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THANK YOU MRS BROWN! The 'Soldiers' Rest' in Southampton during the Great War. 1914-1918. The 'Chine Helpers' in War and Peace.

On the way to France.

On August 4th 1914, Great Britain declared war on Germany. Almost at once, the troops of the British Expeditionary Force began arriving in the port of Southampton prior to embarkation for France. The city was far from prepared to receive them. Hurried camps were set up on the Common, the large tree filled park that bestrides the London road to the north of the ancient walls. The camps were primitive with few facilities and it was raining. On August 8th three ladies out for a walk, Mrs Harrison, Mrs Rowland and Miss Edith Lancaster, observed soldiers in the most uncomfortable state, some using the backs of others as desks in the rain trying to scribble farewell letters home.

Not far off stood the Avenue Hall, a spacious building of the local Congregational Church. The ladies hurried there and asked whether some shelter, provisions and comfort could be accorded the men. Before the following Sunday morning service the church deacons were consulted, the idea warmly approved, arrangements made and the hall thrown open to the men the same afternoon. To their great surprise, the soldiers, fatigued from long route marches, found writing tables, stationary, books and magazines and a warm welcome from a team of willing workers. The hall continued open day after day.¹

The men were often arriving in the port from considerable distances and sometimes had had little food for hours; once this was realised one or two lady helpers began bringing provisions and soon meals were provided regularly. The work rapidly developed in relation to need; stationery, food, tobacco, cigarettes and stamps were supplied and one day no less than 3500 letters were written, stamped and posted. Later, the Post Office took on the job selling stamps to the men. Quickly other comforts appeared, socks, shirts, gloves, mittens, vests, and boracic ointment.

The incoming troops were either camping under rough conditions or billeted in bare, empty houses taken over for the purpose. Conditions were bleak and although the national mood was enthusiastic for war, driving men into the recruiting stations, the real taste of soldiering was one of disorientation, loss of family, departure from wife and maybe small children or from distressed and loving parents. Not yet having had

¹ The details of the work done at Avenue Hall come from an undated, privately published, illustrated pamphlet costing 2/6 published soon after the end of hostilities. It was entitled 'A Record of Five Years Work. August 1914- August 1919. Avenue Hall for Soldiers and Sailors. Southampton. This comprises the report given by Rev H.T. Spencer. Hon Secretary, on the last meeting, Jan 22nd 1920. Photos by Miss Analise Robinson. The two Miss Robinsons lived latterly in an untidy house just up the road from The Chine, both spinsters left behind by the war. They were noteworthy to me as a child since, as one of them aged, she could only be led walking backwards to or from Sunday matins by her forwards progressing sister.

time to build up that companionship that service engenders, many men and boys experienced loneliness and loss as well as excitement about adventures ahead.

Regiments of all description were passing through the town exceeding the capacity of the billeting arrangements so that, at the request of a commandant, hundreds of men were sometimes sleeping in the hall as the cold, wet nights of autumn were coming on. A striking feature of army life at the time was the lack of vehicular transportation. Movement on foot was the standard procedure. Whole regiments route marched to the port, coming down the Avenue across the Common. Workers at the hall attempted to feed the men as they passed. Someone would ride north to meet the commander asking for a halt at the hall where tea, coffee and some food would be handed out during a three or five minute pause. If a seven-minute pause was granted, horses and mules could be watered too. Sometimes, when a halt could not be called, maybe a ship was waiting, the food and drink was handed to the men on the march, cups being retrieved several hundred yards down the road or returned on passing trams. Someone wrote, "It was rather sporting to carry a tray full of filled cups high up for a mounted man and encounter a restive horse or an arm too eagerly stretched out. Many helpers found it made little difference to their state of moisture whether it rained or not."

Occasionally, a whole division came through. Tables were placed along the road as far as Winn Road and portable boilers set up to deal with a whole battalion of infantry or a train of artillery at once. One day 3500 bags of bread butter and cakes were prepared over night. In July 1915 the work began at 4.30 am and ended at 1 or 2 pm. The impression made on the men was deep and echoes of gratitude kept coming back over the Channel. At Christmas, a great party was arranged for whoever was around at the time.

The letter writing was far from easy for some of the men and some helpers became willing amanuenses. On one hot day one lady was asked to write, "Dear Martha – I be a-sweating. I hope you b' aint a-sweating same as I be. So, no more at present. Your loving husband Dick." One man rushed in, gave an address on a piece of paper and was rushing out."Hey –What do you want me to say?" asked the helper."Dunno – do as you like!" and off he went. The lady rose to the occasion.

