

## Memories of Mildred Button

### Extracts from 'A Small Link' – comprising memoirs and diaries of Mildred Button compiled by her son, Arnold Pacey

“Bradford House stood almost alone, but it was built with blank side walls so that other houses could be built on to form a terrace (as happened very much later, around 1980.)... At the front was my father’s shop, which was an outfitter’s selling clothes for all the family. At the back was a stable and a place for the little cart or trap that was used for delivering clothes to customers. My father greatly enjoyed his work, especially travelling round the countryside and meeting farmers’ families. He would take orders for clothes to be delivered on his next visit, sometimes taking measurements on the spot to get the fitting right. While he was on his rounds in the pony-trap, Mrs Tyrrell kept the shop at Bradford House and mother worked behind the scenes, altering clothes for customers. Sometimes one or two of us children would be taken for rides into the countryside, and occasionally I rode with my father as he did his rounds. Sometimes, too, we would exercise the horse on the beach, having it gallop round in a circle on the end of a long rope. Later, father had a car – a Perry, with a dicky seat.



*The Belgian refugees arriving at Southwold Harbour on 15 October 1914. (This and the photo below reproduced from Barrett Jenkins book, 'Reminiscences of Southwold through two World Wars' by kind permission of the author's daughter, Ann Thornton.)*

“Father and mother would often have friends in for musical evenings. He played the violin. We would leave our bedroom doors open so we could listen. We also did a lot of singing round the piano, sometimes with the Denny family. Dad had a gift for music and played the organ at the Wesleyan (Methodist) Chapel. We used to pump the organ for him sometimes. He was also interested in bell-ringing and sometimes rang at the Parish Church.

“Near where we lived, there was salt-marsh grass growing on a sandy spit which separated the beach from a marshy area behind. I used to enjoy lying in the sun behind a clump of this grass. If a strong wind was blowing, the blowing sand would sting your face. To hear the grasses rustling in the wind was like music, played to an accompaniment which varied from the quiet, gentle lapping of the incoming tide to the thunder of big waves as they broke on the shore,

sometimes throwing shingle up the beach.

“I felt quite alone lying there, although there would always be somebody with me. I had my friends – one was Ethel Wright – as well as two older brothers and an older sister, and there were younger children, too: Phyllis was born in 1911, Leonard in 1914 and Marjorie the year after.

“In our home we had electric light, and if we thought about it, no doubt we assumed that there had always been electric light. But it was still not universal, and we benefited from having an up-to-date house. It also had a bathroom but on winter nights we sometimes used a tin bath in front of the fire because the bathroom was cold....

“... At the start of the War, some refugees arrived in open boats from Belgium and a photograph of



*Local Defence Volunteers. Joseph Button is on the extreme left of the back row.*

the Local Defence Volunteers shows Father in army uniform. There were barbed wire entanglements along the beach and the town was bombarded by enemy ships. One building near our house was hit. Bombs were dropped by a Zeppelin airship in April 1915, but fell harmlessly into a field, and another Zeppelin crashed nearby in 1917.

“Our shop remained open, but to be safe, mother and I went for a long stay with relations at Hitchin (Hertfordshire) during the summer of 1915... Then, in November 1915, the whole family moved to a cottage at Uggeshall, a village near Southwold which was a safe distance inland. Meanwhile soldiers were billeted at Bradford House...

“My childhood was divided into two parts. Life changed drastically in March 1920, when my father dies suddenly, aged only 43. He had been perfectly well, then one day seemed ill, and within a few hours was very much worse. That night he was taken into the little hospital in Southwold. Two days later, a friend who had spent the night with Mother came to our bedrooms and very gently told us that Dad had died – it was a perforated appendix (“Peritonitis after appendix operation”, according to the death certificate. The hospital was quite near to where we lived and, after this I would walk a long way round, wherever I was going, to avoid passing close to it.

“Mother was pregnant at the time, and my younger sister, Beryl, was born in June – never having known her father.

“Before father died, life had seemed happy and secure, despite the disruptions of war (which meant that I kept changing schools.) After he was gone everything was different. We had to give up the shop and soon moved out of Bradford House to a terrace house not far away at 29 Field Stile Road. Money was tight, and during the next few summers, we took in holiday-makers for bed and breakfast, or sometimes moved out altogether and stayed in Reydon so that No 29 could be let as a furnished house.”

**Mildred’s son, Arnold Pacey, adds the following:**

*Mildred’s father died in 1920, when she was 12, and everything changed. Her mother was always inclined to be rather serious and had needed her husband’s gaiety and humour to help her relax a little. Now she was grieving deeply, and even when the immediate pain had passed nothing, it seems, could lift her mood. Some of the family said that there was never again any warmth in their relations with Mother.*

*The two older boys, Reg and Douglas, were at boarding school at Bury St Edmunds, enjoying it so much that Mildred later wanted her own children to experience boarding schools. After Father’s death, fees for this sort of schooling could no longer be paid and her brothers had to leave immediately. Reg was nearly 18. He was keen to carry on the business at Bradford House – and would have been capable of doing so. But the business was sold at the insistence of Button Brothers...*

*Mother was given some shares in Button Brothers, following the sale, as her portion of the family business, and they produced a regular income. But money was tight and the family was probably poorer than it would have been if the shop had not been sold. Worse, Reg was badly hurt, perhaps most of all because his mother had not supported him in his wish to manage the shop. There are memories of bitter rows between him and his mother over the next few years, often about religion...*”