

# The Forward Life of Jessie Phyllis Jefferies 1880-1958

*Jean Saunders*

Phyllis was born on 6 December 1880 in Surbiton to thirty-two-year-old Richard and twenty-seven-year-old Jessie Jefferies. In common with her father and her brother Harold,<sup>1</sup> Phyllis was not known by the first name on the birth certificate. Little is recorded about her life including education, and if she acquired any skills or artistry. In the early 1870s, before her mother married, Jessie was a governess and may have helped at her half-sister's school at Spencer Road, Northampton. Phyllis could have been home-educated by Jessie.

The best and, possibly, only description of Phyllis's personality came from her cousin Christine Billing.<sup>2</sup> At the opening ceremony of the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate on 24 June 1960, Christine talked about the Jefferies' family and Coate farm. The two cousins were only a year apart in age and were good friends all their lives. Christine said:

Phyllis was a good companion—sometimes a really charming one—with an adventurous spirit & a boyish sense of fun, caught partly from her tall brother Harold. But, like her father, she had a difficult side to her nature & she would have gloomy moods in which nothing seemed to interest her. As years went on these moods became more frequent... She was a Jefferies in her love of beauty & of the joy of out-door life, but she was practical, clear-sighted, business-like & capable & helpful to all in trouble (she had no sympathy with idle dreamers or with any kind of sentimentality).<sup>3</sup>

The Jefferies family had been living at 2 Woodside Terrace near Tolworth/Surbiton for three years at the time of Phyllis's birth. Brother Harold was five-and-a-half. There is no baptism record for Phyllis nor entry in Jefferies' notebook to mark the event but a notice is published in the 'births' column of the *Standard* dated Wednesday 8 December that reads:

JEFFERIES—Dec. 6, at 2, Woodside, Surbiton, the wife of Richard Jefferies of a daughter (Jessie Phyllis).

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<sup>1</sup> (Richard) Harold Jefferies was born in Swindon on 30 June 1875 and died in Canada on 3 November 1942. He was known affectionately as Toby or Bobby as a young boy.

<sup>2</sup> Christine Emily Billing was born in Guilford on 24 December 1881 to Sarah (Jefferies) and Robert Billing. Christine died in Seaford 4 May 1967.

<sup>3</sup> The full-transcript of the talk by Christine Billing is published in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No. 21 (Autumn 2011), pp.11–14.

Richard's notebook No. IX reveals that Harold went to school for the first time on 18 October 1880. He recalls that 'I was sent to Kindergarten school at Surbiton, but did not last long there. I had my knuckles sharply rapped with a slate for inattention, and when my father heard about that he promptly took me away.'<sup>4</sup> Richard could not abide injustice but he was also firm. Harold added that 'he got such a lecture' from his father for making a noise in the playroom beneath Jessie's bedroom where baby Phyllis was sleeping.<sup>4</sup>

Would a new baby bring visitors to the house? About 5 months before Phyllis was born Richard's childhood friend, Frederick Harrild,<sup>5</sup> moved to a house that was just under a mile away from Woodside with his new wife Edith Warner Baxter.<sup>6</sup> Richard's Aunt Ellen Harrild<sup>7</sup> would have had good reason to visit the area to see her two nephews. No doubt Richard's parents would have paid a visit; Jessie's parents were deceased.<sup>8</sup> The year before Phyllis was born James Luckett Jefferies<sup>9</sup> had stayed with his son and family for 3 weeks and had attended The Kilburn Show with Richard on 4 July 1879.<sup>10</sup> However, it was a common complaint from Phyllis's grandmother, Betsy Jefferies, that Richard 'does not tell us any of his doings—suppose we shall hear when anything comes out in public. Today 6<sup>th</sup> Dec. is little Philis Birthday—12 months—Richard's little girl.'<sup>11</sup>

The Jefferies' family also employed a live-in general domestic servant; listed on the 1881 census as nineteen-year-old Martha Hayes, born in Baydon Wiltshire. She must have been a great help to the family.

Richard was busy writing articles mainly for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *Standard* at the time and was completing *Wood Magic*. He was not in the

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<sup>4</sup> *Richard Jefferies: My Father* by his son Richard Harold Jefferies (Worthing Cavalcade: 1944), p.21.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Harrild 19/2/1854–19/3/1937) was a son of Horton Harrild Snr, Thomas Harrild's brother.

<sup>6</sup> Edith was born in Lewes in 1859 and was a granddaughter of John Baxter. She married Frederick Harrild on 30 July 1880 in Kingston, Surrey.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen (Gyde) Harrild was born 24 August 1825 Islington and died 24 Aug 1911, Sydenham. Richard Jefferies lived with his aunt and Uncle Thomas Harrild from around the age of four to nine only returning to Coate for holidays. His sister Sarah lived with her aunt too for many years even whilst married to Robert Billing.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Jefferies and Jessie Baden married on 8 July 1874. Jessie's mother, Emma Baden, died on 9 November 1873 whilst her father, Andrew, died earlier on 28 July 1864.

<sup>9</sup> James Luckett Jefferies was born on 8 December 1816 in Somerstown and died on 24 December 1896 in Bath.

