



Foreward

William Gibson was born in the reign of Queen Victoria - a period when people addressed each other with such formality that Christian names were seldom used outside the family or between very close friends. Young people even continued to address their parents-in-law as "Mr. & Mrs."

The name (originally conferred on him by a partner from the U.S.A.) by which he became affectionately known by his sons-in-law and by many business associates was simply "W.G."

William Gibson was born in London on 19th January 1887, the eldest son of John and Elizabeth Gibson of Ratho, near Edinburgh. He was named after his father's brother William who, in his youth, emigrated to America, and later became Superintendent of the Cincinnati and Ohio Railway.

Elizabeth had been a teacher before her marriage and, believing no education to be as good as a Scottish one, Will's parents sent him as a small boy to live with his aunt and uncle Mr. and Mrs. James Adam in Edinburgh, to attend George Watson's College. He used to say that, in spite of his Scottish parentage, he was known by his classmates as 'the little English boy', because he wore shorts and they all wore kilts. He also used to describe with a smile the rather astonishing display of bare bottoms when the class turned somersaults over a rail in their gym, as in those days it was not usual for anything to be worn under the kilt!

His mother devoted herself to her family to the exclusion of every other interest which might in any way take from the care and energy she expended upon the training of her children, and during their early schooldays she used to take the three boys William, John and George for long holidays at a cottage on Mersea Island in the mouth of the River Colne in Essex. There they spent all their summer holidays for about ten years, their father joining them for week-ends. The boys had a rowing boat first, and later a sailing boat, and Will formed a great love for the sea. He decided to make it his life, and in 1902 became a cadet on the training ship Conway (at that time not a 'stone frigate' but a real ship at anchor in the river Mersey).

On leaving Conway Will became an apprentice in the full-rigged ship 'Forth'. He sailed from Liverpool in the summer of 1904 with other apprentices who had been cadets on the Conway. On returning to

Liverpool after the first voyage, the apprentices had no money and asked the Captain for loans to pay their train fares home. The Captain said he would lend money to Gibson but no one else, so Will was able to leave the ship straightaway while the others had to wait for money from home.

He gained his Second Mate's Certificate in 1907 and Chief Mate's in 1909, both in sail and steam, and he twice rounded Cape Horn. He had grim tales to tell about being sent aloft in a gale when the mast was whipping across the sky, and about the inadequacies of ships' food before the days of refrigerators, when they would have to give a 'Ship's biscuit' a sharp knock to get rid of the weevils before they ate it. On one voyage the cargo was salt. When they reached Calcutta, there was not a favourable market and they had to spend six months in port before selling it. Rats infested the drinking water and nearly all the crew had to go to hospital.

He used to tell amusing stories as well, and one was of an incident while they were at anchor in the Hooghli river, Calcutta (no doubt on the same voyage). They were in the habit of scraping all the food scraps onto one tin plate, which they would then bang smartly against the open porthole. As the plate was a little bigger than the porthole, the garbage would be shot straight out into the river, but one unfortunate day this handy operation was performed just as the Captain was going down the gangway in his smartest suit of white duck. He caught the lot, and must have taken it as a personal attack for he ordered all the portholes to be closed for the rest of the ship's stay in the river, though the temperature and humidity were terrific.

On another voyage, one night a high wind sprang up and Will, who was asleep, was called out with others to help in reducing sail. He hurried up on deck and, still half asleep, realised he was running

down a steep slope. He grabbed the rail and held on with great difficulty. Just as he was feeling he could not hold on much longer, the ship began to right itself and his life was saved.

In spite of the hardness of life at sea in the early part of the century, Will loved the life, but the bad conditions caused repeated attacks of dysentery, which forced him to give it up, and in 1910 he came ashore.

He took up Articles with Messrs. Chesterton & Sons in Cheapside, passed the Intermediate and Final examinations of the Old Surveyors' Institution between 1910 and 1912, and worked for the Valuation Department, Central London District, of the Inland Revenue. Later in his life he used to say he was fortunate in his early years as a Surveyor to serve under three outstanding members of his profession - Charles F. Slater, John F. Knight and Sir Howard Frank, Bart., G.B.E., K.C.B.

Chapter 2The Great War, 1914 - 18.

(By G.C.R. Coleridge, M.C.)

