more". We went there, I think, at £250 a year and when we left it was £500, which I think was about normal at the time.

Deborah was born in 1951. She arrived three weeks later than expected. The doctor had said that the baby would arrive quickly, so the week she was due I

was packed off to a nursing home. People sent flowers but no baby arrived, so home I went.

One night I said to John "I think the baby really is coming this time" so he went off to ring the ambulance whilst I got dressed. I'd got as far as putting my shoes and stockings on and then said "I don't think I can do any more" so I was told to lie down on my bed. By that time the ambulance had come, and assisted by John's mother, who had come to help, they delivered the baby. Somebody had said that we must have some hot towels but Granny Evans already had them in the oven. The district nurse appeared from nowhere, and the doctor came in his pyjamas, and then, all the hard work having been done I was taken to the nursing home. The parish got to know all about it next day and all the parishioners were wonderful. I think there was more honest thinking in Stoneleigh than anywhere else I've been. They were not only concerned with church going but ready to tackle other matters.

In 1952, John got a letter from the bishop, Montgomery-Campbell at the time, saying "Have you heard of a place called Fleet? My name stinks there because I have taken Walter Boulton away from them. I think it would be just the place for you. Go and have a look at it and tell me what you think". So off we went to Fleet which is just over the border in Hampshire; we had no car so went by train.

The first three children grew up in Stoneleigh. Martin started at the infants school there, followed by the twins a couple of years later. They were part of the post-war bulge and so schools were overfull. Martin was not given a place until he was five and a half.

There were 50 children in each class, often temporary classrooms. The twins started in a class of 51; the teaching was good and they could both read simple books by the end of their first term.

Stoneleigh really was a happy place for us. They were such kind and generous people and gave us a very happy send off. They were reluctant for us to go and it was difficult to tell them that we had to respond to the bishop's invitation. In any case we were bulging out of the house and, looking ahead to the children's education, we realised that we had to have more than Stoneleigh could give us. We had been there for nine years and so it was probably the right time for a change. This was in 1952.

5 TWO TOWN PARISHES

Fleet gave us a very good welcome. There were two churches besides a little mission church. The parish church, I thought was rather horrendous, built in red brick by the great Burgess, and really difficult to worship in, narrow, with great big pillars.

Walter Boulton, whom John succeeded, was I think, very charismatic and had livened up the place. They had been studying the dynamics of communism, and dear John had to take over when they had to say what the Christian alternative to communism was.

Walter was a very good parish priest; he was prophetic in the way he could describe world trends, but he was a shocking administrator. He had started so many efforts in the parish. They were going to build a large new church centre; there were schemes for those who had not been able to find houses.

Poor John had to say "no" to a lot of these things, but he said he would build a lovely new lady chapel, and we would try to build a suitable church for St. Philip's, the daughter church, and continue with the housing scheme. So many of Walter's wonderful ideas had to be pared down.

Walter and his wife were often around in the parish, and it seemed to some that he was still vicar and not John. We survived but it was a difficult time. There were some wonderful people in the parish who were marvellously loyal, and amongst my generation I had some real friends.

Every parish was involved in a diocesan mission and we invited George Reindorp (later to become

Bishop of Guildford) to be our missionary. He came to a meeting of the PCC and said afterwards "This hasn't happened since the days of the apostles". The PCC was practically all men, and what's more they had mostly been in the forces; he was more used to those composed of middle-aged or elderly women.

He went down a treat when he took the mission, making us all work very hard. We had to visit every single house in the parish and tell them about the mission we were going to have. They were all invited to the opening service at the parish church, and John told the ordinary members of the congregation to make room for the others to sit in the best places.

Unfortunately, George stood up in the pulpit in a most dramatic way and said "Now you behind the pillars; you haven't been to church for years but I'm glad you are here now". He woke up the parish to a new outlook and was helpful in other ways. We remained friends ever afterwards.