<sup>10</sup> See *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* by Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel (Oxford: Petton Books, 1994), p.120.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Elizabeth Jefferies née Gyde to her niece Sarah Jane Gyde, 6 Dec 1881, addressed from 13, Bath Wick Street, Bath. Elizabeth, known as Betsy, was born in Islington in 1817 and died in Bath on 21 July 1895.

best of health, having undergone four operations to treat his anal fistula. Woodside was known to be on poorly-drained land and the houses were damp. This would have prompted the move to Sussex, whilst living near the sea and the downs would be an added attraction.

By July 1882 the Jefferies family had moved to 'Savernake', Lorna Road, Hove where the family stayed for two years. Both Harold and his father<sup>12</sup> mention the aquarium. Harold writes 'Father frequently treated us to a visit to the Aquarium, which was a great delight, especially ... at feeding time'.

On 18 July 1883, Richard Oliver Launcelot was born. This birth was also announced in the *Standard* on Friday 20 July, but the son was un-named:

JEFFERIES—July 18 at Savernake, Lorna-road, West Brighton, the wife of Richard Jefferies, of a son.

With the birth of a new baby, Jessie would have been busy. Phyllis was just two-and-a-half, whilst Harold had just reached his eighth birthday.

Betsy Jefferies writes to her niece about this in 1883: 'I have just seen a book advertised of Richard's tittle *The Story of My Heart*. You will see in the times list of new works. He is now better in health but very delicate—they have another baby-boy, the name of Launcelot Oliver. We seldom hear from them. I am vexed to say the little girl is name Philis—she is a very pretty child.'<sup>13</sup> So, at least, Betsy has seen her granddaughter but is, perhaps, 'vexed' that Phyllis wasn't named after her. There are no known Phyllises in the Jefferies, Gyde or Baden families or amongst friends and other relations. Possibly Richard named her Phyllis after the mythological Greek princess whose name meant green leaves or foliage. The inspiration for the name Launcelot might be easily guessed!

Then came the move to 14 Victoria Road, Eltham, probably on 4 July 1884. There is only one mention of Phyllis in her father's known notebooks. She wants to set free a nail that Harold has given her and which she didn't want! 'Toby div me this/nole (nail). I doesn't ant/him (bobbing down & dropping/it under the table)— I going to/let him be loosed.'<sup>14</sup>

It was in Eltham, eight months after the move, that baby Oliver died of meningitis on 16 March 1885. This was a tragedy that hit his father very hard. There are no entries in his notebooks at this time and Harold describes the 'agonised expression on father's face . . . [that] haunted my mind for many years.'<sup>15</sup> Harold only remembers himself and his mother in the coach to

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<sup>12</sup> *Richard Jefferies: My Father*, op.cit. p.22 and Richard's Notebook X entry for July 1882..

<sup>13</sup> The letter sent to Sarah Jane Gyde is merely dated 1/83. The month isn't indicated. Betsy has moved to 48 New King Street, Bath, which is where both Betsy and James Luckett died.

<sup>14</sup> This was written around 20 July 1884 (NB XIII folio 68)

<sup>15</sup> *Richard Jefferies: My Father*, op.cit., p.20.

attend the funeral service at Eltham Church. Baby Oliver was buried in St John's Churchyard, in a common grave that once bore a wooden cross. Perhaps it was a conscious decision to keep the grave basic but a common grave suggests that Richard could afford no more at that time.

There is a photograph at the British Library (BL 58828), pictured below, that shows a young Phyllis (about 3 years old?) sitting on her grandfather's lap. The picture is undated but taken by photographers in Lee Green and Eltham. James Luckett looks very well for a man who must have been about sixty-seven at the time.



By June 1885 Richard reported in a letter to C.P. Scott that he had been seriously ill.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Kidd had advised him to move and the family were staying in temporary accommodation in Rotherfield before moving to The Downs, in Crowborough the following month. The Downs was a somewhat bleak and isolated stone cottage set in lovely rolling hills. Harold remembers an incident there when he was chasing Phyllis: 'She fell and cut her hand rather badly on a piece of glass. Howls and tears of course followed, and I was ordered to my room. Later father appeared and lambasted me pretty smartly, but I am sure that it hurt him more than me.'<sup>17</sup>

By 21 November 1886 the family moved again to Sea View, Goring after spending a few days at Peacock House as paying guests at the Hide farmhouse nearby. Jessie acquired the maid from Peacock House—(Sarah) Jennie Moss born in 1871 in Dover; just a child herself.

Phyllis was just six years and eight months old when her father died (at 02.30 hours, Sunday 14 August 1887) and her abiding memories of him must have been as an invalid in a bath-chair. In her young life Phyllis had watched her father suffer from all the ill-effects of tuberculosis spreading into his lungs, digestive system and spinal cord and this memory of his suffering and pain must have been a permanent scar for her too.

J.W. North recalls arriving just after he died:

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<sup>16</sup> *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, Walter Besant (London, Chatto and Windus, 1888), p.333. The book was dedicated to 'The Widow and the two children of Richard Jefferies'.

<sup>17</sup> *Richard Jefferies: My Father*, *op.cit.*, p.21.