I first met Will at Waterloo station early in September 1914. We both had tickets to Kempton Park Race Course station, but we were not going horse racing. We were travelling to report to the Public Schools Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment which was in training on the racecourse.

I sat next to him in the train and he told me he knew nothing about the Army as he had been an officer in the Merchant Navy. He had applied for a commission in the Navy at the outbreak of war, but was told he should wait as they had no vacancy for him, which seemed to me very odd. He had tired of waiting, and enlisted in the Middlesex Regiment on September 1st, as by coincidence I had also done the same day.

On arrival we were allotted to the same tent and the same platoon. As I had been a sergeant in my school corps, I found myself made Platoon Sergeant, whereas he was in the ranks. It was the only time in our long friendship that I was to be in a position to give him orders.

We enjoyed our training at Kempton Park. The weather was perfect, there were a grand lot of men there and we had a lot of fun, and all the time our friendship grew and ripened.

Early in November I was given a commission in the 8th South Staffordshire Regiment who were training under canvas in a sea of mud at Lulworth Cove in Dorset. On my arrival Colonel Going, the C.O., asked me if I had a friend who would like a commission, so I put forward Will's name and shortly afterwards he joined us. In December the Battalion moved to huts at Bovington, but the officers remained in

tents all through the winter.

It was there Will met a brother officer, Rex Snowden, who was a great friend of mine and a splendid man. Unhappily he was to lose his life on the Somme in 1916. He was Vera's brother and Will met Vera whenever she came to visit Rex and fell in love with her.

He proposed to her one lovely spring afternoon when the four of us were at Corfe Castle for a picnic. She accepted him and that was the foundation of Will's first supremely happy marriage.

The Battalion crossed to France one night in June, and the very first morning on arrival, when we were awaiting breakfast at 6 a.m. on the cliffs of Boulogne, Will was accidentally shot through the wrist by a bullet from a brother officer's automatic pistol, which was being cleaned by the owner. He was put on a hospital ship that very morning and was back in England within 12 hours of leaving Dover, which must be a record for a war casualty. However, he rejoined us within a few weeks and was given command of 'C' Company the same time as I was appointed Adjutant.

We saw heavy fighting in the winter of 1915 in the muddy trenches of the Ypres Salient. In February 1916 the Battalion was heavily attacked in the battle of the Bluff near Hill 60.

'C' Company was in the front line and after three hours' intense shelling the enemy blew a mine under Will's front trench and attacked. 'C' Company held the attack, but the Germans got through on his right and he had to form a flank guard to prevent being surrounded. We had heavy casualties, including our C.O. Colonel Barker, but we pushed the enemy back and the line held.

We then had a quiet and enjoyable spell at Arm ntieres where we had the greatest fun, when out of the line. Shops and restaurants were still open and we were in comfortable billets as well. We had

three glorious months there of 'wine, women and song' with no serious fighting.

In June we were moved south to take part in the big attack on the Somme on July 1st 1916.

Two battalions of our brigade attacked at 6 a.m. They found the enemy wire uncut and lost 75% of their strength before having to return to their original trench. We and the remaining battalion were ordered to relieve the remnants that night and make the same attack at 5 a.m. on July 2nd without any further effort to try and break the enemy wire.

I remember how enraged I was at this senseless, suicidal order, and how I feared for Will and his men, as 'C' Company was due to lead the attack. However a kindly Providence looked after us, as the enemy retired half a mile that night, to straighten their line, and we were able to take our objectives without serious opposition, except from snipers and a small enemy rear-guard.

The battalion attacked again, by night, on July 10th, our objective being Quadrangle Wood. This attack was not successful and Will and I were both wounded that night.

I well remember his solicitude for me in the ambulance going down to the Casualty Clearing Station, as I was more seriously wounded than he was.

We did not see much of each other the next two years, for I spent most of the time in various hospitals.

After a period in hospital and then of convalescence, Will was posted to the South Staffords Training Battalion near Newcastle and was there until July 1917 when he returned to France. He was awarded the M.C. in the New Year Honours of 1917 for gallant service with the 8th South Staffordshire Regiment. This unit was disbanded in February

1918 and he was transferred to the 10th West Yorkshire Regiment. He served as Second-in-Command in the rank of Major, and was commanding the Battalion as Lieut. Colonel in August. As one automatically assumed the rank of Lieut Colonel after three weeks in command, he probably took over command in July.

