

## Marjorie Phyllis Beckett (nee Bains)

17 Barnwood Road.

Fareham,

Hants,

Date 1/2/1985- May 1985

Thank you to Gillian and Christine for sharing their parent's memories. (2024)



Marjorie & Thomas

This all begins for me on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1917.

I was born Marjorie Phyllis Bains, to Hilda Elizabeth and Litchfield Chamberlain Bains of Godden Farm, Challock Leas, near Ashford, Kent. They told me later how Dad had built up a pedigree herd of cows and a calf born near my time of coming into the world they named Marjorie. Doris Pullen, then a girl of 14, used to come and take me for a walk in the pram and help mum, as she lived a very busy life, making 40lbs of butter a week, and I believe I used to find my way to the dairy and put my finger up the bunghole in the churn and get the butter.

Dad's family were all farmers, Grandad Bains was a big man with a beard, and Grandma Bains was tiny. I only have a recollection of them in a photograph. Mum's parents were teachers named Robinson. She had one sister, Elsie who was a marvellous classical pianist but at the age of 21, she developed tuberculosis and died. Grandad Robinson also died from this disease at an early age, which was prevalent in those days.

My earliest memories were not of these early days, but when we moved to a larger farm in Cambridge, called Parkins Farm, in the village of Castle Camps. This was an arable farm, combined with a dairy herd.

I remember we had two Shire horses named 'Smiler and Violet.' As I became older, I can remember climbing haystacks and riding on the wagon and I was fascinated at harvest time each year when the big noisy steam threshing machine used to come,

and other farmers and men used to come to help with the harvest. Taking tea and food to them in the fields and riding home on the horse's back.

I had two little girlfriends Doris and Alice who lived in the village, and their dad worked on the farm, and another friend Janet from a neighbouring farm who used to be brought to play with me in a pony and trap. I remember waiting for her by the duck pond out in front and listening for the pony's hoofs 'clip clopping' coming down the quiet lane. I remember going with Mum and Dad to a tennis party at the Vicarage, tea on the lawn. I was dressed in a white woolly dress Mum had knitted.

Happy memories, but I think it was 1922 when disaster struck for Dad. During a year of drought, the crops failed, no mechanical aids in those days. Bills had to be paid and Dad found he had to sell everything up to clear himself. I can remember quite clearly the day of the auction sale at the farm a lot of people milling about, and at the time it seemed to me quite exciting, but later I realised that everything had to go.

Mum and Dad decided to go back to Kent, but it was a much smaller house, and even at 6 years old I knew everything would be different from then on.

### Cade House

\*They bought an old house called 'Cade House' in Hythe, Kent, about 500 years old with oak beams everywhere and with 3 acres of ground. Supposed to have been the home of Jack Cade the highwayman and smuggler. The story was he was caught and hanged for his crimes. \*

The little house was whitewashed, had a small hall and three downstairs rooms and a long scullery with an old bake oven, a landing 3 bedrooms, and a stable. Dad still had a horse. The sea was opposite, and it was a pretty walk there through the bushes of gorse, honeysuckle, etc. Of course, when you reach the sea in those days, it was like a desert island. No neighbours only far up the road. I remember going with Mum and Dad to look at the cottage the grass was up to our waist and we found it had a well near the back door. Of course in those days, there was no electric light, we had oil table lamps and cooking was done by a kitchen range. These were very cosy in winter, but in summer very hot. You were able to have a small paraffin heater to boil a kettle and help with cooking.

Dad had to find work, there wasn't much about. He started managing a one-man business for Mr Price, who owned a beach quarry next to the cottage. This meant getting the beach out, shovelling it into a skip that ran on rails pulled by the horse then lorries would fetch it away. He also had to keep the books, and Mr price arrived regularly every Saturday morning to see Dad and discuss things. He wouldn't take on another man as he was too mean and of course. Dad used to come home tired out. One morning he had to fetch the horse 'Bobby' from the field and found it laying dead. He brought another horse Chestnut Cob, we named him 'Ginger' he and Dad worked together for some years.

