

Chapter 19 Early Years of Peter Haycraft Dibdin

26th February 1913 – 28th September 1943

Peter was born in 1913, the second son of Lionel and Cecily Dibdin. His older brother, Stanley who was born in 1910, died of pneumonia when Peter was four years old, during the First World War.

The details of this are elsewhere and letters from Cecily, Peter and Stanley mother, indicate the struggle they had to try to help him. Lionel, their father was unable to return from the front line, in WW1, to be with the family.

Letters from Cecily to Lionel at that time give very clearly how fond Peter was of Stanley and how he was aware of what had happened

Volume 2 Appendix 16 Letters between Cecily to Lionel

25 February 1917

Peter's birthday tomorrow. Peter said "I wish Stanley could come to my party". He talks of him a lot.

19 April 1917

Am trying to get to bed early now as I sleep better. I don't know what I should do without Peter although he wakes me early. He is growing very tall and getting slimmer.

Brought up at Avondale in Wallingford, Peter was educated at Epsom College having spent his early years at Elstree School, Carsharilton or Elstree Park Hill, Carshalton Kindergarten and Preparatory School for Boys, following on from his older brother Stanley. There are reports for both boys from this Prep School. School. Reports are in the archive.



Peter and Stanley

On 9 Feb 1929 there is a letter from Lionel – saying that he was sorry to hear of Peter's broken bones and being in Hospital somewhere near Sutton Common Road. Lionel was hoping to drop in and see him. Peter would have been 16 years old and presumable was boarding at Epsom College at the time.

Full letter in Appendix 29

On 31 July 1930 Cecily signed a letter giving permission to Epsom College for Peter to fly with the cadets. Peter was 17 years old – this was 3 years before both Lionel and Cecily died in plane crash.



Air Cadet Badge from Sutton High School

Peter's parents signed permission for him to fly in the Air Cadets while at school.

31 July 1930

To Capt J.H.Pear. Epsom College Contingent

Dear Sir

I am quite willing for my son P H Dibdin to fly if occasion arises.

Yours faithfully C.G.Dibdin

There is little more that can be gleaned about Peter's early years until he reached the age of 18½ years old when he joined his father's property company at 18 Mulgrave Road in Sutton and on 1 June 1931 he was articled to Lionel at a cost of £1-0-0. By this time he had bought his first car, a Unic 1931 Model and bumped it into the local Southern Railway Railings! As we will see later he was very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about cars.

Judging from letters and various documents, the family seemed to have what we now call a good work - life balance with Cecily performing with the Piano and involved in many sporting activities and Lionel active in many spheres of life.

During the next few years, Peter became a member of the following clubs and from letters in the 1930s he seemed to mix

travelling around the country on his father's work with considerable social life and holidays.

He was a member of following clubs:

The Royal Society of

Dartsmen

Sutton Rugby Football Club

Sutton Football Club

Sutton Hard Court Club

Sutton Lawn Tennis Club



He was a prolific photographer and did much of the processing himself.

This would have probably been an interest past on from his Grandfather,

William Joseph Dibdin, who spent

much time in the early days of photography striving to produce high quality results. Also his Uncle Stanley had taken a keen interest in photography while at the front during WW1

It is worth mentioning that William's father in law, Augustine Aglio, worked for a while in the photographic field, in the early 1850s running a studio at 201 Piccadilly with his Nephew in law, Hugh Wolfgang De Mansfield Absolon, for a couple of years.

Amongst his work as a student in Estate Management are examples of his portrait drawing and painting. He, like his father and ancestors, was obviously talented in this field as well as music.

Judging from the spelling and writing in his many letters to Joan over the years from 1933 to 1943, and his worry about exams, it may be the case that he had a degree of dyslexia. This is not to be unexpected from someone with considerable technical, musical and artistic skills and it seems to run in the family.



The few of Peter's diaries that we have, give some insight into involvement with cars at the time when few people would have owned one. Other entries are interesting such as in Feb 1932, he had Flu.

On Aug 21 – probably 1931, there is a letter from Cecily at the Towers in Glenside, Saltburn where her sister, Edith, lived and worked at a headmistress, to Peter explaining that: Cecily and Lionel had journeyed by train to Leeds via Harrogate, Ripon, and to Darlington. Joan was at Heathercote, a house in Castleton (North Yorkshire), Lionel was to train south and then drive to Porthcawl, Glamorgan and back to the Lake District where Cecily would meet him. The reference to Porthcawl is interesting as it may have been a holiday destination for the family as well as being the location of a significant building civil engineering project.

There is a very loving letter to Peter from Rose living near Porthcawl written a few years later during World War 2.

Letter transcribed in Appendix 36.

It is worth noting that Edith and her friend Laura retired to Heathercote a few years later.

During the years up to 1933, Peter did spend time with the family on holiday and there is clear evidence that in 1932 the whole family spent some time on the Isle of Wight judging from Peter's photograph of Shorwell Church which stacks up with a painting by Lionel at that time.



At about that time Peter also took photographs near Yarmouth and in Sussex, places that he happened to visit later during his tour of duty in the army in WW2.

We are indebted to Peter and his father for the many photographs taken by them over the years and to the annotated albums that they have left us. From these and letters it has been possible to assemble some sort of history of the family activities, work and holidays during the late twenties and early 1930s.

The Effect of the Plane Crash 28th March 1933.

In 1933 his parents, Cecily and Lionel, were killed in a plane crash. It is the nature of this disastrous event which dramatically effected many lives, that it will again be referred to elsewhere.. The main details are documented in Chapter 18 in volume 2, regarding the lives of Lionel and Cecily, however the tremendous impact that it had on Peter and Joan are further discussed.

Because the wills did not cover adequately the eventuality of both dying at the same time, Peter and Joan were not only left as orphans but also under the control of the Public Trustees. The impact of this is documented in later chapters, which discuss how Peter had no control at the time as he was just under 21 and Joan had no parenting to speak of. Contrary to good sense, Avondale, their home was sold in 1934 for the sum of £1150. Joan would like to have had her home kept and there an opinion at time that the two could have lived on there with assistance.



Peter moved to East Court, Woodmansterne Lane, Banstead, Surrey and Joan was in effect homeless living either at boarding school in Bexhill or with Aunt Edith in Saltburn and then later at Castleton in the North Yorkshire Moors. It is quite clear from the records that this was not a reliable arrangement.

Joan used to mention how she and her brother who was seven year older, never, in childhood, got on well however, after this disaster they related well probably down to Peter's understanding, skill and good nature. It is noted with interest how Peter fought Joan's corner against Aunt Edith with regard to her choice of career and training once she left school. Some of the letters from Edith were quite aggressive. Joan used to say how well she and Peter got on during the ten year after 1933. Through her cousin, Don Haycraft, she was introduced to the Guise Family in 1941 and Peter was pleased to also be very involved in that family.



During that period Peter bought a grand piano for £10 somewhere local to Streatham and had it shipped into no.4 Pinfold Road where it stayed for many years, acting as a centrepiece for many parties and being well treated with beer.

Once he became of age at twenty one, he had to take on for some seven years, responsibility with the Public Trustees for the financial affairs of Joan, dealing with issues such as the cost of her schooling as well as ensuring that her day to day monetary needs were satisfied.

Not only did Grandma Haycraft tell the Public Trustees that she could not act as Guardian but in Oct 1934 she wrote to explain that she was chasing up interest from before Lionel and Cecily's death on the £200 that she had lent her daughter in 1914. The tone of the letters seems unduly offhand and business like.

How Peter felt about the situation and responsibilities is open to conjecture but we can get some insight of his nature at this young age from the archives and from hearsay. There is enough evidence to show that he must have been a fun loving young man, polite and charming and well liked by those around him. It is reported by a cousin who knew him that he was a very likeable person who one always looked forward to seeing. More insight into his commitment to helping Joan until she became age 21 years old and then for a few years in the war can be found in the chapters 21 and 22 on Joan's Early Years and in the book "Three Lives in World War 2" as well as in Chapter 23 about Peter's time in WW2.

In one of Peter's wallets in the archive was found a small sheet of printed paper containing the Christina Rossetti Poem "Remember me when I am gone away,". This is of interest because this same poem was found hand written in one of Joan notebooks, a tiny tortoise shell address book not much bigger than two inches square from the years around WW2. See Appendix 38.

Peter was involved in the maintenance of the family grave at Carshalton and no doubt had been involved in the funeral and internment of his parents. From August to October 1937 Peter

was concerned about the state of the memorial grave at Carshalton and asked the verger Mr Saunders if he would tidy things up and sent him money for the attendance of the grave. The next times this grave was attended to were in 1943 and 2009. Peter lived a full life before his parent's death and despite his increased responsibilities, he continued to live at quite a pace and was a member of number of sports clubs. His involvement with cars and details of his holidays are documented in a separate chapter.

Coupled with his motoring activities which included at least one driving rally around England and Wales, were his two continental holidays in 1936 and 1937, on both of which, it is understood, he was accompanied by his boyhood next door neighbour David Muir whose name crops up again and again in later narratives. Working for a government department as he was then, this may have been significant at such dates so close to the beginning of the war.

Between 1934 and 1937 he had bought another three cars, the last being a brand new Hillman Coupe and spent considerable money on travel and maintenance.

It would seem that he was used to being moderately well off and this must have applied to Joan as well, judging from a letter from the Public Trust regarding her expenditure, "that she would have to learn that she could not expect to live at the same standard at when her parents were alive". Those in control in 1933 decided that the "children" could not stay on in the family home, which was sold from under them.

From the age of 21, he took considerable interest in stocks and share and in July 1935 Peter bought, at auction, 4 houses at Whittaker Road, Nos. 24,26,54,56, in Sutton as investment properties. He had probably inherited stocks and shares from Lionel and seemed to actively run quite a portfolio.

These and other investments were inherited by his sister Joan (Dibdin) Guise on his death. There is in the archive a file containing much if not all the correspondence relating to the Public Trustees for him and Joan. The most relevant items relate to the management of Joan and the issues are discussed in a later chapter with some documents and letters in Appendix 37.

As war approached in 1938 he joined the Territorial Army and Peter enlisted in TA 11 May 1939 for 4 years – signing on 1st Sept 1939. From his work diary 1939, business appointments stopped 24 Aug 1939, a week before the start of War on Sept 1st. As can be seen from the photograph Peter was already attending camp some one month before



R.E. Camp Rowhook, Horsham. 16 July -13 Aug 1939

Peter is on the top row 2nd from left.

Peter at Work

At the age of 18, Peter joined his father's property company at 18 Mulgrave Road in Sutton and on 1 June 1931 he was articled to Lionel at a cost £1-0-0

See details in the Appendix 39 for documents regarding Peter's Work.

There is a document about Indentures to his Father on 1st June 1931 at 18 Mulgrave Rd Sutton for three years. He studied with British Tutorial Institute, the President of which was coincidentally Sir Robert Dibdin JP, a distance cousin descended from Charles Mungo Dibdin. He took exams for The Chartered Surveyor's Institution and exams for College of Estate Management.

In July 1933 Peter became a Student Member of the Auctioneers and Estate Agents Institute of the UK.

Because of his father's death before he had reach the age of 21 and had finished his apprenticeship, he was in a very vulnerable situation. He had not become a Partner in the company and so it is quite clear that he was not settled in the company and that he did not inherit a position as a partner which probably would have happened under Lionel. It seems that the existing Partners did not recognise his position and went out of their way to make life difficult.

It is sad to find among Peter's photographs, three of the Estate Camilla Lacey which his father or rather the company had bought only two weeks before the plane crash.

Peter being in possession of these photographs indicates his possible involvement in the purchase of the estate with his father and possibly his interest in the estate, supporting the suggestion tentatively made by Joan, in recent years, that that the family was considering moving on to it when houses were built.

See Appendix 40 for more pictures of Leladene.



Camilla Lacey Dorking 1933



Rock Garden Camilla Lacey

In September 1933, 6 months after the death of his father, Peter contacted Quintana & Co Chartered Surveyors in Eccleston Sq with a view to becoming an Articled Pupil. Peter must have had a reason to be fed up with what was happening at Dibdin's in Sutton. It would seem that he had done work with Quintana & Co and so was in a position to approach them about work and pupilage. However he did stay at Dibdin's and on 2nd Oct 1933 he was Articled to Maurice Andrews, 18 Mulgrave Rd Sutton for 2 years at the cost of £140.0.0 as a pupil Chartered Surveyor. On 2nd October 1935 he completed Articles.

The fact that his father's partners charged Peter £140 for pupilage compared with the £1 charge earlier by his father must be an indication of the poor level of relationship.

Peter did stay with them until he completed his time in 1935 although, it seems, he spent quite some time at Quintana's offices.

He then started looking for employment elsewhere once his "indentures" were finished. He immediately joined the Civil Service working for the Commissioners of Crown Lands Office of, 55 Whitehall.

At this time, Peter was getting advice from his Uncle Rex, a wise old member of the Dibdin Family who was always very supportive to both Peter and Joan, and Peter was also receiving letters from a close engineering friend of the family from Nigeria. We glean a little from a letter / card to G. Kingsnorth in Nigeria, written before Christmas 1935 which was sadly returned as Kingsnorth had died after a severe operation on the 20th December 1935 – Information obtained from the Crown Agents. What is significant from this letter is that by the end of 1935, Peter had moved from the firm. Working with the Commissioner of Crown Lands in Whitehall at 2 guineas a week was better than before. He was looking out for something better but The Institute of Surveyors rate is only £5 pw. so he was thinking about looking around. He had come down in the exams but thought that it a

waste of time to continue. Qualified Surveyors were earning no more than him and he wondered about going abroad.

There are previous letters from Blackheath and Africa in the archive to Lionel and Cecily from Northy (Kingsnorth) who obviously had been a close friend of the family for many years. The Northy connection is discussed in detail in Appendix 35.



Peter is on the left hand side of the middle row.

The photograph indicates that Peter was well settled in the Crown Lands Office. Until he joined the war effort.

On the 30 April 1936 Peter asked for a raise having being in the department since Oct 1935. For some reason, presumably indentures, Peter was exempt from National Insurance Nov 33 to Nov 38.

The overall picture

From 1933 there was Peter and Joan both “orphans” financially managed by the Public Trustees. Peter was about to become independent but Joan was a problem and nobody really wanted the responsibility of her. Fortunately she was a boarding School much of the time. Her mother’s sister Edith lived and worked as head of a little school, the Towers, in Saltburn. There is evidence that Joan’s parents Cecily and Lionel used to spend time in Saltburn on holiday. Also judging from a music award certificate for Cecily in Saltburn dated 1900, when she was 18 years old and other evidence is clear that Cecily was a pupil at the Towers School under the headship of Sarah MacPherson, and her sister at the age of 22 was a teacher, living in. Edith for reasons explained later accepted, very reluctantly, the responsibility.

Cecily had been a professional piano player and it was her piano that Joan inherited and kept for most of her life. Joan herself was showing signs of considerable talent from the age of 7, gaining many awards local, and passing Royal Academy exams quite young.

It is clear that Peter managed to bounce back after the tragedy of 1933, presumably because he was just at the age of wanting to branch out anyway.

He seemed to have coped very responsibly with issues after his parents funeral and one feel from the condolence letters that he was generally well supported. The family letters and the official ones are to be seen in Appendix 31 and Appendix 32. From his letters to Joan at that time one gets the impression that he felt at a loose end and did not like settling with family for long although was grateful to visit and one feels got great companionship and support from the Nottingham Haycrafts with Uncle Bernard as the understanding Patriarch. For sound support and advise he was pleased, just as Joan was in later years to write to Uncle Rex, ie Reginald Dibdin.

Chapter 20 Peter Dibdin and His Cars.

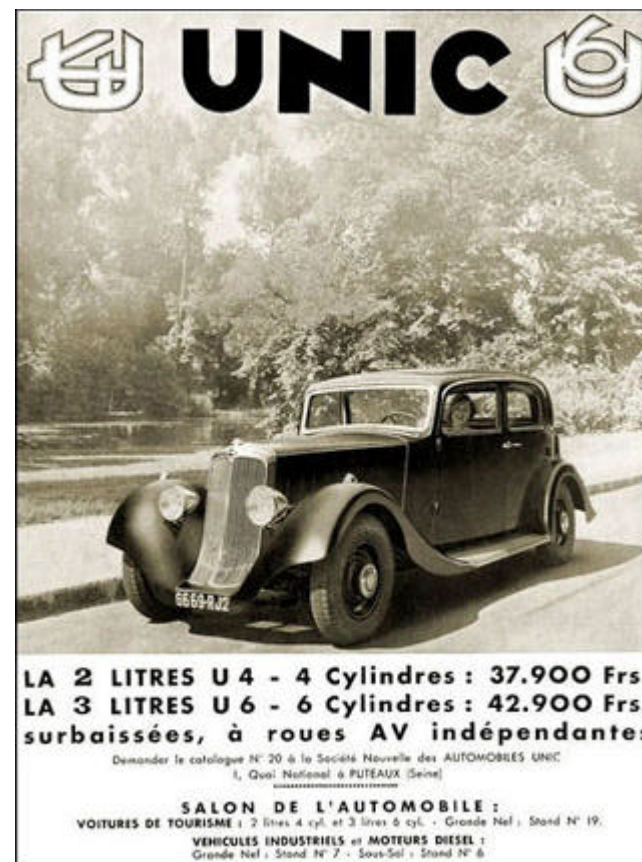
There is little more that can be gleaned about Peter's early years until he reached the age of 18 ½ years old when he joined his father's property company at 18 Mulgrave Road in Sutton and on 1 June 1931. By this time he had bought his first car, a Unic 1931 Model and we have a record on June 5th, only 4 days after starting work with his father he ran it into the Southern Railway Railings! As we will see later he was enthusiastic about cars. It is difficult to establish what model of Unic Car Peter bought but it seems likely it would have been a fairly large vehicle and probably the 4 cylinder version. He bought it second hand with mileage of 31730 and it would have been expensive as he sold it two years later for £100.

To put this sum of money in perspective Peter was earning in 1935, working for the Civil Service the sum of £2-10 shillings ie about £125 a year.

The Unic was of French design and manufacture.

We note that during its first year Peter seems to have damaged someone's Austin 7 and Southern Rail's fence in one go. It is not clear whether it was his fault or not. His diary for this year gives details of the mileage and maintenance and it would seem that he was a member of the Unic car owners club.

For many people especially nowadays, cars are just a necessity as a convenience for transport. During the first fifty years since their invention cars were a speciality and most car owners felt privileged to own one and took a keen interest in the running of the car and its mechanics, to a greater or less extent. In those early days, an enthusiast could and probably had to do much of the routine servicing himself and occasionally herself.



An Austin 7 in the 1920s and 1930s could easily be stripped and rebuilt at the roadside. There was nothing that required very specialist equipment or knowledge and it was easy enough to carry the few spare parts that were likely to be required. In this respect I write from first hand experience with cars produced in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950s.

Note that a book of the time would recommend decoking an engine every 10,000 miles. This entailed a considerable amount of detailed work. An engine would be completely reconditioned between 30,000 and 60,000 miles.

What the reader in the twenty first century will find astounding is the frequency that cars had to be decoked and have their valves ground. This entails removing the head from the engine, cleaning the piston heads and the combustion chamber, regrinding the inlet and outlet valves and reassembling the engine with a new head gasket. In the 1950's and 1960's this could still often be a regular necessity with a robustly driven car, however in the 1930's the car manuals and guides expected it to be done every 10,000 miles.

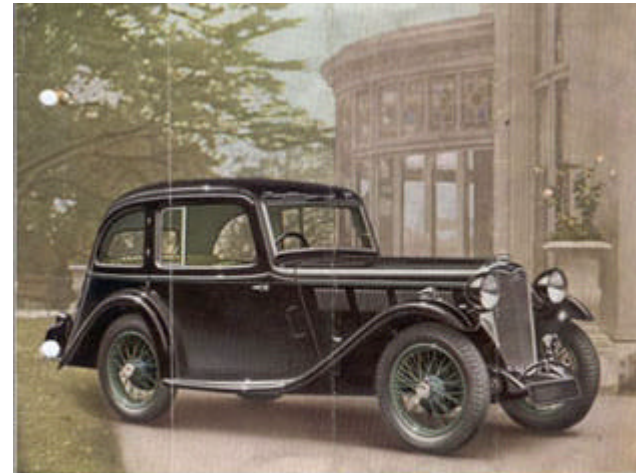
He took the maintenance and repair of the car very seriously and was a member of the Society of Unic Auto – the diary gives dates of maintenance – “grinding valves” and mileages throughout the year. This work was done in one of the local garages.