Fleet had a lovely spacious vicarage though very draughty. There was a private school next door, and the headmistress used to bring the children to the Sung Eucharist every Sunday. Everything like that was comparatively easy.

Just before we went there, John's mother had a crisis in her life. Since his father died, first of all she had taken one or two jobs and then her eldest son had bought her a cottage, and for four years she was very happy there. Then the doctor said that she must not spend a winter on her own again, so I said "Couldn't Granny come and live with us?" I wrote to her because I realised that it had to come from me and not from

John.

She was a great asset We gave her the spare room as a bedsit and she would come down in the morning and peel the potatoes. She also made elevenses for everyone, and as there were often other people in the house, sometimes this would involve taking ten cups of tea around and she enjoyed doing it enormously.

She lived with us for four years and naturally was very fond of the children. When I read to them, I used to do it in her room, things like "Little Lord Fauntleroy" or "Children of the New Forest", as well as more modern books, and she enjoyed them too.

The only difficulty with dear Granny was that as she grew older and more frail, she became more depressed and would say "Oh, I am a nuisance. Oh, I am a bother to you". Of course it was hard work carrying up trays and doing little things for her, but the most difficult thing was trying to buoy up her spirits in her frustration and depression. I was determined that when I got to that stage I would not burden my family and friends with my frailties.

She died in the cottage hospital at Fleet, very well looked after. The funeral was well attended; the Fleet congregation had got very fond of her.

Some months later, we went to the village in Essex where John's father had been buried to inter the ashes. It was years since they had lived there so it was a wonderful moment when we discovered quite a congregation waiting for us.

My own mother died about a year after Granny Evans. We were on holiday when we heard that she had inoperable cancer. She was immensely brave

and despite the pain we had quite a lot of laughter together. She said that when my father died, about 30 years previously, she thought she could never be happy again but she said "Thanks to you all, I have known great happiness". After a few days spent with her she told me "It says in the Bible you must leave your father and mother and cleave to your husband. Now go and cleave".

She was surrounded by friends and family and a few days before she died she asked to be moved to a nursing home in Sussex, where she had stayed before to convalesce. Looking back, I realise what a good job she did; she was left to bring up three teen-aged sons and two small daughters at a comparatively young age. I often think of her.

We loved Fleet and the children were very happy there. Nicholas was born towards the end of our time there. We told the three older children one night at supper. They were rather quiet then Martin said "Now we won't have to give away the Beatrix Potter books." Angela said "Now Mummy will be able to go to the Young Wives Group for ages" and Stephen said "It'll probably be an uncle when it's still at school and be allowed to put it's elbows on the table."

One day the Bishop told John he had just the job for him. He didn't disclose what it was for a whole month and then we discovered where it was.

* * * *

Walton-on-Thames was not one of those pretty places with tree-lined avenues running down to the river.

Mostly it was down town, rows of houses, and suburban estates, with lots of good, solid, and worthwhile people. It was a much bigger and more mixed parish than any of the other places we had worked in. The vicarage, built in the 1930's, was a mile away from the church. Besides having five bedrooms, it had also a maid's sitting room, which we made into another bedroom. John declared that if he could find a site nearer the church he would build a new vicarage but it never happened, nor have his successors been able to do anything about it.

There was a lovely church dating from King Alfred's time, and it is said that Queen Elizabeth 1 had worshipped there. It was a little over-restored but that made it nice and light. It possessed a Scold's Bridle, used for bridling the tongues of women who talked too much, which was stolen. The news got on the television saying "The vicar badly wants it back". What for I wonder?

Walton was hard work. I had already worked with the Mother's Union in our two previous parishes, and we were glad to find a good branch there besides a Young Wives Group. John and I helped to get them working together and many of them got friendly with each other.

The church was well attended but John said that if all the congregation left one week the population was so large that we ought to be able to fill it with another the next. There was a very faithful nucleus which kept things going.