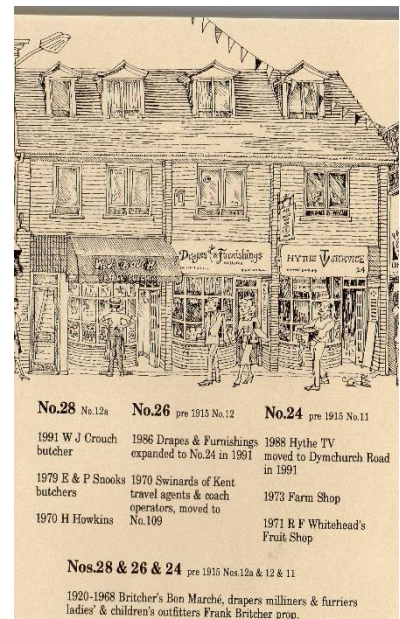
I started school at age 6 in Hythe, a church school St. Leonards. We lived 2 miles from Hythe, so had to walk as buses were few and far between. Mum used to take me down to the next cottage to a girl there and as we walked, we used to collect more children.

When I was 10 years Mum had another baby. She went into a nursing home at Gillingham where they gave 'Twilight Sleep' it was a new thing to save a lot of stress to mothers, as she had been there when she had me and she enjoyed it there. Dad took me to stay with her. Matron Crofts was a jolly person. So after my little brother Nelson was born, I was allowed to stay and Matron Crofts used to bath Nelson and she used to sing, 'What shall we do with the drunken sailor'? and I was allowed to watch. It was a great joy to me to have a baby brother and 10 months passed happily, when I remember him outside in his pram. He would be sitting up in his highchair eating an egg. He had rosy cheeks and fair hair. But tragedy struck he caught meningitis, incurable in those days. He died after what seemed like ages screaming in pain. They came out to tell me one Sunday morning in the garden that Nelson had died. (1927). I was shocked and furious. I just threw myself on the ground and I sobbed. I was heartbroken. He was buried in Lympe Churchyard.

Mum's mother Nin Robinson came to live with us after that, but she was a semi-invalid, her hands were deformed with arthritis, but after a few years with us, she was taken ill and died. She was a very sweet person and she was buried in the same grave as Nelson.

As the years went by, I left school at 14 years old. We had a matriculation exam then, if you passed in English and Arithmetic you went to grammar school. I passed in English, but not Arithmetic. I was glad I could leave school at 14 years. I joined the guides and cycled into Hythe, then I found a job at Britcher's Bon Marche

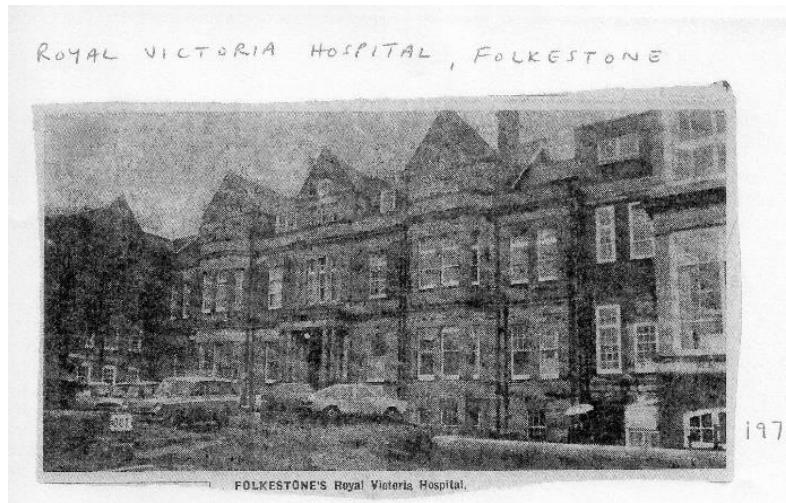
in Hythe, High Street. It was a fair sized drapery shop( the only one then). I started in the haberdashery department. There was a contraption that whizzed around and held things like little pins, needles, elastic, etc. My first job was to dust this thing. After that I was put on millinery working under Miss Blackman, we became friends and I liked it there. When Miss Holman was away, I was sent through to the corset and bra department (all of my own). Then, if they were busy on one department, I was sent to help out. After three years I put in for, and was given, the hosiery and sock department (I was in charge here). I felt very important and enjoyed it. Then I became ambitious and answered an advert in the Folkestone Herald for an under assistant on the underwear department at McIlroy's in Folkestone. This was a fairly large shop and I got the job. I worked under a girl called Doris Kemp who became a good friend. By then Dad had made a very nice tennis court at Cade Cottage and my friends used to like to come to play. There were several friends and we all used to go hiking together and call in at a pub for a drink and play darts. Those were very happy days.