The following time line gives an indication of how busy his motoring life was and that it seemed that lack of money was never a hindrance.

The fact that he was not immune from accidents which, when you consider how few cars there will have been on the roads, is quite remarkable.



This is little information about this car but he did seem to own it for a couple of years.



Time line for Peter and his cars.

Unknown date	1 st Car	Bought Unic Car 1931 Model
5 June 1931	Accident	Unic Car crash - damage to Southern Rail Fence and to Austin 7 Upper Mulgrave Road
27 Oct 1931		Unic 1931 model had a mileage of 31730
Jan 1932	Accident	
April 1933	Accident	
24 April 1933	Another Car	Secondhand Wolseley Hornet – ordered a new sparewheel cover This was probably his father’s car which he sold shortly after this.
6 May 1933	Car	Peter would accept the sum of £100 for the Unic from Commander Heaton at the Naval and Military Club
July 1934	Holiday	Tour to Jersey
14 Sept 1935	Maintenance	Decoke and grind valves
20 July 1935	Another Car	Secondhand black and green Singer 9 Sports Coupe £110 told insurance not sports model
Oct 1935	Accident	Offside wing
12 Aug 1936	?	
1 Mar 1936	Maintenance	Decoke Singer
Aug 1936		RAC booking to Ostend. Moved from 1am to 10am
Sept 1936	Maintenance	Decoke and grind valves after German trip
28 Nov 1936	Accident	
27 Feb 1937	New Car	Bought Morris 10/4 Black £197/11/3 with jacks with £70 part exchange on Singer sports Coupe Presumably the Morris could not be delivered fast enough so Peter changed to a Hillman

28 Feb 1937	Rally	Winter Trail with the Civil Service club - see route sheet Peter complained about the timing results of this rally and the results at one checkpoint were ignored.
2 Mar 1937	New Car	Bought Hillman Minx Coupe £215 with £70 part exchange on Singer. Wireless maybe in car. Bought Ashby steering wheel and deep note exhaust system
		There were many problem with this car which was using too much fuel, oil and water and knocking – see sheet of problems
May 1937		Decoke and grind valves
5 June 1937	Accident	
15 July 1937		Thorough check of 8 items of car - see documents
Aug 1937	Holiday	Trip to France
1 Sept 1937		Wash and polish, adjust brakes, oil springs
Oct 1937		Decoke and grind valves £1-17-0 labour
20 Jan 1938	Accident	Repair to Minx – Cavendish Pl. Regent St
20 Jan 1938	Accident	Repair to Minx – Cavendish Pl. Regent St
Feb 1938	Accident	Damage to Radiator guard
28 May 1938		Police warning
Sept 1939	Accident	
18 Aug 1942		Letter to broker from 4 Pinfold Road regarding Hillman
28 th Sept 1943	XXXXX	Peter Died



In 1935 he was looking seriously at the Singer range of new cars and on 20th July 1935 he purchased a black and green 1933 Singer 9 Sports secondhand similar to the one above. This was the car that he took on his 1936 German trip, as seen from the ferry photograph below and the 1936 holiday photographs



There is a strange anomaly, because on 27th Feb 1937 Peter bought a new Morris 10/4 for the sum of £197 however on 2nd March 1937, he obtained a brand new Black Hillman Minx Coupe. He traded in the Singer at the time for the sum of £70.



Young Lady in Peter's Black Hillman Minx Coupe which he bought in March 1937 and used on his continental tour that year.

The young lady is Winifred the girl next door at Avondale.

Receipts and letters show that he had considerable trouble with the engine which was giving poor fuel and oil consumption and there are letters in which he is fighting with the manufacturers and the agents. Presumably the car was ok by the time that he took it to France on his 1937 August Holiday



The Hillman Minx "Magnificent" Foursome Drophead Coupe. Probably Peter's last car and may have been in his possession when he died.

Peter and Holidays

There are documents relating to a holiday tour to Jersey in 1934, just over a year after Peter's parents died but it seems likely that he did not take a car with him.

The two holidays that are well documented are in 1936 and 1937 when he toured on the continent with his friend and neighbour from before 1933, David Muir.

Peter's Passport was stamped on the following dates at these places

	Riesa
30 Aug 36	Aachen
2 Sept 36	neuhaus
3 Sept 36	sonaamwald
8 Sept 36	
Sept 36	Schweiz Bargaen
Sept 36	Germany
12 Sept 1936	La Cal...E
13 sept 36	Ostende
16 Aug 37	BeauBru (Bouldon)
16 Aug 37	Basel
17 Aug 1937	Ostende
4 Jun 1938	Boulogne sur mer débarquement
30 Jul 1938	Boulogne débarquement
1 Aug 1938	Boulogne embarquement
30 Aug 1938	

George David Muir, born 5th Dec 1912, was a close friend, who lived next door at 81 Grosvenor Ave Carshalton Surrey and seemed to have had a soft spot for Peter's sister Joan. They were neighbours before Lionel and Cecily died in 1933.

They both obtained International Driving Permits on 11 Aug 1937 from the Royal Automobile Club, before doing a Continental tour. - note the date - 2 years before the war.



Records show that they both went to the continent in 1936 and 1937 and toured through Belgian, France, Germany and Switzerland in a Singer nine sports saloon.

Archived are receipts from these two holidays and leaflets about the various hotels that he visited. Also there is a detailed route plan from the RAC for 1937 in France as well as detailed maps for both journeys

The map shows the routes for both years and also show the routes that were coincidentally overlapped by the author 70 years later before the archives relating to Peter's life came to light.

It was the incidences of overlaps in the journeys that further encouraged the writing of the book Ancestral Fantasies which was an attempt to collapse time and imagine encounters with ancestors in locations known to both subject and author.



This map has been produced because of the amazing coincidences within journeys to Europe 60 years apart. The archive material and maps show that Peter Dibdin and David Muir made the two journeys to the continent and on the 1936 journey did go to Freiberg on their way through to Austria.

Europe must at that time have been showing the signs of war to come. It is worthy of mention that the Swiss – Italy holiday of Lionel and Cecily Dibdin included travelling across the North of Italy going to Lake Garda, Verona, Padua and Venice as well as the special Journey to Cremona.

An interesting case of synchronicity that Joanna and I followed much of Peter’s routes in 2006/7 seventy years later, without even knowing of his journeys. We did go to Cremona in the footsteps of

Lionel and Cecily, in the pursuit of Aglio history



**Photograph of Peter's Car at the ferry to Europe -
Singer Nine Sport Coupe in 1936**

*A holiday report by Peter found in a notebook used for notes
regarding his work in 1934 on:*

Holiday 1936

All set and ready to start on our journey at 12.50 am on 29th
August.

3 ¾ 20394

We, Peter HD and David M, straight away set out in Singer
Sports Nine BMK519 for Dover. Only saw 3 cars before
Westerham round about which town we ran into a thick patch of
mist and it was lying in patches on most of the road down to
2.25

Sat 2.45 am Camped off the road near Maidstone until 6.40; 6.70

Sun breaks through heavy mist. David at the wheel.

Dover 8.00am 2080

Boat left at 10.30 – Bright sunshine mist in the distance and fog
horn sounding off.

South Goodwin Lightship. Fairly strong breeze while sitting up
on high deck of Autocarrier. Car stowed below. Loading car on
vessel in done very efficiently – see photo.

Gulls followed ship for several miles, numbers gradually
dwindling as we progressed probably as nobody fed them. Met
two young chaps with an M.G. who were going touring in
Germany and Switzerland.

Left Ostend with a full tank – 7 gallons. On clock 20481 miles.
Then at the Duane (customs) in Ostend it took about an hour to
get through all the customs formalities and it was about 3.30 -
4.00 when we left Ostend.

First impressions – terrible roads made up of uneven
cobblestones.

Continued to Brussels via Ghent – stopped for photos – and had
to go very slowly in parts owing to bad state of the roads.

The cars in the country seem to disregard the bad roads and go
past us at high speed.- Their springs are probably designed for the
roads.

Arrived Brussels 7.30 or there about – cheap accommodation for
the night – went to see one of the cheap hotels recommended –
fr30 double bed . Madame the proprietor knew no English.

Offered us accommodation for fr40 afterwards coming down to
fr 30 for db. We were not at all keen on the appearance of the
place and after climbing about 7 storeys to see the room decided
it was dear at any price. We took our leave as fast as we could,
although it was difficult to explain why we did not want to take
the room. Finally we fixed up at the Hotel Royal du Nord
opposite Nord Station at fr55 db fr5 each for petit dejeuner. After
a wash and brush up we went out to one of the cafes and had a 4

course meal – almost more than we required at that hour – 9.30. However it was quite good fairly reasonable.

Afterwards we walked along the main street to the Grand Place.

All these are well lit at night and the illuminated signs contrive to make a very cheerful atmosphere when combined with the cafes open at the front, some tables on the pavement and a band or comic act going on inside. The city seemed to be waking up at about 11 o'clock at night. In the morning after petit dejeuner , left the hotel about 10.15 fetched car from garage and went tot look out for the King's Palace. We missed, however, but saw a rather fine arch along one of the boulevards (see photo). We continued to Louvain where we halted to look round and have chocolate.

While sitting outside at the café dinking the chocolate we listened to a carillon playing some piece which we would consider to be very intricate and difficult for such an instrument. The roads are much better this side of Brussels in most places although still cobbled almost everywhere. We stopped at a roadside shop to see if we could obtain any bread and cheese for lunch but they only sold drinks. We had a lemonade. Peter, the shop keeper was very nice and brought his wife out to play the piano to us. She played Strauss Waltz, at least it had the resemblance to that in parts. I don't think she had ever heard of a sharp though.....

Notes from 1936 Holiday

<p>ARCHEN 20670 Nibis Kolon 17 litres 5.25</p>	<p>Heidelberg 26 litres petrol Inspired Pacht 5.20-2.10 Anward Ruedel 9.00 Fath's oil Dimitrak 8.20 20925 Freudenstadt 10 litres petrol Freiburg 20 litres Mullerbach 5 Feldbach 10 16</p> <p>30 Anton Thundly night Hotel Post 21217 Fuhmannswald 22 litres July night WEICHNOFEN Sachy 1000N. July 21246 1 litre oil Armbach 1 litre oil 35 litres petrol West. West. Spurbrenner Lung. Jung. 10 litres Kellingblat 10 litres Frankfurt 28</p>	<p>Munich 21253 label 15 litres</p> <p>Friday morning Wlm 21957 Petrol 15 litres oil 2 litres</p> <p>Wiedburg petrol 20</p> <p>Friday night Prison 22174 B. room petrol 15 litres</p> <p>ARCHEN 10</p> <p>Louvain la Neuve Louvain 22226 10 litres 5 gallons</p> <p>Feldbach</p> <p>Carrollton 22612 3 1/2 gallons 22187</p> <p>10 11 2/3 gallons + 295% liter 11 + 550 = 610 gallons 2224 = 22.4 miles 7-gall. oil = 1 1/2 gallons Price of liter of 2022 2/3 liter</p>
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Judging from these pictures of Peter it seems likely that he and David attended the major exhibition in Paris in which both Nazi Germany and Russia were represented. The history of this event so close to World War 2 is well documented on the internet.



Bearing in mind that since 1935 Peter had been working for a Government Office the Crown Lands Office of Commissioners, 55 Whitehall, it is interesting to note that they have should have spent so much time touring in Europe and in Germany in 1936.



Austria - on the summit of the Edelweibstitze 2571 metres

In the archive there is a complete itinerary planned out by the RAC for the 1937 Holiday.

This and many more details are recorded on www.guise.me.uk

The coincidences associated with Peter's two holidays on the continent and those of the author seventy year later in 2006/7 are explored in the Book "Ancestral Encounters" A Fantasy dialogue.

Chapter 21

Joan Mary Dibdin L.R.A.M. A.R.C.M. Her Early Life

Born 23rd January 1920 Died 29th December 2008

Married - Joan Mary Guise Married - Joan Mary Welburn

Also known as Jo, Joanna, Dibby

Not that it is possible to divide people lives into tidy blocks of time but for convenience of narrative Joan's life has been treated as three eras and will be found in three different books.

After World War 1 was over, her parents, Cecily and Lionel had the opportunity of rebuilding normality except of course for the loss of their first born son, Stanley, often referred to in letters, as Little Stanley. The wartime letters at the time of his illness and death indicate the measure of loss to the whole family including Peter, their second born, who was been bereft. During WW1, Cecily had lost her brother Percy and Lionel's brother Rex had been badly injured physically but more importantly mentally. Into this world of grief and possible confusion over Lionel's future occupation, Joan Dibdin was born in 1920. Although it was 20 years after the Victorian era, it is safe to say that much of ethos and attitudes from that time still pervaded and in fact in many respects seeped through into the following generation.

So Joan was born the third child of Lionel and Cecily Dibdin when they were about 40 years old. Her brother Peter was 7 years older and 3 years before her birth her brother Stanley had died at the age of seven. What pressures exist at this time can only be surmised.

We have little source material by which to know Joan in her early life however she, as an adult, admitted that she was a difficult child.

Fortunately she was surrounded by a number of members from both side of her family, however, closest and the most relevant was her Aunt Gertie, her mother's sister, who by this time had three sons and lived until 1924 within half a mile away. Pat her youngest boy was less than a year older than Joan and judging from the photographs of the time the two families spent holiday time together.



**Pat and Joan at Southwold
Aug 1922**


This closeness within the Haycraft family reflects back a generation to the early 1900s, except that Cecily's brother moved to Nottingham sometime after the First World War. Later in 1924 Gertie and family move to Reigate but for families with cars this was nothing more that a ten mile pleasant country run.



Joan seemed to have inherited her family's talents for art and music and by the age of nine was following in her mother's footsteps with the pianoforte. A few letters from her early childhood give clues to her talents and interests, and from the few letters from boarding school we get some idea of her strong will, high demands and desire to express herself in writing.

Music and art were significant activities in the family. Her father was by nature a designer, albeit it, a property developer, and he sang, her mother played the piano and had once played the cello and Peter sang, played the piano and violin. Sporting activities was also enjoyed by the family who were all members of various clubs. Joan at a very young age grasped the essence of piano and seemed to enjoy it. Certificate as 9 years old.

Form 97a.



THE ASSOCIATED BOARD
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TELEPHONE: MUSEUM 1710. 14 & 15, BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1.

"SCHOOL" EXAMINATIONS, 1929.

The following is the result of your Examination on July 13
Joan M. Dibdin JAMES MUIR,
Secretary.

PIANOFORTE (Lower Division)		MAXIMUM MARKS.	MARKS ALLOTTED.
SCALES		15	10
ARPEGGIOS		9	6
QUALITY OF TOUCH		15	11
STUDIES AND PIECES IN LIST:			
1		18	14
2		18	13
3		18	14
4		18	14
AURAL TESTS		12	10
READING AT SIGHT		15	8
IMPRESSION OF MUSICIANSHIP		12	8
TOTAL		150	108 ✓

Number Required to Pass, 100
Number Required for Honorable Mention, 120.
Number Required for Distinction, 130.

If these details are required a second time, the application must be accompanied by the Enquiry Fee of 1s. 0d. (see Syllabus "B.")

Any communication respecting the particulars given on this Mark Form must be accompanied by an Enquiry Fee of 1s. 0d., which will be returned if any mistake is found to have been made.

W.S.C., Ltd. 14000. 10/27. Printed in England.

From the age of nine for three years she attended Sutton High School where her mother and aunts had been and where coincidentally her cousin by marriage Helen Ouin to John Davis, Gertie's eldest son, was also at school but 6 years older. She married John Davis in 1946.

See earlier chapter for full details.

From the Sutton High School Jubilee Register

1884 -1934

Dibdin, Joan Mary 1929-1932 Avondale Grosvenor Ave Carshalton
Now at Ancaster House School Bexhill



Joan at Avondale 1926

Joan probably lived in a fairly comfortable and loving environment at Avondale with 4 grandparents and several aunts on both sides of her parents family.

Following is a letter probably typed by Joan at her father's office. Judging from a note done on a typewriter and some small card designs, she was at ease within the family and although she has admitted to having argued a lot with her brother at least up to the age of 13 years old.

Also from that era were these three little cards for members of the family



Easter 1931

At the age of 11 or 12 she went to boarding school in Bexhill and would have had little knowledge of the daily work and activities of her parents.

Judging from examples of her work she showed significant artistic talent and played the piano and violin although the violin became part of her repertoire in 1934 and she has said that she would have preferred the cello which she knew her mother had. This view is supported in a letter from Peter to Joan at Ancaster House.

Dear Saddy,

I had to come into the office today, as I was caught in the thunder-storm. I am coming home soon in the car, with Peter.

Peter has been to Epsom town to the council. And he soon came back to the office, where I was drying my Brown uniform.

I hope you are not afraid of the thunder-storm because I will soon be home. Peter is talking to Mr. Foreman, and when he had finished he came and tried to irritate me.

The date (if you would like to know) is June 5th, 1951.

Peter is poking the ruler into his eye, and is talking to Mr. Foreman all about (JOKES) indeed.

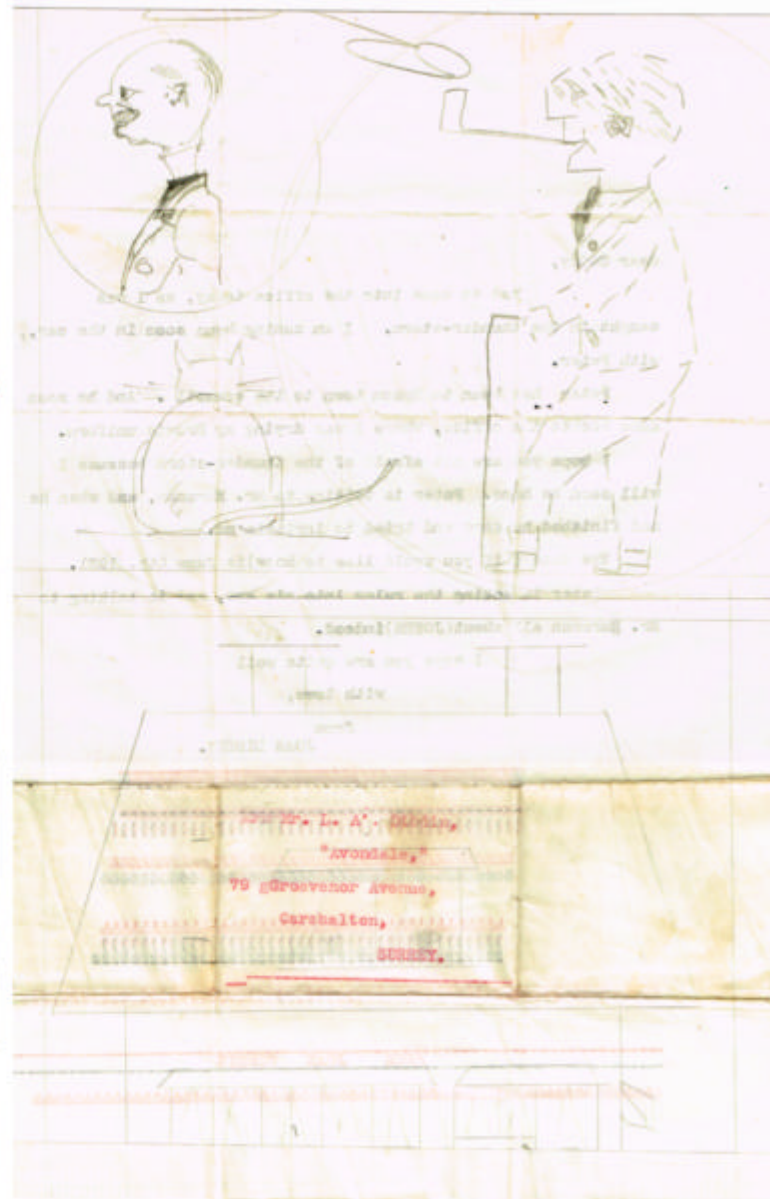
I hope you are quite well

with love,

from
JOAN DIBBIN.