The Battalion was involved in heavy fighting throughout 1917 until the end of the war. The period covered the long retreat to the Ancre in the Spring of 1918 and the subsequent unbroken advance which culminated in the capture of the Hindenburg Line and the final surrender of the German Army.

Details of the day to day fighting of the Battalion are not available, but from the numerous congratulatory messages which exist, it is clear W.G. was a magnificent Battalion Commander and held in the highest esteem by his Brigadier and the 17th Divisional Commander.

When the final advance commenced the Corps Commander wired as follows to the Division: "My best congratulations to you and all ranks of the 17th Division on your splendid work during the present advance. The passage of the Ancre and the assault on Thiepval heights will always be deeds of which the Division may well be proud. The successes are due to the magnificent fighting spirit and determination of the men and the skilful and gallant leading of all commanders."

On August 8th 1918 the Army Commander sent this message: "The raid of the 10th West Yorkshire Regiment was exceedingly satisfactory. It was well planned and rehearsed and carried out in a determined manner. The identifications were most valuable and the result seems to have disclosed the enemy's preparations for retirement. The Battalion is to be sincerely congratulated on its very successful enterprise." In October 1918 W.G. was awarded the D.S.O. for highly meritorious service and for the capable handling of his Battalion.

The following record of captures by the 10th West Yorkshire Battalion speaks for itself:-

Aug. 21 - Sep.9	Ancre, Thiepval and Canal du Nord. 7 officers, 466 men, 34 machine guns.
Sep. 18 - 25	Gouzencourt. 300 men, 13 machine guns.
Oct. 8 - 20	Selle 184 men, 34 machine guns.
Nov. 4 - 11	10 men, 40 machine guns.

The casualties suffered by the Battalion during this period were:

<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>	<u>Missing</u>
24	102	7

The high esteem in which W.G. was held by his superior officers is shown by the following two letters from Lieut. Colonel Barker who commanded the 8th S. Staff. Battalion and from Brigadier General J.M. Hope who commanded the 50th Brigade in which the 10th West Yorks. served:

A. "I have known Major W. Gibson, D.S.O., M.C., for over four years. Without hesitation I can say that he was one of the best company commanders that I had in the Battalion I was commanding.

His powers of organisation are very considerable.

His conscientious application to duty all that could be desired.

His power to handle men and get things done, quite outstanding.

I feel sure that any work he undertakes to do will be thoroughly well done.

W.A.J. BARKER Lt. Col.

(late) Commander 8th South Stafford Regt."

B. "A courageous leader who has an excellent influence in his Battalion. A painstaking, sound and reliable Officer who has commanded

his Battalion most successfully in much hard fighting. He is energetic and keen and looks well after his men. He would make an excellent regular Officer, he has both ability and determination.

J.M. HOPE

Brig. Gen.

Commanding 50th Infantry Brigade."

Chapter 3Knight, Frank & Rutley

W.G. had joined the Army in defiance of his employers the Board of Inland Revenue, who took the view that his services were more important as a valuer of property. In 1919 he was released from the Army and joined the firm of Knight, Frank & Rutley as a junior assistant.

In 1921 he took a leading part, under A.J. Burrows (who was later to succeed Sir Howard Frank as Senior Partner) in a very big deal, the sale of the town of Reigate. Promotion followed rapidly: he became Manager of the Town Department in 1924, and was made a partner in January 1928.

During the next ten years he negotiated many big property sales, including that of Lord Waring's house in Portland Place to the B.B.C. for Broadcasting House in 1931; 78 acres at Earls Court; Hanger Hill Garden Estate (£400,000), and the Foundling Estate (£1 $\frac{3}{4}$ million), all in 1933. He also visited Balmoral and Sandringham for valuation purposes.

He was made a Fellow of the Surveyors' Institution in 1926, and later served for many years on the Council of that body, which by then had become the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. He was a member of the Institution for over 56 years.

In 1939 he was made a Fellow of the Auctioneers' Institute.

In 1934 he was elected a member of the Select Society of Auctioneers (founded 1799).

He was made a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights in 1945.

He was also for some time Agent for the Duke of Bedford, and was Sir Howard Frank's Executor and Trustee.