## World War II

Then came 1939 and we declared war on Germany. Everybody had to do war work. I made another good friend about this time, Ronnie Runcarus, who worked in the shop next door. She used to come in my department which was the hosiery and socks again (Yes, I had a promotion). We didn't sell tights then, only stockings.

## Royal Victoria Hospital- Folkestone

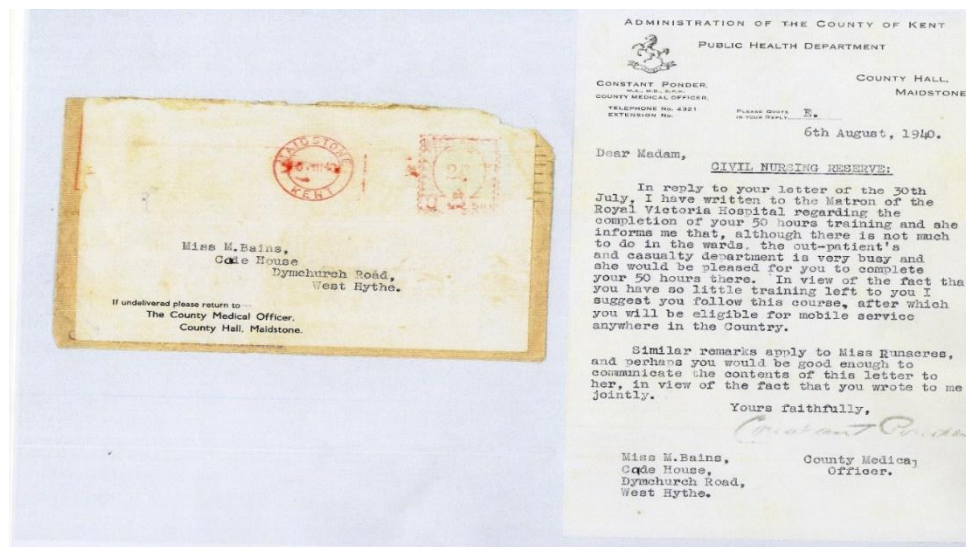


Ronnie and I palled up when we discovered we both were attending lectures on first aid and home nursing at the Royal Victoria Hospital. We were members of the British