Opposite the Avenue Hall, another road turns off to the southwest. Large, even stately, mansions with handsome gardens, a bowling green, tennis courts and a cricket ground then lined Northlands Road. Near its southern end stood a house of four stories set in a large garden of great beauty spread over three layers. The upper part near the road was a rose garden. At a slightly lower elevation, behind a long Wisteria hedge, lay a long lawn leading up to the main house with a dove cote for white pigeons at one end, while, down a steep wooded incline, the grounds extended along a narrow valley bedding a stream, rockeries and a tennis court. This little valley resembled the so called 'chines' of the southern coast of the Isle of Wight, so the house was named 'The Chine' It was the property of my grandparents, Councillor, later Alderman Frederick Robson Brown JP, a business man in the city (E.Brown & Son Ltd) Maud his wife, their teenage daughter Georgina and Rodney her young brother. Alice Hurrell (née Bennet), Maud's mother, a kind and gentle old lady, also lived with them.

At some stage early in the war, my grandparents decided to open the ground floor of

their house and especially the spacious garden room at the end of the long lawn as a place for rest and relaxation for soldiers staying in the city. I am unsure when this actually began but they must have been inspired by the example of Avenue Hall, to which they both subscribed. Many of the grateful letters they were to receive from soldiers were written in 1917 so the 'home from home' was certainly fully operating in 1916. The earliest photo of a Chine soldier is dated January 1915, five months after the start of the war.

The Soldiers' Rest.

On arriving at The Chine, having heard of it doubtless from his pals, a soldier would have opened a pair of wooden gates and walked up a short drive towards the front door porch of the house. To his left, flights of stone steps led down beyond the line of wisteria trees to the lawn below with its pigeon cot and white doves. The lawn was surrounded at one end by a rhododendron shrubbery and tall oaks, and, at the other, it led up to the terrace with the large basement 'garden room' of the house beyond. This room was the main place in which the men found refreshments and company; while up the basement passage was a smaller room where there were tables for letter writing and magazines. Another room appears to have been a kitchen and a place for stores. There was a washroom and toilet. In the summer months, when it was fine, tables were put out on the terrace and lawn. Several photos show soldiers relaxing there, chatting or reading. Beyond the dovecot was a putting green where the men could practice their golf. Some photos show the men sitting in groups up the tall flights of steps and in other parts of the garden. I suspect individuals were sometimes invited to the main part of the house, perhaps for the private supportive conversations that seem to have been a speciality of Maud Brown and evidently also her daughter, both of whom also helped with letter writing. The men evidently told their wives of help received in this way and there are several letters from wives expressing thanks for the help given their husbands at The Chine.

As at the Avenue Hall, The Chine appears to have been open to the men everyday. A camera and photographer were present and the men had their photos taken and printed as postcards to send home. A large collection of these survives as a key part of this archive. The workload must have been considerable and soon many people, always described in our documents as ladies or gentlemen, participated as the "Chine helpers". The majority appears to have been women, wives of local gentlemen, who saw an opportunity to assist the men of the nation who, as became increasingly clear, were being called upon to make previously unimaginable sacrifices.

The prime initiator of these endeavours was my grandmother Maud Mary Brown, then in her prime and developing marked skills in inspiring others to join her in charitable projects, providing the basics of location, organisation and the tactful but quite forceful leadership of which her dominant character was fully capable. Married to a prominent Southampton citizen, the owner of the leading food emporium in the city centre, a councillor soon to be made Alderman and the son of a well known influential father once the Sheriff of the city, Maud was well placed to do the tasks she set herself, not only in relation to the soldiers during the war but afterwards, as we shall see, supporting major efforts in medical charity among poor children. It is important for me, her grandson, to explore these very positive characteristics of my grandmother and the contributions she made to the life of the time when charitable work depended very much on individual initiative and will.

Maud Mary Hurrell had been a country girl from Southminster, Essex. Her father and two uncles came from a farrier family but specialised in the skills of what was

becoming veterinary surgery. William Asbey Hurrell was one of the first students at the RVC London. Maud's father died young when she was still a little girl and her mother, Alice née Bennet, moved in with Uncle Willie as his housekeeper. There is nothing to suggest that there was more to their relationship than this as 'Uncle Willie' seems to have been a scholarly bachelor, a devoted Christian who travelled the country not only as an esteemed vet but also to visit and study church architecture. He was a kindly man doting on his little niece who very much returned his affection. Yet, from all accounts, the little girl was very much spoilt by his indulgence and her mother's gentle kindness. This seems to have enhanced a wilful and demanding spirit that, having a shaky un-fathered psychological base, was to become increasingly temperamental when disturbed by attempts at discipline or by frustration. In later life, this became a family problem.