In our various parishes there were curates whom we have kept in contact with ever since. One

rather active man was terribly good with young people. On one occasion he disappeared for a few days, and when he came back he said one of the lads had been in prison and he wanted to meet him when he came out and help him get back on his feet again. He was also a good theologian and he used to visit places beyond the iron curtain and had links with members of the orthodox church. I still hear from him and his wife.

We had a curate at Fleet who was rather humourless. Once or twice a week he had breakfast with us after he and John had been to church and he had to go on to school or something. When he came into breakfast, he would always bend over the children and kiss their heads saying "Good morning, Angela. Good morning, Deborah" to each of them. What he could not see was the faces of the children.

But the wonderful thing that he did was to produce the Chester Cycle of Mystery Plays. We did it out-of-doors on the site of the new church. Altogether we did six nights. It was really well done and did a lot for the parish.

John always called the curates "The boys" but at Walton there was one very old man who was as deaf as a post. When Series 2 and 3 were introduced, John held a course of talks to which all the congregation were invited and the curates came too. He told them it was not a matter of more modern language, but the development of the liturgy. Robert, the deaf curate couldn't hear a word of the talk but his wife told him afterwards what had been said and he complied absolutely.

When we were at Walton, Deborah went to the local Junior School, and Nicholas, who had been

born shortly before we left Fleet, went first to the Infants' and then to Junior school. Deborah followed Angela to the Grammar School, but we decided that Nic should go to prep school when he was about eight. Martin and Stephen had both been to prep school in Everley, which gave them the grounding to gain "Foundationers Places" at St. John's, Leatherhead. The Headmaster was a cousin of my mother, and extremely generous about fees. So Nicholas followed them and they all went to St. John's which John thought important. They all enjoyed the freedom of the country and were not unhappy there but I don't think that they felt that there was much value in Boarding School.

It was whilst we were at Walton that John was made a Canon and lots of parishioners went to the Cathedral for his installation. By this time we had a Bedford van which was helpful in transporting people. At Fleet the parish had provided a small car but we now needed one of our own so, after mother died and I had a little money, we decided to buy the van.

One thing we got rather involved in at Walton was that we always seemed to have all the problems that the social services could not deal with landed on our doorstep. Their offices closed from Friday afternoon until Monday morning, and then all the people who were homeless or had other problems came to us. More than once I was taken in and gave out money, and we sometimes put people up on a temporary basis. In the end, John furnished a room in the parish hall with a camp bed and other basic requirements. We always seemed to be asking for money but it usually came.

Just before we left Walton we had terrific

floods. It was not the Thames which overflowed but the little contributory streams, and quite a number of new houses suffered. We were lucky to have an office in the church hall where people could come and report their difficulties, and we had lots of help from the parish.

One man had just moved in to Walton and had come to church with his family on their first Sunday and had talked to John.

The following week he came home from work and found his house flooded and the family gone. I am glad to say that he rang the vicarage immediately and I was able to tell him that if he contacted the church hall they would be able to tell him who was looking after them.

The floods were quite exciting. John had to wade through water to get a woman and her cat out of a window. The parishioners were wonderful and everyone who needed it got put up in homes except a tribe of gypsies who had to be accommodated in the church hall.

It was at Walton that we celebrated our silver wedding. Among other things, we were given some rose bushes, and whilst John was digging a bed for them in the garden, the Bishop rang and asked him to go and see him. He said "I hope you will become Arch-deacon of Surrey". John replied, "It's not a good time to leave. I've just planted some new rose bushes."

6 ARCHDEACON'S WIFE

We were sad to leave Walton but it was quite exciting to move to further responsibilities. We first moved to a largish house in Guildford whilst another one was being built on land that had been bequeathed to the church at Chiddingfold.

The house at Guildford was pleasant but too big; the one at Chiddingfold, the best we ever lived in. It had quite a lot of land round it and John enjoyed working in the garden. We never had any difficulty in finding room to put people up, and there was space for everything.

The older children had by then found places at universities. Martin had gone to study architecture in London; Angela went to London University; Stephen gained a scholarship to Oxford, and later Deborah went to the University of East Anglia. Nic at this time was still at prep school but later went to Cambridge.