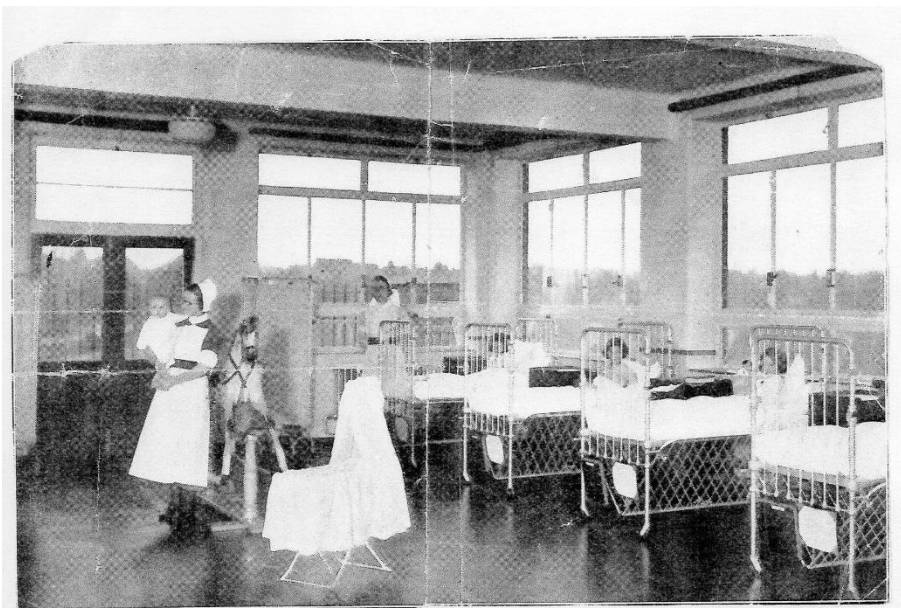


Red Cross Society. After passing our exams at the hospital, having questions fired at us by surgeons and doctors there was not to mention home sister, a practical and written exam, we were ready to start the work on the wards. We also had to 'put in' a lot of hours work on the wards in a voluntary capacity. The summer of 1940 was very hot and I remember us going down to the harbour at Folkestone to watch and wave to the returning troops being evacuated from Dunkirk. Eventually in September 1940, our papers came through from Maidstone and we were called for a nursing duty at the hospital. We were both rather apprehensive, of course. But at the time, it

seemed a great adventure.







CHILDRENS WARD DURING WAR  
SISTER NOAKES AND NURSE GORING



SISTER NOAKES  
ON WARD

POSSIBLY FAR LEFT  
MISS M A CROWTHE  
MATRON

Dad had taken a job as a gardener to Lady Conway at Saltwood Castle and Mum had moved to Castle Gate Cottage with Dad working near. Now France had fallen to the Germans, Folkestone and Hythe were front line towns and the fear in everybody's mind was invasion of this country, we were all waiting for something to happen!

The Battle of Britain started, huge waves of bomber planes came over flying in strict rotation, accompanied by fighter planes. Our Royal Air Force boys were marvellous and scrambled quickly to soar into formation over enemy planes and break them up. Many planes were shot down, some RAF and German alike. Some pilots descended by parachutes and some were found hanging from trees. Our work at the hospital was varied, but always we were very busy. The children's ward on the top floor was closed and brought down to ground level. I worked on the male ward first, then

moved to night duty, and so it went on. We did a few months on each department casualty, operating theatre, maternity, private wards, women's, children and male wards. The towns of Dover, Hythe and Folkestone were full of troops and the nurses had a lot of invitations to parties in the different messes. We went to a police dance and a fireman's dance and officer's mess at Hawkrigde Air Force Base. One day in 1942, Ronnie and I saw the invitation to a dance at the Sergeants' mess R.E.M.E at Capel, on the white cliffs of Dover. All along these cliffs at intervals were huge cross channel guns. After the atmosphere of living in the hospital (nurse's home) we were always glad to go to a party given by the Army or Air Force as the food and drinks were plentiful.

At the 424 battery mess party we nurses all alighted from our taxi and were ushered inside. Little did I know my future husband was there. Yes, yours truly Staff Sergeant Thomas James Beckett, made a beeline for me and was in full attendance all evening, bringing me lovely food and drinks for which I was very thankful. We talked, we danced, and he tried to tell me how to throw a dart. He said he was an engineer and came from Liverpool. Finally he asked me for a date but I refused, as I couldn't believe such a nice chap at 34, couldn't have been married. However it was arranged they would all be coming to the hospital dance. But unfortunately when that came round none of them turned up, as the invitation hadn't been sent. I must admit I was disappointed, as I was hoping to see Staff Sergeant Beckett again. After a month or two, another invitation went up on the notice board in the nurse's home from 424 battery Capel. So Ronnie and I arranged to go again. Well, that was it, Staff Sergeant Beckett was ready and waiting for me, standing back to the fire, all rosy and shining, and came towards me hands outstretched, obviously, we were both pleased to meet again. I think that moment was when we 'fell in love,' and after that we had many dates throughout the war.