At Heronsgate School, Maud became close friends with the daughter of a moneyed London socialite and was to spend much time in town being somewhat fêted in a social circle. When that lady died, or withdrew her friendship – it is not clear which – Maud had increasingly to find her own way. She met Frederick Robson Brown in the Channel Islands, where she was on holiday and he was attending a business conference, perhaps a Rotary event. They fell in love and on marriage she moved into his influential family circle in Southampton. The beauty of home they eventually created, The Chine, with its spacious layered garden and the graceful well-furnished rooms in the house, reflected the considerable taste she had acquired. Willing to share her good fortune with others, she made many friends and she showed a generous disposition to all. When Fred Brown stood as an independent in a city ward she went door to door contributing greatly to his election to the council.

Georgina, Maud's daughter, was a teenager when war broke out. Quickly she found a place in her mother's team. Warm hearted, attractive and good looking, with an open friendly manner she was a good listener, empathising easily with others and soon became a favourite among the men. She seems to have been successful in helping young soldiers with the wartime emotional distress that was often so easily ignored in those times. Letters often express in formal tones the affection soldiers had for this young girl. 'Georgie' had ability; she soon became a leading figure in the team, the secretary, initiating meetings, keeping records in her bold round hand. She helped her mother unstintingly in many ways.

Surviving documents show the manner in which Maud's team of ladies organised themselves. Most of these papers are written in my mother's bold round hand, which changed hardly at all in her lifetime. Handling these papers and other ephemera of the period seems to bring me literally into touch with those times and is a moving experience; as if the person concerned was sitting beside me. The papers show that rather than working on an *ad hoc* basis, Maud had decided that the Soldier's Rest needed to be run by rules understood by all. So on September 13th (1915?) at 3 pm the Ladies' Committee held a meeting². Maud took the chair initially but handed it over to the local vicar of St Mark's Church down the road, a Mr Bates. This seems a conventional politesse, because the church does not seem to have had any direct role

² Present : Mesdames Rider, Gibbings, Boyce, Hybart, Baber, Guy, Kinnell, Bassett, Broomfield, Mason, Edney, Fellows, Matcham, Brown, The Misses Bates. Moor Barber, E Rider, Matthews, Rogers, Rev.W.Bates.

in management, apart it seems from recruiting helpers. On a further nod to the church, The Chine rooms were known as St Mark's Soldiers' Rest. The meeting agreed rules for lady and gentlemen helpers to follow, with each one proposed, seconded and duly passed. An odd feature of the records is that while there is an extensive list of lady helpers there is not one of gentlemen, bar the treasurer, Mr Brookman. Maybe he was in charge of the gentlemen of whom there must have been several as their duties showed.

A final typewritten copy of the rules reads as follows.

Duties of Lady helpers.

1/ Hours of Duty: 12.45-2.30
(Sat. and Sun. only) 3.45-6.0
5.0-10.0

NB Ladies should be present five minutes beforehand, so as to be able to commence duty punctually.

2/ Only Lady helpers on Duty according to the Rota (or their substitutes) to serve at the Buffet (Gentlemen Helpers are responsible for the return of used china etc in the other rooms).

3/ Ladies to give at least 2 day's notice of their inability to attend at any time, when the Ladies' organizer will arrange for substitutes. In a special emergency, Lady Helpers should inform the Ladies organizer as early as possible.

4/ The Ladies' Organizer will arrange for one of the Lady helpers to be in charge each evening. The Lady in Charge to be responsible for:

1. Marking attendance of Lady helpers.
2. Collecting the 3d subscriptions.
3. Appointing one Lady helper to be in sole charge of cigarettes and stamps.
4. Arranging the work of other Helpers.
5. Reporting Breakages to the ladies' Organizer. It is expected that Breakages will be replaced or paid for by the Lady Helper concerned.

5/ It is hoped that Lady Helpers will subscribe 3d each week to meet the increases in prices and so enable the carrying on of the 'One Penny Canteen'

Ladies Organizer Mrs F. Brown. Deputy L. Organizer Mrs Hybart. Secretary Miss G. Brown.