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JOAN DIBBIN



Going to Boarding School

On 4th February 1932 Cecily wrote to Miss Burrows of Ancaster House School in Bexhill of Sea thanking her for the prospectus about the school and pointing out that the fees would be too high, because her husband had been invalided out of the Royal Engineers in WW1 and that his own work has only just begun to revive.

She explained that Joan, at 12 years old, has passed all 4 divisions of the RAM and RCM exams. She had passed the higher division and was now being prepared for intermediate. Letters followed to say that she would like to put Joan in her hands for the next term i.e. Summer 1932 and she emphasised that although she did not do well in recent exams at Sutton High School, she is exceptional at Music, Art and Sport. Cecily pointed out Joan's heritage as she herself was musical and her husband as well, as their ancestor Charles Dibdin. In a P.S. in one letter she explained that Joan was left handed and she wrote and draws with her left hand and the High School would not "have it altered" although she did use her knife and fork the correct way.

As an aside, I was brought up the same way, but much to my surprise, I have heard of those of my age who suffered seriously under regimes that strove to change hand under pain of smacking as well as psychological abuse. I refer particularly to regimes run by some catholic nuns who seemed convinced that left hand people were children of the devil.

It seems from the letters, that by the age of twelve, Joan had not done Algebra but had tackled some detailed work in Geometry. No Latin or German and there was dialogue about dropping some aspects of Scripture. Cecily hoped that Miss Burrows will be able to make the best of her so she could make her own living. "You will think Joan very young in many ways for her years, yet in many respects, she seems older"



Ancaster House School Bexhill on Sea June 1936

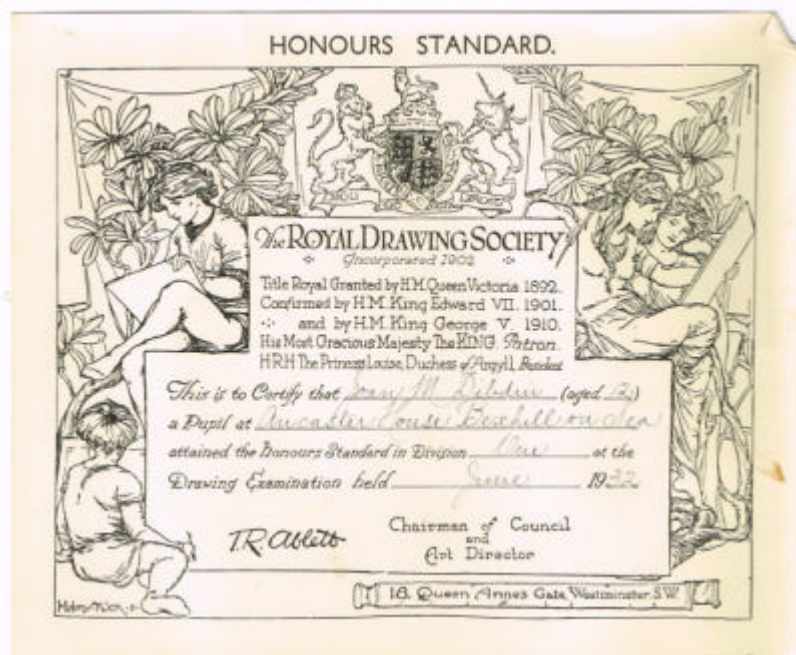
From the time that Joan joined Ancaster in the summer, there are no letters available but Joan kept a number from her mother from the following January 1933 term. From these it is possible to pull a number of interesting insights into the Dibdin/Haycraft family life and also Cecily's relationship with her daughter. Although it seems harsh that Joan was sent away to boarding school, one gets the feeling that it was quite a small school very similar to the Towers in Saltburn that Cecily herself went to and where her sister Edith taught and eventually ran.

A day or so before her birthday in January, Joan had been put on the train to Bexhill at Victoria with a birthday cake which no doubt was enjoyed by the new friends that she had acquired at school. There is indication that these friends had given her a number of presents. Cecily was writing to her once or twice a week and sending her items like knitted gloves and jumpers. The main emphasis in most of the letters was music and the encouragement for Joan to work hard at it and do well at her

forthcoming intermediate exams. She would send Joan all sorts of sheet music for her to practice sight reading, explaining that if she played from sight she would not have to learn the music. Of course, Cecily was herself a qualified music teacher and so understood all the ins and outs of passing the music exams.

In February there was to be some sort of party at the school and there was a discussion between mother and 13 year old daughter about what to wear. Joan had in mind to go as Tom Bowling, the brother of Charles Dibdin, who died at sea however her mother prevailed and sent her down a good fancy dress and a Bolero, so that she could go as Carmen and recommended her getting a red rose.

Family news at the time was that Ben, their beloved dog, had slipped out onto the road and got run over but had only a damaged leg. Puss seemed to be taking advantage of the invalided dog.



Joan's parents must have been pleased not only with her success with music over which her mother would have had some influence but also with her obvious talent at drawing.

At 12 years old and within a few months of joining the school, Joan acquired an exceptional certificate for drawing

Cecily keeps Joan up to date with news of their neighbours particularly, David, the young man next door, a few years older than her. At that time there was a lot of Flu about that was knocking everyone back.

It is interesting to note that at the age of 13 Joan was having trouble with her teeth and was wearing a brace that was causing trouble. Mother instructed her to take it out and leave for a bit. She mentions that the bill had just come from the dentist - £19 – and she hoped that her teeth were straight!

Also Cecily referred to Geoffrey being quite poorly at the moment and was in bed at Tonbridge School. She was taking Gertie, her sister and his mother, down to see him. Geoffrey being one of Gerties three sons was quite close to the family and was about 4 years older than Joan.

She let Joan know that he would like a letter, but not to mention that he was ill, just to say that she was glad that he was better. In late February, Cecily planned to go down to Cornfield to fully recoup from a difficult winter.

Geoffrey was still poorly. It seems that at this time the family used Cornfield, near Bognor Regis, as a second home.

By this time it must have been the case that Lionel was well involved in the property business with Peter indentured to his company and working on many of the projects. The family and Peter both ran cars as has been mentioned earlier and money was more readily available than years before and just after the war.

We are able to read in Joan's letters home from school a slight attitude of expectation that whatever she needed was available.

When Joan was 5 years old she was confronted with death in the family. How much the cloud of Stanley's loss hung over her is not known but she must have been aware of the death of her Grandfather, William Joseph Dibdin, and then when she was 8 years old her grandmother, his wife Marian. What relationship she had with these is unknown but judging from his autobiography, he was a honourable and imaginative individual and so probably rather good fun in his seventies and Marian probably was of artistic background with an Italian grandfather Agostino Aglio.



Joan's maternal grand father Samuel Willetts Haycraft who from photographs looks quite jovial died when Joan was 10 years old and it is reported that her maternal grandmother was of poor health at about that time.

Joan must have been old enough to have been affected by these close deaths and there were more to follow.

By the time Joanna was 13 years old and safely settled in boarding school in Bexley on Sea, her Father Lionel could probably be described as a successful property developer. In 2020 parlance such a person would be easy to despise as someone whose sole motive was profit and who had no respect for the environment or the locality, however the reader is asked to accept that his artistic sensitivities pervaded and he laid estates out with respect for the trees and wherever possible kept the original country house off the estate intact. However, well to do housing estates in the Surry and Hampshire area must have been quite profitable. It seemed that during WW1 he and Cicely rented their house, Avondale, but by 1933 they owned it.

Judging from her letters and her general behaviour in later life Joan was a force to be reckoned with. In fact, Helen, her cousin by marriage, did once mention many, many years later, that Joan "was in fact a difficult child" and she was someone who had known her all her life and had been close friends in their dotage.



Lionel's work and social life ensured that the two youngsters had numerous grown up contacts and friends, very often work associated, as well as a large family of cousins who on the whole did get on with one another. The Nottingham Haycraft family with five children between 11 year older and 2 years younger that Joan must have also been good company, to Peter and Joan as has been demonstrated in later years.

There was a history of the family working together as far back as the early 1900's so it was quite natural and convenient for Peter to work for his father and was probably content to be indentured to his father.

With a dog and a cat, cars and a comfortable house, this just post Edwardian family must have felt well set up to the extent that the parents felt that they were able to go on a flying holiday and tour the sights of Northern Italy for the first time in their lives, leaving one child at boarding school and the other in the office keeping an eye on things.



On 15th March 1933 we have the last letter from Cecily to Joan, saying that her and Lionel were going on holiday for 10 days to Paris and Switzerland leaving on Friday 17th March.

They would be travelling in a Heracles Imperial Airways Liner, the largest type of aeroplane that the world employed for civil transport. She told Joan to post letters to Post Office Lugano where they would be staying and while there had a two day trip to Venice which they enjoyed greatly judging from a postcard.



Postcard from Cecily to Peter & Joan at Croydon Airport.

A Tragedy – The Aeroplane Crash



In 1933, 2 weeks before Easter and while at boarding school and about to come home for her holidays both her parents died in the worst plane crash that England had experienced by that time. How does a young 13 year old girl cope ?

Circumstances worked against the two young orphans. Peter was not yet 21, Avondale, their home was owned by the family but of course may have been mortgaged and maybe Lionel had plans to move shortly into new property on one of his companies estates.



Owing to the rules of inheritance, because the wills written were not suitable for a double death, the family estate was handed over to be managed by the Public Trustees and for the next 8 years Joan's life was subject to institutional level of control. Peter was not quite old enough to take charge and the idea of keeping the youngsters together in their own home was rejected. We have comment in a letter to Peter in November 1933 just before he was 21 years old regarding him selling the house.

As has been discussed in a previous chapter, Peter, although in some respects, part of his father property development company, had no partnership rights and subsequently went to work for a Government office in the field of surveying until the war, once he was clear on his indentures.

Joan continued at boarding school, leaving the problem of who was to have her during her during the school holidays. Grandma Haycraft was the first choice but was too elderly and frail to take on the task, Gertie had three sons and did not seem to offer and the Dibdin family did not seem to be suitable.

In my view, the best option would have been Aunt Marian and her sculptor husband, Paul Montford, who had two daughters however they had settled in Melbourne Australia. After much wrangling amongst Aunts and Uncles on both her mother's and father's sides of the family and with the public trustees, her Aunt Edith, a Headmistress of a private school in Saltburn reluctantly offered. Edith was her mother's older sister and had promised her mother some years before that she would look after Joan if Cecily died while in hospital under some serious treatment. The most significant point of the whole situation was that Joan's finances were under the control of the Public Trustees until she was 21 and this seemed to create quite a cruel regime for someone such as a self-willed Joan.

Joan settled to another 3 or so years of life at Ancaster House in Bexhill, no doubt finding solace in her art and music and apparently burying her grapes in the garden at breakfast time as she did not like them.

In May 1933 she took up violin and at the request of her very supportive music teacher asked Peter if she could use his. Sadly this was damaged but it appears from letters that he had it repaired for her.

The contents of Avondale were sold by auction and there are sad letters from Joan to Peter asking that some particular things should be kept and that their pet dog should go to someone who would care for him.

From this time on, it seems that Peter and Joan got on well, each appreciating the position and feeling of the other. Peter must have taken on a serious feeling of responsibility for his young sister.

This can be seen from all the letters between Peter and Joan that are in Appendices 34 & 35.

It is the very nature of this period in their lives of the next ten years that the collection of archive material encourages one to approach the events of that time from various points of view and in different contexts.

For this reason the reader is asked to forgive any repetition and accept it as necessary to draw out different aspects of the narrative of the highly charged ten years in the life of Peter and Joan and those people around them.

Some of the events during WW2 are referred to in both Chapter 23 in of this volume and in Chapter 24 which give a brief summary of the Book "Three lives in WW2".



Peter in about 1938

Joan in 1938



Letters between Peter and Joan 1933 to 1936

Except for the few comments made by Joan over the years, the next 4 years of Joan's life could well be a mystery. During her longish holidays, Joan may have enjoyed the peace of the North Yorkshire moors and spent time riding the local milkman's horse, although this occurrence may have been during holidays before 1933. Her love of the countryside and animals probably stemmed from this time. However as becomes apparent from letters between her and Peter, she did enjoy the company of friends from school and members of the family. The following insights and narrative have been derived from letters from Joan to Peter during the first year after their parents died and from Peter to Joan during a 4 year period. In addition there is correspondence from the Public Trustees and from aunts and uncles to Joan and Peter.

The tone of language of 13 year old Joan to her older brother is interesting and it is noticeable how it develops as she matures very rapidly. It may appear demanding at times but only those that have experienced the isolation of boarding school and the frustration created by dependence will understand. The need for visiting and holiday breaks away from the school are so important that it is understandable that one demands of anyone to achieve that precious respite from the place, often overlooking the inconvenience one causes to others. Lay into this, the fact that she had lost her parents and was losing her home, it would be reasonable to expect anything of her. The episode of Joan's fantasy about her parents being in Belgium is hardly surprising and when reading these letters to Peter, I cannot fail to see years ahead, to notes in her diary about her gratitude to Peter, at the time when he died during the war that was about to descend on this country in a few years time.

Changing her letter end name is interesting, perhaps a reflection of how she saw her state of mind with particular reference to "Bitter Mary". The fact that she was acting in the school play of the Water Babies in 1933, is interesting in so far as she often used to quote at me from this Victorian moral tale from 1863 such as the Misses "Do as you would be done by" and "Be done by as you did". The difficulty for a creative home lover when being at boarding school is that one needs to have one's things around one all the time. When there is time to relax at school, it is nice to be able to draw, paint or make something. In Joan's case this created a stream of requests to Peter for such as water colours, oil paints, tennis racket, and violin. Years later Joan showed herself to be very capable with oils and in fact tended to use watercolours in a similar way. In later life, working with oils did worry her because of the waste – a rebound from the wartime years.

During her childhood and early twenties, Joan had contact with many of her mother's and father's family with some having a significant role to play either as support or influence. Her Uncle Rex, Reginald Dibdin, acted as understanding pillar of wisdom. Cousins, on her mother's side of the family, the Haycrafts were of particular support.

Letters after the funeral do indicate the measure of support from many of Joan's Aunts and Uncles.

Letter of condolence and encouragement from the Haycraft family generally referred to how special Lionel and Cecily were but the Dibdin letters, although very supportive and aware of the sadness, were very much along the lines of "stiff upper lip" and both Peter and Joan were to continue the Dibdin tradition of struggling on and succeeding regardless.

Letter from Ethel in America 25 July 1933
c/o F.J.A.Dibdin R.Dibdin Forest Hill Forest Hill USA
Pittsburgh

Via Joe and Rex..... My two dear Ones! Though I have not written you are very near in my thoughts and if loving wishes travel mine must have reached you often. I wonder if Mr Andrews is a relative of the Andrews of Belmont I used to teach in my dancing class. Leo knew them well. It is good that Joan is working at her music. Has she taken the R.Col of Music Exams yet? ... I can remember how beautifully you mother played -- It was a great treat to listen to her delicate touch and her accompaniments were wonderful. Go ahead Joan and work hard and I will try to save enough to come over to your debut in Queen's Hall. I'd dearly love to do so and see you all.... If my Winifred passes through England this spring I wish you could meet; she used to love open air life, music and painting, her violin - but did nit get much chance of lessons. I have given you Joe address to write to, as though I am still in Pittsburgh, I have twice changed addresses and hope soon to get a better job - so Joe is a safe medium for forwarding letters. It is too bad he has not job yet though Garnet says he is looking and feeling much better now. Little Marian is a darling and really does have many of her mother's little ways. It's very funny sometimes. I hear she is reading quite well. You perhaps know that we four over here are struggling to get a little home together somewhere but £.S.D. is still preventing or rather the lack of it -- as Joe says. ... Peter old boy are you starting from the bottom up as your Father did or will you be able to carry on his work when you have enough experience. Is the business being saved for you ? Now, though I know I am one of the best examples of the Dibdin system of letter writing, don't follow me if you can help it and believe me your ever loving Auntie Ethel/



Ethel was writing from America as was Uncle Joe who wrote to Peter with a wonderful tone of phrase.

From the large file of letters from the Public Trustees, there a number of points. Peter was asked to make clear to his sister that she would have to accept that she could not expect to live up to the level of expenditure that she was used to when her parents were alive and it also became clear that Edith really did not relish looking after a somewhat strong willed teenager. This is strange, considering that she had been running a school for girls between the ages of 12 to 18, but perhaps they were all very well behaved young ladies.

Peter had the job of dealing with the upheaval of closing down their parent's estate and sorting out his own life while supporting and managing Joan. This he did exceptionally well judging from the letters between them in the first year. Both seem to manage to continue life in a fairly fulfilled way and we know that in April 1933, Peter was enjoying time in the Lake District and in May, Joan has taken up the violin, by so doing expanding her creative repertoire.



Joan at Chale, Isle of Wight 1932

In July there were forms to be signed by Joan and Peter to commit them to the regime planned out by the family and the Public Trustees.

Joan was asking Peter if they could go on holiday. Judging from photograph albums the Dibdin family had regular holidays which may have fitted in with Lionel's Civil Engineering work around the country. In 1932 the family spent time at Chale, on the Isle of Wight at the Clarendon Hotel and they managed to visit many locations there, perhaps over a period of a month or so. This holiday must have been so good that in a letter to Peter in June she asked Peter if they could go there together if there was the money. Failing that possibly she could go the Holland to stay with the Hulsbergen Family who were the last people to spend time with her parents the day before the plane crash.

As summer approached it seems that this was organised. It seems that this family ran a farm and Joan enjoyed a few weeks there in August and managed to fall in love with a young man there. Not only are there letters from Holland but also a select of photographs taken by Joan in an album.

Jan Pleunes – Son of the owners of the farm in Holland





Mr Hulsbergen who owned a farm in Holland had written a very moving letter to Peter immediately on hearing about the plane crash explaining how he and Lionel had spent a delightful time together only the day before the disaster. He indicated that he would be very pleased to meet up with Peter and talk about the time his family and Lionel and Cecily had together on holiday. Joan, from her letters to Peter had a good time there.

In July. Peter set himself up in his own flat in Banstead, having reluctantly spent time staying with Auntie Gertie.

On returning to England Joan seems to have gone to Meols to stay with Aunt Christine, a Dibdin Aunt. Repeatedly throughout Joan's life it became apparent that Meols was a haven of down to earth family love and support.

In November Avondale is sold as was the other family house or cottage "Cornfield" at Middleton. There is reference to this bolt hole, near Bognor, in letters from Cecily who seems to have enjoyed time there. There was a connection between this accommodation and a housing estate that Lionel was developing at Felpham. During June, Peter had to go there and prepare the

place, with the help of two car loads of rally friends, 4 girls and 4 boys, ready for renting out and then selling. Joan's familiar life was slipping away.

At the end of 1933 Joan participated in the school play, *The Water Babies* and she was really hoping that Peter and some family would be able to get tickets and go down to Bexhill.

There was continuous hassle about where Joan should stay for her holiday but it seems that this Christmas was spent at Aunt Tine in Meols. Uncle Bernard got involved and supported Peter.

See letters from Bernard in Appendix 29.

From this time on all knowledge of Joan and Peter's life is derived from letters to Joan from Peter.

From these not only do we get some insight into his work and social life but also his letters act a mirror to what was going on for Joan. His manner is exemplary; he acted as fun older brother, mother, father, counsellor and transport manager. He seemed at ease relating to Joan about elements of his social life and in a cute sentence in a letter of January 1934, he slips out that he now has to wear glasses most of the time, except he removes them for driving and for romantic activities as they get in the way.

It seems that Peter was doing what he could to sort out holidays for them both and in March he had correspondence with someone running a caravan site in Weymouth, negotiating for a period there..