... I went yesterday, expecting once more to speak with him. I found him lying dead, twelve hours dead. I saw him with Mrs. Jefferies and their little Phyllis. A pitiful sight to see them kiss the poor cold face!<sup>18</sup>

After her father's death, along with her mother and Harold, Phyllis stayed with J.W. North at Beggarnhuish House, Somerset although her cousin, Christine Billing recalls:

I do remember most distinctly the day of Uncle Richard's funeral.<sup>19</sup> To my great surprise I found my mother crying, & soon afterwards she went away in a black dress after telling my sister & me to take care of little Phyllis, who had just come to stay with us. Little Phyllis was wearing a black dress too, her fair hair was flying about her shoulders & there was a very rueful expression on her round face. I was only a puny little child & I felt something was very wrong, so I sat down on the nursery floor & howled. That did have the good effect of giving the other two, who were a little older, the amusement of bullying me. Helen,<sup>20</sup> always a person of resource, brought out the wooden horse on wheels, which was one of our great treasures, lifted Phyllis on to it & pushed her towards me with great vigour. Nearer and nearer they came, both looking so vindictive that I was frightened & howled louder. So the game became really amusing.<sup>21</sup>

Phyllis's Uncle Charles (Jefferies) married Louisa Reeve on 29 May 1889 in Guildford (where they lived until death). There is no record to show Jessie and Phyllis attending the wedding but it would seem likely.

Harold was enrolled at Dulwich College in January 1889 finishing his studies in December 1891 whilst. Phyllis started at James Allen's girl school on 11 May 1889 and left in April 1892. Phyllis was finally baptised at Saint John the Evangelist church in East Dulwich on Saturday 24 August 1889. The ceremony was conducted by Rev. Kenneth Maule Ffinch.<sup>22</sup> The date of the baptism is just 10 days after the second anniversary of her father's death on 14 August. Their address was 3 Townley Park Villas, Lordship Lane, Dulwich Rise. From there they moved to 158 Avenue Road, Mill Hill Park, Acton. *The Toilers of the Field* was published by Longmans in 1892 and Jessie had given Phyllis an inscribed copy with the Acton address. Why Acton? The only connection appears to be that Tom Cox lived nearby with his family. Tom was the youngest of the Cox brothers and Richard's cousin, who grew up at Snodshill Farm, Coate. He was just two years younger than Jessie and they

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<sup>18</sup> Besant, *op. cit.*, p.360.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Jefferies was buried at Broadwater cemetery, Worthing on 20 August 1887.

<sup>20</sup> Helen Elizabeth Billing was Christine's older sister, born in Guildford on 22 Jan 1878.

<sup>21</sup> See footnote 3 and *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No. 21 (Autumn 2011), p.11.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Maule Ffinch was born in 1865 (in Tisbury, Wiltshire) and was ordained by the Bishop of Rochester as a deacon on 11 June 1888 and a year later as a priest on 11 June 1889. Saint John the Evangelist in East Dulwich was his first appointment and he was only there from 1888 to 1890.

too would have been childhood friends.

Phyllis's grandmother died on 21 July 1895 only to be followed by her grandfather eighteen months later on 24 December 1896. James Lockett Jefferies did leave a will, dated 30 July 1895 (just 6 days after the death of Betsy). Probate was given as £154 (worth about £20,000 in 2020) and his assets, after expenses deducted, were to be divided equally to his children Charles, Sarah and Henry (in the USA). There is no record whether Jessie and Phyllis attended their funerals in Bath, but it seems unlikely. Leaving nothing to his son Richard's family does suggest that Jessie might not have kept in touch with her parents-in-law either and that she was deliberately excluded.

By 1901, there was another of the many moves in Phyllis's life—this time to Clarence House, 257 Chesterfield Road, Ashford. Harold emigrated to Canada and arrived in Nova Scotia on 14 April 1905 after spending nearly three years working for his uncle Robert Billing as a proof-reader and, before that, he was at sea as a midshipman.

On Thursday, 18 April 1901 Jessie and Phyllis met Thomas Mosher (the American publisher) and his wife in London.<sup>23</sup> In her letter dated 2 January 1945 to Looker Phyllis remembers 'having lunch at the Hotel Cecil with them, he would have given my brother a push in his publishing business but Harold would not go to America, he knew New York very well & hated it!'. Jessie also remembers the occasion in her letter to Mosher dated 4 January 1902 written to thank him for sending her some sets of his Jefferies' publications: 'What pleasure it would have given my Husband could he have foreseen his work would have been admired & appreciated in your country... Phyllis & I often talk of the pleasant time we spent with Mrs. Mosher & yourself in London...'<sup>24</sup> This meeting led to Jessie parting with an autographed manuscript of Jefferies' poem 'My Chaffinch' for £5 that her son-in-law Robert Billing negotiated and organised.<sup>25</sup>

The next move, after Harold emigrated to Canada, was to Oakleigh, Chiddingfold, Surrey. Sixteen-year-old Ellen Lawrence from Hambledon, Surrey is recorded as the servant on the 1911 census. Chiddingfold is just eleven miles from Guildford where Jessie's brother- and sister-in-laws, Charles Jefferies and Sarah Billing, lived with their families. At the time of the census Phyllis was visiting friends near Torquay at Wykeham Lodge,

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<sup>23</sup> 'Richard Jefferies launches an American Collector's Passion' by Philip R. Bishop, *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No.33 (2018), p.134. See also 'Finding Work for Harold Jefferies' by the editors in the same edition, p.139–140.

