

An Edwardian Lady pays visits to Wickhamford

Mary Olive Marshall, was born in South Africa in 1884 and she kept a diary from 1906 until the Great War. In it she gave details of a number of visits to Wickhamford Manor to see her friends, George and Helen Lees-Milne. Olive, as she was known, recorded the trips she made with the Lees-Milne family around the area, mainly by car, and the following summary shows the way that they carried out their social engagements and lives.



Olive Marshall (1884-1977)

The first trip that Olive Marshall records was in January and February 1906 when she visited the Lees-Milnes at their house in Sandbach, Cheshire, when their daughter, Audrey, was four and a half months old. She stayed with the family for nine nights and visited the pantomime in Manchester and made a number of car journeys to surrounding villages.

1907

From January 15th to 23rd 1907, Olive paid her first visit to Wickhamford. George Lees-Milne picked her up in his car in London, which they left at 5.00 p.m. They got lost between Woodstock and Chipping Norton, had a burst tyre, which they repaired, and reached Broadway where the cars' lights failed. This resulted in the vehicle going into a ditch in the dark. It was extricated, and they finally arrived in Wickhamford at mid-night to find Helen anxiously waiting. The following day they set off at 9.00 to visit cousins of George at Lower Slaughter – the Cheethams – and got home again by 7.00 p.m.

[John Compton Cheetham, and his wife Mabel, lived in the 17 room house called 'Rockcliffe' at Eyford, Lower Slaughter.]

On 17th January, Olive had time to explore “the 14th century black and white” house. George Lees-Milne's brother, Alec, called by for lunch and a Mr Alchurch came to dine. In the evening the household participated in a mouse hunt ! The next day a visit was paid to Beckford Manor.

