



KITTY'S DIARY

Transcribed and edited by Barbara Abdy

Kitty's Diary records a three week visit to her uncle's house, 'Conaways', in Cheam Road, Ewell, from May 17th to June 9th 1868. Her uncle was Lawson Robinson, a wholesale grocer and her diary entries were sent to her mother in regular letters. This diary came to the attention of the late Phyllis Davies of the NAS Documentary Group. It is not known how it came into her possession but she typed it out and her transcript is available in its entirety, filed in the NAS Reminiscences folder at Bourne Hall Library.

Conaways was so new when Kitty went there that it is not shown on the 1866 Ordnance Survey map. It was leased by her uncle from the Revd. Sir George Lewen Glyn. The adjoining house, St. Normans, home of the Shaw family, is on the 1866 map and was therefore slightly older than Conaways. It is known that the Shaw family was living there at the 1861 census.

It was to be expected that the opening of Ewell East station in 1847 would lead to the building of houses along Cheam Road. However, such development was much slower than that experienced with the opening of Worcester Park Station leading to the erection of many houses along The Avenue. The map on page 2 shows the extent of the development by 1894. Only Essex Lodge, The Glyn Arms, now incorporated into the Toby Carvery pub/restaurant, and the lodge of Nonsuch House, at the end of Nonsuch Court Avenue survive. Nonsuch House was originally Nonsuch Court Farm, home of the Martin family for many years. In the 1930s houses and bungalows were built on the site of both St. Normans and Conaways but these mansions are perpetuated in the road names - St. Normans Way and Conaways Close.

Kitty's age is not known. Her innocent, gushing, enthusiasm for her experiences at Ewell indicate that she was rather unworldly and naive but this was probably the normal behaviour of a woman from a sheltered affluent background at that time. References are made to drinking champagne, staying up late to play whist and being obliged to make her own gowns if a seamstress was unavailable - all indications that she was probably at least in her twenties.

Lawson Robinson's work was based in London and particularly in an area called The Highway. This may be the street which runs parallel to the River Thames from East Smithfield to Limehouse. It seems likely that a wholesale grocer would need access to wharves and warehouses along the river. There are references to important dinners and meetings in London and many of

his associates seemed to visit him to discuss business. Good use was made of the railway which seemed to have a very frequent timetable of trains.