<sup>24</sup> Jessie's letters are in the archives of Houghton Library, MS Am 1096-753.

<sup>25</sup> Billing had advertised the MS available to the public in a front page advertisement placed in *The Athenaeum*, 17 Nov 1900.

Lincombe Hill Road, Tormoham, Newton Abbot—the home of widowed Beatrice Harvey (aged 59) and her two unmarried daughters Emily (39) and Alice (36). The relevance of the visit is not apparent.

While Jessie and Phyllis were living at Chiddingfold, Surrey, they joined some of the excursions organised by George Avenell for the Field and Camera Club and Selborne Society.<sup>26</sup> In 1911 Phyllis gave Avenell a copy of the large paper limited edition of *The Toilers of the Field*, published in 1892, but the occasion is unknown,<sup>27</sup> possibly to celebrate Avenell's promotion or a parting gift before Jessie and Phyllis moved to Cornwall.

There is little evidence to go on for the next five years but Phyllis's Aunt Sarah Billing died on 16 November 1913. This would have been a huge wrench for her Uncle Thomas Billing and her dear cousins Helen and Christine.

By 1916 Phyllis and Jessie were living in Perranporth, Cornwall. Phyllis married Alfred Hargrave on 24 April 1916 in St. Piran's church, Perranzabuloe. It seems that the newly-weds lived with Jessie at Glen Cottage, until they built Overdale at Cox, just down the road and where they all moved. This was confirmed by the 1921 census.

It is curious to ponder on how Phyllis and Alfred met as he was born in Didsbury south Manchester, on 30 October 1866, and, until 1901, remained in the Lancashire/Cheshire area apart from going to school in Hertfordshire. Alfred was fourteen years older than Phyllis and his father, Henry, was a 'Provision Merchant' (1871 census) and 'glass manufacturer' (1861 census). It is likely that Henry also dealt with cheese manufacture in Manchester employing his sons Alfred and Joseph who ran the business until 1900 when the partnership came to an end and Henry had died. Censuses enter Alfred's occupation as 'Provision Salesman' (1891), and, by 1901, a 'retired manufacturer' living with his widowed mother and sister Caroline at 11 Willes Terrace, Leamington. Brother and sister continued to live at this address (1911 census) and it is where Caroline stayed until her dying day. Their mother Mary died on 29 August 1901 and probate was granted to Caroline (£968 4s. 8d).

Alan Herrick, the son of Jessie's sister Alice, recalls staying with Aunt Jessie at Bearley, Warwickshire around 1915–16. This might well be the case as Alfred Hargrave owned a property at Bearley that is mentioned in an article in the *Midland Daily Telegraph* dated 18 December 1924. This reported that Alfred's sister, Caroline Susan Hargrave, had died at Ingleside, 11 Willes Terrace, Leamington on 27 October 1924. She left the bulk of her property to Alfred and Phyllis. Net probate was put at £5,459 16s 9d. So for some reason

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<sup>26</sup> *Swindon Advertiser*, 2 Sept 1904, 23 Sept 1904.

<sup>27</sup> 'Discoveries', George Miller, *RJS Autumn Newsletter* 2015.

Jessie and, presumably, Phyllis were staying with Alfred Hargrave just before they moved to Cornwall. Alfred was baptised as an Anglican on 11 March 1913 at St Mary's Church, Leamington Spa. His father came from a Quaker family who do not believe in baptism and, perhaps he decided to go through with the ceremony for Phyllis and Jessie's sake.

Around 1918 Phyllis's nephew Bevis, aged nine, came to live with the Billing family in Guildford. He was Harold's first son but fourth child, and had been sent to England to be educated, possibly at Dulwich College where Harold had attended. Bevis sailed back to Montreal on 23 September 1925—he was with the Billings for about seven years. Christine Billing remembered Bevis in her will by leaving him £500.

And so life went on peacefully in Cornwall and between the date of the 1921 census and The Electoral Register of 1922, Jessie had moved from Overdale, Cox to her own home at Penlue (a six-bedroom house), Perranporth. Of interest, on the same Electoral Register, is the name Caroline Hargrave, staying at Penwortha, Perranporth. Could this be Alfred's sister who kept or rented a holiday home nearby? On her death two years later, Caroline was still living at the Hargrave family home at Leamington and Alfred still had the house at Beardsley. At the time of the 1921 census (19 June) Phyllis and Alfred were recorded visiting Jessie at Penlue.

Jessie died in July 1926 and was buried in St. Piran's churchyard. She left a will leaving her furniture and personal belongings to Phyllis, but all other effects and future royalties were to be split equally between Phyllis and Harold. Probate was set at £377 8s. A possible example of an auction sale was one which took place at Hodgsons on 12 July 1928 where thirteen autographed or first editions of her father's writing took place. Copies of *The Dewy Morn* and *Amaryllis at the Fair* were dedicated to Jessie 'with all the author's love' whilst *After London* was dedicated to 'Jessie and Harold'. Five titles were specifically dedicated to Aunt Ellen—*Restless Human Hearts*, *World's End*, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *Bevis* and *Nature Near London*.