In May 1934 he suggested to his 14 year old sister that they go on a cruise to Maderia and then within a short time changed the idea to a trip to Dinard in France as being more pleasant and practical. By June, Aunt Edith had put the block on foreign trips, as Peter was not really old enough, in her opinion, to be responsible for a 14 year old girl.

By this time Peter was working subcontract to a properties company in London and so was becoming busy with all the travelling to and fro. In June his father's old office in Mulgrave Road Sutton closed down.

For the summer, Edith had planned out that Joan should go to Saltburn and instructed Peter to put her straight on the train from school to the North. Edith had in mind for Joan to spend time at her school with a number of foreign girls from Norway, Belgium, Germany and Sweden all 17 to 25 years of age.

It can be assumed that Joan was not amused and Peter clearly disagreed with the idea.

The outcome can be judged from the fact that in July 1934 Joan spent some weeks with a school friend Ann Spencer Smith and her family at Hallamgate Staines.



Three Friends at school including Anne Spencer Smith

Joan seem to have had dreams of acting at that young age
On a scrap of paper : from Joan's school days

I Priscilla Chaldecott promise to pay Joanna Dibdin the sum of 5/- if she succeeds in going on the stage.
Witnesses B. Gase...., R. Crofton Mr Dibdin, E Chaldecott.

1938/9 she did write to the Old Vic and a number of theatre companies regarding acting opportunities. As late as January 1940 before the blitz started, Joan was still looking, and a letter from her music tutor shows the help he was offering through contacts.



Peter visited Joan at Staines and met the Family.

In September of that year Joan did return to the school, The Towers, at Saltburn and without telling Peter for a while was rather ill, probably with Tonsillitis. The reader is reminded that at that time there were no antibiotics available.

However things were brewing during that time with Aunt Edith who must have been getting somewhat distressed by Joan's wilfulness. The following letter to Peter when Joan was 14½ gives some indication of the regime that Joan was under.

A letter from Edith to Peter on 24 August 1934 demonstrates what was going on:

Dear Peter

Thank you so much for the pretty card. I am so glad you are having such a nice holiday, dear.

Joan { *now aged 14 ½* } left us yesterday about midday. I think she ought to have arranged to be in London earlier, as she had another railway journey. Still, I suppose she knows her own business best. She seems more like her father as the years go on. I want you to arrange for her to go somewhere for the 3 days in between her leaving East Wittering on the 30th and Auntie Gertie's return to Reigate on Sept 3rd. The week might have been arranged to coincide with Auntie Gertie's return, but that is not Joan's way. So be sure to see to it please dear. I expect you have his address. Glovers, East Wittering' Sussex.

Joan is invited to Dick's wedding on Sept 17th and Uncle Lewis and Auntie Gertie are already going to another wedding on that night so they will not be able to see to Joan at all. I think the simplest thing would be for Joan to go back to the hostel that day and pay the few shillings extra which it would cost, as she has to return there, in any case, on Sunday the 19th so as to begin work the following day.

Will you talk to Joan about this ?

Of course she may decide not to go. She could not tell me for certain before she left, whether she would go or not. Do not let her leave this to the last minute.

I shall not be able to have Joan for her holidays, as I am going to live with Laura in her very small house at Redcar in the winter time, always now. It only has two bedrooms and a tiny dressing room, so, as we have maids, there will be no room for Joan. Next summer I hope to go abroad again, and let the house.

Perhaps you will be able to arrange for some of the Dibdin relatives to have her, as perhaps, by that time she will expect to arrange her own holidays.

I thought you ought to know, dear, what my plans are, as I could not spring this on you at the last minute.

I hope you had better weather the last part of your stay in Switzerland so as to enjoy Lugano. What memories that place must have brought back to you.

With love you affectionate Aunt Edith Haycraft.

P.S. Could you and David go round to Grandma's and move Joan's heavy black trunk up to the top of the house and her case. They are going off by "Goods" tomorrow. I don't want them hindering up Grannie's hall.

How appalling this letter seems !

In August 1934 Edith retired from her post as Head mistress of the Towers, a girls boarding school, and moved between 15th and 24th August to live with her companion, Laura Gerrand, in Castleton in the North Yorkshire moors.



Edith Haycraft and Laura Gerrand

Joan then spent her some of her holidays at Castleton, in the same house that she had stayed in during summer 1932.

Not only was this apparent lack of care at her “new home” but also there seemed to be similar lack of care and understanding from the senior staff at school.

Joan was quite clearly in a very distress state underneath a possible confident and strong willed appearance.

28 November 1934

6 Dec - 11Dec

To PHD at East Court Banstead.

A letter written by Miss Burrows the Head at Joan's School regarding a conversation with a friend whose name was withheld because of confidence.

Joan had indicated to her friend, that she felt that her parents had not died but that they were living in Belgium in great poverty.

The Letter requested in effect that Peter, a 21 year old grieving lad, should sort out the issue.

Peter wrote a letter back indicating his support for Joan and his confusion but showing that he appreciated that she may be in shock. He also pointed out that he seldom saw her.

On 6th Dec, this was answered by breaking the confidence and naming the girl as Ann Spencer Smith who had told the Vicar who told Miss Burrows. The point of the letter was to re-iterate the truth of the story and emphasise that Peter should do something. This was followed by a lot of oblique suggestions as to how he could go about it. Peter obviously had written back confused by some of the points and so Miss Burrows typed another letter on 11th December sorting out fine details about who said what and the implications and that she felt she did not want to bother the kind Dr. Gardner at Reigate.

From Frances Burrows Headmistress

WHAT INCOMPETENCE!

To not understand the grieving mind of a young girl and then to load such a burden on a 21 year old grieving lad.

Quite clearly Joan’s friend Anne Spencer Smith had heard all Joan’s hopeful fantasy that her parents were still alive and had tried to trigger some help, but to no avail. Miss Burrows Joan’s Headteacher at Ancaster House tried to hand the responsibility over to Peter, also probably struggling with his own grief. Just imagine having one’s life completely controlled by spinster Headteachers.

It is interesting that Miss Burrows referred to this incident in a letter to Joan when she returned a collection of her mothers letters, that were written when she was negotiating a place for her at Ancaster House.

In this letter, Miss Burrows also asked if Joan had contact with he school friend Vivienne Dowdy whom Joan had talked to Peter about some years before.

Judging from Joan’s school photograph album she did acquire a number of friends quite quickly at school.

Vivienne Dowdy



In hindsight, we are now able to accumulate a number of events in the second half of 1934 that give in indication of how Joan was feeling at the time. In June she had to tussle with her Aunt to avoid being drawn into a dynamic at the Towers with a number of older foreign girls and achieved this by spending her summer holidays with the family of a school friend. In September she became ill with infection such that she would need an operation. No doubt with her friend as a confidant, she was able to develop flights of fancy, 15 to 18 months after he parents had died, in the hope that she still had beloved parents who one day she would see again. There was probably little that Peter could do other than to patiently wait out the trauma in a supportive way. For the school to write to Peter instructing him to do something, about a week after a tonsillectomy seem quite unnecessary.

It must have been a welcome relief for Peter to have organised their Christmas to be at Nottingham with the Haycraft family. In telling her about the plans, he nudged her to think carefully about what clothes to pack.

“At Christmas we are going to Uncle Bernard's (Nottingham) Think about the clothes that you will wish to bring with you. You will not want to be in School Uniform.”

This may have been one of the first times that she had stayed with the family and it, no doubt, cemented a considerable number of relationships with members of the family. In writing this, as the biographer, I am well aware of the value of these relationship in the years to come.

Visits to Nottingham seemed to be a regular thing over the next few years.



1937 - Don Haycraft born 1916



1938 - Laura Haycraft born 1922

For the **23rd January 1935** Peter made a delightful issue about Joan's 15th birthday

"Dearest Joan

Many happy returns of the day. It doesn't seem fifteen years ago since that morning that you first made a noise and I saw you in the little crib. All the same it is and many things have happened since then. Now you are becoming a woman, no longer a child. Keep it up dear, and keep going ahead as you are now, as everybody speaks so highly of you. Good luck in the future and God Bless you"
Sending you hockey pads as a present, also a petticoat".

Then a few day later he wrote

"Darling Fifteen year old Baby

Ben put to sleep. Buried in the garden with a stone "Ben 28th Jan 1935 In the light I will always remember him in the darkness my darling I will never forget".



Sadly Joan family's dog Ben who had been taken over by the Muir Family next door to Avondale died in January 1935.

Peter does seem to have been quite involved with Joan's school life, not just as transport and general support but also as an informal friend to her friends. Late February he wrote to Joan "I am sorry that Anne got an order mark, I told her to go in and not get wet. Why didn't the mistress come out and tell her to go in"

We got back to Banstead at 8.45. It took 1¾ hours from School. And it poured with rain all the way."
[not bad going - the estimate time in 2020 is 1½ hours]

During 1935 Peter's letters developed a very down to earth manner, sorting out any logistics relation to travel and train and instructing Joan as what to do to fit in with his plans. - Arrive at Victoria and go to Mrs Midd until he could collect her.

In July he arranged train tickets for both Joan and Anne to go to Saltburn.. "Please keep luggage as small as possible." Because of carrying in across London."

Further details about this holiday are unknown however it does



seem that they are both in Saltburn which is only about 10 miles from Castleton where Aunt Edith had settled.

Although Joan seemed to have a varied, even unsettled, time during her holidays from school, it does appear that she spent quite some time at Castleton and she did refer in later life to riding the milkman's horse around the village. There is a little confusion because in a letter of August 1931 and judging from a photo album, there is reference to Joan being at Heathercote in Castleton staying in the same house in which Aunt Edith was to settle in 1934 but then Joan was c/o a Mrs Francis.



Bearing in mind that Joan's mother Cecily, and her sister Edith had both spent time at The Towers in their youth and it is suspected from letters that the family visited Edith quite often, it

may well be that the Castleton connection had been developed years before.



Heathercote in Castleton

The August letter referring to Joan being at Castleton was to Peter who was staying at Nottingham with his Uncle Bernard, with comment "I am glad you are making yourself useful." In 1931 Peter would have been 18 years old.

In October he is back in fatherly role, picking up that she is not to pleased about working for her Exams.

"My Dearest Joan

Many thanks for your letter, it appears that you are not going to do much work this term as you say that you have not started yet, but seriously Joan this is the term in which you must work harder than ever before, I take it you are now definitely starting on the course for School Certificate. " Followed by page of lecture.

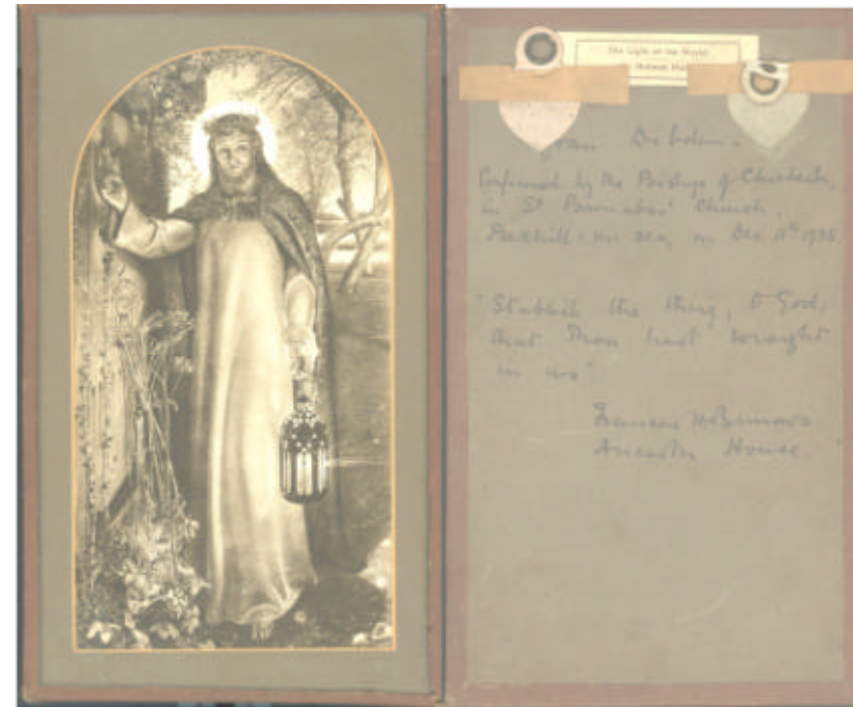
An then a congratulations and some sound brotherly advice

"I am glad you have been made a prefect but do not do too much ordering about because if you do you will not be liked and they won't have you as a prefect. .. The idea is to set an example to others. ..."

Back at School in October Joan was hoping that Peter and some family would go down to Ancaster House for her confirmation ceremony on 11th Dec 1935. At that time Peter was doubtful because he has just started a new job in Whitehall but in fact he did get down there. Joan would be playing at the ceremony.

Joan was confirmed at School by the Bishop of Chichester in St Barnaba Church in Bexhill on December 11th 1935. Frances Burrows, the headmistress, gave her a sepia print of the painting by the pre-Raphaelite Holman Hunt – "The light of the World" on the back of which she wrote "Stablish the thing, O God that thou hast wrought in us".

I now remember that from an early age this hung above my bed in Wellesley Road. It is no wonder that I have some liking for the works of the pre-Raphaelites.



Judging from comments in letters both Joan and Peter were planning to spend Christmas with Gertie.

In February 1936, Peter congratulated Joan on becoming Head Prefect.

It seems that she is at the top of her game, involved in conducting at school, and winning in the House singing competition.

In May 1935 Peter had been able to enter into the celebrations of King George V Jubilee and in February 1936 he watched his funeral from a balcony in Whitehall as he was working in his new job for His Majesties Treasury in the Office of Commissioners of Crown Lands in Whitehall. At Easter, Joan got measles however Peter had a great time going to Paris.

During 1936, life for Joan at school seems to have been fairly settled. Letters from Peter reduce in number and the tone of them is much more down to earth, organisational and chatty. She was made a prefect in October 1935 and Head Prefect in February in 1936 so she probably felt reasonably content about school but was obviously having to confront Aunt Edith's need to start planning her future. The comment in a letter from Peter in February 1936 says it all "If Aunt Edith starts making any more plans for you I should say "Well, what does Peter think about it?"

In June 1936 the school had its 50th birthday celebrations and judging from photographs Joan took part in these.



The Eruption

In early 1936 with Joan 16 and Peter 23 years old, Aunt Edith the controlling force was 58 years old and retired and her younger sister Gertie was 54. In February the conflict was beginning to surface with Peter's comment to Joan about what to say to Aunt Edith.

Thank God for Joan that Peter treated Joan as responsible and backed her with decision making, giving her creative and supportive advice when necessary. How she would have come through, in sound mind, that year on her own against the force of the Aunts and the Public Trustees is a serious worry. As it was she was, in later years, always conscious of that conflict, she lived out the view that elders really did know better, although as a youth she had not followed their advice. This influenced her handling of the next generation on day to day issues, except it is gratifying to read in an ultimatum letter to her husband, regarding her son when he was 21 years old:

"You will no doubt blame Raoul for his behaviour – but in fact the various incidents which accumulated to spark it off were no more than the inevitable process of the life of a boy growing to manhood. This is a most difficult time in the life of the young male (female too for that matter) perhaps the most difficult –the period when he can be made or broken – the time when he must stand on his own feet."

This excerpt was from a 2500 word letter or rather document endeavouring to sort out her husband, philosophically and psychologically, after the psychiatrists had finished with him.

From letters, it would seem that Miss Burrows, the head of Ancaster House and the Public Trustees decided that Joan was not up to taking her school Certificate in the Summer of 1936 at 16½ years old. This was to force Joan to stay on for at least one more term if not two. How she felt about this can only be judged by the

upset that occurred around her with the school, Edith and the Trustees.

“I can imagine that Joan wants to leave school and if she is to stay on then there are some topics she would like to study like.”

During this period Joan was obviously causing upset with Aunt Edith who then approached the Public Trustees who in turn contacted Peter. Peter then had the problem of unpicking all the misunderstandings and ensuring that Joan was allowed to pursue the career of her choice. In a letter to Edith he took a firm line in favour of Joan choosing and doing as she wished.

If a biographer is observed to be prejudiced then let it be known that I, by nature, take the side of the younger members of the issue. Older people should have the experience to recognise the traumas of youth and patiently encourage and support, not take it upon themselves to always know what is best.

The letters to Peter at the end of the year begin to explain much of Edith's attitude towards the role, that she had fulfilled for 3 years and would have to for another 5 years.

August 1936 Letter from Aunt Edith to Peter.

Dear Peter

You have not let me know what you paid for Joan's railway ticket, but she has found the price on the return half ie. 47/3p I therefore send you a cheque for this amount, plus a 1/- for the reserved seat.

In not too courteous a manner, Joan has told me your and her views on my taking a part in the arrangements for her future and the preparations for her career. There must be no misunderstanding about this - The reason I volunteered to help in the matter is because it was her mother's wish that I should use

on Joan's behalf my exceptional experience and knowledge of post school training for all branches of women's work. When your mother entered King's Cross Hospital for the operation on her throat, she asked me to undertake the entire charge of Joan in the event of anything happening to her. This I promised to do and Joan was sent to me until her mother recovered.

Joan is now older and you are of age, though I do not consider you in anyway qualified to undertake such an important and difficult task. Still I shall certainly not intrude upon what you evidently consider your exclusive right, and I have written to that effect to the Trust Officer in charge of your sister's affairs. If you prefer to make other arrangements for Joan's holidays after this year you must let me know and I will withdraw from that also.

Your affectionate Aunt Edith.

On 28th August 1936 Peter wrote the following back

Dear Auntie Edith

In reply to your letter enclosing value cheque 48/3 for which I thank you, please take notice that I have not passed any views on your taking part in the arrangements for Joan's future and her career.

Also perhaps you will bear in mind that during the last years you have not once consulted or even put forward any of the plans that you have mapped out on my sister's behalf.

I should have thought that you at least would have tried to carry out what you said you would, when we last saw each other, but no, I have not heard further.

I expect to be away for about 15 days in Germany as from tomorrow - in the mean time perhaps you will be good enough to let me know what your arrangements for Joan's future are.

Your affectionate Nephew Peter.

So it seems that Edith triggers a written confrontation based on the anger and awkwardness of a 16 year old girl struggling to establish a future for herself having had her school leaving exams delayed because she was not ready for them.

On 25th September 1936 Edith replied:

Dear Peter

I had not intended to write to you again, but, in her letter to me this morning, Auntie Ger says she does not think you have the slightest idea how offensive your to me of the 28th August was. [well done Gertie] I will take it therefore, that you have difficulty in expressing yourself suitably on paper.

Edith then gives all the details as expressed by Gertie about why Peter may be unset etc.. and goes on to point out that she has told the Public Trustees that she could under the circumstance have no plan for Joan. Her view then developed the issue of staying at a costly boarding school to finish exams or some other alternative, like her going to Fran Schneider's Household School for Domestic Science and then spend a year in France with a salary. She goes on to explain that Joan's response was such that she wrote to the Public Trustee to withdraw from any further discussions. Edith then whinges on about how she was pushed into looking after Joan and how difficult she is. She then develops the letter into a tirade about Peter's letter, his comments and attitude for another few pages. She really did not expect to spend her retirement (from the age of 56) looking after a difficult adolescent. Edith did die at the age of 66 in 1944.

Peter must have written back calming troubled waters so Edith wrote again on October 6th

My dear Peter

I was glad to have your letter, darling. So that is all over, thank goodness.

She then goes on to explain her reasoning about Joan's future and why more time in boarding school is not a good thing, including *Miss Burrows and Mrs Smith both are rather sarcastic women and Joan freezes in there company and so cuts herself off from any grown up assistance she might otherwise get when it is her turn to sit at their table for meals.*

And then another 7 pages about the joys of Fran Schneider's Household School and how Joan was not suitable for Film work. In the letter from Peter to the Trustees endeavouring to smooth out things in September 1936, he mentions that Joan should give up the violin lessons as she was only learning it to help out the school orchestra.

We need to keep at the back of our minds, that underlying all the issues was money, as Ancaster House was a private school and any future studies such as a German Cookery School mentioned by Edith in Dec 1936 would be expensive. The fees for one term were in the order of £40.

