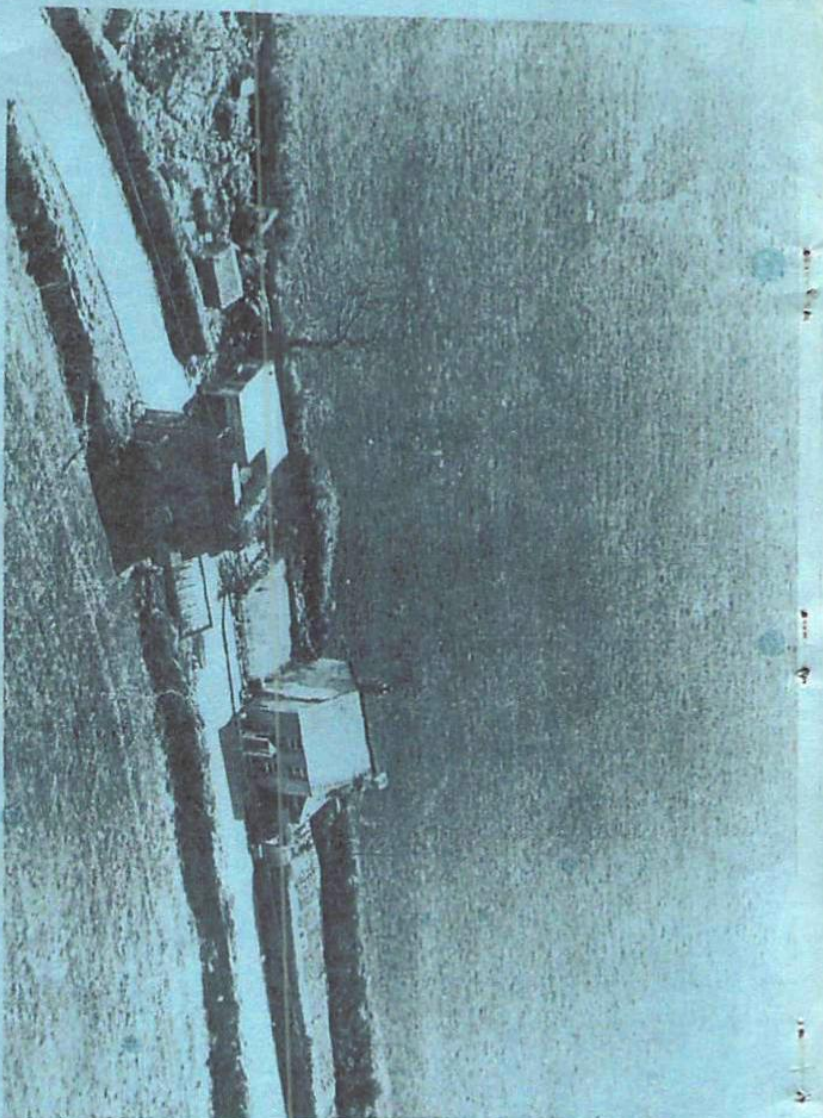


The Wonderful Life
Of
Ern German.



Littlejohns Cottage - Nilton Damerel.

THE WONDERFUL LIFE OF ERN GERMAN.

I was born at Littlejohns Cottage, Milton Damerel. My father was John German an Agricultural labourer, my mother was, before her marriage, a widow woman by the name of Emma Sanders, she had three children; Will, Annie, and Frank. They were working on farms in different places but they took our place for their home.

I was born on 9th August, 1904. I had two brothers, Charlie and Owen. Charlie born September 30th 1905, and Owen born February 18th 1908.

Father worked for the Hopper family at East Wonford and mother used to clean the day school and look after the Chapel; father used to keep the Chapel yard tidy. We boys went to Milton School which is now closed, but I can remember over 70 children going to the school and we were not allowed to use any back shot at home or at school, or when we were going anywhere - mother would come back to the door and shout, 'Mind your manners and keep your nose clean!' I went to school until I was thirteen then I had to leave owing to the 1914 - 1918 war; all the boys had to work on the land and stay with the same

employer until we were 15.

In our school days we would do odd jobs on Saturdays and holidays, such as picking up loose stones in grass fields, and cutting docks and thistles, which were termed as very bad weeds on any farm. Dad and mum kept a couple of cows, so, in our school days, we had to put them to the fields and fetch them again; some of the time we would have a couple calves or yearlings being reared in a shed near by. One day Charlie and Owen were supposed to have eliced up some turnips for the yearlings, but mother came out to see and they had not got the bowl to put the turnips in. Mother went in and the cat was on the table eating some of our food, so mum rushed the cat and flung the poker after it. Brother Owen said, 'look up Charlie, here comes the cat and the poker, the bowl will be here in a minute!' Mum was a very quick tempered woman, and one-or-the-other would nearly always have a good clout beside the ear for doing something against her law.