There is then a reference "(See Rule 10)" but no further rules have been found in the typed documents. A pencil note asks "Where is rule 10?" There is a separate piece of paper hand written in another, unknown hand marked COPY. It is headed General Rules and begins surprisingly with number 7 which is a repeat of rule 4 above. Rule 8 reads "That the sub-committee arrange for monthly 'notes' of helpers, both of ladies and gentlemen, to be pasted up on a special board, and their names entered in separate attendance books, together with the time of duty. Then we find 9/ that all vacancies in the present notes of helpers shall be filled by members of the congregation of St Mark's and all communications from them to the Committee shall be addressed to the President and given to the Secretary. And finally 10. That the Lady Helpers elect from their number a Ladies' Organiser, who shall be responsible for the management of the Refreshment buffet and for making out the monthly rota of Lady Helpers. To assist her the Lady Helpers shall also elect a Deputy Ladies Organiser, and a Secretary; the

latter to keep the minutes of their meetings which shall be held quarterly before the meeting of the General Committee or when summoned by the Ladies' Organiser. So, all becomes clear.

The Gentlemen Helpers also had a list of Rules.

Duties of Gentlemen Helpers.

1/ Hours of Duty. Weekdays. Except Saturday.	6-8 pm 8-10 pm
Saturdays	4-6 pm 8-10pm
Sundays	4-6 pm 7-10pm.

2/ At the commencement of each afternoon or evening, be responsible for the Recreation and Quiet Rooms being heated, lighted and ventilated. Games available in the Recreation room and Writing paper in the Quiet room; also prepare for use the small tables and chairs in the Refreshment Room.

3. Return to the shelf provided, all used china from the recreation and Quiet rooms, and regulate the heat.

4/ Explain to the Guests when necessary that the recreation Room is the place for Music, Concerts and Games; and the Quiet room for Writing and Reading, and that there are pegs provided for coats. In the events of the Quiet Room being full, the small tables in the Refreshment Room may be used for Writing but not for Games.

5/ At 9.30 pm extinguish the heating apparatus, put away the games, tidy tables and chairs, so that the floor can be properly swept next morning, close the windows and doors, and put out all lights. This applies to both Recreation and Quiet rooms and to the small tables in the Refreshment room.

6/ It is hoped that all Gentlemen Helpers will contribute 3d.a week to meet the increase in prices and so enable the '1d Canteen'³ to continue.

The refreshment room, as we have seen, was carefully managed along with the games and rest rooms and my mother as secretary retained the several cashbooks and accounts from these operations. Money matters were checked and audited by Mr Brookman, 'Brookie', a family friend, possibly a former employee at E. Brown and Son. He was known as 'Tresh' for treasurer and the account sheets are all duly checked and signed by him at the bottom. He was clearly both careful and meticulous. 'Treshe' remained a close family friend into my childhood, and I remember him well.⁴ The accounts are worth look giving detailed information about how the Soldier's Rest was managed; the commodities provided the men and their costs as well as the balance sheets of the project over several months, particularly 1917-8 (See Appendix)

The Soldiers Rest was open to all troops and it seems that the existent visitors book may not cover all parties that came to The Chine. Unlike the Avenue Hall that

³ That is a canteen where something can be bought for one penny, i.e. very cheap.

⁴ See 'A Tale of Two Houses'.

specialised in troops passing through the town The Chine seems to have received most usually those who were billeted here for some time. In particular, we find the signatures of numerous signallers of the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). It seems there was a signalling school in the town training the men prior to departure for France. Signallers were particularly important for the artillery in the days without wireless. They often crept up in front of the trenches towing their telephone lines behind them and lay out spotting for targets for the guns and noting the origin of enemy fire. This was a dangerous job as many accounts have told. After training, signallers appear to have been billeted in austere 'forts' near Fareham prior to crossing to France.

When the Americans began arriving, they too found their way to The Chine although they left few signatures. One fascinating piece of card provides the berth number and ship's name whereby the man concerned reached Britain. It must have been his berth allocation card. His name and address are scribbled upon it as he presumably hurriedly left it as his calling card at The Chine.

A particularly noticeable feature of these signatures is that they are almost all of 'the other ranks', no officers and few NCOs. Officers would have of course had their messes elsewhere in the city, perhaps in hotels. The men would have been without comfort had not ladies such as Maud and her helpers not strode on stage to help. However commanding Officers were well aware of what was happening and there are several letters of recognition from a commandant to Maud (see further below).

Letters from Soldiers.

Apart from the Avenue hall pamphlet, the account books, details of rules and numerous portrait and group photographs, the little archive contains a bundle of mostly hand written letters almost all of them expressing gratitude for the kindness experienced at The Chine. Clearly, whatever went on there meant a very great deal to the men. Often referred to as 'a home from home' The Chine clearly provided the men with a homely respite from billets, military training and the oncoming transfer to the front, which, after all, was a mere stretch of water away.