Of course there were worries about them at times. I remember several harrowing periods of concern. But we all survived and I'm glad to say that they have always been only too ready to come home.

I was a bit lost when John first became an archdeacon. I felt I knew more or less what was required of a vicar's wife but I was uncertain as to what my role was as the wife of an archdeacon. Added to this, none of the children were at home all the time so I did not have to look after them.

John enjoyed going round the parishes, not just for the grand occasions but also to ordinary services. I often went with him and got very fond of the

clergy wives. It may seem a funny thing to do but I kept a little note book with the names and ages of their children in it so that I could remember where they had all got to.

Another thing that we did was to have informal clergy suppers. It sometimes seemed to us that many of them scarcely knew their brother clergy in the next parishes, and were even antagonistic towards them. I don't know whether or not it helped, but we had just an ordinary meal with a cider cup; they seemed to enjoy it so I hope it did good.

Whilst he was archdeacon, John had an invitation to visit Nigeria because we had a diocesan link with the Province of West Africa. He went with the Bishop's secretary who was a retired naval commander, and they did a brief tour of the country, going to see some of the projects we had been connected with. It was just after the Biafran War, and he was so impressed by the energy of the church there and the way they were coping with their troubles. I think it gave him enormous insight into the wider church and he gave a good many talks about it in different parishes.

Here it might be good to talk about family things. John had a sister, nine years older than himself, who was always a great support for the family. When anybody moved house, Aunt Mary always arrived to help. Not only us, but also her nephews and nieces who were moving house could count on her assistance.

She used to spend Christmas with us at the time the children were quite small. That was a very good thing because we always said "We must get the house straight before Aunt Mary comes". She was a

wonderful help.

Later, she gave John and me some wonderful holidays. She would take a house in France with her ex-teacher friend and arrange for us to go there. We did not do more than pay our personal expenses. She would say "You must have a man about the place". So it was that we had wonderful holidays in Brittany, Provence, and the Dordogne - about eight in all.

She had been headmistress of a secondary modern school since she was in her thirties and it was when it was made into a comprehensive school that she retired. She gave her energies to so many things and lived on until her nineties. I am glad to say that the family gave her a wonderful ninetieth birthday party.

We also had holidays with our children when they had homes of their own. Martin went to work in Buenos Aires, and three times we were able to go out there, but it would have been difficult to find the finance without help from Mary.

Angela taught in Kenya for a while and she invited us to stay with her. John could not find the time to go so my sister Angela went with me. It was at the end of term and we met quite a number of staff and the girls. When the holidays came, Angela took us to a number of wonderful places. In the game parks she was able to get residents' charges which saved us quite a lot of money.

In one of the parks, though we were not normally allowed to get out of the car, we got out to see an inactive volcano. There were lots of sharp bits of lava and I wanted to get a piece to take back to Nicholas, but I fell and cut my head. We went back to the lodge

where we were staying and they told us to go to the Baptist Mission Hospital which was the nearest source of medical help.

At the Mission, we saw a queue of women and children sitting around on the grass so joined them. Then a Sister came out and said "You white women shouldn't be sitting out there in the sun", and took us inside. She looked at my head and said with a sigh that it needed stitching but that her sight was poor and she had a migraine, so a smiling Kenyan orderly put some stitches in it. Whilst this was being done, my sister, who had been an almoner, chatted to the hospital sister and discovered they had both trained at St. Thomas's. The sister, who was in late middle-age, said that she would rather work in the Mission Hospital, with all its limitations, than in the NHS.

In the end I said "I am sure we owe you something for all this", to which the reply was "We usually ask for half-a-crown".

We gave rather more than this, and she gave me some anti-biotic tablets, wrapped up in piece of scrap paper, apologising for not having a proper box to put them in. When I got home a few days later they checked up and found that everything was doing well.

