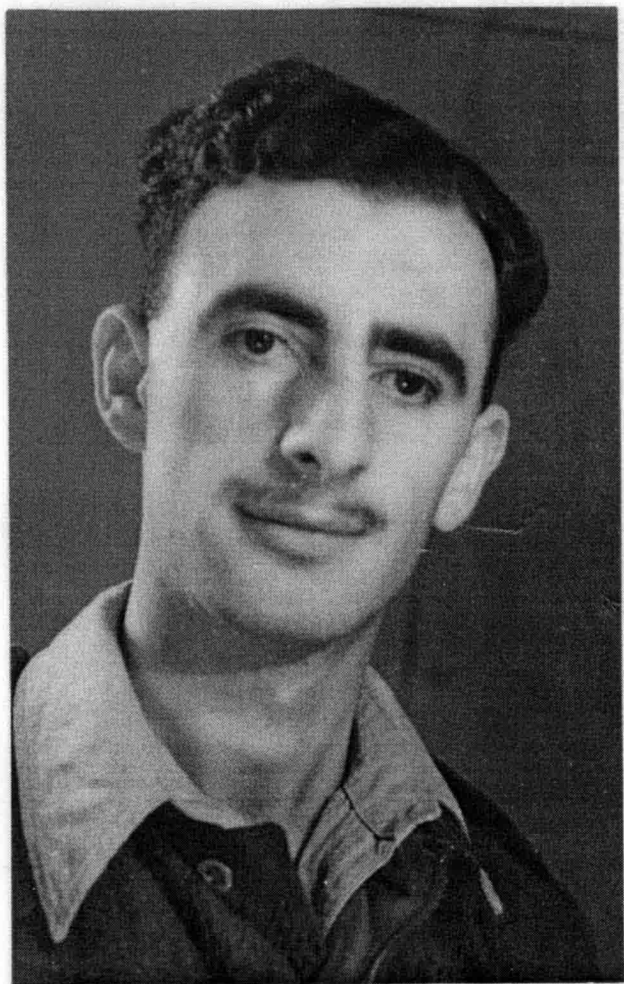


Arthur



Elktra comp lex

Isobel Williams

In 1918 Annie made shells for the war.

Who's the father, Annie?
What's his name?
Is he married?
Do you know who he is?



Annie gave birth to Arthur in 1919. Did she ever look after him?



"Do you think that's a bit of an arm?
Do you think that's my mother's arm?"

We don't know.

Arthur lived with Annie's parents who were kind to him.



Nin, Arthur's grandmother

"She had a fruit and veg stall. She wouldn't sell damaged goods."

"She only gave me best butter."

Annie was three months pregnant when she married Jimmy in 1923. They had four children: Gladys, Ernest, Pauline and Doreen. They all lived in the same street as Arthur and his grandparents. Arthur never went into his mother's house.

This century I traced Pauline via the internet.

I rang her up.

"Are you Arthur's girl? My dad would offer him sweets to come in the house and play with the other children but he never did. We always thought he was a shy boy who liked to be by himself. Gorra go now love."





The beach at New Brighton, Merseyside

"I'd just been in hospital with diphtheria and my head had been shaved. The boy behind me is Arthur Morecroft. His father made him let me ride in front. His father was always very kind to me."
(Daddy's eyes fill with tears)

When Arthur was 11 his grandfather collapsed in the street. A policeman thought he was drunk and arrested him. He was put in a cold cell and died that night from a cerebral haemorrhage.



DR. G. C. MORT.

DEATH AFTER ARREST.

"POLICE DID ALL THAT WAS POSSIBLE."

JURY'S RIDER AT LIVERPOOL INQUEST.

"IT is unfortunate that there should be a connection between a case of sudden death and the arrest of this man. I am not suggesting you should whitewash the police in any way, but look at the facts like reasonable men."

The Liverpool Coroner (Mr. G. C. Mort) spoke thus in addressing the jury at an inquest today on Thomas Williams, aged 56, of Penrith-street, Toxteth, Liverpool.