In January 1939 W.G. became Senior Partner on the retirement of Mr. A.J. Burrows, and thus reached the top of his profession. Life as

Senior Partner was not to be easy, as the previous year had seen the Munich crisis, and preparations for war were again under way, though a great many people still hoped it might not come to that. W.G. prepared a list of suitable country properties for wartime evacuation of offices, including the Denham Film Studios (the site of which he had sold in 1935) and the Pinewood Studios. The Stock Exchange occupied the offices and dressing rooms at Denham, and the Ministry of Food the stages. Pinewood was earmarked for Lloyds.

When war did come in September 1939 W.G. moved the Accounts Department of Knight, Frank & Rutley to his home Braid House, Gerrards Cross, and installed it in the largest ground-floor room, putting up the Chief Accountant Mr. James as 'house guest' until the department returned to Hanover Square.

During the war the railings round the gardens in Hanover Square were taken for scrap metal, and large air-raid shelters were constructed. The plane trees remained, and after the war the garden was redesigned and replanted before being opened for public use, as it is now. W.G. played a prominent part in all this, and at the official opening in May 1950 laid a plaque in the pavement of the garden commemorating the occasion. It reads:

THIS PLAQUE
 WAS LAID ON THE 23rd
 DAY OF MAY 1950 BY
 WILLIAM GIBSON
 D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., CHAIRMAN
 OF THE HANOVER SQUARE
 GARDEN COMMITTEE
 1946 - 1948.

Chapter 4.Family Life.

By the time Will was released from military service it was 1919. He and Vera had been married in 1917 and their first daughter Nancy had been born in 1918, at the home of her maternal grandparents Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Snowden in Hampstead, her arrival presided over by Will's adored brother John ('Uncle John' as he now became).

The family's first home together, apart from a temporary wartime one, was in Rosemont Road, Acton - a house which belonged to John but which he was vacating because one on a corner site became available only two doors away, and this was more convenient for a doctor's practice. It was an old-fashioned house, and the district was deteriorating residentially, but it filled an urgent need, and their second daughter Jean was born there in October 1921.

In the spring of 1922 they moved to a more modern and attractive house in Grange Park, North London (on the edge of the then County of Middlesex and close to the old town of Enfield). Will was then still a very junior member of the firm of Knight, Frank & Rutley, so the house was bought by Mr. Snowden - Will rented it from him, and later acquired it from the Snowden estate. In 1922 the area was still very open, and fields adjoined the garden fence, though in the course of the next ten years it was all built over. Two of Vera's sisters and their families lived in the same road, and it was no great distance from the Gibson parents and John and George at Acton, or from the Snowdens at Hampstead. Many happy years were spent there, including the whole of Nancy's schooldays and most of Jean's. National troubles passed like clouds across the scene, and during the General Strike in 1926 Will served as a Special Constable (a sinister-looking truncheon remaining in the house for years afterwards as a memento).

*It now hangs on the back of the pillar
at the far end of my sitting room*

J.V. 1999

Will enjoyed his garden and took great pride in cultivating it, small though it was. At week-ends he would often go riding with the Stapletons (Vera's eldest sister Evelyn was married to Jack Stapleton, who had a dairy farm a few miles away). After a few years Will gave up riding in favour of golf, and there would be many Sunday morning games of golf with a small circle of friends, and evenings of bridge with them and their wives.

John had qualified as a Doctor, and George first as a Surveyor and later as a Dental Surgeon; both practised at Acton. The three brothers remained the greatest friends throughout life, and many family holidays were spent together. No house was ever bought or sold by John or George without expert advice from Will; nothing more serious than a cold in the head ever assailed Will's children without 'Uncle John' being consulted, nor were any dental problems taken to anyone but 'Uncle George'.

In 1926 Will's father died, and his mother never got over her grief at losing his devoted companionship. For a while she kept on her house at Acton, with a companion-housekeeper after George married, and then her three sons persuaded her to give up her home and divide her time among them, staying with each in turn. (John had married in 1921, shortly before Jean was born, with Nancy as a small and very unruly bridesmaid.) In practice, it did not work out quite like that, as, by the time John's three children were born, he had no room to spare, with so much of the house taken up by his practice, and later on George moved his practice to Ruislip where they had no spare room, so 'Granny's' home was virtually with Will and Vera.