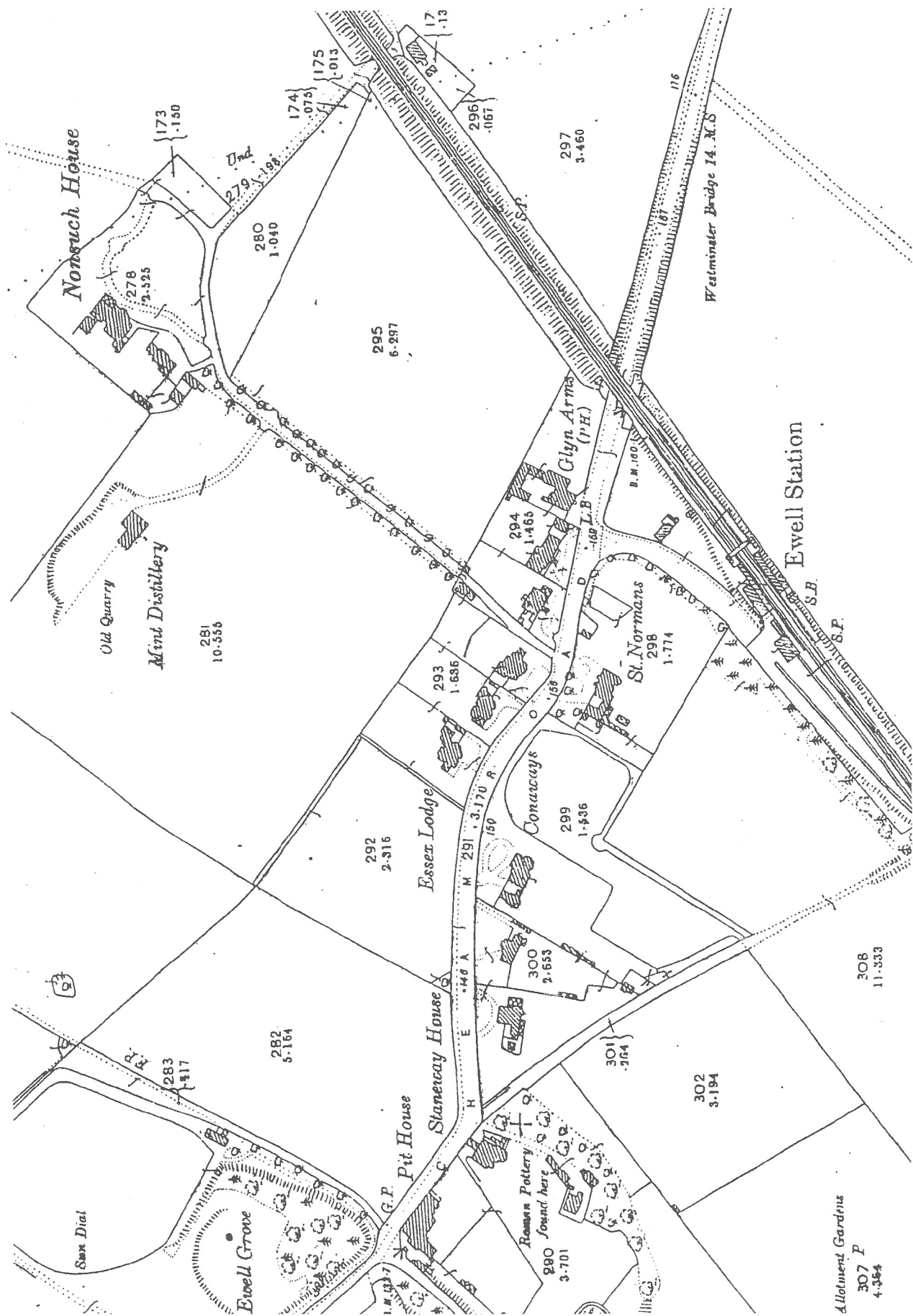
Census records show references to a family background at the village of Orsett in the Thurrock area of Essex. Other relatives mentioned in the Diary are Aunt Rhoda, wife of Lawson, who died only 4 months after Kitty's visit aged 50, and Hattie, Lawson's sister who took on the post of housekeeper after his wife's death. Lawson Robinson himself died in 1892 aged 75. Rhoda and Lawson Robinson were interred in the Ewell Churchyard, together with Catherine, Lawson's sister, who died 3 years after Lawson Robinson. The most frequently mentioned relatives in the Diary are Sally, who seems to have been a cousin of Kitty, Uncle Botting from Orsett and Uncle Jim who came back from Australia for a visit.

Considerable mention is also made of local friends of the Robinsons - the next door neighbour William Shaw, a leather manufacturer, James Townend, a hat manufacturer, of Harefield House, situated on the way to Cheam, Dr Hogg, Mrs Charman of Rectory Farm in Church Street, George Stone, corn and coal merchant in Ewell High Street and the Martin family at Nonsuch Court Farm. William Shaw and James Townend had large families but the Robinsons did not seem to have children and they did not appear to have their own carriage - they used the nearby railway extensively and joined the Shaws or the Townends in their carriages when they went on joint family outings.

Much of Kitty's diary is boringly repetitive with accounts of the daily weather, minor health matters, playing croquet and paying minor visits. I have extracted the more interesting parts of the diary to try to convey something of the atmosphere of the times in which she lived at Ewell for those three weeks. A few grammatical errors have been retained.