After leaving school I went to live with a Mr Kerslake at Gratton and I was soon driving a pair of horses by the names of Prince and

Sport. I used to do farm work as well as carting stones to various wayside depots in the parish. I was with the Kerslakes until I was 18, then I went to live with a Mr Hopper and his mother who was around 80 and a cousin who was around 65 or 70, so I had quite a lot to do indoors and there was about 40 acres of land with grass and some arable, so I was busy with one thing and another. I used to plant some corn, potatoes, mangolds, and turnips. We used to keep 3 to 5 cows and rear the calves until they were fit to sell.

When I had been there about 3 years the old lady bought a new car, so she said, 'Our Ernie will be the driver.' It was an Austin 12 and bought from J.P. Whitlock from Holsworthy, so Mr Whitlock (junior) taught me to drive. The car cost £250 and was the second new car in Milton Damerel, so I thought myself a very great and important man - and so did Grannie Hopper, and she would not let anyone else drive the car. I used to drive her to Milton Chapel every Sunday and take Miss Maggie Hopper to Holsworthy Market every Wednesday with the butter and eggs to sell; Mr Bill would be perched beside me as big as any Lord Mayor. I got around quite a bit with the

car as they had quite a lot of relatives and friends around. Mr Bill had a brother who lived at Samford Courtney and we went there quite a lot and sometimes on to Exeter, and they used to like taking trips over to Dartmoor and down to Plymouth.

I lived with the Hopper family for ten years and Granny and Maggie passed on and left me with Bill for a few years.

Now I just remember how I got some gold, when I was living at Wonford with the Hoppers. Maggie came to me and said, 'Can you lend me a pound note?' And she said, 'If you like I will give you a Golden Sovereign!' So I was very pleased indeed, and I think I touched my hat to her and said, 'Thank you very much!'

The next one was from a lady who was on holiday from Bristol and staying at Wonford, she was very fond of fishing, but was afraid to go down by the river because of the farm animals, Cows, Horses, and Sheep. So I had to be on patrol and guard her Ladyship; she wasn't a bit afraid of me! When she was leaving she gave me another sovereign, so I always used to think how well off I was.

In my youth I remember cycling to Gidcott Cross Chapel. Having a bicycle I was somebody in those

days. Mr Beckly used to walk from Whitebear Farm. One day I was speeding down and turned a corner a bit quick and just missed Mr Beckly. When he arrived at the church he gave me quite a talking to.

There used to be two churches at Gidcott Cross and there used to be socials held in one - they were called Spite and Envy, one Wesleyan and the other Bible Christian.

While I was with the Hoppers I met with a nice girl who lived at Thornbury. She was known then as May Shadrick; she lived with her parents at South Wonford and had a brother, Harry, and two sisters, Ivy and Dorothy. I used to take Granny Hopper to Chapel, then take my bike and make for Woodacott Chapel, if I saw Dad and Ma Shadrick coming I would slip inside a field gate and let them go by. I followed May at South Wonford for three years, then the Shadricks went to live at a farm by the name of 'Vaglefield' near Holsworthy Beacon, but May stuck to Woodacott Chapel so we were more or less following the same procedure of courting. From then Bill H... was not too well and the lady that kept the work in control wanted to get married so he sold

the farm and went to live with his brother at Widemouth near Bude. I went back home to live with mother and family and worked with Mr.W. Elliot of Town and May and I thought more about getting married. So I looked around an old lady died at Milton Mill Cottage, so I went to see Mrs Cornish who owned the cottage, she said she would be pleased to let the cottage to May and me as she was on her own in the other cottage and it would be lovely to have some young company around.

We went and bought some furniture and got married at Woodacott Chapel on the 12th October 1933. I was lucky to get a job on the Council as a 'road man' and was very pleased as there were a lot of people unemployed around, and I had to thank Mr Davey who was a District Council Representative, and he recommended me to the Road Surveyor, so I started in November, with Jack Cartes and Bert Tremeer as workmates.

The wages were £1.11s. Od per week (old money). We had to go to work in any Parish in the Holsworthy District, so sometimes we had a long way to ride our bikes - but the long journeys were mostly for tar spraying in the summer time. We were mostly

clearing water tables in Milton Damerel and Abbots Bickington.