Holidays by the sea were spent in a large and cheerful family party, some years with the Gibson relatives and sometimes with those on the Snowden side, because their tastes were so different. The

Gibsons' chief love was golf, which had little appeal for the Snowdens who preferred the beach, with bathing, sun-bathing, picnics and an occasional game of tennis. The Gibsons loved the bracing air of the east coast; the Snowdens found it put them to sleep and preferred the gentler climate of the south coast. A fair compromise was struck, and, whether it was a 'Gibson year' or a 'Snowden year' large gay picnics would be held, and special festivities if anyone's birthday happened to occur during the holiday.

During 1934 Will and Vera began to look for a larger house, further from the ever-spreading built-up area of London, and with more elbow room, both inside and out, for the needs of the three generations which now made up their household. Many houses were inspected and discarded, in an area ranging from Northwood to Leatherhead, and eventually the right one was found - an attractive well-built house called 'Carmel' at Gerrards Cross. When the purchase was completed they renamed it 'Braid House', after the Braid Hills outside Edinburgh where Will had spent his early schooldays, and because the design of the house so suited the name of 'broad' (or 'Braid' as the Scots say).

It was a wonderful house for a family of young people, and Will and Vera, although around thirty when they began to raise their children, were always so young in outlook and so much enjoyed young company that it was indeed a houseful of young people. Dances and supper parties were held in the house, and frequent week-end tennis parties in the garden (quite often ending up as ping-pong parties in the dining-room when fickle weather ruined the tennis).

There were about three and a half acres of land with the house, nearly an acre of that consisting of orchards with a steep slope from the house which was always a mass of bluebells in the spring. The rooms looked out onto a large lawn enclosed by flower-beds and a high hedge, but Will opened it up to a grass walk and herbaceous border,

and created a new tennis court and a formal garden called the 'Italian garden' with stone paths and a fishpond.

In the summer of 1939 Will and Vera gave what was to be one of the last peacetime-style parties for many years - a dance in a marquee on the lawn, with the garden lit by fairy lights, to celebrate Nancy's twenty-first birthday. Her birthday was actually in April, but it was considered the weather would be too cold to hold the party in the garden so early in the year, and it was postponed until Midsummer Day. In the event, the June evening turned out much colder than it had been in April, and guests had to be greeted with cups of soup, but that in no way marred the success of the evening. Vera had had her fiftieth birthday in April too (her 'centenary' as she insisted on calling it) so it became a combined celebration, and was a party long to be remembered and cherished in the grimmer days that were soon to come.

In 1938 Will and Vera, with others who had survived or lost relatives in the battles of the Somme in the Great War, made a pilgrimage to France to attend the unveiling of a memorial to the 17th (Northern) Division at Fricourt.

They went to honour the memory of those who had died in the 'war to end wars', yet already the thunderclouds were gathering for another struggle. In 1938 came the Munich crisis, and although the cry was 'peace in our time' nearly everyone knew war was almost inevitable, and the ensuing year saw hasty preparations to meet attack at home and to build up forces to send abroad.

3rd September 1939. Everyone who had a wireless set that could even squeak must have had it switched on at 11 a.m. that Sunday morning. The Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's solemn words telling the people of Great Britain that they were now at war with Germany took a while to sink in, inspite of the unusual activities that had been going on the previous week - gas masks issued to every man, woman and child, air raid shelters being constructed, Report Centres and First Aid posts set up, children evacuated from the cities and billeted with people in the country. A few minutes after the announcement of war the air raid siren sounded, and not knowing at all what to expect we sat on the floor and waited. It turned out to have been a false alarm - most likely a deliberate one to accustom people to a sound they expected to be hearing quite often at any time of day or night.

The British Expeditionary Force went to France, and at home the Report Centres, Auxiliary Fire Stations etc. were manned, but to begin with the chief enemy seemed to be boredom - and the black-out. So as to give no guidance to German bombers, no building was allowed to show a chink of light during the hours of darkness. Thick pieces of cloth had

to be hung behind curtains, or pieces of wood or cardboard fitted across the glass. (It took three quarters of an hour to black out Braid House if one person had to do it alone.) Cars had at first to be driven with sidelights only; then special hoods became available for fastening over the headlights, preventing any light from shining upwards. Even bicycle lights had to be shaded.