Although John used to enjoy driving, and Guildford is not a large diocese, he had been there twelve years as archdeacon, and decided to take retirement a little early. He was then in his early sixties and so he wrote to his friend, Bishop John Neale, asking him if he had got a job for an old man with still some ministry left in him. John replied that a younger man had just left the Ogbournes in Wiltshire and he wanted

to put someone in there, but it was not a whole time job.





THE EVANS FAMILY AT THE TIME OF
JOHN AND WENDY'S GOLDEN WEDDING
PEWSEY 1991

Standing: Sue, Jonathon, Nicholas, Stephen, Martin
Seated: Deborah, John, Wendy, Angela, Cathy,
Becky, Suzie, Kate, Owen

7 THREE STAGE RETIREMENT

The two villages, St. George and St. Andrew were near Chiseldon where the Rector lived with whom we got on very well. Sometimes John went to Chiseldon and the Rector came to us. We had two beautiful churches.

It was not a very good team area because both the Ogbournes were near Marlborough and did their shopping there, whilst Chiseldon was nearer to Swindon and it was very difficult to work as a group. John always said that the two Ogbournes had been on different sides in the Wars of the Roses and had never come together since.

Interestingly, Ogbourne was connected with Bec in Normandy and the monks from there had had their principal English house at St. George. Once we went on holiday to the abbey at Bec and made ourselves known to the monks. One of them said "Ah, Ogbourne St. George, that is ours".

The Cistercians from Bec had provided us with several notable churchmen, including Archbishops Langfranc and Anselm, besides the builder of Westminster Abbey. There is a plaque in the Abbey at Bec giving the names of their bishops who came to England. During the thirties there was an important RC/Anglican Conference there when they shared all the things that they could together, and it was felt that it might not be long before the two churches got closer.

John had been on General Synod and had taken part in some conferences about the diocese of Europe. As Archdeacon of Surrey, two committees which he chaired were the Council for Social Work and

Women's Ministry - it was long before the ordination of women. John was always in favour of women's ordination.

This aspect of his work was of particular interest to me as well. He was also a member of the Pensions Board and had quite a lot to do with looking for a site for a new retirement home. Some of the ones we were using were quite inadequate so he was involved in an enquiry into future needs. The conclusion they came to was that people needed residential homes where the residents had their own front door, and where there was some nursing assistance.

Having made these recommendations some of them were asked to go and look for suitable sites. We went together with an architect who was splendid. When we went to a place he would look for the right kind of things such as the availability of social services. At one site, he said it was too steep for old people. At Fairford in Gloucestershire he said it was too far from anywhere else, added to which there was awful noise from aircraft.

That same day, he said that the church owned some land near Cheltenham so we decided to go and look at it. Thus it was that we went to the village of Prestbury and found that it was both accessible and a place where staff could be recruited. That was how Capel Court came to be built but not without trouble because local authorities are not keen on residential homes being built on their doorsteps. This was the first of the purpose built retirement homes to be constructed. Before then it was always thought that residents needing nursing care could go to a nursing home, but be-

cause of the increased cost of such places, and due to the insight of Captain Woolgar, Warden first of Capel Court and then Gracey Court, things have changed.

Ogbourne was fun and we enjoyed being there. John made rather a speciality with the children. There was a thriving Junior School and a good Brownie Pack, and he built up the Family Service. We also used to run a holiday club for the children and have parties for them.

Once we had three or four days of snow when we could not get out of the village. We had oil-fired central heating and the oil froze. John went round the village calling especially on the older people but found they were coping better than many of the younger ones. They could not get the milk out of the village and farmers were not allowed to sell it so they gave it to us. That Sunday it was impossible to get into St. George's church. Even Alice, the indomitable church-warden, could not dig a way through the snow. We held a service round the fire in the sitting-room of the vicarage. Later some neighbours came and shared a camping style lunch with us.

Whilst there, John had a nasty cancer operation. The parishioners were absolutely wonderful. Everyday someone would drive me to see him in the hospital at Swindon. The family came down at week-ends and mowed the lawn and did things like that. And, of course, Mary came.