Fortunately, Joan did passed the School Certificate Exam which she took in December 1936, so that in January, she could leave and she applied to enter a hostel, Queen Alexandra's House, by the Royal Albert Hall, in preparation for starting at the Royal Academy of Music. She passed in the following subjects: English, Religious Knowledge, History, Geography, Latin, French, Arithmetic, Mathematics, Biology, Art, Music, Handicraft and Needlework., with credits in Art and Music.

1937 A Fresh Start

In January, Edith wrote to Peter, glad that Joan has passed and with plans for her to take music Exams LRAM with the Royal Academy. She was going to ask Miss Bridgen if Joan could be a paying guest with her while she studies at the Royal Academy.



Miss Bridgen – Music Teacher at Ancaster House

Miss Bridgen was unable to help in this respect but it now is clear from records that Joan entered Queen Alexandra's House at the end of January 1937, so at just 17 years old was settled in her new home in Kensington and started studies at The Royal Academy.



Queen Alexandra's House

Of course all of these arrangements had to be agreed with the Public Trustees who not only had a close eye on Joan's finances but were also supposed to be ensuring that she was behaving herself.

To most of us, it would seem a dream to be living in a magnificent and presumably comfortable building at the back of the Royal Albert Hall, in the most delightful part of West London.

However, we have from a letter written seven years later by a friend from Q.As. called Jane, that she was not to happy there, but it is unclear as to what was her grievance. May be it was run like a young persons hostel with a lot of rules and control.

“Do you look back on those years we knew each other with great pleasure or have you had nicer things happen since? I shall always remember you rampaging up & down those tiny Q-A rooms (Queen Alexandra’s House) like a caged lion – saying you must leave the place come what may! Poor Jo, you did hate it and us sometimes. How silly it is that I still think of you as someone who needs looking after and here you are far more responsible and experienced than I am.”

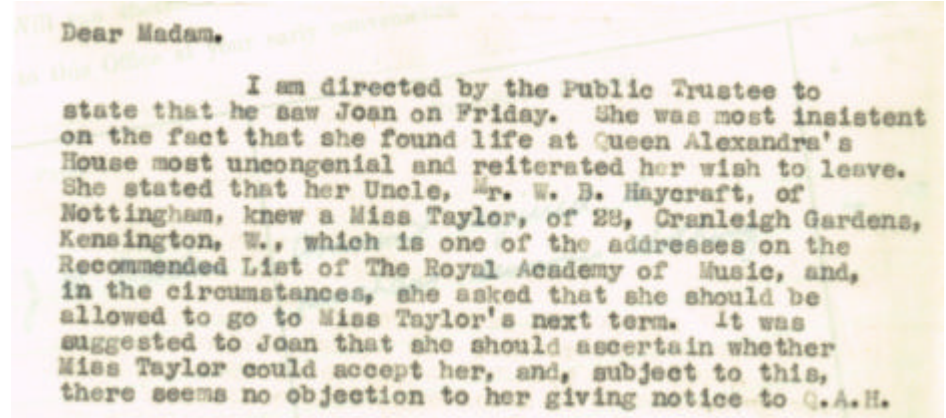
From a letter dated 24th December 1943
*From Jane – married to Harold and
working in the War Effort for the
Mechanised Transport Corp in Leeds.- 25 of them*

Joan must have been very unsettled in all respects judging from a note on 1st March 1938 to Peter from the Public Trustees:

“I am directed by the Public Trustee to say that he will be glad if you could arrange an appointment to call to see him to discuss the question of your sister’s future career.”

Joan did stay there for a total of a few months and then with the help of Uncle Bernard from Nottingham managed to get permission to move out to 28, Cranley Gardens.

From a letter to Edith from the Public Trustees in June 1938



Dear Madam,

I am directed by the Public Trustee to state that he saw Joan on Friday. She was most insistent on the fact that she found life at Queen Alexandra's House most uncongenial and reiterated her wish to leave. She stated that her Uncle, Mr. W. B. Haycraft, of Nottingham, knew a Miss Taylor, of 28, Cranleigh Gardens, Kensington, W., which is one of the addresses on the Recommended List of The Royal Academy of Music, and, in the circumstances, she asked that she should be allowed to go to Miss Taylor's next term. It was suggested to Joan that she should ascertain whether Miss Taylor could accept her, and, subject to this, there seems no objection to her giving notice to Q.A.H.

With Peter’s help she moved her stuff to Cranley Gardens before the holiday period ready to settle in September.

Although music was her main strength from an early age, she had taken an interest in elocution, perhaps with the plan to go on the stage or to fulfil the dream of becoming a film star. Joan must have up sticks from Castleton and moved everything to her new abode in Queen Alexandra’s House.

In the letter from the Public Trustee, there is also a report that Joan, in discussion with them, had said that she planned to finish her exams at the Royal Academy and then apply to go to the Old Vic Drama School for 6 to 12 months.

There is, in the archive, a very full file of all correspondence to and from the Public Trustees who of course were no longer responsible for Peter but were to be in charge of Joan until January 1941. Apart for a brief to keep an eye of her generally, they controlled her finances on a day to day basis. This included ensuring that capital was always invested in an optimum way and that her day to day expenditure was acceptable. In the second half of 1938 there is a major tussle over whether to let Joan have £170 or £180 a year.

It was settled at £170, as it was “jolly” to give Joan 71 shillings a week. Every now and then she would have to request and negotiate for extra for clothing – she once mentioned that she had to asked for cash for knickers as well as money to get her piano tuned. It was taken for granted that she would be having holidays with Uncle Bernard in Nottingham..

From that date until 1939 we have in the archives no correspondence but then with Peter working in Whitehall and Joan being in South Kensington there would be little need. Joan diaries from 1938 and 1939 indicates that she was having a very busy student life and an equally full social life. A fair amount of time was spent with Peter and young cousins and friends but she did also visit the older members of the family, her last Grandmother before she died and any number of Aunts. An extra diary covering a few months in 1938 give us some details of her activities during that period includes the move from Queen Alexandra House in July 1938 to Cranley Gardens, with the help of Peter and his car. As you can imagine her piano, a full size upright inherited from her mother had to be moved although records show that the Cello stayed in the north of England until after Aunt Edith’s death in 1944. During the middle of 1938 she and Peter were involved with Aunt Lettie in welcoming the Montford family back from Australia after the death of Paul Montford.

Joan, during the summer, must have been drifting about various relatives “Sofa Surfing” but with the knowledge that she had a room to go to in September.

It is difficult to grasp what life felt like for Joan at this time as sadly, but logically, we have no letters between her and Peter however we have two memorable references to Joan at that time in letters written later in 1943 by a close friend Jane, from Leeds, in which she refers to that early time at college.

Within two short letters from her days at Alexandra House, we acquire so many insights in retrospect regarding how Joan was feeling and how she appeared to others. This friend Jane was able, in the mid 1940s, to put into the context of that time, observations about Joan’s emotional state in earlier years, with reference to behaviour like that of a caged lion.

“Remember the old days when after a successful elocution or music lesson you used to hurl yourself at the piano, and fairly let off steam? Legs, long dark hair, fingers – all flying about in every direction in your exuberance”

These can be seen in full in “The book 3 Lives in World War 2” Appendix 18.



To help us further we have this wonderful set of entries in a diary marked up in a notebook from July 1938 to September 1938. It seems that she negotiated for a room at 28 Cranley Gardens moving in on 4th Sept 1938 out of Alexandra House.

Her diaries from 1938 to 1950 are shown in full in Appendix 2 of the book “Three Lives in World War 2”, however the rather full descriptive special entries are shown on the next page.

It seems an honour to be able to share in the emotional turmoil of an eighteen year old.

From the diary

24 July 1938

She, with Peter's help, took her trunk to 28 Cranley Gardens, borrowed a couple of pounds from him and went to Nottingham to see her Uncle Bernard Haycraft who was her mother's brother.

23 August 1938 is interesting in so far as we get a vivid picture of the extremes of pleasure and despair that this very alone girl must have experienced.

"Met Don in the Mikado at 12.00. Got a taxi at 2.40 for the Midland Station. (Nottingham) Micky was there. Then Don came down. I felt awful leaving them all. Don opened my small blue case and said what's in here? I told him to shut it because everything would fall out. I kissed them both and said good bye. I felt wretched all the journey, I wanted Don so much.

This entry is followed by a description of travelling across to Ruislip to see Aunt Lettie who was not there so having to go back to Victoria and flop down at Mrs Midd's

4th September

By this date Joan had settled for a bit at Aunt Lettie's and then "Later she went out for supper at the Imperial Restaurant with a glass of Worthington. "I expect Don was in the Tavern drinking Worthington at the same time 9.00-9.30pm".

When she unpacked her small blue case she found a packet of 25 Players cigarettes – "Don must have put them there when he opened my case at Midland Station – He is a darling.

Later -- She received a letter from Don saying that he would come to London at the weekend and also he wrote "What about the holiday? He is a darling and I love him so."

Peter came round later and fetched her box from Queen Alexandra House. When Joan talked to Peter about Don and the holiday he, in a knowing way, just took it for granted.

7th September

They met Adrian, Bobby and family at Southampton and put them on a boat train and then drove to the house Cremona in Sutton (Cavendish Road) to deliver some of the luggage, arriving there at 9.30pm having stopped at Drift Bridge nr Epsom for an enormous dinner.

Peter dropped Joan off at Morden Station.

8th September

Joan went up to see Mrs Midd who had broken an arm and then went up to Regent's Street to do some shopping.

"Just two more days and Don will be here if all goes well. Oh dear, time goes so slowly and I love him so much"

Her Academy report in January 1939 was very good and confirms that not only was she studying two aspects of music ie. Piano and harmony but also elocution. She was seen as conscientious and had an excellent attendance
See Appendix 37.

In mid 1939 life began to unravel for everyone. Peter went to camp in July and in August he enlisted in the army in preparation for War which was declared on 3rd of September.

Careers were cut short and the British youth turned its attention to the war effort. Peter had enlisted and Joan joined the Red Cross Service in London in preparation for the impact of War in London.

For the next 5 years Joan activities centred on the war and the war effort and a social life with relations and new found friends that all came together in that rarefied wartime atmosphere.

The transcripts of these short bursts of diary are in full in Appendix 2 of "Three Lives in World War 2".

During my life, Joan had occasionally mentioned that she had a soft spot for Don but had never indicated the depth of feeling that she had for him. The fact that he had talked about a holiday together suggested that the feeling must have been reciprocated.

The notebook also contained detailed accounts for March 1939 with some from Sept 1938.

There was little else written in this large notebook but many of pages had sketches and scribbles. Tucked into it were a number of drawings by Joan including cartoons and many sketched of dress designs.

It is worth noting perhaps, for historical purposes, that also tucked into this notebook were letters written by her son in the 1950's.

As has been mentioned in 1939, Joan music life went on hold and we observe the development of a capable young lady facing with confidence the problems of wartime life and accepting with relish the opportunities that came her way.

This new era of her life is considered in the book "Three Lives in World War Two" with a short summary in Chapter 24.

Cousins, on the Haycraft side, in Nottingham were like siblings and a source of fun. Aunty Gertie, her mother's sister, who married Lewis Davis, offered pleasant and stable hospitality and the Davis family have been good friends for much of her life.

Joan always saw one of Gertie's sons, John Davis, a man of exceptional qualities, as a sound source of advice and his wife as a friend and inspiration.

John Davis worked in colonial Malaya before the war endeavouring to quell rebels and then fought, with the Malayan communists in the jungle against the Japanese. After the war he then returned to work against the same communist rebels in Malaya. In fact he was responsible for finding the communist

leader, Chin Peng who he had worked with in WW2, for the Baling peace talks in northern Malaya in 1955 and for being his advocate during those negotiations that sadly failed.

From Chin Peng at John's funeral

"That initial meeting forged an association that was at first expedient. We both wanted to rid Malaya of a common enemy. But both of us ultimately realised that the period of being allies in a common cause would eventually come to an end. And it did. But I can never forget my time together with John in the Malayan jungle. I remember him as an implacable leader in the most harrowing of circumstances."

Ref: Times Obituary and Private papers.

Book : Our Man in Malaya ISBN 978-0-7509-4710-7
by Margaret Shennan Further details are in the History Website.
The Public Trustees had the responsibility of controlling all expenditure until Joan was 21. It seems that in May 1941 there was a balance to the estate of about £3800 owed to Joan.

The letters from her mother to Ancaster House School were returned to Joan, in late 1937 by Miss Burrows, who felt she would like something in her mother's handwriting. She pointed out the effort her mother had gone to on her behalf and reminds her how her mother had eagerly looked forward to Joan doing well in Music and she hope this will encourage her. The letter is also interesting in so far as it refers back to the time that Joan lost the plot in 1934 trying to convince her friend that her dead parents were alive in Belgium. Miss Burrows in this letter seems very understanding about this behaviour and that it was really to have been expected. This seems a somewhat different approach to that in the letter to Peter, Joan's brother, in 1934 asking him to sort the issue out.

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There is more about Joan in Chapter 22 - Caring for Joan

## Chapter 22 Peter Caring for Joan

The feeling of isolation experienced by Joan and Peter after their Parents death must have been intense. One does not get the impression that members of their quite extended family were demonstrable in rushing around to help. There were plenty of condolence letters but among those aunts that were in a position to help it seemed that this tragic event created yet another problem or responsibility. Because of the complications of the wills and a double death, both youngsters ended up under the control of the Public Trustees and there was considerable negotiation as to who would be responsible for them.

Many of the details of this are covered in the chapter of Joan's Early Years and the impact on Peter from a practical point of view was limited as he was to reach the age of 21 within a year or so but officially at the time of the crash he was still a minor.

What was significant was how he immediately took on the role of Joan's loving brother, parent, supporter, advocate and close friend, guiding her and standing up for her against the pressures from the Trustees and Aunts when she was at an age of struggling with immense and unseemly adult pressure.

The evidence for this can be seen through over 60 letters between Joan and Peter during the years 1933 to the end of 1936. Before that, there is no suggestion that they had communicated much even when Joan was at boarding school. Her letters demonstrate the needs of a grieving teenager struggling to grow up and appear grown up and searching for her own identity. Peter's early letters seem to be a natural follow on from their mother's advising her about schooling, encouraging her with her music work with seriously down to earth advice and sending her the numerous items that she demanded for school.

In 1933, he had to not only sort out his parent's estate and his own affairs but also carry Joan with him and explain to her why

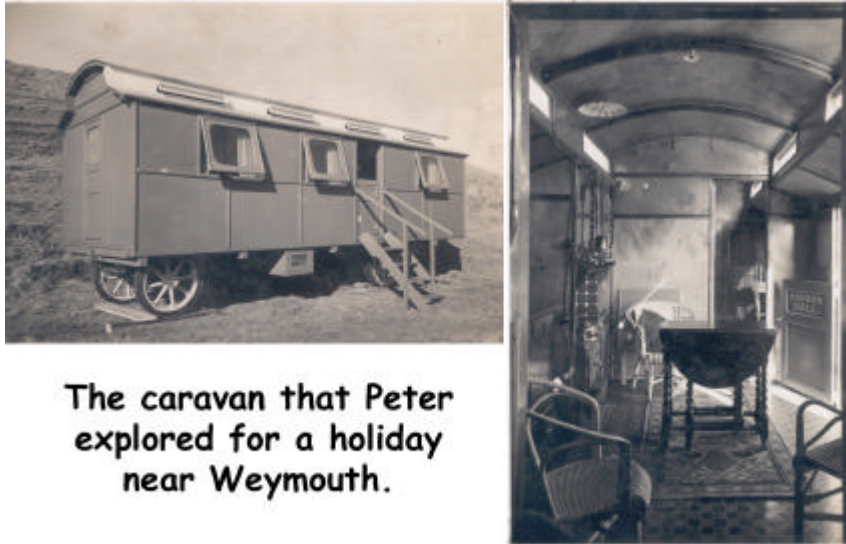
the changes in their lives had to occur. This entailed selling off most of the estate including their home and signing their lives over to the control of Auntie Gertie and Aunt Edith and the Public Trustees.

For him this must have been a nightmare especially with a 13 year old sister continually asking why and giving her view as to what should be happening, followed by plaintive requests that certain items should not be sold but kept for her. How Peter felt about selling off his home is uncertain but perhaps in some respects, for him it was not so bad, as he was at an age of being about to set off on his own life and as it turned out within a couple of years he had left the family firm and started a new career with the Civil Service.

Peter's letters to Joan offer us a wonderful blend of brotherly newsy chat and firm advice and advocacy. He tells her details of his adventures at work and with his driving and aspects of his social life with young ladies and then discusses with her in all seriousness how he agrees with her view about her aunt's holiday plans for her and gets involved in sorting things out in the family.

When she was 14 years old and he, of course, was now "of age", he suggested in one letter that they go on a cruise together in the summer and then in the following letter indicated that perhaps this was not such a good idea so changed the idea to a trip to France. A letter from Edith firmly stamped on this, suggesting that although he was of age he was not really experienced enough in life to take on the responsibility of looking after an adolescent girl in a foreign country. (As only she could be that skilled as the spinster head teacher of a small elite girls school). He had to submit to this because there was always the threat of the Public

Trustees and so finished with the comment that once she was 16 they could do what they liked and went and look for a caravan near the south coast. It seemed that, quite understandable he was looking for the chance to recreate those long family holidays with their parents, such the one in the Isle of Wight in 1932.

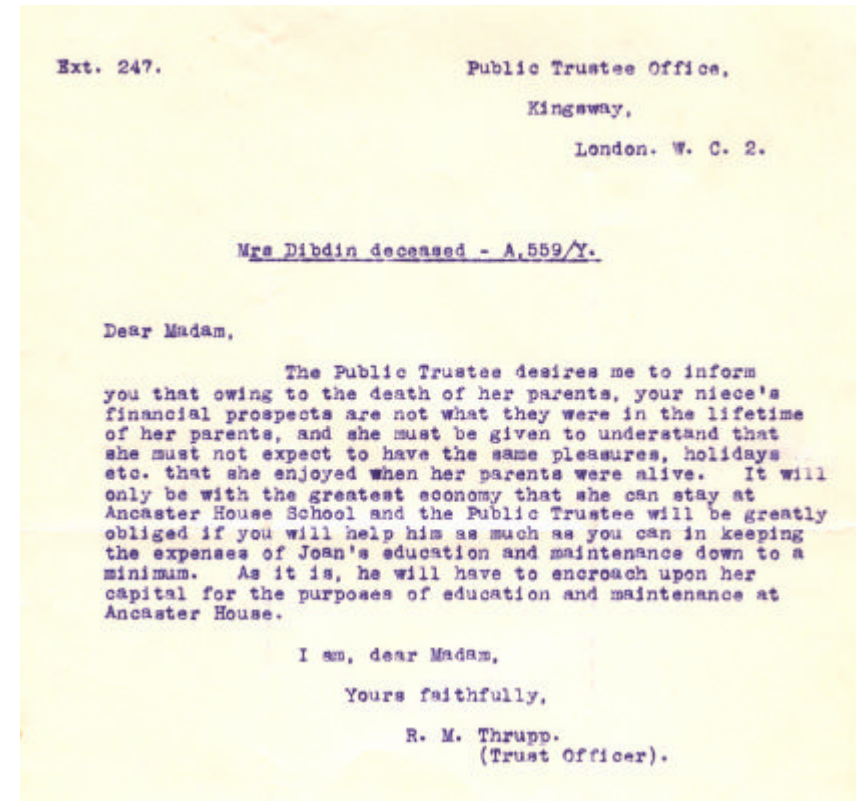


**The caravan that Peter explored for a holiday near Weymouth.**

Bearing in mind how level headed Peter was, it is easy to accept his interpretation of the somewhat unreasonable management of Joan by those in power and it is delightful to read of the full hearted support he give her in this respect and yet over other issues that needed a firm hand, he was not backward to holding his ground with her. Even when she was as old as twenty he challenged her over a request for a large sum of cash insisting on knowing the reasons why and then moderating the request.