We would meet, go to the cinema first, this was quite a business as servicemen had to take rifle, tin hats and all had to take gas masks, so there was a lot of clattering. After the film we would go for a meal, and then he would take me back to the hospital for night duty.

Sister Noakes had taken a fancy to my work and always liked to get me on her children's ward, if she could. There was always a list of tonsil cases, then, besides the mixture of illnesses.

One night about midnight, the shell warning went, the children were asleep, then the shell started to fall, the gasometer was hit not far away, and things were really nasty. I was alone on the ward, when the door opened and Sister Noakes came quietly in, 'Alright nurse' she said, 'shall we have a cup of tea'? Her presence was greatly comforting, as previously I had been thinking, wouldn't it be dreadful if a shell fell on this ward. It quietened down later on, that was the trend of the May nights, on the night duty.

However August 1944 we did have several direct hits on the hospital. The Germans had been shelling most of the day. I was then working in the operating theatre. We had a long list of ops all day. Sister Hickton said, "You go off for a couple of hours, Bains, we may need you later." So I was resting in the nurses' sitting room. It was a lovely summer's evening, the windows had been open, but we heard the 9 o'clock news and the blackouts were drawn. There were 6 nurses in there, when there was

a tremendous blast and the ceiling started to fall on us and water from burst pipes cascaded down on us. I was seated in the middle of the settee with Vivian Ibbett on my right and Katie Brooker on my left. Vivian had a piece of shrapnel in her lung and was calling out, Katie only had a small piece in her scalp, I kept quite still thinking 'are we alright or have we lost a leg or something'? Voices called out, 'stay put nurses' and the door was being forced open over the rubble. One of the sisters came in with a lantern. We were taken into matron's sitting room, apart from feeling shocked I felt alright. I remember blood dripping onto matron's red carpet from a nurse's leg wound. Mr Buttery the head surgeon came into us and said, 'get them downstairs, that was the emergency underground area, where the nurse's training school had been. There was also an emergency operating theatre. We didn't see Vivian anymore, later we heard she had died that night.

## 10-hour on town

HELLING of Folkestone by the Germans came more frequent as the battle for Boulogne and Calais gained momentum and reached its climax.

Allied convoys on their way to the Normandy beach-heads were often the target, but towards the end of the war the Nazi gunners used their guns on Folkestone and neighbouring coast towns from time to time.

During September, 1944, Folkestone was shelled on several occasions, many of the bombardments lasting several hours, and the detailed incidents were as follows:

- The Slade, Bellevue Street, Margaret Street, hit September 1st.
- Hill Road, 2nd.
- Dudley Road, 10th.
- Dolphins Road, Rita Place, 13th.
- Radnor Park Crescent, Radnor Park Gardens, Charlotte Street, Coolinge Lane, Alkham Valley, Royal Victoria Hospital, Foster's Laundry, 14th.

● Cannabury Road, Downs Road, Walton Gardens, 15th.

● Railway Road, 23rd.

● The Leas, Leasway School, Beachborough Villas, 27th.

During a prolonged attack on September 14, starting at noon and continuing until almost 10 p.m., the Royal Victoria Hospital received a direct hit on the western side, causing fatal casualties.

In the hospital at the time were 60 patients, a number of whom had been injured by shell fire earlier in the day. They had been moved into a shelter in the sub-basement and none was hurt.

The damage to the building, however, necessitated the evacuation of the patients to hospitals in other parts of the county. Colonel Love, R.A.M.C., also made available the Emergency Military Hospital at the Royal Marine Police, and moved in a medical team and made orderlies.

The hospital had been damaged on several earlier occasions by exploding shells in the vicinity, and

## attack hospital

the bombardment was renewed on the following day when shells fell in the Black Bull area.

Sergt. William G. Dickenson of the Kent County Constabulary, Folkestone Division, was killed.