May 17th

Uncle Lawson walked to the College church (Epsom College founded in 1853) this morning while Aunt Rhoda and I went to the Ewell church. Aunt Hattie had such a bad headache, she stayed at home with Sally. On our way home we found them sitting in the meadow so I stayed with them until dinnertime. After dinner we all strolled about the garden and across Uncle's little meadow, and the Shaws came across their little meadow and we chatted with them until nearly tea time. Uncle went over to Epsom to tea at Mr Furners. In the evening Aunt Rhoda and I went to church again and walked home with the Shaws and Harry Townend. When we had just taken our bonnets off Uncle came home and brought with him Mr Furner and Mr Green who he took all over his house and then treated us to a bottle of champagne in honour of its being



The 25" Ordnance Survey map of 1894, reduced to 80%

Mr Green's first visit to the new house. Aunt Hattie has been very poorly all day and has decided to go up to London in the morning to see her doctor.

May 18th

Such a lovely morning After dinner Mrs Shaw sent in her love to me and would I like to go a drive with her and a lovely drive she took me, all through Ashtead Park. I did so enjoy it, the hawthorns were a perfect sight and at time the perfume seemed almost too much, if you can imagine such a thing being possible. Uncle did not get home till half past 2 for he had gone to some grand dinner in London.

May 19th

.... After tea Uncle took Sally, Aunt Hattie and I by the half past six train to a little station at the foot of Box Hill called West Humble, from where we walked into Norbury Wood. It is no use attempting to describe its beauties. The place seemed alive with nightingales and the banks all blue and white with wild strawberry blossom and forget-me-nots. It was really wonderfully beautiful. We came back again by a train which left West Humble at half past 8 so that we got home by 9 o'clock.

May 20th

We began playing croquet the minute after breakfast and kept on without ceasing till nearly 12 o'clock when it began to rain a little which drove us in. The Misses Furners came to call and bring us a ticket for the Athletic Sports at the Medical College which are held tomorrow. I'm afraid we shall not go for Uncle does not seem to care about us going without him and I don't fancy he will care to go for he has another grand dinner tonight at the London Tavern, some grocer's affair I think.

May 21st

Only one month to the longest day. It makes me sigh dreadfully, summer goes with me so much quicker than winter but it's no use grieving. Sally and I have been playing croquet nearly the whole day. My right hand is nearly in blisters from holding the mallet. We have not been to the Athletic Sports.

May 22nd

Aunt Rhoda went up to Town this morning with Uncle to see after a cook, for her present one has got notice to leave. Sally, Aunt Hattie and started off about 10 o'clock to Cheam to see the Townends. It is a lovely walk, the whole way through beautiful fields and very little over a mile. We took our time as you will imagine when I tell you we were rather over an hour getting there for we strolled most lazily and sat down several times to enjoy the lovely country.

May 23rd

Not at all a nice morning, so windy and looking very much like rain Dr Hogg arrived at six o'clock. He came alone. Mrs Hogg was prevented from accompanying him. The weather was beautifully fine by that time for it ceased raining soon after dinner so we had some croquet.

May 24th

.... We had a beautiful dinner and all seemed to enjoy it very much, at least I can speak for myself. We drank two

bottles of champagne to wish the Queen many happy returns of her birthday. In the afternoon there came a letter down by the train from Uncle Jim himself saying that he and all his family had dined at the Highway. Just fancy the state of surprise and excitement it threw us all into for they were not expected for at least a week

Uncle got home at half past eleven. We all sat up because we felt anxious to hear what he had to say about the travellers. We did not go to bed till just upon one o'clock for he had much to tell us. He found them all in bed, except Uncle Jim, but of course he had a look at them all, the wife included, and seemed very favourably impressed. He says they are very beautiful children and he said one little girl, as she laid in bed fast asleep, was so strangely like our Polly, he said it was quite wonderful. She is the only one that is dark, the other four have quite flaxen hair. I feel quite anxious to see them.

May 25th

Old Dr Hogg went up to town this morning by the first train Sally and I went down into the village to post and then to call on Mrs Charman. She lives at such a pretty old farmhouse. We went round the nice old garden and she gave us each a lovely rose.