Alfred died in February 1933 and was also buried at St. Piran, the parish church where he married Phyllis. Phyllis chose the same grave design for both her mother and husband but were separated in the churchyard. Alfred's memorial reads: 'Sacred to the memory of Alfred Hargrave who passed away Feb 5th 1933'. Jessie's memorial reads: 'In Ever Loving Memory of Jessie Jefferies widow of Richard Jefferies who passed away July 12th 1926'.

Christine Billing remembered that Phyllis ‘had sad times nursing her mother & her husband unto their deaths & then came years of loneliness after both had gone.’<sup>28</sup>

Probate for Alfred amounted to £130 12s. 2d, which was not a fortune, but Caroline Hargrave’s will left £2,000 in trust for Phyllis, if widowed, of which one quarter was to go to Alfred’s cousins in Canada. Phyllis should have been comfortable for some time if this was the case.



Alfred Hargrave’s grave



Jessie Jefferies’ grave

In 1933, Phyllis went to Canada staying with her brother Harold. Perhaps she visited Alfred’s cousins too. When she returned to England in 1934 she gave the address of her dear Uncle Robert Billing in Guildford ([28?] Arncliffe, Nightingale Road) where his unmarried daughters Helen and Christine remained. Christine Billing recalls: ‘Little Phyllis & I were . . . great friends. As young girls we had some splendid holidays in Cornwall, climbing over rocks, scaling cliffs & doing many things that would have horrified our



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<sup>28</sup> Christine Billing’s talk dated 24 June 1960, Coate Farm, published in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No. 21 (Autumn 2011), pp.12.

parents had they known anything about it.<sup>27</sup> This might also explain why Cornwall was chosen as the destination for Jessie and Phyllis to live.

1934 was also the year that her Uncle Charles Jefferies died in Guildford.

There are few photographs of Phyllis but the one to the right was dated 1936.

The 1939 register lists Phyllis as still living on her own at Overdale in Cornwall but Guildford was clearly a second home for Phyllis. Not only the Billings but her younger cousin Dorothy, born in 1890 (the daughter of Uncle Charles), lived there too. Dorothy had married Reginald Herbert, a local Guildford man, on 10 August 1919 and they had two girls, Joyce (born 1920) and Nancie (born 1923)<sup>29</sup>.

Phyllis's dear Uncle Robert Billing died on 24 February 1940 (aged 91). Probate was granted to his two daughters. His effects amounted to a substantial sum of £23,238. 19s 7d. (worth over £1.3 million in 2020). The girls left Guildford to live in Seaford, Sussex about eight years later. Christine Billing was a teacher at a girls' residential school—St. Winifred's, Sutton Avenue, Seaford—at the time of the 1921 census and clearly loved Seaford that was to become her final home with Helen.

Samuel Looker mentions that he corresponded with Phyllis for over 25 years.<sup>30</sup> Her letters to him, collected by the Richard Jefferies Society, date from around 1941 to 1956 and are incomplete. Phyllis writes clearly but with no full-stops or year of the letter included.<sup>31</sup> Most of the earlier letters relate to exchanges of newspaper articles whilst Looker sends books by and about her father that Phyllis does not own. He buys four of Jefferies' notebooks from her for £20 that Phyllis first mentions in a letter dated 19 July [1942]: 'I am thinking of sending four more notebooks to Messrs Hodgson but perhaps you would like to buy them as I think you purchased some I sent to their sale a short time ago, these are the last ones I have. I know you make such good use of them & appreciate them... Life is so uncertain & I have no one to leave them to & should not like them



<sup>29</sup> For more information about Charles Jefferies, see the account of Nancie D Jefferies Cator in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, No. 5 (1996), pp.7-13.

<sup>30</sup> *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields*, by Samuel J. Looker and Crichton Porteous (London: John Baker, 1964), p.xviii.

<sup>31</sup> The letters have been transcribed and the text can be downloaded from the Richard Jefferies Society website on the publications page.

to fall into unappreciative hands.’ A few days later she writes: ‘I do not like parting with these little books at all but feel they would be safe in your hands especially if you will leave them to the nation... I sometimes feel perhaps I ought to destroy them & not put them in the market at all but these times are hard for everybody.’

She was thinking of her brother Harold (pictured right) in Canada when she wrote this. He had ‘a large family of seven’ that she tried to help.

On 14 September [1942] Phyllis writes to say that she has had two cousins staying with her—no doubt referring to Helen and Christine Billing. She writes regularly to report that she is staying with them. Looker had requested information about the family and wanted to borrow a photograph of Harold, which is likely to be the one reproduced in the Worthing Cavalcade publication pictured on the previous page.

On 3 November 1942 Harold died. In her letter to Looker dated 14 January [1948] Phyllis writes: ‘you cannot think how much I still miss his weekly letters, I could always write just as I felt to him for we loved the same things.’ Christine Billing noted Phyllis’s loss too: ‘Another blow was the death of her brother Harold, for though he lived in Canada they understood one another & corresponded regularly.’<sup>27</sup> The closeness was evident for Harold also named his first child Jessie Phyllis who was born on 9 September 1907.