The town was shelled for the last time on Thursday, September 20, when Cannabury Road, a private house on The Leas which had been open throughout the war, received a direct hit.

Another shell hit a part of the Harvey Grammar School, Chertton Road, blasting open the front of the building which, at the time, was being used as Corporation Offices. Almost on the other side of the road, a shell fell in the back gardens of houses in Beachborough Villas.

Late in the afternoon of that day, the air dropped two more shells on the edge of the beach between the harbour and the Victoria Pier.

In earlier bombardments the Folkestone Gas Works suffered considerable damage on a number of occasions. On the night of December 16, 1942, it

*Nana was below in nurses lounge -*



*THE STONE figure, familiar to staff and patient, remained on its pedestal when a shell made a direct hit on the Royal Victoria Hospital, Folkestone, on September 14, 1944. None of the patients was hurt, but there were casualties: a nurse and a cyclist were killed.*

There were bunk beds down there and a mixture of men and women patients, some children and staff and our wounded. I was just thankful I was alright, although I felt tearful with shock. They gave me an injection of morphine, but it had no effect, as the

pent up tension seemed too great. Mr Buttery came round with the night sister in the morning, they were arranging for all the nurse casualties to be transferred to Dartford. I asked him if I could be sent home, as home was in Hythe then. An ambulance took me there., I was still in my white theatre dress and white shoes, my hair was grey, standing on end with dust and debris, my head ached, but that was nothing compared with some of the others. I asked the driver to stop just along the road and I walked slowly to the gate and across the lawn. I must have looked a funny sight. Mum, of course, was concerned. I assured her that a wash and a couple of aspirins would put me right. Later on she wanted to send Tom a telegram to say I was alright and at home. His commanding officer told him to come and see me, although they were busy. Tom walked from Hougham battery to Hythe, there was no buses running, about 12 miles.

After three weeks I returned to the hospital, but by that time the Germans had been driven out of northern France, this was 1944, the situation was better. The children's ward had been reopened on the top floor and I worked there until I left.

In July 1945 Tom came in a taxi to fetch me. I think I filled the taxi with all my things, electric fire, wireless set, etc. We made arrangements for our wedding day on July 31<sup>st</sup> and although we had a Register Office Ceremony, owing to circumstances, we had a reception at Paddock House Hotel, and in spite of rations were able to get a wedding cake made at the local bakery. It was a lovely sunny day and the nurse friends from the hospital came and sergeants from Tom's mess. There was a nice garden at the hotel and it was a very happy day. They all saw us off from Folkestone station and I believe some of them got into trouble with the guard for writing something on the carriage. We stayed the night at the Strand Palace Hotel in London and the next morning caught a train to Liverpool to see Tom's mother, then on the to North Wales. Llandudno. The next morning was also warm and sunny and walking arm in arm through the hotel it seemed the start of a new life for us both!

Tom was demobbed from the army in December 1945 and we decided to live with his parents in Liverpool. He took a job at Dunlop's at Speke as maintenance engineer. It was a big move for me, not having lived far from home before, but Mum and Dad Beckett were lovely people and made us feel at home there at 33 Antonio St, Bootle .But the weather was very depressing, it poured with rain for 8 weeks. I was rather lost, as after helping Mum Beckett in the morning, the day seemed very long for me. Tom came home from work about 7:00 PM, had his meal, he must have been tired, but most nights we would go out for a drink or a visit his friends. Then I caught flu or something, now, I felt 'under the weather' for some time. Tom decided we would go back to Kent to live, He said ' he would rather live down South now and he had promised my parents if I wasn't happy, he would bring me back.' I think I was homesick really!

We settled in Hythe; Tom walked into Mackeson's Brewery and came out with a job of maintenance engineer.

We went into lodgings, our Gillian was born September 21st, 1946. The brewery gave us a 4 room cottage at Saltwood to rent and promised a larger house in Hythe, which was being built at Ormonde Rd.



Tom's mother spent two holidays with us, one time bringing Tom's youngest brother, then 15 years old. We moved to Ormonde Road in 1947, happy days with the sea very near!