These are more than mere thank you letters written to a rather upper class grand-dame who 'did them good' – as an American recommendation was to say. There was heartfelt feeling here, gratitude for comradeship and caring feminine warmth that is often not only expressed by one man but also sent by several signing the letter together. The language, although markedly polite and respectful in the manner of the time, has a personal edge, clearly speaking to a familiar and caring person. Some of the letters have been filleted (probably by Georgina); only the expressions of gratitude remain as if the rest of the letter had been too personal or involving confidences that had best be removed. Others remain lengthy and full of description. Most are addressed to Mrs Brown but several quite intimate ones are for Miss Brown. Fred comes in for thanks too now and again. Some of the most moving come from wives whose husbands had either been killed or who were far away at the front. The husbands had told them of The Chine and they wrote to say thank you for the treatment shown to their men there.

On Active Service.

Letters from men on active service, especially perhaps from France were all subject to careful censorship. Several of the surviving envelopes are stamped 'Passed by Censor' and some are official, printed envelopes subject to censoring at the base rather than regimentally at the front. These Green printed envelopes had several notes for guidance on the front cover. "Correspondence in this envelope need not be censored Regimentally. The contents are liable to examination at the Base. The following certificate must be signed by the writer: - *I certify on my honour that the contents of this envelope refer to nothing but private and family matters – Signature, name only* --"And also,"(*Several letters may be forwarded in this Cover, but these must be all from the same writer. The cover should be addressed in such case to the Base censor*)".

Of course, all this censoring meant that few references to the actual struggle at the front are given in the letters. A few hints sidle through and the longest letter is actually a wonderful description of Christmas in the trenches and the kindness of a junior platoon commander. This intense censorship contributed to the strange failure of people at home to understand the extraordinary privations and horrors to which the men were subjected at the front. Only after the war had progressed for many months did any realisation of the terrors of trench warfare penetrate the public conscience. There are of course many accounts from officers of these events and they form a background to what our correspondents with The Chine were going through.⁵ It appears from these letters that the signallers of the RGA were billeted at the forts in the hills behind Portsmouth before being drafted to France and several letters come from there. They all seem to have felt much deprived after the joys of The Chine.

Gunner W A. E Knight, in straightened circumstances at Fort Fareham awaiting a draft to France, writes on Sunday November 4th 1917. He is sorely missing the puddings he enjoyed at The Chine and regrets that "Pudding cannot be sent by post" in the parcels he has received. He compares the various canteens at the forts such as Wallington with Fareham coming off worst. He signs off "The Pudding Boy", so evidently his love of such a dish was well known.

Herbert P Hains appears from a surviving Chine photograph to have been a pleasant easy-going fellow. The topics he covers reflect the family atmosphere the Browns created around the men when they were at The Chine and the very personal interest they took in them. With some imaginative spelling and punctuation, he wrote his first letter to The Chine from Fort Elson near Gosport on Sept 16th 1917 when it seems a part of a draft about to go to France. He was replying to a letter from Mrs Brown and thanking her for an invitation and the "pleasures we have had at your beautiful garden --- I only think that my own home could give me greater pleasure therefore --- my gratitude and thanks are more than words can express. --- Only this morning on returning from church some of the boys were saying how they would miss their Sunday tea (i.e. at The Chine). With regards the shooting test we had quite a nice time ---Sgt Hailes choosing the best range we did well, all the boys were so sorry when their 15 rounds were over as it was not till then that they began to like rifle firing, we all wished there were another 15 rounds to fire. Sgt Hailes displayed many kindnesses towards me during his short stay here. It was so good of him getting my brother off duty on Tuesday to see to my sister, as I know how upset she was. So glad to know she came back to The Chine after we left, as I know it would cheer her up. Well and

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my dear little friend Rodney is terribly busy. I can imagine him doing his home lessons and not hidden away down the rear garden not to go to bed – ah well- I shall often think of the night we went after nuts tell him and hope the nut on his bicycle is all right now. I shall be looking forward to his letter tomorrow. Have to stay in the fort for today we have a few tomatoes so I shall make a few sandwiches and as we have to have all meals outside fine weather we shall have to try and imagine we are on your beautiful lawn but I am afraid these big basins we use here will end our imagination. - -- Expect to leave on Tuesday - will write when settled. It will be best not to write until you here from me again.”

