

MELITA MARGARET

Only daughter of Walter Betts, farmer, by his wife Margaret née Paterson.

- BORN** 17 January 1877 at Gateley Hall, Gateley, Norfolk.
- BAPTISED** 11 April 1878, privately at Gateley Hall, together with her brother, Walter William Betts.
- MARRIED** 6 September 1899 at St. James's Church, Hampton Hill, Middlesex, Arthur Dashwood Howard, B.A., M.D. Brux. (Honours), M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., F.R.M.S., only child of Joseph Jackson Howard, LL.D., F.S.A., Maltravers Herald Extraordinary, by Ellen Clara née West, his wife.
- DIED** 19 February 1959 at her home, "The Mowle", Ludham, Norfolk. Ashes placed in her husband's grave at St. Catherine's Churchyard, Ludham, after cremation at Horsham St. Faith Crematorium, Norwich, Norfolk.
- 1910** Honorary Secretary of the Hampton Hill, Middlesex, branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.
Distributed prizes "in a general downpour" at the Flower Show held on 20 July by the Hampton Hill Horticultural Society, of which her husband was President.
- 1912** The distribution of prizes and awards at the Band of Hope's Annual Entertainment gathering on 15 September "was most kindly performed by Mrs. Dashwood Howard".

Melita Margaret's many interests included gardening, painting, shooting, riding and, in earlier years, angling. She also shared her husband's interest in butterfly collecting, boating, and photography and very much enjoyed car driving. The compiler well remembers her last car, a large, grey Armstrong Siddeley, which she drove with great gusto until shortly before her death.

According to her younger daughter, Nona Nivea Green, she was a Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society. The Society is unable to substantiate this as the cumulative membership lists only go up to the year 1933, after which it would be necessary to search each year individually - a task the Society is understandably not prepared to undertake.

Nona Nivea also told the compiler that her mother had experienced an extremely unhappy childhood. Melita had an elder brother, Walter William Betts, who died of diphtheria when he was only eight years old and Melita seven. Apparently Melita was frequently told by her mother, Margaret Betts, how unfortunate it was that it was the much-loved son and not the daughter who had died so prematurely. One can well imagine how poor little Melita must have felt and as her mother came from Scotland it is hardly surprising that she developed over the years an intense dislike of the Scots, a fact which caused some disharmony in the family when her son, Arthur Maltravers Dashwood-Howard, announced that he wished to marry a Scot, and indeed did!

A ship's lantern which she placed in St. Catherine's Church, Ludham, had a label bearing the following inscription:

"Given by a sailor's mother. It is lighted on Sunday evenings when the weather is rough, and prayers are offered for sailors, fishermen, keepers of coastwise lights and all who go down to the sea in ships."

The cited inscription was transcribed by the compiler in the Seventies but, according to his father, the lantern was later removed by the Vicar and put in safe-keeping to prevent it being stolen.

The compiler recalls:

"I have very happy memories of holidays and Christmases spent at Gran's home, "The Mowle". Although perhaps sometimes giving the impression of being a rather severe person, she was extremely kind to me and her other grandchildren, always being willing to fulfil any reasonable wish and to support new hobbies and interests in every way she could. Certainly she was very generous and the large, beautifully decorated Christmas tree in the Nursery with all the presents laid out beneath it was always a highlight, as was Christmas Dinner with plenty to eat, the silver sixpences wrapped in foil which were hidden in the Christmas pudding and everyone hoped to find, and the after-dinner crackers containing all sorts of exciting trinkets and jokes - including, on one occasion, little tablets which could be inserted in cigarettes, which would then gently explode while the cigarette was being smoked. Gran

had a large silver cigarette box in her drawing room for the benefit of visitors. My cousin Robin and I 'prepared' the contents of the box one Christmas and early in the New Year the vicar got rather a fright when his cigarette exploded during a visit to grandmother! Of course the incident was reported to our respective parents so we were both in rather bad trouble.

The compiler's elder cousin, Robin Maurice Dashwood Wright, recalls:

"Grannie was great. She was not to be meddled with however and this could be sensed even from a child's position. Her family name [nickname] was 'Toad' and come to think of it, she did have a passing resemblance to the pictures of 'Toad' in the story 'Wind in the Willows'. Most of the family were characters from the book. Don't know about your Dad though. Nib [Nona Nivea] was 'Rat' and Ula was 'Mole'.

"But to us kids, Grannie was brilliant. Whenever I went to The Mowle there was always magic. She would go to her magic cupboard in the corner of the dining room and produce some toy or other - often a balsa-wood glider which I would promptly lose in the tallest fir tree ('He's so careless and destructive you know ...' Thus went the script which I followed with consummate ease).

"And those Christmases - WOW - a tree as high as Nelson's Column, decorated with amazing lights, streamers, glitter fit to light the rest of your young life. And all those wonderful presents - remember the steam launches!? Our joy and excitement of good old Yule Tide was not shared by our parents however, who apparently had to be severely anaesthetised by copious draughts of gin and/or sherry to withstand the ordeal!

"However, Gran was always kind and generous to us. She had real magic and I loved her."