Williams was arrested for alleged drunkenness, and after some hours at the bridewell was removed to hospital, where he died.

"I think it was wrong to keep him in a cold cell for seven hours," she said. "I did not think he would be very comfortable in a cell."

The Coroner: It would be unwise to move him if he was not well.

→ Nin

A verdict of Death from Natural Causes, with a rider that everything possible was done by the police, was returned.



Arthur on the Isle of Man with
the Boys' Brigade, aged about 14

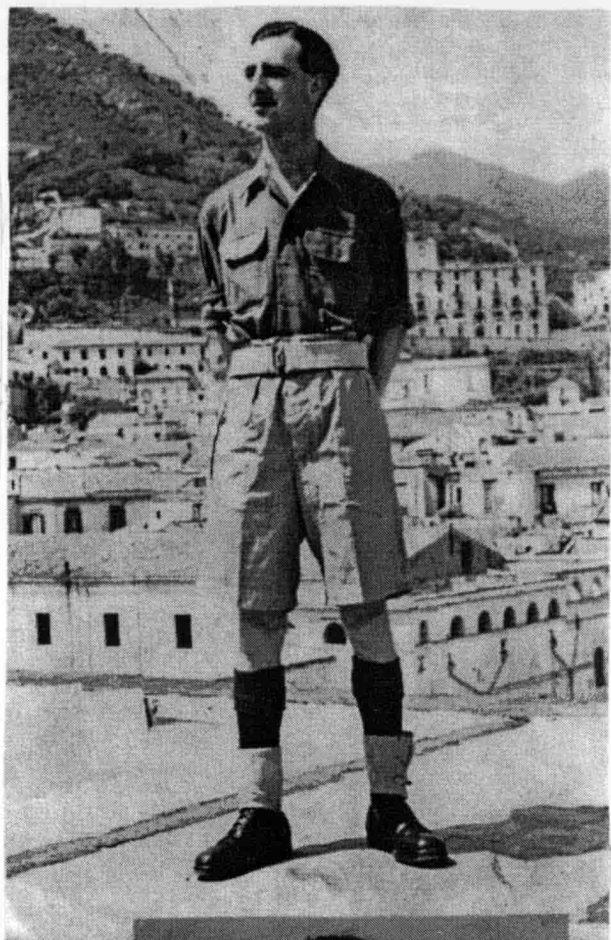
Arthur left school at 14
and got a job at the Produce
Brokers Ltd.

"I took over from Gordon
Blair who said get out
as soon as you can."

"My first duty was to look at all the ships
coming in. I wanted to get on a ship and go
round the world but I couldn't because of
Nin."

In 1939 Arthur volunteered to join the Army. "At the medical, the doctor said, read the letters on that board. I said, what board? I didn't know I was blind in one eye. They rejected me twice, then they said I'd never be posted abroad because of the eye."

Arthur served in North Africa and Italy.





By saying some sweetie
 the spaces inside the
 and when I
 me - in just a few
 in now - well above
 inful delight of such
 in, please, the beautiful

When Arthur was stationed in Wiltshire he met Kay.



only kindest and warmest
 to you, My Nicest Wif
 feel I want to take you
 kindest, kindest embrace
 hold you
 to my heart as you
 and you may pledge the
 and you may pledge the

My Beautiful Young Wife -

Love, war and underwear

When my mother was dying her wedding ring dwindled. It became thin, dull and sallow.

I assumed the ring had melted with her at the crematorium, until I found it hiding in a drawer in my father's house, or maybe it found me. I put it on. It started glowing again - with a pinkish lustre, as it was made in wartime and the alloy includes a lot of copper.

And what are we to make of my mother - this woman with film-star looks who preached virginity? Did she really mean that throwaway comment, 'Hate can be as sustaining as love'? She longed for happy endings in films and books; disliked music in minor keys; her favourite colour was a depressive's blue; in her coffin was *Persuasion*, Jane Austen's mellow account of stoicism and resignation.

