

# ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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## NEWSLETTER No. 135 March 2017

### ***“My life in four worlds”***

**This is Dr. Margaret Hollands’ story of her life prior to coming to Orbost in 1963 and beginning what was to be nearly 40 years of medical practice in Orbost with her husband Dr David Hollands.**

**Transcript of a talk given by Margaret to the August 2016 AGM of the Orbost & District Historical Society**



*This talk was going to be titled “My Life in Two Worlds”, but when I thought about it, it is really **FOUR WORLDS**, Ireland, England, Germany, and Australia.*

*My father was Irish and the eldest of eight children. He came from a farm called “Broughanore” which had been in our family for centuries. I have photographs of graves dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, but I think that they were there quite a long time before that. My grandparents lived there and had a dairy and they grew crops. My grandmother bred turkeys, geese and hens and she made her own butter and cheese which she sold.*

*My grandmother had decided when my father left school that since he was the eldest and had some brains that he*

*would go to Edinburgh University to do dentistry. He had never left the farm before except to go to school on the train. He finished his degree, didn’t like dentistry, and changed to medicine. In 1939 he was a GP in England.*

#### **IRELAND**

*In 1939, an aunt decided to take me to Ireland to stay with my grandmother. I was four years old and had one older sister and one younger. So I stayed there and enjoyed myself because my grandmother was far too busy to look after me anyway. My father and mother and two sisters arrived in September.*

*At this time there was a gathering storm in Europe. Hitler had walked into Czechoslovakia and was*

*threatening Poland. Great Britain had a pact with Poland that if it was attacked, Britain would help. I have this memory of my father on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 bending over a crackly sounding wireless in the kitchen at the farm listening to Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of Great Britain when he announced that*



**ABOVE:** At “Broughanore” farm, Ireland. Margaret aged 4 years.

**WE ARE AT WAR WITH GERMANY** and that all efforts to get peace had been fruitless.

This was the second time in a quarter of a century that we were at war with Germany. Everyone was absolutely aghast since it was only 22 years since the First World War had ended.

My parents were quite scared because they thought that the next place that Hitler would walk into was England, so they decided that my mother and us three girls should stay in Ireland with my grandparents and my father would go back to Wolverhampton which was where he had his practice.

My sister Janet and I were enrolled at the local school which was called Knockahollett. It was a two teacher school. Fortunately for us, the headmaster passed our farm lane every morning and he used to pick us up. If he wasn't ready to come home when we were, we would walk the 2½ miles home. We picked blackberries all the way home and arrived home covered with purple juice.

After walking into Poland, Hitler didn't do very much for a while and that period between September 1939 and December was called the 'Phoney War'. When Christmas came, my father said that he would come and collect us and take us back to England. Instead of travelling on the overnight ferry, which we usually did from Belfast to Liverpool, he thought it would be better if we went from Larne in Northern Ireland across to Stranraer in Scotland which is only a three hour trip. Germany had U boats in the Irish Sea and had already sunk the liner **Athenia** going from Glasgow to Canada with huge loss of life.

We said good-bye to my grandmother who was weeping. She didn't know when she would see us again. I remember that she gave us a big pack of ham sandwiches to eat on the journey and an uncle drove us to Larne to get the boat. As we got on the boat, we were all given life jackets which must have worried my parents but we thought it was a big joke. We then travelled on an overnight train down from Scotland to Wolverhampton.

## ENGLAND

Food rationing started in January 1940. All the basic goods were strictly rationed i.e. sugar, butter, meat (8d. worth of meat per person per week). We had ration books which were full of points. My father had a patient who had a fish stall in the market. Fish was not rationed because they could not guarantee the supply of fish so Mr Cod (appropriately named) used to make sure that we had fish whenever he could get it.

My father had another patient who was a cattle dealer who went to Dublin every fortnight to buy cattle. He went with a case full of condoms which were banned in Ireland being a Catholic country and he used to trade these for Irish sausages which were beautiful pork sausages so we scored there too.

Southern Ireland, or Eire as it was called, was a separate country to Ulster the north of Ireland, and it declared itself neutral in the war. Eire wasn't strictly neutral though because German submarines used to refuel off the coast of Southern Ireland. Everybody knew that.

Food was very limited. We never saw bananas or oranges for the whole of the war. Occasionally, we would get oranges from America and they were given to babies and small children. Everyone was urged to grow vegetables. There were **DIG FOR VICTORY** posters to encourage everyone. Also, we kept chickens in our back yard. Clothes were rationed for many years, even after the war. My mother was handy with a needle and everyone wore hand-me-downs of course and got clothes from friends. If you wanted wool, the only wool you could buy was khaki, air force blue, or navy because we were expected to knit for the troops. Petrol rationing was quite severe, but because my father was a doctor, he was issued with a small allowance.