Phyllis and Looker continued to exchange letters regularly. Around 1943 she expressed her dislike of Henry Williamson because: ‘The comparison drawn by Williamson is more than ridiculous, can you compare a gentle mystic [her father] with a raving lunatic! I feel like writing a scorching letter to him, I have always disliked him & his writings, he is odious!’ She was obviously referring to Williamson’s comparison of her father with Hitler in his biography of *Richard Jefferies* (London: Faber & Faber, July 1937).

In September 1944 Phyllis mentioned her father’s manuscript material and letters that Looker was keen to see. She described it as ‘very difficult to read & to sort’. Over a year later Looker’s first meeting with Phyllis finally takes place. He writes: ‘I came to the cottage of Richard Jefferies’ daughter on a late November afternoon’.<sup>32</sup> Eventually Looker takes away assorted manuscript material to sort out. On 8 May [1947] Phyllis writes:

Dear Mr. Looker

It is most kind of you to send the cheque. I never thought of such a sum & hesitate to accept it, you must not send any more. I do not think that we are a mercenary family but my mother used to say that though my brother & I had a rather lofty disregard for mere cash we were very fond of the things that only money could buy!

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<sup>32</sup> *Richard Jefferies: a Tribute* (Worthing Cavalcade, 1946), p.27.

However my tastes are extremely simple, which is fortunate

I know my father was very interested in flying & felt sure it would soon develop & studied & watched the wonderful flight of seagulls, my mother has often spoken of this

I am most interested to hear of letters from my grandfather & hope you will be able to get them he was an extremely clever & thoughtful man & I am afraid the picture of Farmer Iden, wonderful as it is, stresses the rather eccentric side too much & gives rather a wrong impression.

Yes, my father spent much of his time at Sydenham with my great-Aunt Ellen Harrild, a most sweet & understanding soul, who always believed in him, her husband, great uncle Tom, was also a great help & very attached to his nephew

As to the 1887 note books I do not really know but imagine my father was able even then to write short notes him self

The Red Folio book I do not know anything about

Also I am not certain if he ever went back to Coate if so I think it was a brief visit.

I so often wish his mantle had fallen on me for while I have an internal love of nature & perhaps some of his powers of observation I have only a very halting pen

No one here really cares for walks so I am always alone but often feel his spirit with me

I like your introduction to *Field & Hedgerow* very much indeed, I think you read it to me when you were here I always think *Field & Hedgerow* a collection of lovely essays

It is nice for you to have a daughter at home housekeeping is a difficult task now especially I think for one alone

With kind regards & renewed thanks

Yours sincerely

Phyllis Hargrave

So Looker must have bought the manuscript material and papers and the cheque he sent amounted to £250 which Phyllis acknowledges with a stamped receipt on 3 July 1947.

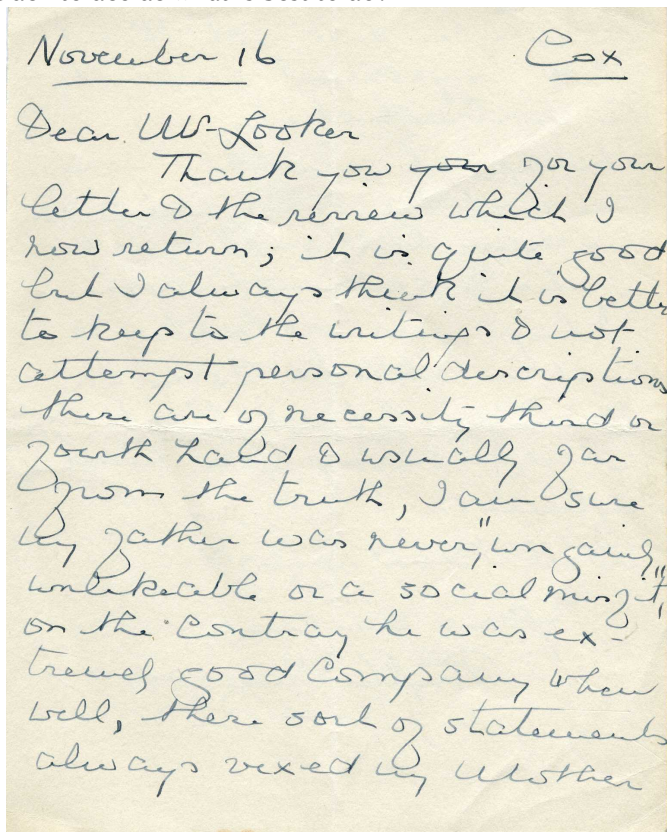
Looker sent Phyllis a copy of his edited version of *The Story of My Heart*. A letter from Phyllis dated 13 October [1947] appreciates the result and comments:

My Mother and I often talked about this book & she felt that much of it, the pessimistic parts, would have been re-written had the author lived longer for as he himself says, in spite of this experience he remained an optimist.