May 26th

The first day of the Races. Uncle advises us not to go out walking for the whole neighbourhood is inundated with (you may truly say) the scum of the earth, so we kept about the house all the morning in the garden and meadow and Lettice came in to see us. After dinner Mr Townsend's waggonette drove up to the door. It was sent to take us all up there to tea, so away we went and spent such a pleasant afternoon and evening. I have told you before what a beautiful old place it is. On the lawn there are three immense elm trees and between these trees they string hammocks, regular bona-fide hammocks such as are used in ships, made of tarpaulin and nice little mattresses and pillows in them and there they lie and read or work for hours together. I felt a little afraid to get in at first but they said it was so nice that I got in and then I didn't have a second thought as whether I liked it or not, it was downright splendid. The sensation was just like being on the sea for the wind was rather high which made the hammock swing gently to and fro and there I lay looking up into the trees for more than an hour. It was most delightful - I said I should like to live in a hammock. They persuaded Sally to get into the other one but it soon turned her sick, just like sea-sickness.

May 27th

The Derby Day. Such a lovely morning. Directly after breakfast Sally and I put on our hats and went out into the garden and through into the meadow with Uncle. We were soon joined by three or four of the Shaws and soon a train came in which brought Aunt Judy, Uncle Botting, Mr Spitty, Mr Catt, Mr Ferrier and two or three other gentlemen so we made up a game of croquet. Mr Spitty, Uncle Botting and I against Sally, Henry Shaw and Mr Catt and they beat us. My two partners were such 'duffers', I couldn't do anything with them. Then we went in to lunch after which the gentlemen went up onto the course

and we ladies down in the village to see the people go to the Derby. We went to Mr Stone's for he kindly allowed us the use of his upstairs windows so we had a capital view. I never saw such a sight before in all my life - where all the people came from puzzled me. Conveyances of every description from donkey carts to splendid coaches, four-in-hand, and all so closely packed that the horses never went off the walk and continually streaming by, till it made me stare in amazement. It was next to impossible for a pedestrian to cross the road. There were mounted policemen at equal distances to try and regulate the traffic. When the Prince of Wales came along two of the mounted police rode along to try and make way for him but he had to go very slowly which was very nice for us for we had such a good view of him. Some gentlemen at Mr Stone's hurraed and we waved our handkerchiefs so the Prince very politely took off his hat. He was in an open barouche with four horses and two postilions in blue. The Crown Prince of Denmark sat by his side. I shall never forget seeing the people go to the Derby. Sally said that had we paid ten shillings each for our seats it would have been quite worth it.

When the people had pretty well cleared off we returned to Conaways and had dinner. Just as we were sitting down to tea in came Mr Charman with a message from Mr Stone that he would be pleased to see us down again to see the people go home so away we went and rare fun we had. The people seemed to me to try what guys they could make of themselves, such noses, and with little dolls stuck all round their hats, but unfortunately we could not stay very long for Sally was taken very poorly and wanted to get home. The continual going by of the carriages made her feel very sick so Mr Charman took her under his wing and Frank Stone, me and Aunt Judy, by watching our opportunity, managed to get across the road and home in safety. We did not see the Prince return from the races but we saw the Australian cricketers both go and return.

May 28th

Another lovely day and such an unexpected treat I have had this day. I had no idea of going to the races till about eleven o'clock when Mr Ginner drove up with his beautiful pair of horses and waggonette and offered to take Sally and I, Mrs Shaw and Lettice, if Mr Shaw would drive Uncle Lawson and the refreshments in his waggonette, which was a very nice arrangement and which we all agreed to. After we had made ourselves smart and had some lunch, away we started, Mr Ginner and his coachman on the box and we ladies inside and Mr Shaw, his groom and Uncle following us. We drove right up to the edge of the course in a splendid position exactly opposite the Grand Stand. The horses were taken out and Uncle helped Lettice and I to get into the box, for we could see so much better there. It was so nice. The Townends were there and drew their carriage up close to ours so we were quite a nice party and had such fun. I never saw a race before so it was quite a novel scene to me and so exciting and very pretty. I enjoyed it wonderfully. We had plenty of refreshments, as much champagne as we could drink. Sam Newcome was there - he came up to the

carriage and chatted with me for some time and had some champagne. I was so pleased to see him. I did not win or lose anything, simply because I did not bet; when the races were over the horses were put to and away we went to Mr Shaws where Aunt Rhoda joined us and we had a sort of tea-dinner, then went into the garden and had a game of croquet. After we had singing and music until we came home at half past ten.