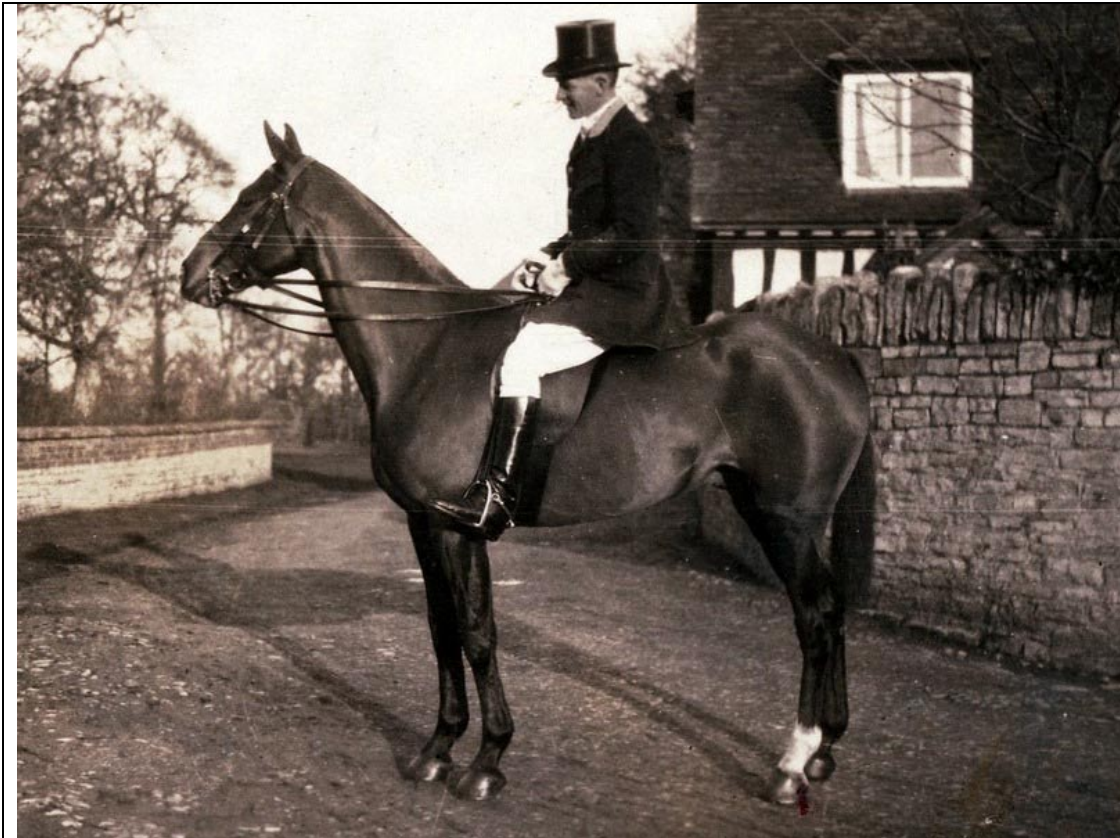


Wickhamford Manor in about 1910

On Saturday, 19th January, George was driven in the luggage cart to Honeybourne to join the N. Cotswold Hunt. On Sunday, they drove to Worcester to visit the cathedral and then on to Ribbesford, near Bewdley, to see Alec Lees-Milne and his mother, before taking 90 minutes to get back to Wickhamford – a journey of 34 miles.

The next day George drove Olive and Helen to Evesham station to catch the 8.52 train to Birmingham, where they met up with Alec Lees-Milne who escorted them to the Motor Show. This was deemed by Olive to be not very good but they did get a ride in a Delaunay-Belleville car. After lunch at The Grand they went to the pantomime to see George Roby and Millie Lindon. On the Tuesday, Helen and Olive went for tea with Mrs Openshaw and her seven children – “they do everything themselves and the eldest girl played the piano beautifully”. Olive was sad to leave Wickhamford the following day, catching the 3.07 p.m. train to London.

[James and Mary Alice Openshaw had lived at Bowers Hill Farm, Badsey, since about 1906. Married in 1890, in Warwickshire, they had lived in Montgomeryshire until their recent move to Badsey. By the 1911 census, they had nine children.]



George Lees-Milne outside of the Manor on his hunter

1908

This year Olive Marshall returned to Wickhamford in the Spring, coming by train and being picked up in Evesham by Alec Lees-Milne. It was Thursday, 12th March and after dinner they all listened to the gramophone and played bridge. The following day they drove to Tewkesbury to see the Abbey – “very beautiful” – and got home for tea. After a quiet Saturday, helping with some gardening, the household went to church “in the garden” on Sunday – “a dear old 14th century church but very smelly”.

On Tuesday, 17th March, they motored to Evesham to a meet of the N. Cotswold Hunt and after lunch went on stay at Alec Lees-Milne’s parent’s house at Ribbesford. There Olive met Mr Lees-Milne senior, who she thought was very frightening.

[In the 1911 census, a widowed Mary Lees-Milne (her husband James having died in 1908, very soon after Olive’s visit) was living with her son Alec at the 31 room Ribbesford House, together with seven servants.]



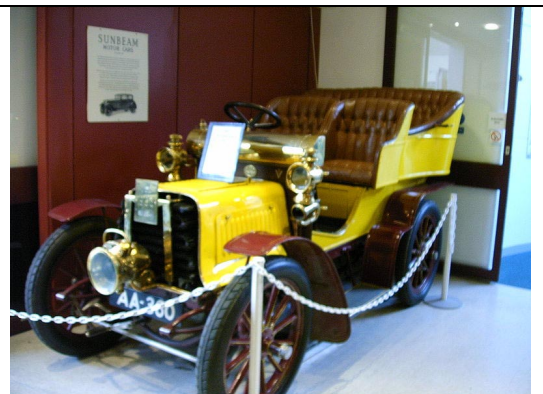
Ribbesford House, near Bewdley

On Wednesday George, Helen, Alec and Olive went in the Argyll car to Ludlow races. It was a cold day, but the event was well attended. The following day, Alec went hunting, so Helen and Olive went to Ludlow in the Sunbeam car. Olive couldn't stand the ride inside the car, so instead sat outside with the chauffeur. She returned to Wickhamford on Thursday, in the Vulcan car with Alec; George and Helen returned in the Argyll. After an early lunch they all went to the Cotswold Hunt point-to-point races. After tea "at the Swallow's in a tiny little drawing room" they went home to Wickhamford.

[Reginald Sawdon Swallow, a Director and Stockbroker in the 1911 census, lived in an 8 room house in West Bank, Broadway. He was a cricketer who played for Worcestershire at various times between 1907 and 1920 and also for England.]



An Argyll car of the period



A Sunbeam car of the period

The rest of Olive's visit was uneventful – making a lampshade, a visit to Badsey, the clergyman came to tea on Sunday – and she left on Tuesday, 24th.

[The clergyman would have been the Rev. William Allsebrook, Vicar of Badsey and Wickhamford.]