I was 30 years old and May was 28 when we married, and both were very good looking. Then our eldest boy was born at Mill Cottage in 1934, and Thelma was born at Winsford Hallwill in 1936; we had quite a lot of trouble with the children as they did not seem very strong. When Ken was nine weeks old he had to go to Exeter Hospital for an operation for a hernia, but he recovered and it was very successful.

As time went by I got interested in the steam roller, and used to go around with Mr Turner who used to drive the roller, I had to brush the muck into the stones, which we used to call 'Water Binding'.

I lived at Milton Mill for 12 years, then my father died in 1945, he was 85, so mother was on her own so we moved up to Milton Town with mother.

David was born while we were at Milton Mill and was one year old when we moved. Anita was born at Exeter Hospital in 1946, so we had another addition to the family. My mother died 1950, but we had father's sister with us as the 1939 - '45 war was on

and she was evacuated from Bristol to Devon because of bombs, so we were still full of excitement with a large family.

Ken had won a scholarship and was at Crediton School and was comfortable there. When we were at Milton Town I used to help Mr Luxton at Ven Farm with his hay and corn and help to lift his potatoes evenings. Ken was taken ill while he was at Crediton with T.B. and was in and out of (Hawk Moor) hospital for nearly four years. He lost one lung but made a good recovery and went to Torrington to learn Electric and Television work with Mr Tom Squires.

Ken recovered, left Mr Squires and went to Barnstaple to work with another Electric and General Stores for a year or two, then he settled with a Radio Rental firm and had a house built in Pilton, Barnstaple, and has been there ever since.

Ken met Eileen at Hawk Moor Hospital. He used to make handbags as therapy. He sold one to Eileen and this was the beginning of a friendship. Ken and Eileen, who is a Staff Nurse at the North Devon District Hospital, have two daughters.

Susan is the eldest and is married to Andrew who is a Lieutenant in the Navy and deals a lot with submarines. They live in Plymouth, where Susan is a School Teacher - they haven't any children. Claire the younger is also a nurse in Plymouth. She is also courting another Andrew and works for Telecom in an office in Plymouth.

Thelma, after leaving Milton and Holsworthy schools went to live at Woodford Bridge Hotel, Milton Damerall, and was there for 7 or 8 years as a waitress; I think she had various hobbies in her spare time. She learnt to drive a car (on our Austin ten) and I often wonder what that car could have told if it could speak, as she used to take the car, with other girls, to dances. After leaving Woodford Bridge she went to Torquay as a waitress in various hotels, which, I expect, would make another chapter. She made friends with the friends that May and I went with for our honeymoon. Then she came back to Barnstaple and was working at a hotel and met with her husband to be, Geoff Crook, and now they have their own home and children; a boy Graham 21, and a girl Lorraine 19. Graham is an electrician and Lorraine is still at school.

David, my second boy, is married and lives in Scotland, he is a mechanic for the Government, on guns; he was formerly in the Army. His wife is called Mary and a small but a good wife, and they have a ^{LYNNE} girl who is eleven, and a little ^{STEP} boy nearly six. They come down from Scotland in the summer for their holidays to Westward Ho!

Anita, our youngest, and a daughter is married to Grahame, a School Teacher; and Anita does Social Service work with the women and children in Plymouth. They have two daughters, Juliette 14, and Natalie 10, and they are fond of Ballet dancing.

So I have had some ups and downs to now. Now I will go back and tell you a bit more about my own ups and downs. After I had been on the Council for a few years I learnt the way to manage steam rollers, and I drove one particular one for 14 years. It was an 'Avelon and Porter and sometimes in warm weather, with the smut and grease, you could hardly tell the difference between the roller and me. The motor car drive would argue with me but not the roller even if got in their way, and in those days I pulled quite a number out which had got bogged down with trying to pass in narrow roads.

There are 300 miles of road in the Holsworthy district and I have at sometime or other worked nearly everywhere with the roller.

I used to ride a motor cycle (Vellolette 2 stroke) to and from work and it used to be early mornings as you had to be out on the road, ready for action, by 8 a.m. and if it was for spraying I have known it to be 7 a.m. Monday mornings I had to light up much earlier as it would take much longer to get up steam. May used to pack my lunch etc every evening ready for the morning as it used to be so early, if the roller was a long way from home. May and I never had an angry word in the morning. I had been on the Council 16 years when I changed and finished up driving diesel rollers, but there was not the novelty or interest in diesel like there was with steam.