He visited her school in Bexhill whenever possible and despite the pressures of work attended her Confirmation Service and accepted an invitation for tea at the school. He was not backward at being involved with her friends and was very pleased when in

the summer of 1934 a school friend Ann Spencer Smith invited her to her home in Staines for the summer holidays so Joan did not have to endure the rigours of her Aunt Edith's plans for her to spend summer in Saltburn with a lot of foreign girls older than her.



Judging from this letter to Edith, the Public Trustees considered her to be "in charge" and one can see from the detail and the tone of the letter that Joan must in her early teens felt that life was becoming somewhat dour.



As is mentioned elsewhere, letters between Joan and Peter ceased after 1936 probably because there were both settled back in the London area and were able to see each other on a regular basis. The strong relationship between them as Joan approach adulthood was probably based on the very deep understanding of both having been orphaned at such a critical time of life and as an expression of the tremendous care they had for each other. Even when Joan was younger and at her most demanding, there always came through her letters a care and concern for Peter. Joan had often admitted, in later life, that such an affinity was never there before 1933.

As will be seen in the chapter about Peter's life in WW2 and in the Book "Three Lives in World War 2", this strong working relationship carried on throughout the war until Peter died in 1933, through Joan's time with the Guise family and marriage to Tony Guise with Peter acting as support in the early part of the war.

Once Joan was married, he was delighted to have as his sister, a capable and responsible woman with a husband that was a good brother to him during the short time that they knew each other and he enjoyed the company of the whole Guise family and friends. As will be seen in the next chapter, during the war Peter had a very watchful eye on Joan and particularly on her state of health, however it has to be noted that once Joan settled into a family, she seemed to offer tremendous support to Peter and even then wondered if she had helped him enough.

It is pleasing to note that although Peter was still keeping an eye on Joan and her behaviour during the war period, he was able to depend on her to a large extent with family administrative matters travelling down to Sutton and Reigate on occasions and sending him parcels or taking items down to his camp wherever in Sussex.

It is at this point worth looking in some detail as to what happened to Joan and Peter with regard to guardianship and the Public Trustee. This is referred to elsewhere but a closer look and the relevant documentation gives a distressing insight as to what was going on. These documents are a few amongst about 200 in a file that covers 8 years of Joan's life and whereas it could be a worthwhile activity to research them to build up a more complete story, the process would be very time consuming and somewhat chilling.

Three documents, all involving the High Court of Justice, Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division

The first signed by both Joan and Peter as minors states that they elect Frances Georgina Haycraft, our lawful/ Grandmother, ( who was their only living grand parent) and only next of kin to be our curator and guardian for the purpose of obtaining Letters of Administration of the estate .....

Exactly when in 1933 this was signed is unclear, however it seems to have been followed by another document in July 1933 to be signed by Peter and Joan.

This states that Frances Georgina Haycraft has expressly renounced all her rights and the title to the Curator or Guardianship of the said Minors and to the Letters of Administration or all the estate which by law devolves to and vests in the personal representative of the said deceased.

Whatever the common sense of their Grandmother's decision, it must have feel quite a blow that their next of kin and so natural guardian by law should actually reject responsibility for them. It should be recorded that these documents actually only related to the financial side of Joan and Peters care and in relation to the Public Trustees .

The document goes on to state that Peter and Joan elect two of their aunts Edith Mary and Ethel Gertrude Haycraft as next of kin and Curators and Guardians ..... until each is 21 years old. This would seem to have settled things and whereas it would be neither here nor there to Peter who was supposed to be his Guardian, whether she recognised it or not, it would be of extreme importance to Joan.

In December 1933, letters from Aunt Edith in Saltburn to Peter give an indication of the issues that were going to develop over guardianship of Joan and confirm my view that have developed over the time of my researches that nobody, except her brother Peter, wanted to take a deep responsibility for her.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> December, Edith wrote in a caring manner about Joan and wishes that several of the family could have gone to her play at school and hoped that Peter managed to go. Also she asks Peter to keep her mother's cello for her and somehow get it up to Saltburn in case Joan wished to play it in the future as Edith has the idea she may go to the Royal Academy of Music. She went on to say that she was pleased that both Joan and Peter are going to Aunt Christine in Meols, a Dibdin Aunt for Christmas, and then asks for Joan's school coat to be sent to her so she can get in altered.

So Edith is interested and capable of sorting out the practical Joan's day to day living and for that matter she can plan her future, as you would expect a Headmistress of a girls school to be able to do, but what of the emotional side of life?



The Towers School which was run in the 1930s by Edith Haycraft and closed in 1960. Now called Tower Court



It was in this letter that Edith took it upon herself to remind Peter to ensure that Grandma Haycraft got paid her interest that was referred to in a letters from the Public Trustees.

In terms of the impact on lives and minds, the situation that enveloped Joan and Peter, at this time, must have been awful and to top what must have seemed like a rejection from her Grandmother, we find this letter to Peter fussing about a loan within the family and the interest on it.

*Public Trustee Office*

*Kingsway*

*London W.C.2*

Dibdin deceased – A. 559.

Dear Sir,

I am directed by the Public Trustee to say that your grand-mother, Mrs. F.G, Haycraft, writes to say that it was only immediately "before your father's death that she received any interest from him in respect of a loan of £200 which she made to your mother in 1914.

The Public Trustee will be obliged if you can let him have any information with regard to this loan. Since your mother's death, he has been paying interest to your grand-mother at 5% less tax but he has no Information to show that interest was not paid upon the loan regularly since the advance was made to your mother.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

Trust Officer

To:

P.H.Dibdin Esq., "Eastcourt", Woodmansterne Road,  
Banstead, SURREY.

Coincidentally Aunt Christine wrote to Peter on the same day. She also had some down to earth suggestions about the school coat and skirt and suggested that this was sorted while she was still at school. She suggested that her trunk goes straight to Meols either

with her or "luggage in advance". For those readers unaware of the complexities of boarding school living, particularly in the days of few cars and many train journeys, children packed all their worldly good into a trunks and this went back and forth to school and home and the beginning and end of each term.

Usually these trunks where collected by the railway from home and delivered on mass to the school a day before or after term started. This procedure was one of those rituals performed 6 times a year. And depending on the nature of the child, created dread at least 3 times a year.

Everyone in Meols was looking forward to seeing Joan and Peter at Christmas.

A letter written on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December by Edith is of great significance, with regard to this issue of guardianship. She wrote to Peter in confidence and explained that she had heard that the Public Trustees were expecting the guardianship of Joan to be sorted out by the two families. This is six months after Joan was orphaned and it seems that still things were not sorted. She and Gertie had been acting as guardians but now the situation had to be made legal. The letter then goes one to say that for any number of reasons she feels that Christine would be a better guardian and how Edith herself was really not suitable. The letter points out that Joan and Peter are really more like the "Dibdin Family", suggesting the creativity, but there is an undertone based on the view generally held, that their father was very stubborn. Naturally Edith wanted to do the right thing for Joan and had written to Christine in September suggesting that she was the guardian. There was a slight tone of wingeing in Edith's letter, suggesting that she really did not want to care for Joan and this was confirmed a year later in August when she told Peter that she cannot have Joan for the Summer Holidays. As described in Chapter 21, the eruption between Peter, on Joan's behalf, and

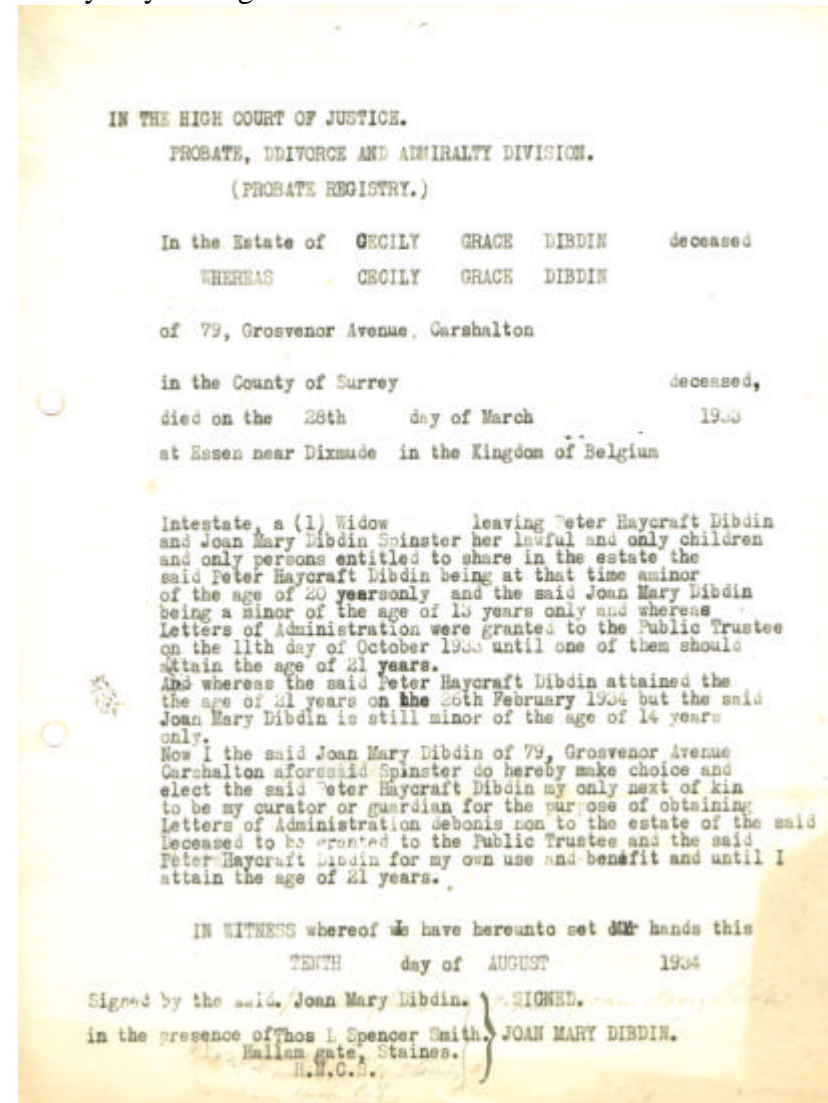
Edith made her position quite clear; it was all really just a matter of duty and responsibility to her dead sister.

In the middle of all this Christmas correspondence, Peter was dealing with the sale, no doubt with “help” from an uncle, of the content of his home which was to be on the 15<sup>th</sup> December. On the 12<sup>th</sup> Edith wrote to thank him for the sale catalogue and said she wanted some plates for her home but was not sure if they were “up for sale”. She then proceeds to lecture Peter about managing Joan on the basis that any temporary sleeping arrangement could not be rough and tumble like for a boy because she was a growing girl. Also it seems that as was to happen from time to time in the future, Peter’s actions or plans had “hurt” Auntie Gertie, and Edith took it upon herself to support her sister by pointing out that his parents would not have liked the situation.

In that letter Edith refers to two of the Dibdin relations Rex and Lettie and how Peter and Joan ought to be visiting and in a subsequent card on the 15<sup>th</sup>, she demands Aunt Margaret’s address by return of post. Margaret Cowham, nee Dibdin, was the most inept of the Dibdin Aunts and Uncles according to her daughters autobiography “Unspoken Hope” written in Canada or America after she had escaped from the clutches of her mother at the age of 32.

At the end of 1933, Margaret and her 3 children were sharing a house in Babington Road, Streatham, while Margaret’s husband was working as a vicar in India. Within a year, she was to have returned to India leaving her 3 children, one called Mary with a clef palette, to the care of family on her husband’s side, who then, two years later, shipped them off to boarding school in Keswick. In many ways, Aunt Margaret was the bane of Joan’s life, bossing her about in much the same way as Aunt Edith. It is still very unclear who actual was Joan official guardian taking into account

that this High Court Document sign by Joan on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1934 is really only relating to financial issues.



By this time, Peter was now over 21 and Joan must have been pleased to hand over degrees of control to him.

“Now I the said Joan Mary Dibdin of 79, Grosvenor Avenue Carshalton aforesaid Spinster do hereby make choice and elect the said Peter Haycraft Dibdin my only next of kin to be my curator or guardian for the purpose of obtaining Letters of Administration debonis non to the estate of the said Deceased to be granted to the Public Trustee and the said Peter Haycraft Dibdin for my own use and benefit and until I attain the age of 21 years.”

What every the official power of this, it did not stop Edith considering that she and Gertie should have a degree of control over Joan and have a say in planning her future. Judging by the letters and battles between The Public Trustees, the Aunts and Peter over Joan’s activities and behaviour this must have been the case. However, it is a delight to record that Peter stood his ground and supported Joan in her decision for her future and that in the long run, he saw the fruits of his judgement in the form of a grown up married sister before he died.

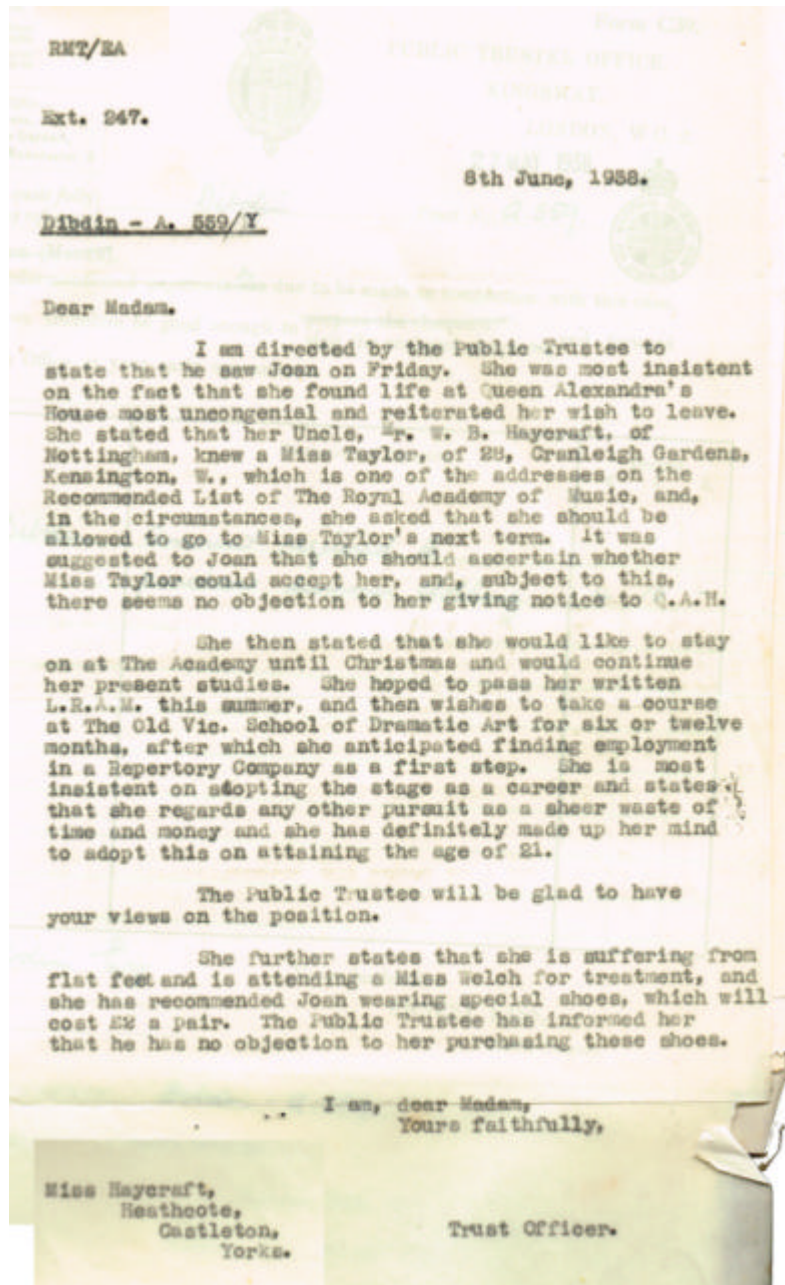
I have this feeling that the life of Peter and Joan was somewhat like a Dickensian melodrama with no one really understanding how they really felt.

I am saddened by the fact that I never got to seeing or being aware of all this historical detail before my mother, Joan, died and be able to discuss it with her, although if the opportunity had arisen, it would probably have been the case that she would not have realised or remembered the details of those confusing times.

The three documents referring to guardianship are actually only relating to who Joan wished to deal with the financial side of her life and negotiate with the Public Trustees on her behalf. There seem to be no documents relating to who would be responsible for her pastorally and hence the significance of the letter from

Edith to Peter in 1933 suggesting that Joan’s Aunt, Christine, should act as guardian. It seemed that Edith did reluctantly take on the job in conjunction with Gertie but as she made absolutely clear in her letter to Peter in 1936 when he was arguing with her over Joan’s future, she really was only caring for Joan as duty to her deceased sister. Joan must have felt very insecure and often unwanted for those 4 years 1933 to 1937.

When Joan left school she got her way, with Peter’s encouragement, and entered The Royal Academy of Music however even at the age of 18 years old, she was having to fight her corner and we note how she had to use as many family connections as possible to achieve the independence she required. As described elsewhere, Peter generally was involved in helping Joan move from place to place. Amongst the documents is a report to the Public Trustees from Max Pirani, her tutor, which indicates that she was a conscientious student and obviously very talented at the Piano. This endless watchful eye by the Public Trustees must have been very irksome and in later life Joan did mention how tiresome it was to have to beg for money. Official permission by letter was needed in many cases for detailed items as can be seen from the end of the adjacent letter where permission is given for the purchase of special shoes for flat feet. In effect the Public Trustees controlled her life, checking on her living accommodation, the level of her work at college, and had total control of her capital finances with the responsibility of buying and selling investments so as to maximize the income of her estate. The demands on her trust of people must have been phenomenal and there is not doubt that having Peter to advise and fight her corner must have been a Godsend.



It seems that Peter was old enough and perhaps laid back enough to manage his life in a more enjoyable way, taking things as they came but there is no doubt that he took Joan's need very seriously and managed her, when required with a deep sense of responsibility.

Once Joan had moved to the Royal Academy we get little communication between Peter and Joan supposedly because they could meet often, however there is much between those people trying to manage Joan and Peter.

Joan moved a lot: In Sept. 1938 she moved to 28 Cranley Gardens and on 13<sup>th</sup> Aug 1939 to 95 Queens Gate by mid October 1939 to 12 Granville Place Portman Square W1. That was just after the start of the war, but two months before she joined the Red Cross.

It is moving to read in letters how she was able in many respects to reciprocate with care of Peter, particularly when he was obviously fed up during his later time in the war and that Peter was able to share in her joy of a husband and child. Letters indicate how much she was supporting him and how proud he was of her as a grown up married mother.

It is not surprising that a few years later when she had lost both her brother, Peter, and her new husband that we find her looking around family and friends for further support and guidance on details of financial management.

Appendix 37 shows a number of documents and letters relating to the whole issue of Public Trusteeship and how issues were managed within the family however it should be noted that there is in the archive a large file of document which would create a whole narrative in its own right.

There will be a limited collection on the History website.