My parents listened to the news three times a day, 8am, 1pm and 6pm which coincided with meal times.

Wolverhampton had a lot of munitions factories so we thought that it might be a target. However, we weren't bombed anything like Coventry, or Birmingham, or London. Our local hospital was bombed and some of the factories. At this point, my father decided that he would buy a little house in the country where we might be safer. We loved that as children and we came to school on the bus every day.

My father joined what is called the **A R P (Air Raid Precautions)** and he was issued with a tin hat and his job was to go out at night and check on people's blackouts. Then he joined the **Home Guard** which has been immortalised in the B B C sitcom as 'Dad's Army'. Because he was a doctor, he was promoted to Major. He had a very busy time because he was looking after a lot of neighbouring practices where the doctors had gone to the war.

My parents bought bicycles. Everyone went everywhere on bicycles. I remember asking my mother "What will we do if the Germans come?" and she said, "**Oh I'll fix that. I'll boil up all this jam and I'll go up to the top of the house (We had a three-storey Georgian house which opened onto the main road), and when the German armies come I'll throw open the window and I'll pour the boiling jam over the soldiers.**" So, being a young child, I thought that was OK.

We were all issued with gas masks which we carried in cardboard boxes on a string. When we heard that awful wailing sound which was the sound of an air-raid, everyone donned their gas-masks. They smelled horribly of rubber and they were full of dust. We also had gas-mask drills at school and had to recite multiplication tables wearing gas masks.

My father built a bunker in the back yard in case the house

was bombed and we had to go there whenever this wailing sound was heard. It had bunks, but it was cold and damp and I don't think that we ever slept when we spent half the night in there.

In 1943, the tide of the war began to turn. General Von Paulus had surrendered his German armies to the Russians because he had failed to capture Stalingrad. By 1944, German and Italian forces surrendered after the battle of Tunisia and the Allies started marching up Italy. When Rome fell in 1944, everyone became a little bit more cheerful.

I remember **VE Day** which was in May 1945 and there was tremendous rejoicing. Once the war with Germany was finished, we could go back to Ireland and could travel around although there was still petrol rationing. Life was a lot better. Of course the war with Japan did not finish until August.



**ABOVE:** Margaret aged 11 years, on 'Bonzo' at an event in Shropshire.

**In 1956 I went back to Ireland as a 5<sup>th</sup> year medical student from Birmingham University.**

I had to do a term of obstetrics and learn how to deliver babies. A friend of mine, Shirley, had been to the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin which was famous. It was a Catholic hospital which delivered hundreds of babies every year and took students from all over the world. We booked our trip on the ferry and then two days before, Shirley said that she couldn't come because her mother was ill again, and I went alone.

At the Rotunda Hospital I was shown my room and then all of us students were lined up and told about the program. We had to watch five babies being born, and then we had to deliver 10 babies each (supervised by midwives of course). Then we were deemed to have had enough

experience, so we went out in teams of three to do home deliveries on the district.

Many of the women were very poor and lived in tenement flats with only two rooms and no running water (except a pump outside in the street), and a communal lavatory. I was in a team with an Indian girl and an Irish boy and when our names moved up to the top of the roster, we were woken up and had to come down to the office, and get our bicycles and map and off we went. I think these women thought we were doctors when actually we were medical students with very little experience.

I'll never forget the first delivery that we went to. We rode there on our bicycles and the husband was waiting on the pavement for us and took us up to the third floor where we found the patient in great distress. She said "This is my eighth baby and I've always had easy deliveries but this one seems to be going on for an awful long time."

We elected Doris who came from Bombay to be the team leader. She was delegated to examine the patient and while she was doing that I realized that the patient was lying on newspaper. It happened to be copies of the '**News of the World**' which was the big scandal paper in England and banned in Ireland (just as contraceptives were.) Irish people used to get their relatives in England to send it over. I also looked around for a cot and couldn't see one. There was a drawer which they pulled out from a chest of drawers and there were shawls in there and that was where the baby was going to go.

Doris turned around to us and whispered, "This baby is a breech, coming upside down, and that's why it's taking so long." We all knew that breech deliveries were frequently associated with complications, so we were all a bit worried. Michael was thumbing through his text book and we were all thinking "What do we do?" But, suddenly, this lady had this really strong contraction and the baby came out and he cried straight away to everyone's relief because we were thinking we would have to ring the hospital and call for help. The placenta came out soon afterwards and everything seemed all right and I thought "What are we going to do with this placenta?" I supposed we are going to take it back to the hospital. So we wrapped it up in a copy of the '**News of the World**' and then the father came with refreshments for us.