I also remember the Winter of 1947, it was awful, it started to snow on the 27th of January and continued on and off until March the 4th, and then we had rain, sleet, and hard frost, which collected on the telephone wire, and there used to be anything from two to a dozen wires between two posts, and the weight of the ice would break the poles off at the base and they would fall across the roads

and it was an awful job to get it cleared away as the wires would be in the snow and would catch up in the wheels of traffic and it was ages before things got back to normal.

I well remember a lot of us saying; we hoped we would not see any more snow like it for as long as we lived - but we have! 1963 was a bad year but it did not last for as long.

During the 1939 - '45 war all the men that were not fit for active service abroad were asked to join what was called and known as 'The Home Guard'. We all had a real uniform, the same as the real army, we were trained by the Government to use firearms, rifles, Sten guns, bombs and hand grenades. The men who were most capable, with brains etc, were made Captains, Sergeants, Corporals, Lance-Corporals, and Privates.

I was a Corporal with Ern Hatherley (Sergeant-in-Charge), Bill Ayers (Sergeant), Harry Horn and Garfield Braunton (Rear Gunners). We were trained at Holsworthy and all the men that were

in Milton Home Guard which consisted of the main committee, the 'Big High Ups' who did the office work, such as the Transport Section who used to test our various jobs and grade them accordingly. My mates and I passed out on the use of the 'Lewis Gun' which was a fairly heavy load to carry around.

The duties of the Home Guard took place mainly at night, such as being stationed on night points watching for any mistrustful happenings, also around milk factories, quarries, or any place where the enemy might be likely to land - any place likely to cause trouble.

We were mostly confined to the Holsworthy district, but could be called to go anywhere. There was a lot of ammunition stored about in the Halwill, Brandis Corner and Asworthy to Launceston areas which took up a lot of our time. As we had to patrol we had to be very careful not to show any naked lights. We used to have huts in various points to have a little refreshment and rest periods. It was all OK if the weather was good, but we had some very bad weather sometimes, but as we were several of us the time passed much better than we

expected. We did not get any money for our labours but at the end of the war we were presented with a certificate each, thanking us - these certificates came from the Government.

After the war I was asked and I joined the Special Police to help our Resident Policeman who lived in the Police House at Venn Green.

Bill Ayres also joined at the same time as me and later James Jollow of Holsworthy Beacon joined us. We used to go on duty with our Policemen, and go to anything doing in the Holsworthy area, such as, shows, fairs and sports days.

I was in the Force for nearly 20 years, with several different policemen that lived at Venn Green Police House. One of our largest exercises was Holsworthy Carnival which was an annual event, as was Holsworthy St. Peters Fair.

I had several cars in my day but no new ones. After I retired I used to do some gardening and other jobs for different people who were old or could not do it themselves. I did Mrs Bradfords, Mrs Sellers, and used to go into Venn Farm helping Mr Luxton.

We used to look forward to seeing the children when they came home to see us as all our Grans and Grandads had passed on. We were retired 2 years and at Christmas 1971 we were lucky to have all the children home with us for Christmas Day, and everything went well until after lunch, May was taken ill and taken to Barnstaple Hospital, she had an operation and seemed to recover, but on the 2nd of January 1972 she passed away, which meant a great upset for all the family. She was buried at Milton Damerel Methodist Chapel Cemetery. I went to Ken's and Thelma's to stay for a week or two, then I went to Milton to live on my own.

May was 65 and we had had 38 years of married life together. Since May died I have had a lot of good friends, and still have! I've still got my car and have got around quite a bit, and used to take some Milton people on some journeys including, Mrs Nell Bradford and Ted Leonard who have passed on. I used to take Mrs Bradford, formerly Nell Brock, to Bideford to see her niece Gwen Brock, then go on to Barnstaple and Braunton to see Ken or Thelma, and call for her on the return journey and I was pleasing them all but they did not know the whole business procedure as all Milton and a good many others did not know that Gwen and

I was on very social terms and I used to have a meal or two with her and she had been told the way to a man's heart was through his stomach and I think I must have had indigestion after one of her meals. I did not get to Barnstaple, Braunt or Milton some nights, we really got on very friendly and after a year or so Gwen and I agreed to become engaged. Gwen told Aunty Nell and she said, 'Whatever next.' Nell said I hadn't told her we were keeping company and asked, 'Why were we so private?' I said, 'I was shy.'

After a year or so we got married, me 73 and Gwen 64, at Northam Church, we went to live at 3 St. Helens, Bideford. After two years we moved up to Northam, at the house called 'Bonhay' 20 Windmill Lane. Then we moved again after five years to 43 Link House Flat, Westward Ho.