Hains next wrote to the Browns on Christmas day 1917 from the trenches. Again made colourful by numerous spelling eccentricities, his long account of Christmas lunch in a dug out, pencilled in a light clear hand, makes an intriguing read.

France. Christmas Day.25/12/17.

Dear Mr and Mrs Brown

Well here we are, Christmas morn which as come with a fine clear and bright sunny morn making us all feel quite light and happy apart from all our separations which is against our grain on Xmas time. Well to begin with, I must thank you so much for this most delightful parcel, which I have just opened. It is really kind of you all, and so thoughtful, candels and soap which are so difficult to get out here, we get plenty of army issue soadr and now about this fairy cake it is really looking to nice to eat, with its fluffy edges, but we shall have some for tea.

I am pleased to say there are every prospects of a good day having begun with an excellent breakfast of Cold boiled pork, bread butter, tea and plenty of it about 3/4^{lbs} of pork each, which was really lovely.

Dec 26th/12/17.

Well here I am again we are living in a dugout with two Sgt, one which makes me quite a good father and is awfully deasent well he compelled me to give up writing in his company yesterday morning as they wanted all to chat and have a sing song so he took my pad away. I have only just by luck found it again so I shall carry on with the proceedings of our dinner that had been well arranged by out section officer a Mr Paget son of Bishop Paget of Preven and a relative of the old Bishop Paget of Oxford. Well he is one of the funniest chaps one could ever meet, and as I have not told you in open letter before, but I have left the Bty⁶ and am some miles forward very near the line there are only about 20 of us up here and have a fine time Mr Paget being our officer and visits us every day calls us his fighting section and considers everything should come forward to us anything we want he gets it for us and looks after us well even to sending us loads of fire wood up well of course the other officers don't quite like this so poor old chap he does get into some miserable scrapes with one and the other but still he carries on quite unconcerned. So for dinner he got us a big rib of beef about 18-20lbs a piece of shoulder of pork about 10^{lbs} and gets both roasted with apple sauce, cabbage, mashed potatoes, HP sauce, and served up at 12.30 sharp. He arranged it in a dugout big enough for all to have dinner together at 12.15 came 3 gallons of Ale for the men and didn't they cheer.

Well the Sgt taped the first jar and he, Mr Paget, drank the first cupful with a short address, in which he said he was tired of the war, he had been in the infantry 18

⁶ Battery

months out here and wounded and came out again with a commintion⁷ when he joined us 2 months ago, but still he said he had read of the latest trouble in Egland about Mr Lloyd George and he thinks he is right not to give in to Germany's offer of peace, which was cheered and seconded by a Bm⁸ who said that he had been out here three years and had a family of five children and he felt shure that although we chaps grumble and grunt out here, about peace weather at Germany's offer or not if votes were given to the tommys in France weather please at Germany's proposals or at ours the tommys would vote to carry on until he is beaten to the ground and the three years of hard fighting and the avenge of our dead in the field brought to a great Victorious Peace. Well that put the hat on it cheers and 'here here' like a lot of jubilations, a Sgt finished the toast with the best of luck to all out dear friends and families at home trusting the new year to bring our Victorious Peace, and by next Xmas that all may be home again. I tell you it brought many tears to several of the married men, but were soon forgotten by a good heaped dinner two servings and then hot pudding and sauce until we all felt to full to eat any more was impossible.

Of course, the Ale was gong rather low the men getting rather lively so Mr Paget gave a song which continued all the afternoon with deserts of nuts, dates, apples, cigars and chocolates sent by Bishop Paget of Priven.

My friend and I being TT⁹ left the company to attend to our duty on the telephone in our own dugout a few yards away.

Then 4.15 tea you would have laughed we couldn't eat our plum pudding from dinner. And now tea, well it was served a thick slice of bread about to butter 1/2 cheese; we all sighed for it could not be eaten. I felt if a pin was stuck into me I should go pop BANG with that in comes the 2^{sgt} and the officer quite gay for a cup of tea. We had a good fire and the tea nice and hot then I brought out my cake you sent me and offered it all round. We were still drinking tea and just managed half the cake so you see how hungry we all were. It was realy delcious, and my friends told me I was to convey to the sender of the cake their Compliments and wishes of peace and prosperity n the New Year.

Well tea over and all feeling a little happy we began whist, patience and crib, but ended in all the songs we knew from Home Sweet Home to Rag time Cowboy Jo. Then they began to miss the accompaniment so we rigged up a sort of gramophone with the telephone getting the chap at the exchange to take interest and listen in at the receiver, he got quite excited and returned the compliment with a song from his end we keeping the prestle switch down heard it all right and quite filled the space for a gramophone that continued for some three hours with selections of whistling and songs through the comb and piece of paper.