My mother had a sister. Their mother brought them up with callous detachment, an unexplained lack of love. The two sisters kept a rabbit and a bantam as pets, which they loved; one day they came home from school to find them gone. Their mother said she had given them to another little girl who had asked for them.

Perhaps this was true; maybe the animals had been sold for desperately-needed cash, or devoured by a daylight fox, but my mother never forgave her mother and learned that love was a dangerous business, likely to end in loss and bad dreams about blood, fur and feathers.

She fled for comfort to the cinema - black and white Hollywood romances. Her willowy figure, her glossy permed hair, her perfect porcelain face made other women look lumpen; she never conquered her dismay at her dishevelled, acne-ravaged teenage daughters. 'You don't know how you two hurt me,' she said, 'with your hair so messy like that.' We were mute in the face of her onslaughts; we didn't know how to be sleek.

My Auntie -
Secret
Beloved.

1946.
R.A.
1946.

1946.
1946.

But grimly she tried to make us ladylike and in the 1960s it fell to her to introduce us to the paraphernalia of womanhood. That terrible age of twelve comes along, too young for sex, too old for knee-socks. Tights have just come on the mass market and are no longer reserved for theatrical costume. They are horrible. Lycra does not exist. The mesh is like dead skin. They pucker over the knee and have industrial-weight deniers. The feet tend to point in opposite directions. Fully-fashioned stockings have reached a much higher stage of evolution and are the preferred option with reinforced heel and toe, seams and half sizes. They ladder easily so you smear the runs with soap or, to defy the school ban on make-up, with nail varnish.

And off you go in your grey flannel uniform trussed up like a paedophile's dream. After the post-gym-lesson shower (a joke if you haven't managed to break sweat from exercise, humiliation or panic), you have to struggle back into it quickly, damp.

When it is your period you are also wearing, underneath your suspender belt, an elastic belt holding on its two hooks a sanitary towel. Tampax is forbidden, not even discussed, the shameful symbol of lost virginity.

My mother had a blinding moral searchlight; long-sightedness gave her a piercing look and intense observation. This is what led her to meet my father. He was a tall, naïve, handsome soldier, billeted in Wiltshire during the Second World War before being transferred to North Africa with the Eighth Army. My mother ran up to him in a public park, pointed out a GI who was leading a schoolgirl towards some bushes, and asked him to intervene. (She had a particular dread of being pounced on by GIs in the blackout and carried a knitting needle in her handbag in order to stab them in the eye.)

My parents never had sex. But they did have romance. And they wrote love-letters. Hundreds of love-letters.

They were separated by the war. They met in 1941, married in 1943; my father wasn't demobbed until 1947.

After the children arrived to spoil it all the letters were stored in a chest at the bottom of a massive walnut wardrobe. When my sister and I were little girls, my mother would sometimes untie a bundle and read us paragraphs of swooning romance. Although we witnessed marital rows and endured my mother's angry screams, we gained security from believing that we were part of the handwritten epic of love.

After my mother died, I pounced and lifted the lid - an act of treason. The chest was empty. I challenged my father. Where were the letters? He said: 'She told me to destroy them. They were very intimate.' It was like being stabbed.

But my father was a careless hoarder. When his house became mine to explore I found little misfiled treasures which had survived the inferno. Here are extracts from two of the forbidden letters. Remember that they and their language belong to their own time, which has passed, and which was rooted in the Song of Solomon. All you need to know is that my father was brought up in a Toxteth slum, and was abandoned by his mother when he was tiny.

'Taranto, 26 January 1946

My Beautiful Young Wife -

So dearly, dearly I love you, My Precious Liza.

Oh! I promise to ever say only kindest and sweetest words to you, My Nicest Wife. I so feel I want to take you in my tenderest, fondest embrace, My Dearest Liza... hold you so closely to my heart as prayerfully I give you my pledge that for ever my thoughts of you and for you will be the loveliest thoughts a man ever cherished for the Woman he so dearly loves, Darling Liza; and Oh! I kiss your lovely lips...and you hold my promise that for always I shall seek to use my mouth

and voice to say words as sweet as the kisses we beautifully share, My Dearest Heart's Only Joy.