When we got married it was a lovely day and everyone did their best for us. We went to Padstow for our honeymoon with Gwen's cousins and they were ever so kind, but they had a few pranks with us, such as hanging bells under the bed and an 'Apple-pie bed' - but with a struggle we got through.

Gwen and I are happily married; she looks after me well and always welcomes the children. I know that they all appreciate her very much.

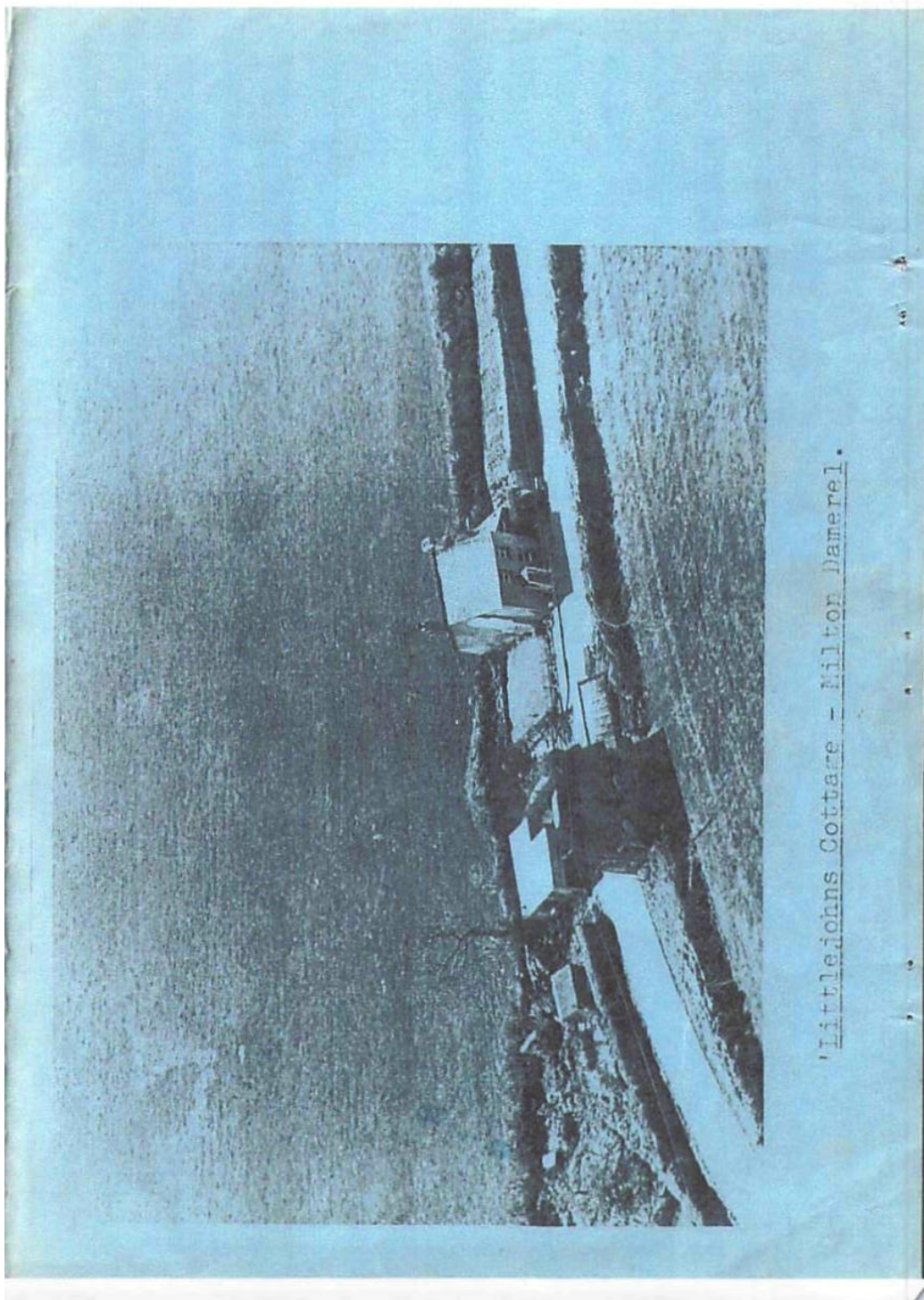
Gwen has one sister, Mary, she was married to Bill Hole, he died in 1986. Mary has one son, Tony, married to Anne, they have a son David and daughter Debbie.

Gwen is now 74 and I am 82. I hope we shall have many happy years together.

Signing off now - March 9th, 1987.

Ernest Albert German.





'Littlejohns Cottage - Milton Damerel.

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