Tom's mother became ill and died just before our Christine was born March 9<sup>th</sup>, 1950. Both babies were premature, Gillian came at 8 months and Christine at 7 .5 months but thank goodness both were perfect.

The summers were very busy times as Tom's sisters and brothers with their families would love to come and stay with us. They used to come with white faces, looking tired and go home with rosy cheeks, it was all a bit hectic ,but we all enjoyed ourselves!

By this time, Mum and Dad had sold 'Cade House' and moved to Palmbeach Avenue on the Palmarsh Estate. They bought a piece of ground ,and had a bungalow built. Finally when they were moved in there, most Sunday afternoons, Tom, I ,Gillian and Christine would go to see them. The children loved the little train as it used to puff along one whole side of the garden. I remember Grandad Bains having cut the grass, made a big mound for them to sit on, and they were very excited watching the trains come by, sitting on the top, and some drivers would sound their whistles. Sally Dumping, the Sealyham dog, used to be scampering around too.

Sadly 1953 Mum became ill and died unexpectedly. Dad remained on his own for a time, then Tom persuaded him to sell up and come to Ormonde Road with us. But after three years he also died.

When Tom's retirement was coming, we decided to buy a house of our own. We bought a small house in Dymchurch Rd, but after 2 years there, we had the offer of a Brewery property, The Hermitage. Tom was promoted to chief engineer by this time. After 10 happy years there, the girls growing to teenagers and then going to work in London. Both meeting their future husbands there and bringing them to the Hermitage to meet us. Then Mackeson's Brewery closed and Tom retired, so we bought a bungalow in Romney Way. Both Gillian and Christine were married while we were there. Christine and Bert were married at St Leonard's Church Hythe, and Gillian and Barry one year before at Holy Trinity, Sidcup. Now years after, Tom and I are living at Fareham, Hants, again in a bungalow of our choice. Blessed with our five grandchildren, added to the family.

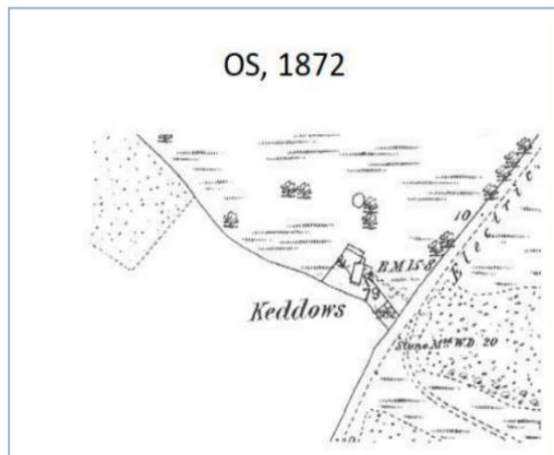
Marjorie P Beckett, Nanna, and Nanny.

PS I forgot to mention Dad had 4 sisters and 1 brother. I still have several cousins who live in and about the country.

\* NB.(page 2) Cade's Cottage along the Dymchurch Road (set back beside the Palmarsh Garage). Jack Cade and his rebellion, but there was no mention of him living in Hythe.

Sometimes referred to Cottage or House.

Mike de la Mere HLHG: The 1872 OS map shows the house or the area as 'Keddows'. The 1838 Tithe Map as 'Kidd House'. The three names are clearly connected, but it suggests Jack Cade was not originally involved. \*



We'll meet again



**We'll meet again...**

WAR-TIME nurses had the chance to chat over old times last week at a reunion at Wakefield Hall, Folkestone.

The women, now living throughout Kent and Sussex, nursed at Folkestone's Royal Victoria Hospital between 1939 and 1945.

Nursing officer Miss Janet Laing showed them around the hospital pointing out changes that had taken place since the war.

The reunion is the first of its kind and another is planned for next year.

Miss Louise Noakes, who between 1939 and 1945 was a sister in charge of war casualties is pictured above cutting a cake to celebrate the