Olive returned after a couple of months and stayed with the Lees-Milne family again from the 8th to 23rd May. On the 9th, Alec came over to Wickhamford and he and George drove to Lechlade to fetch their cousin Frank Jones. As Frank was a market gardener, he and George were busy the next day, with Olive's help, washing asparagus. This continued on Monday 11th and 3,500 heads were tied. On Tuesday, Olive and Helen took Audrey with them to tea with old Mrs Ashwin and her companion. By Wednesday, Olive and Frank Jones were friendly enough to call each other by their Christian names ! They walked together to Badsey the next day to collect letters. Frank left the next day by the 9.37 train and Olive was "quite depressed at his leaving". After lunch George drove Olive and the family over "to call at a glorious place at Toddington" and on to Dumbleton.

["Frank Jones" was Francis Joseph, a son of James Jones J.P. of Lechlade Manor.]



Lechlade Manor House in about 1910

The next few days saw 4,500 heads of asparagus prepared and sent off, visitors for tea, and a trip to Cheltenham (which had to be postponed on the Wednesday when it was realised that the shops were shut). Olive thought it a nice town and the races were on. Olive went home to London on the afternoon train on Saturday 23rd May.

She returned to Wickhamford, for the third time in 1908, arriving on Friday 4th September by means of an express train to Guildford and right through to Evesham, arriving at 5.37. She was met by George and Helen and taken to Wickhamford by Helen who was driving for the first time. Olive wrote that she "quite approved of Augustus, he is dear, plain of course". *[Helen, in her diary straight after the birth of her son, referred to him as 'Augustus' or 'Gussie'.]*

On Saturday, 5th September, Helen's new son was christened in church. Apart from Olive, those attending were George and Helen, Mrs Lees-Milne and her sister – "Mrs

Pratchett ?” – the nurse and Audrey (her first time in church). None of the godfathers were present and “Richard was called in as proxy”. The baby “was called George, James, Henry – poor chap !” Mrs Lees-Milne and her sister stayed for lunch and were joined by the Cobbs.

On the Sunday, the hounds were fed and one poor chap “had to die”. Olive went to church in the afternoon with George and the Swallwells came to tea, George driving them back to Broadway later. The next day she went to Bretforton for tea with the Ashwin family, who had just had a new baby. Olive returned to her London home the next day.

[James and Clara Ashwin lived at Bretforton Manor. In the 1911 census, they had four children living at home and six servants in the 22 room house.]



Audrey, Richard and James Lees-Milne in the garden of Wickhamford Manor in about 1913

1909

Olive Marshall returned to Wickhamford on 17th June to be met by George and Helen Lees-Milne, a now much grown-up Audrey and her godson, Jim, “so nice and jolly, now aged 10 months”. There was a tennis party at the Manor the next day, but only Dr and Mrs Alexander turned up and their children played with Audrey.

On Saturday 19th May, Sir John Campbell called directly after lunch and they went off to polo at Cheltenham. George and Sir John played in a match v Cheltenham. On the way home they picked up Mr John Fisher who came to stay. They all came home “over 50 miles in Sir John’s huge Mercedes”.

The next day, after church and lunch, they took George’s car to Beckford but due to problems with the vehicle it was over two hours before they covered the ten miles. They had tea with the Scotts, Campbells and Alexanders, played tennis and stayed for dinner. George’s car refused to start so Sir John had to take them back to Wickhamford, which they reached at 1.00 a.m.

[Sir John Home-Purves-Hume-Campbell (8th Baronet) was Master of the N. Cotswold Hunt from 1906 to 1910, when he returned to his native Berwickshire.]

On Tuesday, June 22nd the group left Wickhamford at 10.00 and drove through Gloucester to Wickwar to watch Sir John play polo, but it poured with rain nearly all day. They then drove through Sudbury, Chippenham, Badminton, Devizes, Marlborough, Savernake, Hungerford, and Newbury to Reading. There they dined and took the train to London. Olive records that they drove 150 miles “some of which we did in under a minute”.

1910

It was almost a year before Olive Marshall returned to Wickhamford, arriving on Friday, 27th May to stay until 8th June. The next day she went with George, Helen and Doreen, to Ribbesford in the new Minerva car. The Lees-Milnes attended a funeral there while Olive and Doreen took Audrey to Worcester for some shopping and went home *via* Pershore.