When France collapsed in 1940 and Mr. Eden (later Lord Avon) made his famous broadcast appeal for 'Local Defence Volunteers', Will was one of the first to respond, and was made commander of a section, then a platoon, then a company. The country was warned to be prepared for invasion at any moment by sea or air, and observation posts were set up at any point which gave a good distance-view. One of these was the water tower on Gerrards Cross Common, and Vera drew up a rota of ladies who kept constant watch during the hours of daylight from the top of the tower. Gradually as time went on the 'L.D.V.' acquired uniforms and weapons, a new name 'Home Guard', and was taken under the administrative wing of the Army and its officers granted commissions. Will was made Commander of the 5th Bucks Battalion, which at one time covered the areas of Amersham, Chesham, Beaconsfield, Gerrards Cross & Chalfont St. Peter, and Denham, and numbered some 2500 men. He devoted all his spare time, evenings and week-ends, to training his men and running his battalion, and when he died one of his officers, looking back over nearly thirty years to the formation of the Home Guard, wrote: "He spoke quietly and slowly and simply and with confidence. There were no high-sounding words, but he seemed to know at once what we had to do and he made us believe we could do it. I had never seen him before that night, but as he spoke I could feel my courage coming back. He was talking to us as one man to other men who shared his beliefs and loved England. Thank God! We have a man to lead us - was the thought in my mind. I never felt so depressed again."

In the Birthday Honours of June 1943 Will was awarded the O.B.E. and at the 'Stand Down' parade in London on 3rd December 1944 (when the threat of invasion had passed) he led the Eastern Command contingent in the march past the King.

In the early days of the war his old friend Guy Coleridge had a war job in London as Controller of Censorship, and while his family were still at their home near Liverpool he moved into Braid House and spent two years as a temporary member of the family. After the war he joined Knight, Frank & Rutley as a partner in charge of the Galleries.

Will's mother Elizabeth ('Granny' to Vera and the girls) spent most of her time at Braid House and died there peacefully in July 1942, on the anniversary of her wedding.

War efforts made great demands on housewives and domestic help was disappearing. In 1943 Will and Vera sold Braid House and moved to Bramleys, near Great Missenden, which was a smaller house and in more open country.

In May 1945 peace came to Europe, and though the war against Japan had still to be finished, in great thankfulness Will and Vera wrote to Nancy (in the W.R.N.S. in Sussex) and Jean (in the S.O.E. in Italy) "Providence has been good to us", and went to put electric bulbs in the outside lights which had not been used for six years, while the black-out was in force.

Chapter 6More Family Events.

Jean had married in Italy in 1944; it was wartime so no members of either family could be there. She and Pat came to live at Bramleys when they first returned, and Nancy's marriage took place there in the summer of 1946. It was a wonderful 'do' with the reception in a marquee in the garden; the season was late and it was the first warm day of the summer. Petrol, food and clothes were still rationed, but probably it seemed to Will and Vera that they could take up the threads of what had been their life before the war disrupted it, in spite of the changes which could never be altogether reversed.

Sadly, it was not to be. Nancy and Ted were living in Glasgow; they came south on leave and Christmas 1946 was to have been the first that the six of them had spent together - Gibsons, Lords and Hellers - but less than a week before Christmas, as she was dressing for the Women's Institute Christmas party, Vera was taken ill with a massive stroke and died within four hours.

In the New Year Nancy and Ted returned to Scotland, Jean and Pat kept house at Bramleys, and W.G. threw himself wholeheartedly into his work at Knight, Frank & Rutley, postponing the plan he had of retiring and enjoying some well-earned leisure. The mainstay of the family at this time was Adele, who had come to Braid House as cook in 1941 and through her devotion, and support at every crisis grave and gay, had made herself so much one of the family.

The first of the grandchildren, David Lord, was born in December 1947, and Bramleys was his first home. Jean and Pat moved to their own first house Brick Cottage, near Marlow, a few weeks later; Ted was at sea, so Nancy and David remained at Bramleys.

Joan, the daughter of Vera's sister Evelyn Stapleton, had been in England that year on a visit from Rhodesia, where her first marriage

had broken up. Will asked her to marry him, and it was arranged that she should return next year with her two sons Ian and Mark, and make her home once more in England. Before that came to pass Will was to have more trouble to bear.