A review of the book must have followed. Phyllis writes on 16 November [1947] (see image of the first page of this letter below): 'it is quite good but I always think it is better to keep to the writings and not attempt personal descriptions these are of necessity third or fourth hand & usually far from the

truth, I am sure my father was never "ungainly, unlikeable or a social misfit", on the contrary he was extremely good company when well, these sorts of statements always vexed my mother though she did not think them important enough to contradict.' Looker is planning to meet Phyllis the following week if his health is okay.

Correspondence is then more related to the 1948 centenary celebrations for her father. Perhaps there is some concern about the look of her father's grave. Phyllis informs Looker on 8 March [1948] that her Uncle Robert 'paid a small sum yearly, about £2 I think, to have the grave kept in order but I do not think anything has been paid since then, except after my brother died, when I paid about £4 to have his name put on the kerb. I should really be very glad if the town could look after the grave in perpetuity & the centenary seems a suitable time to make such an arrangement. May I leave it to you and Mr. Odell to decide what is best to do?'



November 16 Cox

Dear Mr. Looker

Thank you for your letter & the review which I now return; it is quite good but I always think it is better to keep to the writings & not attempt personal descriptions there are of necessity third or fourth hand & usually far from the truth, I am sure my father was never "ungainly, unlikeable or a social misfit", on the contrary he was extremely good company when well, these sort of statements always vexed my mother

A sample of Phyllis's hand-writing from her letter to Looker.

Phyllis's next letter, 21 March [1948], is written from Guildford where she is staying with Helen and Christine again. It seems that Looker had sent her his introduction to the planned Lutterworth Press edition of *Field and Hedgerow*. Phyllis says 'Both my father & mother were very reserved. I would not care for too much of the personal note & I feel the same.' and she requests that some of the wording is removed.

The focus of her next letter is addressing where Phyllis might stay for her father's 1948 Centenary Celebrations in Swindon. A postcard from Phyllis announces on June 3<sup>rd</sup> [1948] 'I have not been able to hear of any rooms in Chisledon, Coate, or neighbourhood so it looks as if we shall not be able to come. We could be in an hotel in Swindon but do not know of anything about them & I so much prefer the country, shall be disappointed as we cannot come, in haste.' She writes on 12 October 1948:

I hope to go to Seaford on the 19<sup>th</sup> & may stay until Nov 8<sup>th</sup> & shall then be able to go to Worthing & hear your talk on the 6<sup>th</sup>. I should like to hear Richard Church at Swindon but cannot manage that. I think I told you I wrote to Clifford Dyment and found fault with his broadcast on RJ.<sup>33</sup> I enclose his reply for you to read & pronounce judgement on, it does not impress me somehow!

Phyllis's cousins Helen and Christine Billing moved to Seaford from Guildford. There is a letter from Christine to Looker dated 8 August 1948 from Dendra, Seaford. Phyllis did attend the celebrations in Worthing. The local branch of the English Association organised several events that included a wreath-laying ceremony at her father's grave on 6 November 1948 that was reported in the *Worthing Gazette* on 10 and 12 November and in the *Worthing Herald* on 12 November—all articles included the photograph (right) that shows Phyllis with Samuel Looker watching the Mayor (Councillor L. Bentall) place the laurel chaplet. Laurel was one of Jefferies' least favourite bushes but a similar wreath was put on his grave when he was buried. The words on the card read: 'Let not the eyes grow dim: look not back but forward.'



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<sup>33</sup> There was a talk on Richard Jefferies by Clifford Dyment broadcast on the BBC Home service on Wednesday 26 May 1948 at 18.30 hours.

Eulogies of Jefferies' life and work were given at an evening meeting at the Worthing Arts Centre. Looker was the key speaker. An exhibition was held in the Worthing Museum for several days that exhibited first editions of Jefferies' works, manuscripts and other items of interest that included the centenary oil-painting by Stephen Makepiece Wiens: 'The Last Chapter: Jefferies' Last Days at Goring' that was used on the cover of the dust jacket for the Worthing Cavalcade publications *Richard Jefferies: A Tribute by Various Writers* (1946) edited by Looker and dedicated to 'Jessie Phyllis Hargrave, daughter of Richard Jefferies, In Friendship and Admiration of her Loyalty to the Memory of her Father'.



'The Last Chapter: Jefferies' Last Days at Goring'  
Stephen Makepiece Wiens

Helen and Christine Billing also attended the Worthing celebrations along with Phyllis's cousin Dorothy from Guildford and her husband Reginald Herbert. It seems that they had all managed to attend the celebration in Swindon too. Christine Billing, in a letter to Looker, dated December 1948 thanks him for all he had done 'for Uncle Richard in his centenary year' and she thinks that 'the honour paid to her [Phyllis's] father has cheered her greatly & she seemed specially happy at Swindon.'

Sometime around 1949 Phyllis moved to Seaford and stayed with her cousins Christine and Helen at Dendra, Blatchington Street. Christine said: 'After some time we persuaded her to live near us, but I never felt that she was as much at home in Sussex as in Cornwall.'<sup>27</sup> Phyllis moved nearby to Wayside, Homefield Road (also in Blatchington).