John made a good recovery, and the last thing he did at Ogbourne was when the roof of St. Andrew's church needed replacing. I think the estimated cost was £20,000, and as there were only about 200 people in the

parish it posed quite a problem, but we all decided that the church was too good to let it fall into disrepair. So with the help of all sorts of central funds, the village managed to raise an enormous amount, and by the time we left we had the necessary funding. One effort was a concert at a manor house owned by a Roman Catholic which shows how ecumenical we were.

We then talked things over and we decided it was time to move, so we looked around for somewhere in Wiltshire; Surrey would have been far too expensive.

We wanted to move to a large village or a small town where we could walk to the shops and to church. So it was that in 1984 we went to Pewsey. We bought a small house which had originally been a council house. We wanted a good sized sitting-room, at least two bedrooms, a reasonable kitchen and, if possible, an extra room. Actually the house we got was better than that because it also had a dining room.

It was a very happy home for us. John got an allotment to garden and we were near enough to the church. We bought it for £29,000 and by selling off various bits and pieces we managed to raise that amount and never regretted it.

We both enjoyed Pewsey. John told both the vicars we had that if they liked to use him, he would gladly assist. When we had a woman priest appointed to one of the churches, and the villagers were rather apprehensive about her, John went over and preached for her and received Holy Communion at her hands. Perhaps because of that we did not hear of any objections to her ministry.

John also joined the local History Society and

became its chairman; he also became a member of the Gardening Club. I joined the local Mothers' Union. It was rather elderly but extremely friendly and, I think, glad to share things with me.

One of my joys at Pewsey was singing in the parish church choir. It was a good choir and they were glad of another alto. I was also able to help some of the children to sing alto as well. Our choir practice was on Thursdays, and when the children had gone, the older ones would gather round the piano at the back of the church and sing, perhaps an anthem. I remember singing the Russian Kontakion for the Departed. Sometimes whilst we were doing this, I would hear John come in and join with the tenor line.

Whilst we were at Pewsey, not only did our youngest son, Nicholas, get married, but we celebrated our Golden Wedding. The family all wanted us to do this in a proper way and asked us what we would like. We thought that the best way to begin was to have a celebration in church, and then hoped that our family and friends would join us for some sort of a meal afterwards.

The Rector was very kind. He celebrated Holy Communion and many people from the village joined in. Friends from all the parishes we had worked in came and it was a very happy occasion. Sue, our daughter-in-law, produced a wonderful celebratory cake, and after the service we joined together for coffee and cake, and then we moved to the village hall for lunch which the family had provided.

This was fairly near the end of our time at Pewsey, which we loved, but John knew that getting up

and down stairs was becoming more and more difficult for me, so he said it was about time to write to the Pensions Board and move to where we could get some help.

By this time the children were all more or less established in their own homes. We were lucky in that all of them had the benefit of a university education, paid for by a generous government. I had acquired no A levels but felt that I gained about 16 vicariously. They worked hard (and so did I) to get the right grades. I realise now that they all had to manage on a very tight budget. John was proud to relate that they all got better degrees than he did.

No family grows up without causing some anxieties. Our worries about Martin came when he and Silvia were living in Buenos Aires and their children were small. They both had teaching posts at the university when the Falklands War broke out. For some weeks we could not communicate with them. They were well treated - there are ten times as many British in Buenos Aires than there are in the Falklands. Martin lost his post for about a year which he spent in rebuilding their house.

Angela and Stephen both went into teaching after university. They had both been teaching for some years when, for different reasons, they decided to change. It must have been a difficult time for them, but now Angela is a librarian and Stephen is an accountant.

Deborah's troubles came soon after she went to university but she recovered well and got her degree.

Nic was always a traveller. He got a temporary job in South Africa as part of his post-graduate

training in Method and Management, and returned home with his arm bound up. He had been mugged and his camera stolen by a youth at a bus station.

