

December 23rd 2021

Dear fellow Dereham girl

Who would have thought it that walking through a wood in Holton, two random people would have found that we played in the same playground of what was then Church Infants, now St Nicolas, with your mother living in Allwood road.

We've both landed up here - in Holton - also randomly. How did we arrive at this places? You from Scotland, I from Yorkshire/Ireland.

Here's the story, as I recall it.

My mother was born in Hull, to a large catholic family, rooted generations in Hull. It was the war that displaced my mother, no doubt escaping the constraints of a large family and a city no longer a rich fishing port but a dead end on the brown murky river Humber. My mother recalls writing essays as a child, what would it be like to have a bridge over the Humber.

She joined up, became Major Barbara, and her halcyon days were in Germany, with the allied forces as part of the re-habilitation of that devastated land. Oh to ask her now about that time! She met my father over there, Ross Kellett, from a Protestant Irish family who had land in the south, County Meath, but had come over here, and lived somewhere in the home counties - I am shocked at the paucity of detail I know. He was the youngest of 5 brothers, and one sister. The sister, Margaret, had married a Rainer, who so the story goes, was a homosexual, so it was an unhappy marriage.

When war ended, my father came out of the army (he had to get the Kings permission) and trained to be a solicitor in London. Looking for a practice in a market town, not a city, he answered an advertisement placed by Lesley Allwood, who had just become a partner of Hood Vores and Allwood. Hood and Vores had just died, and Leslie was keen to build up the practice. So it was Ross Kellett came up to Dereham, joined the practice, purchased 35 Quebec Road, and lived there with his sister Margaret recently widowed. She must have died soon after, and my mother and father married and settled in Quebec Road. I was born to my mother, in the Norfolk and Norwich hospital, the Jenny Lind ward, 1957. My father, with ill health, heart problems, died 4 years later. He died in the bath and I understand from a witness years later, I found him. (I developed a stammer from this time - but that's another story)

Lesley Allwood was married to a Norfolk landowning family called the Thistleton Smiths, from Pudding Norton. Here Pam was raised as a grafter and was one all her life, starting off with chickens, selling their eggs. She was a no stuff and nonsense woman, who I came to love and feel as my own mother, more so when my mother died when I was 30. Inheriting 35 Quebec Road, I lived there for a couple of years, as i was deciding what to do, learning Bridge with Pam, drinking whisky and ginger with her in the late evenings after bridge, analysing our hands or the people, doing her garden, walking her dogs, always boxers. I learned later from her that my father had helped save her marriage to Leslie with his advice to her. Before Leslie died, I

took him in my convertible car to the south of France to a man who became my mentor, who I met through them. His name was John Moss, and that's another story.

Leslie Allwood was originally from southern Wales, and had done well to move out of the valleys, to set up and grow his solicitors business. He had a lucrative connection with the the two major industries of Dereham, Jentiques and Crane Fruehoff. They lived in Scarning Grange where they had two daughters, Penelope and Felicity, and I was bridesmaid at both of their weddings. I loved the garden there, mainly wild with thousands of bobbing daffodils, a field where sometimes they had a donkey for the children/grandchildren, with a stream at the end, and a hollow tree, where I used to put my messages. I remember this tree and gave it as an example of a special tree on our Wood day with the Elders.

The photograph is of the whole Allwood family on the occasion of their golden wedding.

In the centre are Pam and Leslie. On the right as we look, is John Moss, next to him my mother Barbara Kellett and kneeling down I am.

I was sent to Swaffham Convent at the age of 7, and New Hall in Essex at the age of 8 to 18, so Dereham was never a heart home to me, I was a visitor who returned for the holidays, but even the holidays were escaped to Hull, Essex or Dorset (another set of stories) so I never got to know local friends. However a few people stick out in my memory. Nigel Alexander who ran a hair salon at the top of Norwich Road, near the Kings Head, where my mother and her friends all went to get a regular perm. He ran a campaign to get back the body of St Withburger from Ely (the Ely monks dug up and stole her body and relocated her in Ely Cathedral in AD 974.) It was a tongue in cheek campaign but I recall its jest. Sister Benedicta, lived on the treacherous and busy Swaffham hill - she was a break away nun, and a sculptor - I have the bronze cast of my head that she modelled in clay in my garden. An eccentric and kind woman. The person I remember most is Mary Seaman, who lived next door in my 33 Quebec Road, and when my father died, slept with my mother for a week, to take

care and be company for her. I lived more with her than in my own home, and can walk through all the rooms in her home. She was a servant to the Miss Counts, never married, and when the Miss Counts came to write their Will, leaving their home and money to the Methodist Church, Leslie Allwood, the solicitor, asked them so what would become of Mary, who had served as their servant since the age of 14. They changed their Will and left her their home. She knew all the other servants in the road, and often we would go and visit them, always using the back doors and sitting in their kitchens, eating bread and dripping, laughing and catching up on news. She'd take me to the cattle market - now the Cherry Tree car park - where the cows, hens, geese, rabbits, would all be auctioned. We'd go blackberry



picking on the Neathered - probably a housing estate now, but then wonderfully wild. She loved me as her own. She died on the Norwich to Dereham bus having just put me on the Norwich train to Chelmsford back to school.

Sue Palmer was the doctor, who had a specially converted car to give her extra head room - she was another no stuff and nonsense woman, firm but kind.

<https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/health/susan-palmer-nhs-norfolk-norwich-liver-group-1236726>

My mothers friend was Barbara Mathias, whose husband, David Mathias was the local doctor. They lived in Toftwood, had two children, Richard - my age - and Helen, who was younger. They were good but uninteresting to me. Neat tidy sheds, stamp collections, etc.

I came back to live in Dereham when my mother got cancer, and happily we lived together for two years before she died. I resumed my art restoring with Michael Chapman - who i trained with for two years in Foulsham before setting up my own practice in London.

Do you know Dodman Court? Named after Dickie Dodman, the chimney sweep, who when he came to and sweep our chimneys, would give me a sweat and bet his would last longer than mine! Playful man.

Sweet memories.