He brought a bottle of Guinness and a plate of bread and margarine. One of the older children came in with a bowl of warm water and we bathed the baby and made the mother comfortable. We told the lady that one of us would visit her tomorrow. (We had to visit her for ten days after delivery to make sure that everything was all right.) She knew far more about looking after a baby than we did of course. Then we had to write it up as a case and that was part of our course.

As we were riding back to the Hospital, dawn was just breaking and we stopped and looked over the River Liffey

and suddenly to my surprise, Michael took the parcel with the placenta out of his basket and hurled it into the River Liffey. I thought that we were probably meant to take it back and some midwife would check to see if it was all right.

When we came back to the hospital, I was itching all over being completely infested with fleas. I filled the bath, took all my clothes off and dropped them into the water and all these huge fleas came out of the seams. This was what happened at nearly every place we went to.



**ABOVE:** Margaret's graduation photo, Birmingham University, 1957.

We had a great time in Ireland. Dublin had lots of bars and pubs and we had a tour of the Guinness factory. Also, the Gate Theatre was quite close to the hospital and they always had a season of Irish plays.

#### **GERMANY**

National Service remained compulsory for young men for several years after the war. You could either do it before you started your tertiary course, or you could do it afterwards. David elected to do it afterwards because then he could go in as a doctor. He was an M O to the 45<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment which was stationed in Germany. So, in 1958, we went to Germany.

We got married at that point and I followed him to Germany. Because he was a Doctor, we were given army quarters with everything supplied. I thought I might be able to work but realized that officers' wives were not expected to work, and also I was not

registered to work in Germany.

So I had to settle down and be an officer's wife which was really quite pleasant. David's job was not onerous. He had to do a sick parade of soldiers early in the morning and he was a G P for the families. He had quite a bit of time off. We bought a little Morris Minor duty free in Germany and used to go up to northern Germany and travel around, down the Rhine, and of course you can go anywhere in a car once you're in the middle of Germany.

There was lots of entertaining. This floored me a bit because I had never learned to cook and you had to work up though the Regiment – starting with the Lieutenants and their wives, the Captains, and Majors. One very taxing evening was with the Colonel's wife when I was trying to cook something and she came out into the kitchen with a glass of sherry and said "I think I'll talk to you while you cook." That's the worst thing that could happen to someone who can't cook.

David had some nice jobs – he was M O to a training camp for the Army Ski Team so we went to Austria. Later, he was selected to play in a Rugby Team which went to West Berlin and that was an exciting week end. Germany was divided into West and East Berlin and we had to travel through the Russian Eastern sector to get to West Berlin. We went by train. It stopped in the middle of the night. German guards came on the train and paced up and down and I was thinking that we'd be behind the Iron Curtain forever, but we got through.

The British Army was attached to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) and many countries had army bases in Germany. That was I think to warn the Russians that they needn't try to come over into Western Germany.

We made a lot of friends amongst the regular army officers, some of whom had remained in the army after the Second World War and others who had decided to make



**ABOVE:** Sailing on Möhne See, Germany.

the Army their career. They were all looking forward to their next posting which could be Hong Kong or Africa or British Honduras. In those days, a lot of the map of the world was coloured in pink because of all the British colonies and possessions.

We went back to the UK to get some more experience. David did obstetrics and I did paediatrics and was an Assistant Medical Officer for the City of Birmingham.

We thought about where we would go next. David decided that he wanted to specialise in eye surgery, so I thought we'll have to delay the travelling for a bit.

It was one Sunday afternoon in our cold flat in Birmingham and David had all his books open and was sitting in the kitchen with all his clothes on and a dressing gown and his feet in the oven trying to keep warm. I was actually in bed in my clothes with a hot electric blanket on. I was reading the 'Sunday Times' and I suddenly saw this article on emigration to Australia and there was a picture of people lying on Bondi Beach.

So I took this article out to David and showed it to him and I said "Let's go to Australia." and he laughed as he closed his books. We made an appointment at Australia House in London where they were recruiting doctors to work in Australia. There was a huge map on the wall with pins stuck in it for places where doctors were needed. There were a lot of pins because Australia's population was growing at a great rate. We did not know where we wanted to go. The interviewing doctor said "what about Hamilton in the western district of Victoria which is a nice place?" So we said OK and within three weeks we were on a ship with first class tickets paid for by the Hamilton hospital.