Then came the tales that made you shudder, some made you weak with laughter, one poor chap told us of how after the war he is going to be married and instead of building a house he is going up to some bank and dig a few dugouts, one for the wife, one for himself, one for the children, one for the pigs, one for the fowls, all in a row and get a few boxes to sit on, an old petrol tin with the side out as a washing bowl and an old bucket with a few holes in for the fire place, two long poles and two short ones nailed together four legs and some netting wire over it for their beds. Now what do you think of that for a happy home. My poor sides were sore with laughter the way it

⁷ i.e. commission

⁸ i.e. Bombadier

⁹ Teetotallers – i.e. not taking alchohal.

was all explained and arranged. Oh and a little camouflage to conceal how any time he wanted to get out without being noticed by his wife (oh ah oh)

Well 9.30 came supertime cold pork roast then bread and butter and some cocoa et Lait ¹⁰ very delicious with a peppermint drop afterwards or as some of our boys call them (BULLS-EYES).

Well I think I must change the subject now and turn to your letter of 15/12/17 which as usual I was very pleased to receive the other contents being so pleasing. I really must thank you for the real perfect photo of dear old Chine it is a beautiful photo I have looked at it so many times since I have had it and thought how many times I have enjoyed myself on that very lawn. I also notice the new doors which I must say look exceedingly smart, Ah but how quiet it all looks how beautiful and peaceful after all these ruins over here, though the trees are all bare it is a beautiful photo and will go nicely with the other three I have. Please thank the Rev H R Bates for his very kind wishes for Christmas and the New Year also return the compliments with the greatest of prosperity for the Church and Parish in the New Year.

I am so glad to hear you are having the old boys up for Christmas and trust you had an excellent time and favourable weather Out here it rained Xmas eve, the sun shone all Xmas morn, the afternoon sleet, the evening 4 ins snow and thick blizzard.

Well I expect you will be surprised to here that if all goes well I hope to be in England for 14 days in about 6 or 8 weeks time perhaps before if a bit of luck comes this week and continues for a while. It will be delightful to be able to see you all again.

I hope you are quite well as it leaves me at present after a nasty cold in the head.

Well I think I have told you all now for present. I do hope you will not be boar with this lot but having a few green envelopes, I thought you would be pleased with our Christmas History.

Well thank Miss Brown so much for her kind letters. I will write in a day or so again.

I hope Rodney had a good Xmas and a full stocking. Did he hang it up this year?

Well I really must now come to a close to catch the mail so with my best wishes and many thanks to all I must conclude

Yours very sincerely Herbert P Haines

A very different perspective comes from a group of four letters written between 1917 and 1928 by a skilled pianist and accompanist who will have played at many of the impromptu concerts arranged for the men at The Chine and Avenue Hall and who probably accompanied my mother singing. His first letter comes from Fort Fareham after leaving The Chine and a few days before embarkation for France.

Gunner C.G Weller 160407 writes: Dear Mrs Brown, As there is only limited writing accommodation here and no one rushing about looking after our comfort as at The Chine, I am writing this little letter on the wall, so you must kindly excuse deficiencies. – We have been moved here at very short notice from Fort Elson, but I think we are here for a few days, at any rate! - I am so sorry to say it will be impossible for us to come to you this weekend as no passes whatever are being granted from here.Au revoir was so much easier to me than Goodbye last Tuesday – I am afraid I made a rotten little speech, but believe me, Mrs Brown, since you and yours have made me so very welcome at The Chine, and have done so much for me, it has been as nearly at Home to me as any place except my own could possibly be. - Army life now is a dreadful hardship to me, and I don't mind admitting

¹⁰ i.e. milk- from the French – 'au lait'.

it. – It dos not do for me to think too much of The Chine, for I get so depressed that I don't feel up to any duties whatever. Our next meeting must be postponed until after this beastly business is disposed of, and I need hardly say I look forward to seeing you and Southampton again only second to being reunited to my own little family. – We have been much on the go since Tuesday. We have “smelt powder” in the sense that we fired 15 rounds each on Wednesday and the Sergeant may have reported to you that the results were very good. – Yesterday and today have been nothing but marching to and fro for medical inspection, change or rather reduction of kit, pay books (no money for some time I fear), identification discs, haversacks, water bottles, bandoliers etc. The march with equipment this afternoon from Fort Elson to Fort Fareham was nearly the last straw to break your young camel's back! Oh dear, I wish I were at The Chine now, but it can't be helped. – We are forbidden to disclose any knowledge we may have, or think we may have, of future movements, so you must pardon my omission on this score. ---I shall never forget your kindness, and know your good wishes go with me.