May 29th

We have had a most terrific thunderstorm today. I never felt so thoroughly frightened at thunder before in my life. Mrs Shaw and Lettice called about 11 o'clock and asked Sally and I to go down into the village with them to see the Prince of Wales go to the 'Oaks', so we went with them to a room over the baker's shop. Mrs Shaw's nurses and children were there too and there we were all through that dreadful storm, the rain was so tremendously heavy. The people as they drove by looked like drowned rats but we had good reason to be very thankful for there was a very bad accident not more than a hundred yards from the very house we were in; two men who were going to the races in a pony chaise, drew up against a wall to shelter under some trees and the lightning ripped the wall right up and killed one man instantly and injured the other one so dreadfully that although he still lingers on we have been told there is not the slightest hope of his recovery. The poor horse was struck blind. Is it not sad ?

We could not at first think what was the matter, there was such a commotion in the street, the policemen galloping about to restore order, for with the carriages stopping to see what was the matter there soon became a block and the Prince was expected every minute. However, the storm had quite abated before he came. I should fancy he stayed to shelter somewhere; we were able to stand at the window again by that time. I saw him beautifully, I think better than when he went to the Derby.

When we got home we found Aunt Rhoda looking quite ill; she had been frightened at the storm. We made her have a little brandy but she did not get over it all day.

May 30th

Uncle Jim is coming down with Uncle tonight. We have just heard that the poor man who was struck yesterday is still alive. When I had finished my letter Sally and I went to Epsom by the ten o'clock train. First we went to the Post Office and got my order cashed, when we walked all up the town to find something pretty to buy but we did not see anything worth having, the muslins were all such common things. Sally wanted to buy some white alpaca to make a dress and we could not even get that so its no use to think of shopping at Epsom After tea, Sally and I went down into the village to see if they sold white alpaca there, but no such luck, then we just walked round to see the wall where the two poor men were struck with lightning.

May 31st

.... We all went to Ewell church except Aunt Rhoda. She stayed at home as a sort of guard to the house for there are so many suspicious-looking people about just after the races. In the evening Uncle Lawson, Uncle Jim, Mr Shaw and three of his sons took the train to Leatherhead and

walked through Norbury Park to West Humble just to show Uncle Jim a few of the beauties of the neighbourhood. Aunt Rhoda and I went to church again in the evening.

June 1st

When we got home I found my letter from Papa, which I took into the garden to read. I cannot understand about his being so ill, but it seems to me quite wrong to attempt to do without his opium After dinner we dressed, had tea at 4 o'clock and went by the 10 minutes to 5 train to Sutton, which is the next station but one to Ewell nearer London and where there is a very nice shop where the Shaws and Townends always deal. Aunt Rhoda and Sally each bought a white alpaca dress and I a white muslin one and a sunshade which I wanted very badly, for I have had to borrow Aunt Rhoda's several times. We returned to Ewell by the half past 7 train and found that a box had arrived from London during our absence containing the most lovely vase I ever saw. It is Bohemian glass, presented to Uncle Lawson and Aunt Rhoda by the gentlemen at the Highway, for the centre of their drawing room mantelpiece. It is exceedingly handsome, the presentation is so prettily got up and so beautifully illuminated and so much in the style of Papa's Allegory that I rather suspect Aunt Kate must have asked Mr Tompson to do it for them. Sally and I were in the secret and it was most amusing to us to watch Aunt Rhoda's excitement and then again when Uncle came home we had the pleasure of seeing his surprise. He seems to me to be better pleased with the presentation than the vase. He is quite proud of it and will have it put by the side of the vase on the mantelpiece so that everybody may see it.