To us this was an exciting adventure. We had no intention of staying. We thought we would go for two years and then come back. Our families were devastated, although my mother said that we were lucky and she wished it was her. My father being Irish, wept because he remembered having to put one of his younger brothers on a boat to America. My father had also heard talk of his great-great uncles who went to Australia and were never heard of again.

We came on the P & O liner 'Orsova' and waved our families good-bye at Tilbury docks, with all the streamers of course. We were just so excited about the whole thing. It



ABOVE: SS Orsova, well known to many people who came as immigrants to Australia after W W II.



ABOVE: On board the SS Orsova 1961, Margaret and David meet the Captain at the Captain's cocktail party.

was just an adventure, that's all it was. We set off across the Bay of Biscay. The sea was terribly rough and I was violently ill and was also pregnant. It was like that for the next 28 days and I lost a stone in weight.

It was a great thing to come by sea because it made us realize just how far we were going and how difficult it would be to come back.

We got to Gibraltar and had a day there, then to Naples where we picked up a lot of Italian migrants, through the Suez Canal, Aden, and then Colombo (Ceylon as it was then).

At Colombo there was a dock strike and we had to wait three days. We were very well looked after by some tea planters whom we'd met. They were going home to their plantations after leave in England.

When we left Colombo, the captain made an announcement that because of the lost time, he was going to take the stabilisers off the ship to make up time in the Indian Ocean. So we rolled and rolled for nine days to Fremantle.

We looked at the shore in the early morning at about 6 am. A lot of women were there waiting to meet relatives off the ship, all wearing hats and gloves as though they were going to the races. I remember too that there were a lot of people with placards saying things like **PLUMBERS and ELECTRICIANS GET OFF HERE**. Many of the £10 Poms who were travelling steerage did get off there instead of coming

on to Adelaide and Melbourne.

## **AUSTRALIA**

*At Melbourne we were met by the Manager of Hamilton Hospital. It was about 6 pm on a Sunday evening. He said that he didn't know where we would get anything to eat at that time of night. What a contrast with now. **This was November 1961.***

*We eventually found somewhere to eat, and then spent our last night on the ship. He came back next day and we drove to Hamilton on the hottest day that I had ever experienced. It was a one-lane road all the way to Hamilton, through the Grampians which I thought were beautiful.*

*We arrived at Hamilton where David had a job doing surgery. I hadn't applied for a job as I knew I was having a baby. I had done a bit of pathology as a medical student and I knew from the technicians that there wasn't a pathologist at the Hospital, so I was asked to be the pathologist. I was pressed into service cross-matching blood and doing the tests that I knew how to do.*

*We stayed there about 16 months and then decided to look around and see where we could get into practice. David used to go off at week-ends looking at practices while I stayed at home with the baby.*

*And then he came to Orbost and he thought, "this is great." The person who was trying to sell the practice was Dr Robert Gardiner who had been a fighter pilot in England during the war. His nickname was 'Ace'. He was trying to leave because he wanted to go to Melbourne and educate his children.*

*He said to David "Before I show you round the hospital, I'll put my boat in the water and we can go for a spin on the river." So off they went down to*

*Marlo and cruised up and down the Snowy and the Brodribb. Two Sea Eagles flew overhead, and there were other birds of prey. David thought that this was all right.*

*The hospital was extremely busy at that time. There was another general practitioner in town, Dr Stone, in Ruskin Street (where the accountant is now). He was very good and delivered my next two children. At that time, the hospital was delivering 160 babies a year. There were 30 sawmills in the district. People injured themselves every day, and there were accidents on the road. Orbost had about 3,000 people and another 3,000 in the district.*

*Lakes Entrance had an elderly German doctor, but there were no others until you got to Bairnsdale, and no one before Eden in the other direction. Our practice area was as big as Yorkshire. It was very stressful at times, but very enjoyable.*

*Dr Stone left in 1967, and then there was a succession of doctors. We had registrars from the College of GPs. They came for six months at a time. Dr Hulme Hay was about the fourth one and he stayed here for 30 years. David and I were in practice here for nearly 40 years.*

*We settled down. We loved it and forgot about only intending to come for two years. That's how we came to Orbost.*

**In 2010, Margaret Hollands published her book, titled [Orbost Hospital: history, personalities and stories](#). This a well-researched and easy-to-read history of medical services in Orbost.**



**ABOVE:** While David worked as an M O at Hamilton Hospital, Margaret worked as a stand-in Pathologist.