I never smiled until I met Liza...but oh! Now I am so perfectly, boo'fully happy - your happiest little Boy-Baby, my Darlingest Only Mummy.

Dearest One, I never LIVED until I met Liza. For EVER I love you, my Dearest Liza - Beloved Nicest Wife of Arfie.'

And from my mother, in reply:

'Darling Mine, when at last you are safely home I'll hold you so gently against my heart and there will have been no separation or weariness. Am I in the next room, Baby? Well then, you must know that always I have been no further from you than this. My Dearest One, I have breathed and lived because you love me, and I adore you - the loveliest reason, My Precious. (Appears to be two reasons, but Liza-Arfie know that there is one only.)...

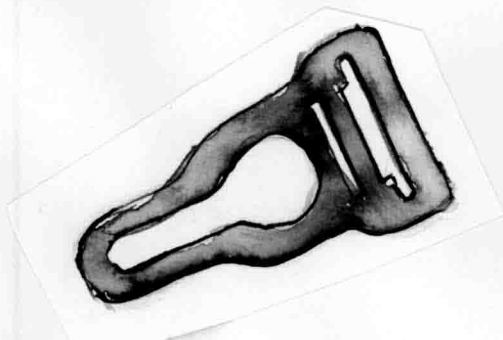
Dearest Heart, I love you when I open my eyes every morning, and it will be so very charming to find you sharing my Good Morning.

Wonder how far my little love has travelled, and how soon am I to hear your pleasant voice - first over the telephone, and then, oh Joy! the very moment of greeting when the Dearloves meet. You are my Precious, and I love you dearly. Liza.'

I found something else in the envelope, posted to Taranto and carried back to England in a troopship.

This suspender clip.

The minx.





Arthur married Kay in 1943. He was demobbed in 1947.

Kay's hat got soaked in the rain on the way to the studio for this photo.

Afterwards she jumped on the hat.

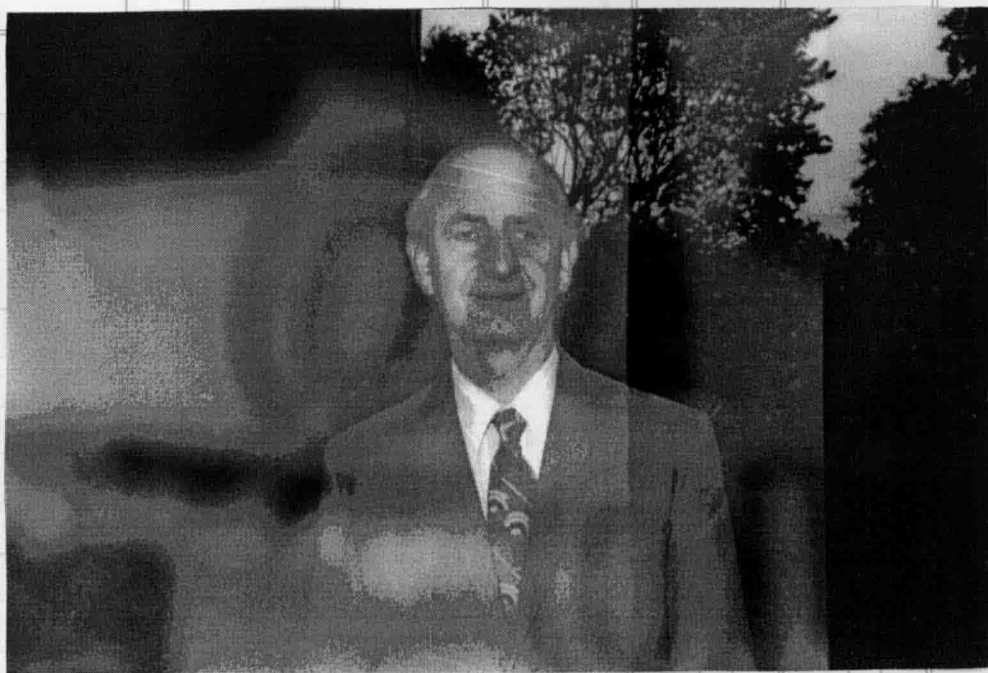


I wore her dress to my niece's wedding. I am the baby.