He went into hospital in the Spring of 1948 for a simple hernia operation, but while there trouble flared up, later traced back to the dysentery he had suffered as a young man, and he underwent three major operations within a week. He nearly died, and had an uphill struggle to regain his health. Perhaps he never quite recovered his vitality, but Joan was there to encourage him with her love and care, and made the house glow with flowers and life once more, after their quiet wedding in May 1948.

Other grandchildren followed - Peter Lord, then William, John and Elizabeth Heller. From time to time Will would go and stay with them - with the Hellers at Brick Cottage, and with the Lords in the West of Scotland, then in Berlin, then at Stoner Rise, near Petersfield, which he bought for them in 1951. Ian and Mark completed their schooling, and their National Service, in England and Europe, then both chose to return to Rhodesia, Ian to take over his father's farm and Mark ultimately to become a Chartered Accountant.

The grandchildren would visit 'Grandpa' every school holidays, and 'Auntie Joan' and Adele always welcomed them warmly and made a great fuss of them.

In 1951 Will and Joan went to America to visit Dorothy Keith Gibson, the only surviving member of Uncle Willie's family in the old house in Pittsburgh.

Chapter 7.Declining Years.

In 1956 W.G. retired from Knight, Frank & Rutley and he and Joan moved to Harewood, a smaller but still spacious bungalow about a mile from Bramleys. He retired but he was never idle. He took an active part in village life at Little Kingshill, particularly in the purchase of land for and erection of a building for the new village school and hall - planning, corresponding with various Ministries etc., in connection with the Thanksgiving Fund which was raised for this purpose at the end of the war. He started the Little Kingshill Branch of the Conservative Association and was its first Chairman - on retirement from which the branch made him its first President. He was also active on behalf of the Laity Challenge Fund formed to provide a more adequate remuneration for clergymen. He was always ready to listen and advise and he had the respect and affection of all who knew him.

He retained his interest in his garden to the end of his life, but the deterioration of his sight put an end to many of his activities. Like his father he had slow-growing cataracts and reading, which he had always loved, became increasingly difficult. He went into the King Edward VII Hospital for Officers for removal of a cataract, and found himself first having to undergo a prostatectomy; nevertheless, he had the cataract operation shortly afterwards. It was a partial success, but the war years had taken their toll. Two or three strokes of varying severity followed, resulting in slowly increasing weakness. The death of his much-loved brother John was a great blow to him.

Always an active man (and not always the most patient) he bore his growing limitations and increasing frailty with an uncomplaining patience which was the wonder of all who loved him. As he gradually lost his independence, the love and care which Joan so unselfishly

gave him, and Adele too, never went unappreciated, and so his life moved quietly to its end on the evening of the 22nd December 1969, within three days of the anniversary of Vera's sudden death twenty-three years before.

The church was full. The vicar conducted a service in accordance with our own rites, the emphasis being on thanksgiving for his wonderful life, rather than mourning for his passing. The choir sang their finest, and his widow's grandson David read the lesson. Several of his former partners, and other officers who had served under him in the Home Guard, came to say good-bye. In spite of its being quite a long service, and the fact that it was held on the anniversary of its being the Christmas Eve, it was a most fitting and memorable service.

On 19th January 1970, which would have been Vera's 50th birthday, a Memorial Service was held at St. George's, Hammer Lane. The vicar of St. George's took the service, assisted by the vicar of Little Missenden. Peter Oldfield, the present Mayor of the Town, read the lesson, and Mrs. Oldfield gave a moving address, in simple words sincerely spoken and without any notes, which no one who heard it will forget.

On 12th September a service took place in Little Missenden Church at which a plane was unveiled. It was a most fitting and memorable service.

In Conclusion

What Next?

and by his family and friends. The service was held in the church at Little Missenden on the 19th January 1970. It was a most fitting and memorable service.

Chapter 8.Au Revoir.

On the day after Boxing Day 1969, at the Church of St. John the Baptist, Little Missenden, Will was buried beside Vera in the little churchyard. The church was full. The Vicar conducted a service in tune with everyone's feelings that day, the emphasis being on thanksgiving for his wonderful life, rather than mourning for his passing. The choir sang their finest, and his eldest grandson David read the lesson. Several of his former partners, and also officers who had served under him in the Home Guard, came to say good-bye, in spite of in some cases quite considerable journeys, and the inconvenience of its being the Christmas week-end.