## Chapter 23

## Peter's time in the Army

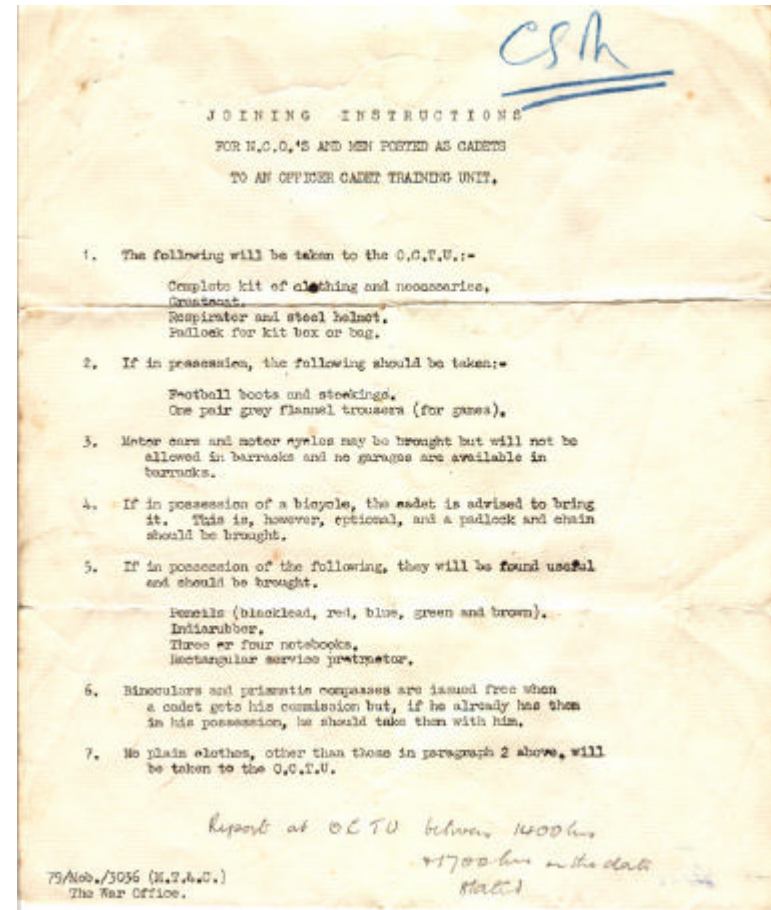
The last 'early years' letter we have from Peter to Joan is from July 1936 as she was due to take her School Certificate Exams. The next we know of Peter is after his two continental holidays when in 1938 he became involved with the Territorial Army and in 9<sup>th</sup> August 1939 and 24<sup>th</sup> August 1939 he wrote to Joan from camp at Rowhook near Horsham where he indicated that he was working hard. As war approached in 1938, he had joined the Territorial Army and enlisted 11 May 1939 for 4 years – signing on 1st Sept 1939.

It is dramatic to observe that from 24<sup>th</sup> August 1939 that Peter had no further appointments in his diary to do with work for the Crown Commissioners.

Up until the last moment people in England hoped that there would be no war, however on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939 war was declared on Germany and Peter was already in harness ready for full training. It seemed that he had enlisted, presumably in the Territorial Army on 11 May 1939, judging from a couple of documents relating to the Officer Cadet Training Unit, he had enrolled for Officer training and seemed to have been settled at the rank of Lance Corporal.

Peter joined up at the beginning of the war and worked with the Royal Engineers. What we now know of Peter's time in the army is through about 55 letters to Joan during the war period from 9<sup>th</sup> August 1939 and notes in Joan's diaries.

These are interesting as they give some idea of the Engineering and Gunnery work that Peter was doing even before the actual outbreak of war and also how he was still supporting Joan as, of course, she was still only 19 years old and under the control of the Public Trustees. It seems that the Aunts by now had lost control.



Records have been found that while in training, he made detailed notes on the workings of the Otto cycle combustion engine and other useful vehicle mechanics. Coincidentally later in the war his sister took some similar notes!

### Tour of duty of Peter Dibdin over 4 years.

|                   |                                                                                      |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 09/08/1939        | 325 RE Camp Rowhook Station 3 Attachment 6                                           |
| <b>01/09/1939</b> | <b>War Started</b>                                                                   |
| 07/09/1939        | Hoopwick Farm Rudgewick Sussex                                                       |
| 09/11/1939        | Rowhook                                                                              |
| 04/01/1940        | Broadbridge Heath Horsham                                                            |
| 02/03/1940        | No 1 Company 163 OCTU Risborough Barracks Shornecliffe Kent                          |
| 08/08/1940        | 325th Bty Coombe Place Offham nr Lewes                                               |
| 23/07/1941        | Westfields Wrecclesham Farnham                                                       |
| 27/11/1941        | Coombe Place Offham                                                                  |
| 18/12/1941        | Bexhill on Sea                                                                       |
| 29/12/1941        | 325/31st s/h Regt RA<br>First House<br>Clavering Walk<br>Cooden Beach Bexhill on Sea |
| 20/11/1942        | 408 Lt AA Bty RA<br>c/o GPO<br>Ryde Isle of Wight<br>To Stanthorpe Road              |
| 26/12/1942        | 408 Lt AA Bty<br>Att 11th Lt AA<br>Training Camp<br>Stiffkey<br>Norfolk              |
| 11/01/1943        | 408 Lt AA Bty RA<br>c/o GPO<br>Ryde Isle of Wight                                    |
| 26/01/1943        | Ventnor<br>(Isle of Wight)                                                           |
| 17/02/1943        | 12 Commongate Road Hythe Kent                                                        |

|                   |                                                                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 05/03/1943        | c/o GPO Leigh on Sea<br>Essex                                                     |
| 01/04/1943        | c/o RAF Station<br>Nrth Coates<br>Nr Grimsby                                      |
| 08/04/1943        | c/o H.m.Fuel Depot<br>East Halton<br>Grimsby                                      |
| 01/05/1943        | c/o RAF Station<br>Bircham Newton<br>Kings Lynn<br>Norfolk                        |
| 14/05/1943        | c/o GPO St Olaves<br>Nr Great Yarmouth                                            |
| 02/06/1943        | Waveney Hill<br>Oulton Broad<br>Lowestoft                                         |
| 18/06/1943        | "C" Troop<br>408/123 LAA Regt AA<br>Evans Barracks North Camp Blandford<br>Dorset |
| 09/07/1943        | 16th LAA<br>Clacton on Sea                                                        |
| 06/08/1943        | "C" Troop<br>408/123 LAA Regt AA<br>Evans Barracks North Camp Blandford<br>Dorset |
| 24/08/1943        | Queen Bertha's School<br>Birchington<br>Westgate on Sea<br>Kent                   |
| <b>28/09/1943</b> | <b>Peter died</b>                                                                 |



### Summary of Peter Wartime activities



Peter is 4<sup>th</sup> from the right on the top row



Peter's letters are interesting from two points of views; firstly they give us a little insight into what was happening in the country over 4 years from a military perspective and how those at home on the front line were affected and secondly we get a narrative of what was happening within the family particularly as they add to our knowledge of what Joan was up to over that period.

A month before the outbreak of war, Peter was involved in moving and setting up searchlights somewhere in Sussex, so the military must have been preparing for war and possible invasion. He was obviously sleeping fairly rough and asked Joan to send his sleeping bag which he had left at her digs at Queen's Gate.

### September 1<sup>st</sup> 1939 the UK declared war on Germany.

Peter immediately gave Joan instructions about his investment houses and told her to get out of London. Also he asked for her to send his camera. From now on there is a repeated story of leave being cancelled and Peter involved in a lot of work that he is not allowed to discuss. This meant that there were often times when he was unable to visit Joan in London as he had planned.

In November, he referred to being so busy that there would not be time to move the camp to a dry spot. He then took on the job of being a Section Driver, which entailed a lot of delivery driving.

In March 1940, Peter enrolled for officer training and moved to near the windy cliffs of Shornecliffe, in Kent

It is interesting to question what the mindset of those still not immediately affected by the war was, particularly with the older generation. Until the bombing many probably felt that war was something that happened somewhere else as in the case of the Boer War and much of the First World War. In March 1940, the last of Peter and Joan's Grandparents, Georgina Haycraft, died and the family asked Peter and Joan to remove there effects as soon as possible because of the need to sell the house, Medmenham.

One gets a flavour of Peter's impatience at the demands of Uncle Stanley and Aunt Edith, when he was somewhat trapped in the army system with little time to organise anything. He was obliged to get his 20 year old sister to sort out removal of stuff to the Montford's house. As Peter was training to be an officer, he asked Joan to find their father's Sam Browne belt. This request is a reflection of a similar request by his brother in law to be, Tony Guise, who asked his mother to find him a good second hand one. These belts were obviously of great significance.



In late April, Peter was pleased to be living in a tin hut at Shornecliffe which was more pleasant than Barracks and he was learning to ride a 500BSA motorbike. He seems to have a bit more time and was pleased go with a friend and meet up with Joan at the Drift Bridge Club in Surrey for an evening.

By the end of May, we become aware of military action judging from this note in a letter.

27/05/1940 St Martins Plain

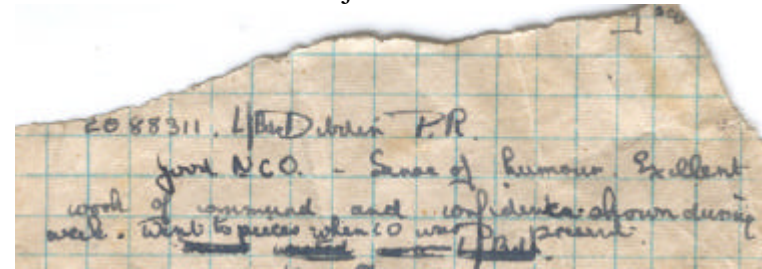
Sorry not to have written but very busy

"I have just watched 12 of our bombers with 144 bombs go over towards Belgium and am watching to see how many come back. We make a habit of this when we have time"

*"Have a friend here who goes over to France on the ferry and has seen the swine bomb the Red Cross and refugees for 6 hours continuous - I missed a bomb by 25 yards the other day - in Bologne"*

*"P.S. Bombers just come back - only 9 so far"*

It is interesting that this letter was written on the 27<sup>th</sup> May on the second day of the famous evacuation from Dunkirk (26<sup>th</sup> May to 4<sup>th</sup> June) and his reference to a bomb in Bologne must have meant that he was over in France just before the retreat."



His next letter at the end of July informed Joan that he was not going on with a commission as he was not interested in the infantry and it seems that he really rather liked the engineering work that he is doing.

Peter was still responsible for much of Joan's finances, as she was not quite 21 and so still under the control of the Public Trustees.

In August, he has bit of a tussle with her over a demand for rather a lot of money which did appear like rather much even for a average young lady of 20 years old, who wasn't under the control of a Government Office. In November, we get to know that Joan was actual rather ill in Hospital because of "overdoing it and not taking care of herself" and Peter did what he could to visit her and talk to the sister on the ward. He then did what he can to ensure that Joan took time out and went to stay with Auntie Gertie for a rest period.

Failing this, he suggested that she came down close to his billet near Offham and stay for a while at a local Inn.

I feel sure that all attempts to slow Joan up were futile and that she would be back in action as soon as possible, notwithstanding a telling off from their Aunt Margaret in a very pushy letter. More of this in “Three Lives in World War 2”

Peter’s new billet is the annexe to a country house:  
“I only just been moved into my billet, it is an annexe to a country house, of course, it is absolutely devoid of all furniture but it has a sink with some cold water, a W.C. and electric light - my room I share with another fellow Sam Tolly. Had roller blinds and a curtain faces south across the grounds.”

On 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 1941, Joan would be 21 years old and free from the control of the system and probably the “Aunts”.

Peter wrote Joan a lovely birthday wishes letter

His instruction for Joan to get out of London a year and a half before, was followed in this letter by his pride in her joining the War Effort in London as a Red Cross Nurse and being a soldier and true citizen of the state. He followed this with this comment “I have no doubt in my mind, that we have to face harder things in the future and we shall need all the self control and courage to overcome them which we shall, we must do so. When this war is over there will be a new era and social revolution, life will be very different - there will be social reform and nationalisation it is bound to come.”

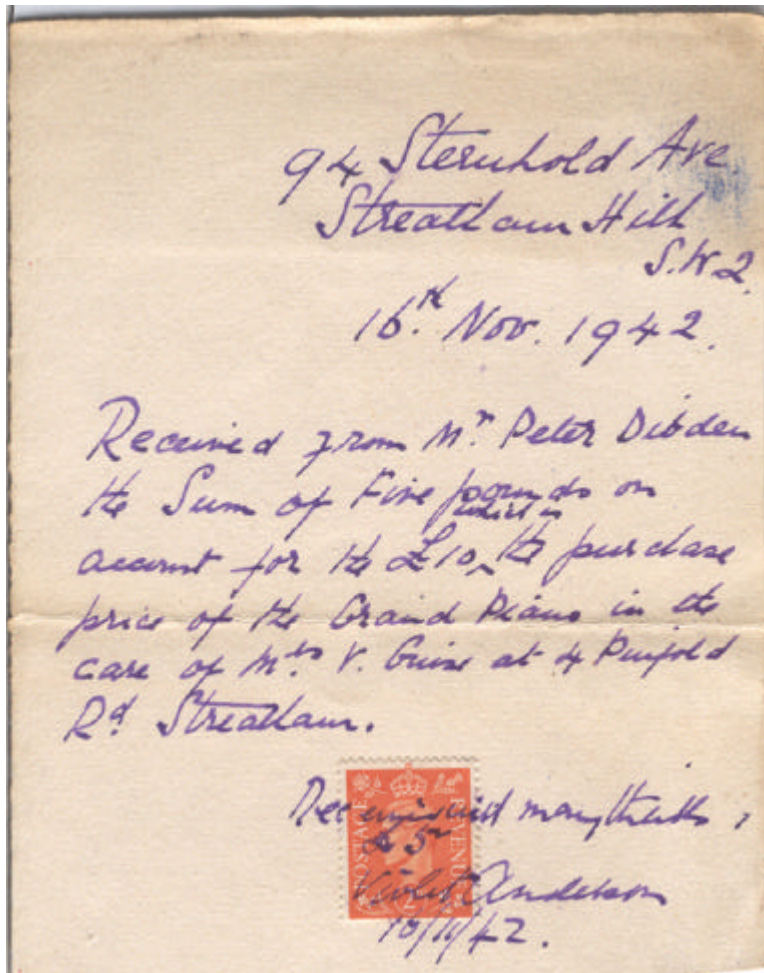
How true for Joan and so many others.

Letters in July, tell us that how he was moving about and that much of what he was doing was secret. He spent time wiring up telephone exchange switchboards. His aptitude and probable enjoyment at technical work is to be expected, judging from some of his equipment that Joan inherited after the war. This included a high quality loudspeaker and the chassis of an amplifier as well as a wind up gramophone of the pre war era and cameras and photographic equipment.



In May 1941, circumstances created a far reaching change in Joan’s life which probably had quite an impact on Peter. Because Don Haycraft, their cousin from Nottingham had met up with Tony Guise on a training course, the two young Dibdins were welcomed into the bosom of the Guise family at 4 Pinfold Road in Streatham. The full details of this are related elsewhere however, in June, Joan met Tony and seemed to have become part of the family.

Peter also was drawn in and enjoyed the lively welcome and parties that seemed to be the signature of the household. As was mentioned earlier Peter became sufficiently involved in the family and that household, that a year later, he bought a grand piano for £10 and had it delivered to the house. This lived at 4 Pinfold Road, the Guise household, until it was moved to Cumberland, Joan’s farmhouse in about 1985.



This acceptance of hospitality from an established family is not surprising, considering that Peter like Joan was an “orphan” with no grandparents and just a few Aunts and Uncles. A letter from him in June 1941 to Mater, Vera Guise, suggested that he was grateful for the good time offered by the household.

The receipt indicates that Peter was quite involved at Pinfold Road even after Joan had married and was moving to her new flat.

There is a slight paradox regarding Peter, in so far as it would be easy to think of Peter as a loner and from Joan’s later diaries we get the feeling of sadness, however as a young man after his parents died, he did enjoy quite some social life with reference to young ladies at various times and we have a letter in June 1941 from Rose, which can really only be read as quite an expression of love.

This one, significantly loving, letter from Rose in Maesteg, staying at Bridgend Glam. on 9th July 1941 with a reference to Porthcawl, pours out a flow of concern for Peter during the war. See Appendix 36 for a copy of the letter.

It may be conjecture but this letter and some photographs are the only indication that Peter may have had a girl friend at any time. The reference to Porthcawl is interesting as it may have been a holiday destination for the family and was definitely connected to the project that Lionel and Peter had been sorting out at the harbour at Porthcawl.

On Aug 21 (probably 1931), there is a letter from Cecily at Glenside, Saltburn where her sister, Edith, lived and worked as a headmistress, to Peter:

*“Cecily and Lionel had journeyed by train to Leeds via Harrogate Ripon and to Darlington. Joan was at Heathercote, Castleton (North Yorkshire). Lionel was to train south and then drive to Porthcawl, Glamorgan and back to the Lake District where Cecily would meet him.”*



maybe Rosie

It was the case however that Peter did enjoy the family time spent with Joan and was quick to thank her when she managed to find time to go down to Sussex to visit him. Probably the sadness that Joan pick up and referred to, was that Peter really hated the idea of war and fighting, although he was happy with the demands made by his technical work.

In November 1941, Joan moved in with the Guise family at Streatham and much to Peter's surprise, he was moved to Bexhill on Sea near where Joan had been at school.

“Arrived yesterday, no food, no beds, just a blanket and hard floor. No hot water and yet 12 times better than the other place they are going to in tents. "Micheldiver" ( In Hampshire) . No work, so went out to the town and got put on a charge ! Put down for guard duty ! Shall go out again - cannot sit on the floor all day and night. Stand up for meal times. Had been sorted at Coombe Place with the ATS to wait on them.  
Ready for toughening up training - Feels like a turkey being fattened up for Christmas”

As the year ends, we find Peter still at Bexhill on Sea and referring to himself as Gunner P H Dibdin. He got no leave at Christmas and was sorry to not see Joan or the Guise family over the festive season. It seems that Joan was well settled with the Guise family and had not been heard of much by other members of her family, so he gave her a run down of what the cousins were doing; most notable was John Davis, Gertie's eldest son, who is back in Malaya, attached to the police but “working for the service”. In hindsight we now know that he was working for SOE, The Special Operations Executive, the fore-runner to the SAS and was fighting behind the lines in the jungle with the communists against the Japanese invasion. This was 2 months before the surrender of Singapore.

The story of his life is documented in the Book “Our Man in Mayala”

For whatever reason there is a complete gap of a year of letters from Peter.

Joan was obvious immersed in a courting relationship with Tony and we have no clear idea of what Peter was doing.

He had, at the end of December 1941, decided to put his car into store as he seldom used it and petrol was too scarce and costly and there is a note in Joan's Diary that she moved the car, a Hillman Minx, to Mason's Garage in March 1942.

In October Peter attended Joan's marriage to Tony and soon afterward moved to the Isle of Wight, which is significant as this was probably the last place, ten years before, that the whole family holidayed together, a few months before the fatal plane crash. In his letter of 20<sup>th</sup> November 1942, he wrote about Joan moving into her new flat and details regarding wedding presents. Bearing in mind Joan's rush to get married and the absence of Dibdin and Haycraft family at her wedding, except of course Peter, it is interesting to note Peter's comment .  
"Tell me how did you get on at Gertie's. Did you have a good reception, I mean a genuine one."

This give us a little more insight into the family attitude to Joan's marriage and probably general behavior. Joan probably was ducking having to run the gauntlet of introducing her new husband to "the family" and although there would really have been no problem with Tony, Peter probably foresaw how the family could behave. Whereas by mid January 1943, Gertie had seen Joan and she was still looking forward to meeting Tony.

It seems absolutely clear that by now Peter was in the Light Anti Aircraft Regiment although he still was being trained in practical Engineering. Over Christmas he had to go to Stiffkey in Norfolk to help out with Anti Aircraft work and was amused to have to attend a "working petrol motors course" learning how to clean a spark plug and turn the petrol on and off. He felt he could teach the instructors. This reminds me of the story of a close friend, John Faulkner, an ex-apprentice from London transport, who while doing his National Service in the 1950s was amazed to find that to take a back axle out of a vehicle the army start be removing the engine and gearbox.

Peter was not amused by Norfolk and found the social life limiting:

*"Not like Xmas for him as working. Left Cowes early on 23rd and arrived at this dead hole late at night. 3 Pubs one won't serve soldiers, the other two only beer and threaten not to serve.*

*Thanks for parcel.*

*What a surprise Tony arriving - how is he getting on and has he been on that IFCS course yet. There was a dance last night 30 girls and 1000 men."*

Having gone back to the Isle of Wight, Peter was then sent to Burnham on Crouch, Essex at the end of January. There is obviously a lot of action against enemy bombers coming in across the East coast.

*"I hope you don't attempt to go outside during the raid, it is so much more dangerous now than last year as the barrage from our AA guns is so much heavier than anything before and can and does inflict very heavy casualties of the unfortunate people who have to stay out of doors so be careful."*

Peter was reporting back to Joan about letters that he had received from Mater and one can see that he was getting into a role of intermediary between Joan and Tony's family who are living less than half an mile away. Tony was obviously away on duty but still in the country. This dynamic was due to grow over the coming months.