Arthur's mother-in-law's
illness made her
avoid sunlight.





Arthur got teaching and accountancy qualifications and supported his family. He retired from Brooklands Technical College in Weybridge, Surrey, in 1979.

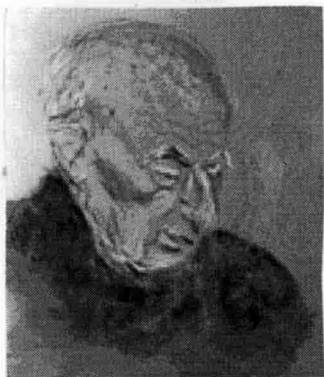
He has always made lists, some as yet unexplained.

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|---|
| 71 | For the | Instincts in the unconscious in |
| 72 | I think therefore I am | Descartes doubt |
| 73 | It takes two to tango | Cannot be achieved by one pe |
| 74 | Jihad | Holy War |
| 75 | Kafka, Franz | Author / critic of bureaucracy |
| 76 | Khomeini, Ayatollah | Political & religious leader of Iran |
| 77 | Laissez-faire | Non-interference |
| 78 | Little blonny is a dangerous thing | A Alexander Pope quote |
| 79 | Luddite | Opponent to industrialisation |
| 80 | Mass Extermination | Groucho, Chico, Harpo, Zeppo |
| 81 | May had a little lamb | Nursery Rhyme |
| 82 | Martinet, Etienne | Granting of religious & civil liberties to France |

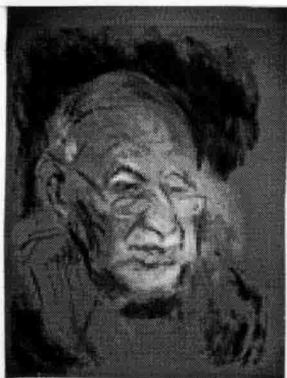
Daddy has dementia



...but only mildly. He is content and well cared-for.



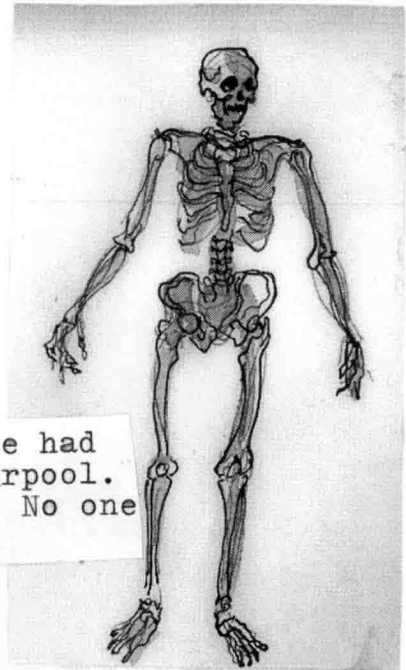
"Are you still left-handed lovey? Good girl."





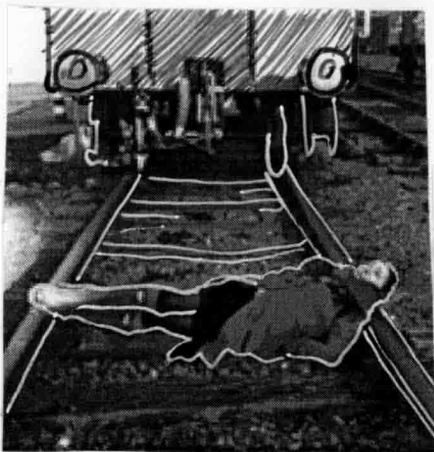
Now Arthur, didn't your mother ever tell you to eat up your vegetables before you could have your pudding?

kind nurse who doesn't know



This century I found out that Annie had lived at 33 Skellington Fold, Liverpool. She died in 1988. I never met her. No one knows who Arthur's father was.

THE END



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