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10th January, 2005

Dr. M.M Raraty
41 Bridge Down
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Dear Dr. Raraty,

Thank you for your interest in my father and mother. I may be repeating myself in this letter as I do not have a copy of the letter you mention. I think I wrote that as a result of a Walk Around Bridge with Meriel Connors that was part of the Canterbury Festival about 4 years ago.

My father was born on the 16th May, 1910 in Coleraine, Northern Ireland. His father, Dr. Samuel John Hunter, MA, LL.D, Trinity College Dublin in about 1884, taught Classics and was Vice-Principal at the Coleraine Academical Institution. My father also attended the school and also went to Trinity having won the Northern Ireland Classics Prize for his year. After a year studying Classics he changed to Medicine. I believe his interest in medicine grew partly because most of his friends were medical students. He never lost his interest in the Classics and was able to speak and read ancient Greek - something that impressed the waiters when we used to go to Greece but was not very useful when it came from ordering from a menu! When he died we had the Greek for "He is Risen" inscribed on his tombstone. Canon Perry, who was Vicar in Bridge for many years, said that these were the words my father always greeted him with on Easter morning.

He came to London, after he married my mother, as a Registrar at the Hampstead Children's Hospital. Following their stay in London he joined a practice in Sheerness but they only stayed for about a year. They then came to Bridge in 1939, buying their house and the practice from Dr. Wilson for, I believe £1,800. I don't know if the Trinity College Dublin connection was relevant. The practice was run from our house at 24 High Street, Bridge for many years.

My father was very ill, and almost died, when he suffered from peritonitis in December 1965 and subsequently retired. I think Bill Russell had joined him in the practice by that time, and the surgery moved from our house to Green Close (I think that was the address).

My parents met in Guernsey. My mother, Joyce Wall Poat, was born there in St. Peters Port, on May 19th, 1912. Her family were tomato growers. She spent her childhood on Guernsey, coming over to boarding school in England, and met my father when he went to the Island as a junior doctor in one of the local practices. I think he found life on Guernsey rather narrow and they decided to leave for the mainland. Given the events of the next few years in the Channel Islands it was a fortuitous move.

I suppose my mother didn't really play a major role in the practice, but she did field the telephone calls as there was no such person as a receptionist or practice nurse in my father's day. As you know, the surgery was in our house. The syringes, etc. were sterilised in a saucepan in the kitchen and the drugs kept in the back of the 'fridge, but that's how it was then. In the pre NHS days I do remember my parents sitting down at a table every few months to send out the bills to patients. I believe that the wealthier patients helped carry the costs of those who had very little. I imagine that after the NHS came in there were still patients who were 'private' and sat in the dining room while waiting for their appointment, rather than the waiting room. Another person who helped my father was Phyllis Mattock - she lived in as housekeeper but also helped with phone calls and dealt with callers to the front door who wanted to speak to my father.

My father worked extremely hard. He had Surgery in the morning and evening and spent the day, except for lunchtime of course, travelling around to see patients who were too ill to come into Bridge or had no form of transport. The practice extended to Petham and parts of Stone Street and Stelling Minnis. He also went to Bossingham, Upper and Lower Hardres, Bishopsbourne, Kingston and parts of Barham, and Patribourne and Bekesbourne. Dr. Mercer was the doctor in Wickhambreaux and he and my father took over for each other at weekends.

I remember him telling us how difficult it was during the War to find one's way around the area, especially as he hadn't lived here for very long before the blackout system was imposed. The road signs were all taken down and apparently head lights had to be practically covered up so they were very dim.

Night visits were the norm back then and my father also helped with difficult childbirths. Most deliveries were performed by the District Nurse. The nurse I

remember was Nurse Blomberg who lived just up Union Road, two doors up from the corner of Dering Road. I think her father was Norwegian which explains her unusual name.

After his retirement (and I will try and find the date but I was living in the States at the time and can't remember when this was, and nor can my sister) but it must have been in the mid 60s, he worked part time until he was 70 as a member of the medical board that assessed people for disability allowances. The offices were on the New Dover Road.

I think that in my last letter I probably mentioned Mr. Stockwell, the Chemist, who lived and worked in his shop on the corner of Brewery Lane. Prescriptions were either taken down to him by hand or phoned down. He made most of the tablets up himself and put them into round pill boxes.

When the Hunter Room was built as the extension to the Reading Room my father was very honoured to have it named after him.

I still meet people who, on finding out who I am, always say "Oh, I remember your father. He was a lovely man and such a caring doctor. He'd come out anytime, day and night, when you needed him." This is usually followed by the words "Not like nowadays"! My sister and I feel very proud of him and the affection and trust he was held in.

I am enclosing a copy of the address given at his funeral by Mr. Gilbert, Vicar of Bridge, which I thought you might find useful.

I have a small booklet with the names of all the subscribers to a gift that the patients gave my father when he retired. The names of the Bridge subscribers are all listed under the names of the streets where they lived - the High Street, Brewery Lane, etc. It is a record of the names of many of the people living in Bridge, Patricbourne, Bishopsbourne, Bekesbourne at the time of his retirement. I would like to keep this, but would be happy to send it to you if you would like to see it and maybe make a copy. It's a small ring binder so easy to copy.

I hope this is helpful to you. It's rather fun reminiscing, so do get in touch if I can supply anymore information about Bridge.

Yours sincerely,



Diana Cairns