



Evacuee Children playing at Gayton Croft 1939



Heswall WUDC chairmen



Gemmell's 21st 1939

whom he met on a trip to Iceland in 1939. He entered the colonial service in 1946 and helped developed co-operatives in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Mauritius and Cyprus. After his return to England in 1960 he had a variety of jobs and finally settled in Cumbria. He died in 2014 aged 95.

The second son, Stuart, saw service in the Cheshire Yeomanry and wrote many letters to his sister Hilary, recalling their idyllic childhood in Heswall and Trearddur. He was never to see his family again, as he died aged 22 during the Battle of El Alamein after treading on a mine as he guided a lorry through a minefield. He did not know that his brother was based only a mile away on Monty's staff and Gemmell was called upon to bury the body and collect his possessions.

Donald, the youngest son, was a gifted sailor, eventually becoming a doctor. He moved to Suffolk where Marjorie filmed his growing family. Ann-Marie's daughter came over from France to look after his children.

Their sister Hilary joined the Wrens in the War and for 50 years kept secret that she was a code breaker at Bletchley Park, for which she received three war medals. She was recommended for this role by Commodore Dowding (Royal Navy) a key member of Churchill's War Cabinet, whose wife was a close friend of Marjorie's. Hilary travelled to New Zealand in 1951 where she met and married John Towle. Like Donald, she was also an accomplished sailor and crewed for Sir Peter Blake. Marjorie took many films in New Zealand and Australia, and captured scenes in Panama, Curaçao and Cape Town on voyages to see her niece.

Her brother Harold died in 1948 and by 1955 Marjorie was recorded as living with Marion Hopley in Redcroft in Thurstaston Road, adjacent to Ashlea. In 1946 she became the first woman councillor for the Heswall/Oldfield area and in 1950-52 the first Chairwoman of the Wirral Urban District Council, which was based at Hill House (now the Jug & Bottle). She had a particular interest in the welfare of the elderly and would visit the council's residential care homes on Christmas Day to ensure the elderly occupants were being well cared for. She was instrumental in organising and fundraising for the construction of an Over-Sixty Club situated in Rocky lane, a very convenient location near the shops, bus station and bowling green. The club which Marjorie started in 1950 and had 115 members, had previously needed to share the Scout Headquarters in Sandy Lane. The club was open five days a week and a large increase in membership was catered for. The new building, which was named Alexander Hall in tribute to Marjorie,

was used for community purposes until 2009 when Wirral Council made the hall available for sale following a strategic asset review. Fortunately, the users of the hall were able to transfer to the adjacent Heswall Hall which is flourishing under community management. The site has now been redeveloped as flats but the connection with Marjorie is commemorated in the name Alexander Court. Marjorie was part of a syndicate of landowners who, in 1963, donated land on the Heswall Dales to the council for the enjoyment of the public. She was also a president of the Heswall Soroptimist Club.



Alexander Hall 2009

When Marjorie died in 1983, Gemmell had the task of clearing the house. Not realising the value of the reels of film, cine camera and projector he found in the attic he sent them for auction. The son of the purchaser kept them for 13 years before advertising them for sale, with the intention of selling them individually at a car boot sale if no one wanted the whole collection. Fortunately, they came to the attention of ValleyStream Media Developments, an AV/film production company based in the Conwy Valley, North Wales, and producers of special interest media, who carefully restored and researched the Alexander archive over six years. The discovery of the collection featured throughout the national press and on the *Richard & Judy* TV show, etc., in 2002. Producer Stef Bate and production assistants Ange Davies and Jan Foulkes spent eight weeks working with the unit on the difficult task of restoring the film. The vital clues to the identity of the family depicted on the tapes was the name 'Towle' and location 'New Zealand' written on one of the film boxes. Using International Directory enquiries, the only Towle listed in New Zealand was Simon Towle, the son of Marjorie's niece Hilary. Simon was able to give ValleyStream the contact details for Gemmell who was still alive and provided full details about his aunt. All Marjorie's nephews and niece are now dead, but they remain captured on celluloid. The interested reader is referred to the ValleyStream website where excerpts from the film can be seen – <http://www.valleystream.co.uk/alexander-archive-1.htm>

The authors would like to thank ValleyStream Cultural Media 2019 for permission to reproduce biographical details and images from their Alexander archive, and further copying or reproduction of this article and its contents is strictly forbidden under copyright law.

Article submitted by Roger Lane and Jenny McRonald (roger.m.lane@btinternet.com or 0151 342 9269) on behalf of the Heswall Society, which was established in 1953 "for the public benefit to conserve the heritage of the Ward of Heswall". For more details of membership and activities, please call Roger Lane or visit theheswallsociety.org.uk