June 2nd

We have been haymaking today for Mr Shaw's hay was cut yesterday and we have all promised to help make it. After breakfast Aunt Rhoda and I started off in search of a dressmaker, but in vain. We went to no less than four - they are so busy they cannot do our dresses. When we got home Mrs Shaw was there with her pony carriage, so she drove Aunt Rhoda over to Epsom to a dressmaker she knew, but she was like the rest, very busy, so I expect they will go unmade unless we make them ourselves.

After dinner Sally and I went into the hayfield, then into see Mrs Shaw. After tea we all went again into the hayfield, where we found Mr and Mrs Shaw, Willie, Alfred and Henry all regularly haymaking, turning the rows of hay over. They soon supplied us with forks and set us to work but I found haymaking a little harder work than it looks. I turned one row and then I had had quite enough. Sally didn't do more than three yards, so we two sat down and watched the others. After they had finished we had a good romp, smothering one another with hay Uncle has lumbago so badly he can scarcely walk.

June 3rd

Uncle has been at home all day with his lumbago. He did not get up till dinnertime and then was quite a cripple, hobbling about with a stick. In the evening Sally and I went to help the Shaws turn their hay over again. When we got in we found Uncle had gone to bed. His lumbago

was so bad. I have had some strawberries today for the first time this year and we had the first green peas on Sunday.

June 4th

Uncle Lawson has been in bed all day, his lumbago is still so bad.

June 5th

.... Uncle has been rather better today. After breakfast Sally and I went up and had a little chat with him, then we went down into the village for a walk; as we were passing Mr Stone's he was coming out so he asked us to go and look at his flowers, which we did for they are so lovely it is quite a treat. We gathered such a lovely little bouquet of roses which he gave to me and a beautiful cucumber. We then went round to call on Mrs Charman and she gave us a little basket of asparagus to take to Uncle and so many flowers that by the time we got home we were quite laden with goodies.

June 6th

Uncle is better again this morning but he is not up yet I have not been able to get my dress made. It is very tiresome for now is the time to wear thin dresses. I am afraid to undertake it myself for I like to get out of doors as much as possible and not sit sewing. I am afraid I should be so long about it. I wish I was near dear old Miss Catley but I must see what I can do when I get up to London.

June 7th

.... Uncle has been much better today. Sally, Aunt Rhoda and I all went to church in the morning and walked home with the Shaws. We don't dine until two o'clock on Sundays so we went in, had a bit of lunch and out again into the hayfield until dinner was ready.

June 8th

.... After breakfast as Sally and I were just finishing our packing thinking we should return to London at ten o'clock, in came Uncle Lawson and he said 'I don't like the idea of you girls going away without having been to Box Hill' so I said with such an inducement as Box Hill I thought we could exist just one day longer without going to London so it ended with Uncle writing a note to Aunt Kate to tell her we should not be home till tomorrow morning and another to Mr Rutley at Epsom to tell him to send a nice open carriage and pair of horses at three o'clock. So away we went, such a lovely drive. We did not go straight to Box Hill but went round Walton on the Hill and right over Borough Heath. When we did get to Box Hill we stayed there for more than an hour looking at the view. It is very beautiful. There happened to be a volunteer review in a park which looked just at the foot of the hill but Uncle said it was quite two miles from it. However, we could hear the band very distinctly and once or twice Aunt Rhoda thought the firing a little too loud to be pleasant. She had her trowel and dug up some beautiful ferns which she took home to her garden.

About seven o'clock we had our tea which consisted of sherry, lemonade and cake and then we started back again. Uncle would have me get up onto the box, by the side of the coachman. He thought I could see the country

so much better from there. I felt a little nervous at first for they were such prancing horses and I seemed perched up so high but I soon got to like it and when we stopped at Headley to give the horses some water Uncle wanted me to get down again but I declined. It was so nice I liked to finish my drive there for it is certainly the place of all others to see the country. We drove into the gate at Conaways just about nine o'clock, after a most delightful six hours, a beautiful finale to a very happy visit.

On the 9th June Kitty left Ewell and returned to London.

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