Christine Billing sent Looker a photograph (below) taken at Dendra on midsummer day 1949. Phyllis is with her puppy in the garden. Phyllis mentions to Looker that her 'dear little Judy (you may remember her friendly ways) died last August [1947] & I have just got a little Corgi puppy, she is very engaging but also very wicked and destructive but she will soon grow out of those little ways. I have always had a dog & felt quite miserable without one.'



Phyllis and her puppy at Dendra, June 1949

There is a letter from Wayside to Looker dated 30 November [1949] that mentions that Phyllis and her cousins had been driving through Patcham and had hoped to find Looker's house<sup>34</sup> 'but there were so many new avenues.' She added:

I like Seaford very much though it seems very towny after Perranporth & I miss all my cottage friends & my lovely orchard, I expect the violets are out there now.

I have just been reading "The Worthing Cavalcade" & like it more than I did at first.

We have lately been to Crowborough where the occupants seemed very pleased to see us & also to Goring. I was a little startled to see the house is now a guest House but it is nicely kept & part of the garden is left much as it was when we were there.

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<sup>34</sup> Looker had moved to 11, Brae Side Avenue, Patcham, Brighton.

It seems that Phyllis and her cousins were out and about a considerable amount. She was 'glad to be near my own kith & kin, I see my cousins most days' [7 December 1949].

In October 1950, they were on holiday in Dartmoor. Christine Billing used the following photograph of a Dartmoor trip to send in a Christmas card to Looker that shows her sister Helen and cousin Phyllis next to the East Dart River at Postbridge, Dartmoor. Phyllis is standing on the old clapper bridge whilst Christine is seated and stroking a dog.



Helen Billing & Phyllis at Postbridge, Dartmoor, October 1950



Helen died on 6 February 1958 leaving effects of £25,025 2s 6d to Christine. Phyllis died a few months later on 28 November 1958. She left a Will leaving

assets of £3371 17s 2d that were to be divided in equal shares to her brother's widow and her surviving nephews and nieces in Canada.

Christine helped distribute some family items. On the opening of the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate in 1960 she donated Jefferies' writing table and chest, the daguerreotype and painting of his mother, Betsy Jefferies as a young lady (that belonged to Christine herself and was painted by another cousin), and Aunt Ellen's sampler embroidered when she was 8 years old. The year before, many letters were on sale at the Hodgson auction held on 23 April 1959. This included the manuscript of 'Ben Tubbs Adventures' and Jefferies' letters to his Aunt Ellen Harrild.

Christine died herself on 4 May 1967. Nancie, the daughter of her cousin Dorothy, was an executor for the assets of £73,022. The three are buried at Seaford Cemetery. Phyllis in plot G4, 4004 and Helen & Christine together in the next plot (G4, 4003).



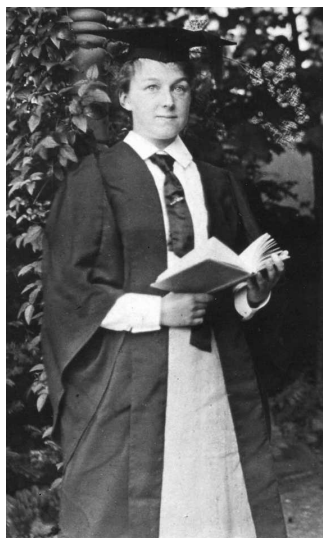
The grave of Phyllis Hargrave, Seaford Cemetery

The memorial reads: 'In/ Loving Memory/ of/ Phyllis Hargrave,/widow of /Alfred Hargrave/ daughter of/ Richard Jefferies/Died 28th November 1958,' whilst an inscription was also added to the west side of the plinth of her father's grave at Broadwater Cemetery, Worthing that reads: 'also of/ their daughter /Jessie Phyllis Hargrave /Died Nov. 28<sup>th</sup> 1958/Buried at Seaford' thus adding to the memorials of her mother and two brothers also.

No pictures of the Billing grave are available nor later photos of the Billing girls. However, Jessie, Phyllis and Harold owe this family a great debt in

being good friends as well as helpful relations and the following photographs serve as reminders of the Billings. Christine has the same facial characteristics as her grandmother Jessie, whilst Helen looks more like her father, Robert.

And whilst this might be an unkind and harsh comment to make about a person's life, Phyllis had a very easy and privileged one compared to the majority, as did her cousins Helen and Christine Billing.



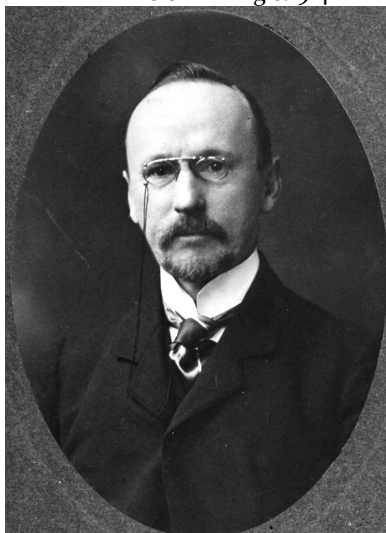
Christine Billing c.1905



Helen Billing c.1914



Sarah (Jefferies) Billing c.1910



Robert T Billing c. 1910