On 19th January 1970, which would have been W.G.'s 83rd birthday, a Memorial Service was held at St. George's, Hanover Square. The Vicar of St. George's took the service, assisted by the Vicar of Little Missenden. Peter Oldfield, the present Senior Partner of Knight, Frank & Rutley, read the lesson, and Guy Coleridge gave a moving address, in simple words sincerely spoken and without any notes, which no one who heard it will forget.

On 18th September a ceremony took place in Little Kingshill Village Hall at which a plaque was unveiled. It reads:-

In Gratitude
to
WILLIAM GIBSON
who by his foresight and
leadership was responsible
for the founding of this
Hall and was one of its
first Trustees.

Chapter 9.Postscript by Guy Coleridge.

At the end of the 1914-18 War I sailed for India to take up a business career, and was there for twenty years. During this time my friendship with Will by no means waned.

We saw as much of each other as we possibly could on all my six-month leaves from India, which I had every three years. Not only did we visit each other's homes, but Will and Vera and my wife and I went on some wonderful holidays together.

He was an ideal companion for a holiday. He had a great sense of humour, a vast ability to enjoy himself, and we had so much in common. We were both devoted to golf and very level at the game. We played all the time on our holidays and ended the day with light-hearted family bridge. I have such wonderfully happy memories of those holidays: Scotland, Madeira, Le Touquet, all come to my mind and all spell real happiness.

And what did I learn from this wonderful friendship? What effect did it have on me?

I think he had three traits in his character which deeply affected me on occasions, and which must have affected many others too. I refer to his courage, his high standards and his outlook towards religion.

He was quite fearless. Not only in war where his awards for gallantry are proofs of his courage, but throughout his life he feared no one - he was afraid of nothing. If he decided there was some action which must be taken, some word to be said, he would take that action, he would speak that word, utterly regardless of any repercussions.

As an example of what I mean, he told me once a story of what happened on Armistice Day, November 11th 1919, one year after the end

of the war. He was working in the big office in K., F. & R., with a number of men much senior to him in the room at the time. When the maroons sounded for the two minutes' silence at two minutes to eleven he at once stood up to attention. No one else in the room moved.

"Stand up you fellows!" barked Will, and slowly and rather sheepishly everyone stood up.

It took a lot of courage for him to do that, but he knew it was right, he gave no thought to any trouble that might ensue, and it was all just typical of him.

How could anyone who was in his company for any length of time fail to be inspired by so fearless a man?

I think he set himself a higher standard of perfection than any man I know. He always gave of his best. Whatever he undertook, he would do not merely well and accurately, but as perfectly as was humanly possible. And it was not only in his work and his profession that he set himself such high standards, but he had an integrity which shone like a star in all he did both in office and outside.

Meanness and deceit were hateful to him. He also expected others working under him to produce the same high standards in their work as he himself produced. I remember when we were training at Bovington in 1915 the Colonel decided every officer must learn to semaphore with flags. Will, with his sea training, knew semaphore and he was ordered to train each officer and send his name in to Orderly Room when trained. I decided the whole thing was a ridiculous waste of time, and could not possibly imagine any of us would ever stand on top of the trenches waving flags. (Actually I was right as we never even took flags to France.) I told Will what I thought of the order, and suggested he sent my name in as having passed without more ado. I remember he was furious at the suggestion, and kept me longer learning semaphore than

anyone else. This is a trivial example, but it is typical of his reaction to anyone who tried to take short cuts when given a task to perform.

How could anyone who worked with or under him fail to learn something from a man of such standards?

He was deeply religious. He took the greatest interest in his parish and church at Little Missenden, where he was a churchwarden. But his outlook towards religion went much deeper than that. He was a true Christian in the real meaning of the words.

I remember two conversations I had with him about religion. One was in the trenches in the winter of 1915, and the other was in the garden of Harewood in the summer of 1968. As a result of those conversations I realised his deep belief in God, and his deep belief in the life to come. In the latter conversation he told me how ready he was to go and how sure he was of the future life.

His religious faith shone throughout his whole life, and when his soul passed on, I am quite sure Almighty God opened his merciful arms to him and said: "Well done, thou brave and faithful pilgrim!"

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