They are all good friends and I think they must ring each other up to decide who is coming to see Mum next.

We had not by then heard of Gracey Court and thought we might go to Cheltenham but discovered that it had a four or five years waiting list. However, the Pensions Board told us that if we would like to look at Gracey Court in Devon there would not be such a long wait. And so it was that having seen it, we decided that it was the right place for us. Some of the family were surprised at our idea of moving into a retirement home. They enjoyed coming to Pewsey and knew we were happy there, but eventually decided that it was a wise move.

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John stayed on a little longer at Pewsey in order to take the wedding of a friend's daughter, but in 1993 we came here to Gracey Court. We found some good friends here, and although we were no longer free to do what we wished to do when we wanted to do it, we had security. John helped a bit at the parish church and especially enjoyed doing the 8 a.m. at Bradninch, a nearby village, during an interregnum.

After we had been here about six weeks, all the available family came to see us and we had lunch in our flat, fourteen of us altogether, and then I think they all saw we had got to the right place.

We had not been here very long when Mary

said "I think you ought to go out to Argentina again", and so, with her help, we went for three weeks. I am very glad that we did because we got to know the grandchildren better, both by then at university. We also got to know what Martin and Silvia were up to in their work, things like tests in wind tunnels and the angles of light, which were all important for such architecture.

John, like many older men, had prostate trouble and had an operation which went fairly well, but he took a little time to heal. He was soon active again and taking services in chapel, but suddenly got a nasty chest infection.

Actually, the Monday before he died, he gave someone a lift into Exeter, but the following day he was obviously quite ill. The doctor came out and looked at him and said "Stay where you are until you get better".

Having had a nasty day or two, he sat up in bed when I brought him his tea and said "I feel much better" and then collapsed and died. It really was a marvellous way to go, just as he was feeling on top of things.

People here were terribly kind. I rang the children, and dear Angela and Stephen came over that morning and helped with all the things that had to be done. When I rang Martin he said he would come from Buenos Aires that night. The whole of that week some member of the family was with me, and on Sunday five of them took me out to lunch. It was really a very happy meal and we talked about things we had done together, besides, of course, the funeral arrangements.

The Rector here was very good. John and I

had talked about funeral services because he had already shared in services for residents who had died, so it was not difficult to know what he would like.

We decided to ask a nephew of his to preach because he knew John well. During the service at Broadclyst church, a man turned and said to our eldest son "You must be Martin; I was head choir boy at Stoneleigh!" That was when Martin was a baby.

The following week, the Rector of Pewsey arranged a memorial service there. It was good to be back in Wiltshire and join in thanksgiving for John's life with friends there. Bishop John Neale preached a splendid sermon.

When my mother was dying, at the age of eighty, after being a widow for thirty years, she said to me "I did not think I could be happy again after Percy died, but family and friends have given me so much joy". I have so much to be thankful for, so I can say the same.

After John's death there was a great deal to be done. There were letters to write and to answer, and I had to move into a smaller flat. The family were wonderful and I had great support from Gracey Court. It was good to be among friends who knew John.

The worship in the chapel means a lot to me. When we were in different parishes, I rather envied John being able to go into a quiet church and share Evensong whilst I was busy with the children or getting a meal ready. As I get more disabled, I can always share in the worship here. There is a lot of unintentional humour in our services here which is inevitable with a group all doing their own thing, and where some are

deaf or disabled. The angels must also chuckle when they see our attempts at worship.

I am grateful for the telephone because there is a good deal of communication with family and friends. The eight grandchildren are a continuous joy. I never get bored at hearing about their achievements, passing an exam, doing a job, serving at the altar, performing in a play, learning an instrument, taking part in a match, acquiring the ability to read, or crossing the Atlantic.

Not many weeks go by without a visit from some member of the family, or from some old friends or colleagues. Of course there are black moments but I am lucky enough to have an invariable optimism. This must be the result of all that life has given me, and the deep conviction of faith that is part of me.