In mid February, Peter became ill, probably as a result of sleeping a night in a Martello Tower.

He was pleased to be treated with some considerable respect as the Medical officer knew him because



they were at school together, a situation that caused a bit of friction with one of the sergeants.

Early March, he was back at work at Leigh on Sea and got called out by the police to change a red light to a white one. It does seem that although Peter was in the Light AA and probably expected to manage the artillery, his main function was "Engineer" so he was classed as a sapper as his father was in the First World War. He wished Joan well with the forthcoming birth and asks after Neil Callow.

Peter was very quick to send Joan congratulations on the birth of her son on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1943 and was pleased that she had Jean Irvine with her who already had a son 18 months before.

One gets the picture of Peter being shipped up and down around the coast to various Ack-Ack gun emplacements positioned to fire at bombers as they came into the centre of England. In April he moved up to Grimsby and in his letter of the 1<sup>st</sup> April we get some idea of the difficulties involved in moving a group around the country.

Leaving Leigh on Sea at 10.30 at night it probably took nearly 24 hours and the issue was not helped by a number of the group vanishing as the train was arriving. While at Grimsby, he was stationed in an aerodrome and hoped to get the chance to fly in a Beaufighter. While still at school, some years before, he had Air Cadet training.

A later letter he reported that:

"Oh I managed to get an hour and a half flying in the other day but the weather was not too good for visibility. Anyway it was quite a good trip and the old kyte was very smooth."

On 1<sup>st</sup> of May, he was at an aerodrome near Kings Lynn and felt totally cut off. He was desperate for supplies of tobacco and the food was bloody and very little of it. Just as aside, we note that Peter does not like Balkan Sobrani tobacco whereas Tony would smoke only Black Russian if he could.

Ever in the caring and conciliatory mode, he suggests that Joan has a rest in the countryside say in Sussex and takes Mater with her.

In mid May, Peter wrote from Yarmouth

"As you see from the address we are in a hot spot and were hurried here last week as a result of the raids. The ATS got it rather badly about 70 killed. Fortunately the weather is good, we cook on open fires and the cook has been taken away so we all have a turn at it, when we are off the gun, which is not very long as its full manning all the time. Now I have to go to dinner so shall have to finish off. Today I am ( in my spare moments which are long) building a field kitchen fire complete with oven and flue pipe. Oven make out of an old milk churn from the local farm. Of course we have tents which I like at this time of the year. We are only two miles from Oulton Broad where I used to spend Easters before the war on tour."

In June he had to explain to Joan that leave had been cancelled again. His last leave was for her wedding in the October of the previous year.

"I have managed to get out to the Wherry, the pub we used to stay at over Easter before the war. Of course they remembered me directly, but its all very different now, in fact most places are closed or have no beer."

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June he was still at Lowestoft, working 24 hours on and 5 hours off.

Again he had to explain to Joan that leave was a problem

"My dear girl its not a question of arranging leave now, there's none of that sort of thing these days, they just tell you a day or two before and then probably cancel it at the last minute. As a matter of fact, I am overdue 9 days."

We read that he was pleased that Tony was able to have time with Joan at home and that he passed his course at Larkhill.

10 days later Peter was down at Blandford in Dorset presumably doing Ack- Ack work. He was pleased to report that there was good accomodation and good pubs and beer, a 50 minute walk away.

In July, he indicated that he had had leave and was grateful for Joan looking after him.

From there, having had a team of men cutting grass, he left Salisbury and was now in Clacton. This says it all.

*“Food like pig swill, potatoes sour, cooking containers not been cleaned for months. Things can't get worse.*

*March a mile each way for meals, then back on parade. No breakfast this morning and no tea tonight.*

*Hope to do a bit of firing - that is why they came there for the fortnight. Billet has 24 chaps, 1 sink , 1 W.C. cold water, no lights. Putting on wet clothes .....*”

In August, Peter wrote again from Blandford

*“Not much news or leisure time. The Sgt is in hospital with broken foot caused by the Engine draft connector of a gun falling on it.”*

It seems that there were plans to go to Woolwich ready for going overseas. On 24<sup>th</sup> August he wrote from Queen Bertha's School, Birchington, Westgate on Sea, Kent, explaining how busy he was.

*“Well dear I must get this off, it has taken four days to write snatching odd moments here and there. We don't even get a break for meals, so you see how difficult it is.”*

He had given Joan his camera and in the letter, he had written 8 pages of instructions. He also took an interest in his new nephew, Raoul, discussing hair colour.

He also refered to Doreen who was a new cousin by marriage from the Fleuss/Guise family.

It is worth mentioning here that during his time in the forces, he had taken a keen interest in all the other members of the family who were in the forces one way or another.

These included:

Neil Callow who was to marry Yvonne, Tony's sister

Doreen Perrier a cousin of Tony

Don Haycraft his first cousin was on active service -- 115 26

Light Mobile AARA Luton

John Davis his first cousin

Pat Davis his first cousin

Geoffrey Davis his first cousin.

Also he kept in touch with Mater, Tony's mother and always asked after Marie, Tony's younger sister.

On 9<sup>th</sup> September, we have his last very rushed letter

*“Joe Darling*

*Hope to see you Saturday Afternoon. If so will stay the night.*

*Have to catch early train back Sunday morning.*

*Forgive short note dear, but no time to write more and have to get this off by special courier*

*All love Peter.”*

All his wartime letters are in Appendix 34 either in summary form or as a whole.

By chance we have two letters written from Joan to Peter at this time from Stanthorpe Road, one from Mater.

These are in Appendix 34.

From the following letter and a note in Joan's diary six months later, it is clear that she was worried about him and concerned that he was not happy and wished she could have done more to help him.



**On the 3<sup>rd</sup> September** Joan wrote to Peter expressing her worry about him.

*“How are you? As a matter of fact I am a little worried – I have a feeling that it may be a very very long time before you get another leave ( if you know what I mean) If it is so, always remember Darling, my best wishes go with you – God speed and safe return. I hate to think of it but I suppose it will have to come sometime. However, perhaps you will get leave soon, I do hope so. Tony will be home, I think at the end of Sept or beginning of Oct. He has put in for it anyway.  
Poor Darling, you must be having a lousy time and I don’t like the sound of your address.”*

It is from this letter that we get some idea of the tensions between Joan and the Pinfold Road family. She recognises their attitude towards her as it is she that stole Tony from them.

**On 17<sup>th</sup> September**, Joan sends a more chatty letter discussing the chaos surrounding Mater’s furniture.

**On the 1<sup>st</sup> September**, Mater wrote to invite Peter to Marie’s 21<sup>st</sup> birthday on 1<sup>st</sup> October party pointing out that Johnnie Sloan and Victor would be there and she hoped he could get leave.

Tragically, Peter was fatally injured 3 days before, in a gunnery or lorry accident and died in Hospital at Lymington on Sea.

A note in Joan’s diary refers to her worry about how unhappy he seemed to have been at one point during the war. There must have been many people who grieved Peter’s death as it seems that he was by nature a sociable and likeable person however from a study of the last ten years of his life and that of Joan, his sister, it is clear that he was her rock and although she had in the last year of his life been married to Tony, he was still

there, are tremendous support and was the ultimate confident to whom she could discuss the difficulties and tensions within life with the Guise family. Letters over the period 1933 to 1943 are a beautiful lesson in the brother and sister relationship. These are available in the Appendices 33 and 34.

The following excerpts from Joan’s Special Diary say so much:

**28/03/1944** Tis eleven years ago today that Mother and Father died; tis six months today that Peter died. Have been to the cemetery this afternoon. Met Beryl afterwards and stayed for tea. Everything is really the same at Carshalton but somewhat disappointing.

**Sun 2nd April 1944**

Quiet day at home –turned out some of the boxes and cases. Was very harassing – going through Peters things Poor darling he must have had a miserable life & so lonely. I wish I could have been more help to him – wrote to Tony.

And to further empathize with Joan’s state of being:

**05/04/1944** Tony’s Birthday - It is just past 6.00 and have just drunk Tony’s health and happiness I wonder if he is thinking of home at the moment and having a drink with me.

Oh God bless you my dearest Husband  
Bon voyage & safe return my heart is yours forever.  
Tony died in Ceylon within the following 4 months.

Joan’s Diary for this period can be seen in Appendix 2 of the Book “3 Lives in World War 2”

## Letter from Joe Dibdin to Rex Dibdin regarding Peter's death

Letter

This letter, found with Joan's letters, seems to be a suitable way of closing a narrative about the Dibdin Family.

It was written by one of her uncles Joe Dibdin from New Orleans, but who normally lived at Farm in Forest Hill, Louisiana, to Rex Dibdin, who was living in Forest Hill, London.

Both had been in World War 1. Rex was invalided out, injured and later very depressed.

Joe Dibdin fought as a Lieutenant, in the gunners in charge of a machine gun on the front line and suffered minor injuries. Not only did Joe get the Military Cross with Bar but also became a Major by the end of the war.

Frederick Joseph Dibdin also known as Joe or Fritz emigrated to America soon after World War 1 and worked in Engineering in the New Orleans area partly on the drainage for the Town. He married Garnett and had a daughter Marion. Joe was the bouncy member of the family with a fun sense of humour and judging from anecdotes it is surprising that he survived the war. He like others in the family will have grieved the many deaths but from a distance. When writing this letter he was unaware of the irony that Peter had died in an accident, nor probably, that Joan was married and had a son.

The reader will note the usual strong Dibdin clannishness in his writing.

Joe and Garnett did visit England sometime before 1933 and Joan remembered him so there is a good chance that he and Peter met. Joe Dibdin 1888-1956 so about 56 years old when this letter was written.

Rex Dibdin 1883-1957 must have been about 61.

Their exploits in WW1 and other aspects of their lives can be seen at in Volume 1 and on [www.guise.me.uk](http://www.guise.me.uk)

306 Baroune Building

New Orleans Lane.

About

Send Mail to Forest Hill Lane.

I have just received from Garnett your letter telling of Peter's death. I am very thankful that you wrote at once as we have been thinking very often about him and wondering in what part of the fight he was, how he was getting along and the many possibilities.

To say that we knew he was in it is superfluous, we know the breed too well. That he fought gallantly goes without saying, we over here know that nothing else was possible to him. But will you tell Joan for me just this. When Lionel and Cecily were lost, I wrote to Peter something of how I felt. In that letter I tried to show him something of the intense pride I felt in having had for a brother such a very gallant gentleman. I wish her to know that I have the same pride in Peter. I know, nobody better, what is the full meaning of "serving the guns" IT is something I can never forget and there is no greater test that a man can be put to. SO again and so many times gone by I have to count off one more on the score started in 1914, this time the hardest, the last of the direct male line.

Old chap after going through so many risks myself, I wonder "why". But it's a terribly heavy score.

Well, there's just that much more effort to be put into work. We fought last time to give the kids a fair chance to live in decency. Today we survivors owe it to them to make it worth their while, as our old folk made it worth our while.

I expect you see more of American troops and can evaluate them better than I can. But as far as I can gauge the American Civilians, there has been developed in this country an intense and

deep-rooted admiration and respect for British courage and effort. For many years after 1918 the feeling in USA was of antipathy and a certain sense of caution towards the old country. This has now disappeared and is replaced by a desire to emulate and characteristically American to excel Britain in every way. Maybe some of our missionary work over here has taken effect.

Since 1939 I have been continuously at work on construction of training camps, as Sanitary Engineer, first with Geo.P.Rice a local firm and then with the US Engineers. We built seven cantonments or training grounds housing about a quarter of a million men so you know we were busy. Now I am working on industrial housing projects for war workers.

I am ambitious enough to be looking forward to be tackling some of the European reconstruction problems, if I can get the chance. That would be right up my alley. So as the old Dad would say – I try to do my little bit as big as I can, then somebody will say “well the old horse pulled his best anyway”.

Now to pass from sublimity to absurdity, let me try to give you a portrait of my two “encumbrances”. Garnett, of course hasn’t changed at all – just the same except for a vast improvement in health with a consequent increase in ambition. She and Marion are living out at Fowler’s farm or rather what farm is left – while I get business straightened out here.

There both go to the same school at Forest Hill (strange coincidence of names) – Garnett teaching and Marion learning – I hope. They really are more like two sisters than mother and daughter, though Garnett can exercise the jolly old parental authority when necessary – far better than I can ! – Marion now 13 years of youth – 5’3” – 117 pounds and a superabundance of the Dibdin sense of independence is really doing excellently and will be ready for a college course in 2 ½ years.

I have just received a letter from her- She says algebra is easy but she does not do so well at sewing but is almost crazy about cooking. I often wonder what our Fiton would have thought of

her. Biology fascinates her. She tells me they have got some goldfish and says “they are very pretty. I hope the spawn in the jar so we can see them and the baby fish. Biology is very interesting and we are studying vertebrates now.”

You can see where the microscope is going to be useful ( By the way it has been extremely useful in camp sanitations, as you can imagine in spite of my feeble knowledge of microscopy ).

Amongst other things Marion has a marked musical Ability – she plays Bach, Mendelssohn, Gulman – and for the school recital selected the old Polish National Dance by I forget whom – and rocked the auditorium.

But let me warn you – if ever she gets to England and get over her shyness – she’ll treat you like a dog – pull your ears, rumple your hair and tease you to death. Now you can imagine how I get treated. But it’s ok with me.

I am very glad to hear from you old dear. I would have written to you but we lost a whole lot of addresses in our many moves round – yours included so couldn’t get a line to you. We often talk about you and the times we had together. I found a photo of the picnic at Portheand – you with your trousers up to the knees and a fire going on the wehs. Remember! Give my love to Lettie and Marian and all the younger folk especially Joan. Of course Garnett sends hers too though she asks me to write for both of us. I know that you are all more than busy – and we have been a bit anxious about your welfare during raids, wishing we could do something more than just sitting here – work like hell and wait for news.

But drop us a line at times when you feel like breaking loose and busting something – we’ll understand.

Always your loving brother- sister and niece

Joe Garnett and Marian.      DIBDIN



Peter's grave is in the newer part of Carshalton Grave Yard at All Saints Church however he is also remembered on the family gravestone positioned in the older part nearer the church. This now includes a total of 8 members of the family.

|                                  |                                          |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <b>Name:</b>                     | DIBDIN, PETER HAYCROFT                   |
| <b>Initials:</b>                 | PH                                       |
| <b>Nationality:</b>              | United Kingdom                           |
| <b>Rank:</b>                     | Lance Bombardier                         |
| <b>Regiment/Service:</b>         | Royal Artillery                          |
|                                  | 26 years old on entering Royal Artillery |
| <b>Unit Text:</b>                | 408 Bty., 123 Lt. A.A. Regt.             |
| <b>Date of Death:</b>            | 28/09/1943                               |
| <b>Service No:</b>               | 2088311                                  |
| <b>Casualty Type:</b>            | Commonwealth War Dead                    |
| <b>Grave/Memorial Reference:</b> | Sec. V. Grave 237.                       |
| <b>Cemetery:</b>                 | CARSHALTON (ALL SAINTS) CHURCHYARD       |



This grave must have been established in 1909 by William Joseph Dibdin and family for Augustine Aglio Dibdin (Gus) his son who died young of cancer.

The last interment was for Joan Mary Welburn nee Dibdin in 2008

## Chapter 24 For Completeness

### A summary of the Book – “3 Lives in World War 2”

The chapter about Peter Dibdin and his time in World War 2 will by nature have made continual reference to his sister, Joan, who was as far as possible at such a time very close and very supportive. Likewise, he watched over her as she grew up from a struggling young girl living a wild life at the beginning of the war, into a fully responsible young woman with a husband and child by the time of Peter’s sad demise in 1943. It seems right to round off this series of three volumes with a summary of the book “Three Lives in World War 2”, already written some 11 years ago but now being renewed as a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, which really is an effort to describe life as seen through the eyes of Joan Dibdin herself and later her son as she steered her way through the war and post war period until 1950. This edition is a considerable amplification because of the surfacing of very many letters which have facilitated a further understanding of Joan’s life in the 1940s.

The reader will by now have grasped that Joan had already suffered major loss by the time she entered the war period and was about to experience more upheaval and tragedy by the end of the war.

I hope that the reader would find that story worthwhile in its fullness and be sympathetic to the repetition of some of what has been written before.

I endeavour to summarise aspects “Three Lives in World War 2”, as the narrative unfolds.

The life of Joan and Peter in World War 2 can really only be seen clearly in the context of the tragic loss of their parents 1933. Peter seemed to have taken the trauma in his stride coping very well with the upheaval in his life and the responsibility imposed on him by circumstances. Joan on the other hand, quite

understandably, was like a raging lioness striving to manage her immense musical talent as well as making sense of a destroyed domestic social life. She entered the Royal Academy of Music at the age of about 17 years to study piano and drama but was unsettled and in 1939, on the outset of war, left to work as a Red Cross Nurse in London, as did many young girls at the time, including the author’s mother in law. Although under the control of the Public Trustees and the watchful eye of a number of Aunts her social life developed in classic war time style with intense activities and relationships. Through her cousin, Don Haycraft and his meeting up with Tony Guise during military training, Joan met up with The Guise family and being an orphan was easily drawn, with her brother, into a very welcoming family world at 4 Pinfold Road, Streatham. She soon encountered Tony Guise, the beloved son of the Streatham family, and within no time they were embroiled in a passionate relationship resulting in conception and marriage with 18 months.

And so started another chapter in the life of Joan Dibdin soon to have a son, become Joan Guise, watched over by a caring brother Peter until he died in 1943.

In late 1943 Tony, Joan’s husband of just one year embarked for military action in the Far East where he drowned at Mount Lavinia, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1944 leaving Joan yet again bereft and



with the responsibility of a child and a truncated music career. The book is able to draw on numerous letters written by Tony to his mother and wife while on training and active service in the UK and then during his journey to India and while there and in Ceylon. These letters and the many written after his death give an immense insight into his nature and personality and include letters written by friends who had got to know him and his family well. There is no doubt that he was the apple of his immediate and extended family's eye but also we have comments from such as a young man that he met before the war Johnnie Sloan.

In a condolence letter

*"I think I was sixteen and a half when I first met Tony – I had paid a visit to the Adam's and was on the point of leaving when Tony walked it. We chatted about one thing and another until midnight and then he took me back to his den in Kirkstall Road where he made some of his famous coffee and continued our conversation. From this night I became a staunch admirer of Tony and was proud to think that he honoured me with his friendship. From then on I met several interesting people but none that would stick in my memory for evermore than Tony, except, of course, your dear brother and yourself."*

What is particularly interesting is that after this he wrote several times to Joan giving details of his military life in Greece as the war ended and much of the way he performed his responsibilities towards the men under his supervision, echoed the way Tony functioned as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in India and Ceylon towards the soldiers under his command.

It is fascinating how these apparently random disconnected letters add so much to the narrative and enhance not only the knowledge of life at the time, but also increase the understanding of the people involved, including recipients of the letters.

A batch of letters from one of two close Friends who both had Tuberculosis tell us that during 1945 and 1946 Joan was, in effect, caring for two people struggling with TB and supporting their time in and out of Sanatorium. One of these friends, Joan Boxall went with Joan and Raoul to France in 1947 and in 1949 gave accommodation to them for 4 months in Sutton for some reason that is still not very clear.

To round off this era of Joan's life the book follows through the years to 1950 during which time she bought as leasehold a house in Chiswick, big enough to fill up with lodgers, organised annual holidays including the trip to Paris for a week in 1947 just 2 years after the end of the war, and then qualified in her music exams to become a teacher having accepted the advice of giving up the idea of becoming a concert pianist, which was well within her capability except for the responsibility and pressure created by having a child.

The years between the end of the war and 1950 were full of excitement and change, the work involved in caring for a houseful of lodgers, the purchase of a railway carriage parked in a field as a caravan, some months living in Sutton, very near to the place of Joan's upbringing, and endless piano practice while her son went off to the local day preparatory school until in 1950 when he was sent off to boarding school for the next ten years and Joan selected one of three suitors to marry.

And so starts yet another story.