[‘Doreen’ was Helen Lees-Milne’s sister, Margaret Doreen Bailey, who was to marry William Cunninghame in 1912.]

On Sunday, 29th May the four of them went over the Malvern Hills, *via* Pershore, Upton and Ledbury, and had lunch in Malvern with George’s friend, “Mr Holkend at Old Colverall. Such a gorgeous garden.” He gave them an awfully good lunch and they left at 3.30.

[In the 1901 census, Elinor Holland, a 61-year-old widow, her son Edward and step-daughter Julia, lived in a large house in Old Colwall, with eight servants. All three of the Holland family were ‘Living on their own means’. Elinor died in 1903.]

The following few days had little of importance to report, a lunch here, shopping there, and comments on which horses won the ‘Derby’ and the ‘Oaks’.

Monday, 6th June, was Asparagus Show day. George was disappointed to only win a fourth prize and Olive and Doreen went to see the “crippled children’s flower exhibition”. Mrs Eyres Monsell, the M.P.’s wife, “two other women and Mrs Scott” came to tea. The next day there were fearful thunderstorms all day, with the climax

from 8.00 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. Olive had never seen worse and they did a lot of damage. In the afternoon, George took them to Stratford to see Shakespeare's house. Olive left Wickhamford the following day.

[The diary for 1911 is missing.]



*George and Helen Lees-Milne in front of
Wickhamford Manor*



*Richard Lees-Milne, George and
Helen's youngest child was born in
1910*

1912

Olive had come to Wickhamford in early May and her first diary entry refers to Audrey being in bed with tonsillitis and gastric poisoning on the 13th. She was still poorly the next day, but this did not stop Olive accompanying George and Helen to Cheltenham races. Olive won 15/- on 'Le Viso'.

On the 16th May, George Lees-Milne's eye became inflamed and the following day they motored to Campden to see Mr Johnson's garden. *[Hidcote Manor]*

On Saturday, 18th May, the nurse thought that Audrey had appendicitis and "Dr B-Jones" came at 6.30 and confirmed it. He advised Helen to get a specialist from Birmingham. They eventually secured the services of "Gangee" who arrived at 12.30 p.m. but refused to operate and left at 2.00 a.m. Whilst waiting for him to come, Olive helped "Nannie" to sterilise and convert the nursery into a theatre. The next day Audrey was worse and the temporary cook got drunk – Olive and Helen discovered her. She was dismissed the next day. Mrs Lees-Milne senior arrived to see Audrey and was "most depressing".

On Tuesday, Olive took George Lees-Milne to the oculist who advised him to have the bad eye removed. The depressing week continued with thunderstorms on Wednesday and a man was killed by lightning near to the Manor.

[Harry Halford, a cowman, of Wickhamford was the man killed by the lightning. He was walking across an open field when he was struck. His hair was singed and cap burnt, while his right boot was torn off, according to press reports.]

On Thursday, 23rd May, Olive took the children out but refused to take the dogs with her. However, one, called 'Teddie', escaped and was promptly run over by the first car that passed. The driver didn't stop and left Olive with two small children and a half-dead dog to look after. George, meanwhile, was just off to Cheltenham with Helen, to have his eye removed. In the afternoon, nursery tea guests included "Mr Osnalbrook, Mrs Bonham and Mr Bannerman" and Olive's face was still swollen from crying. Helen returned in the evening to say that George's operation had been a success. He returned home the next day and Audrey was also a little better.

['Osnalbrook' was probably an incorrect spelling of Rev. Allsebrook's name.]

Little else of note was recorded during the rest of her eventful visit and she returned to London on Tuesday, 28th May.

[George Lees-Milne had injured his eye in a riding accident and its loss precluded him from service in the Great War. He was employed recruiting horses for the Army.]

On June 15th 1913, George and Helen Lees-Milne were guests at Olive Marshall's wedding, when she married a widower, Nelson Zambra, at St Andrew's Church, St Marylebone, London. Her father, George Marshall, had addresses at 6 Seymour Street, Portman Square, London and Broadwater, Godalming, Surrey.



The Lees-Milne family on the beach at Aberdovey in 1913

Acknowledgements

The diary of Olive Marshall is on line via the Marshall family web-site at

<http://wildwood.org.nz/david/p1.htm>

Some of the photographs used in this article were kindly supplied by Simon Lees-Milne and others are in the James Lees-Milne section of the Yale University web-site at

<http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/>

Tom Locke and Val Harman – June 2014