Yours very sincerely and gratefully Cyril Weller.

11/10/1917.

Cyril Weller's next letter is from France. On Tuesday 30th October.

My dear Mrs Brown (and family), I must apologise for not writing you before but I find myself in such a veritable Inferno that letter writing seems impossible. I never conceived how really terrible War really is until my arrival here – I have been very near to death, and my steel helmet has justified itself more than once. I am not doing any signalling but am helping serve my gun to the best of my uninstructed ability. Carrying heavy shells through a lake of mud with dozens of guns blazing away around you is a very different life from the dear old Chine, which we all miss more than we can possibly express to you dear good friends. I have been parted from friend Nelvey (spelling?) whose battery number is 24 (my address is 160457, Siege Battery 284, BEF. France)- I should not think there is a Piano for miles, so even Harry Lauder's ¹¹ Pianist (excuse my conceit) must content himself with thinking music instead of playing it. Heigh ho, please God I shall get back to it some day. Well, dear friends, I must close sending you all my best wishes, and once more most sincere thanks for all you have been to me. ---- Should be glad to hear from you anytime. --- Believe me yours gratefully and sincerely, Cyril Weller.

On November 15th 1917, Gunner Weller was in a more cheerful mood. Maybe this is because he is writing to Georgie in a very friendly way recalling common cultural interests. Georgie played the piano and had specialised in recitation gaining a bronze medal for elocution. Clearly, they had had lots of chats together for he addresses her as “My dear Miss Georgie” and thanks her for her letter, which must have been very chatty. “How do you find time to write such splendid letters? Keep it up for goodness sake! I have been truly touched by your and your dear mother's solicitude for my welfare and am pleased to say I am beginning to settle down to the life, the mud, the work and other circumstances. Granny's soap has had to be used though I had hoped to retain it as a keepsake; still it is doing good work.” He jokes about the new troops coming to The Chine and as for the Americans -”well, didn't I tell you they were a grubby unshaven lot?” He congratulates her on her Bronze medal and tells her. “Still,

¹¹ The famous Scots singer and music hall entertainer of the period.

just go on being your charming self, and follow your own bright principle of “Carry on”! He regrets he has not been able to help her with her music and tells her of the artistes he has “played for” (i.e. accompanied); – Miss Violet Oppenshaw, Mr Charles Tree, Mr Walter Hyde. “Selwyn Driver”, the man at the concert she has mentioned, “is a personal friend and I have often nearly died of laughing at his sketches. Did he do that ‘Hush not a sound’ (Bang Bang!)?” He regrets that a collective letter of thanks to Maud and all at The Chine was not well written ‘due to circumstances’. He ends” Yes, we can procure nothing here and if you can send me some writing material I shall be very glad to have it. Thanks for the offer.” As a PS he adds –”A kiss for Granny – I know she will not be offended”

We do not know whether Weller corresponded further with The Chine during the war. There are no further letters in the extant collection until 1928, ten years after the end of the war, when he is back into his musical career and writing on headed notepaper. The heading is ‘The Weller-Langton Orchestras and Concert Direction’ with his name to the right addressed at 1 Ravensbroune Road, Bromley Kent and his partner’s name to the left; Arthur Langton, MBE of Chiswick, (violin). Down the left of the page is a column entitled ‘Orchestras, Dance Bands and Artistes of every description’ for concerts, banquets, dances and cabarets at ‘Society and Diplomatic Receptions’ etc. He seems therefore to have gone into the business of supplying musical entertainment on quite a big scale. There are two letters of the same date, 11th November 1928 (the Armistice Day of red poppy fame). The first to Mr Brown suggests that the enclosed letter might be placed in the local newspaper if it so pleased. He says “Things go fairly well with me – I am not particularly rich or down right poor but just carrying on quite comfortably with the same happy family – just the wife and little daughter who was a baby of two years when I was quartered in Southampton.” The enclosed letter intended for the ‘Echo’ but addressed to ‘Mr Brown, Mrs Brown and family’ reads as follows: “The 10 years anniversary has inevitably called up memories of ‘SOUTHAMPTON’ to my mind and I would like to feel that at least one of your ‘khaki Protégés’ sends again his sincere thanks to you and to other good friends in Southampton for the great and very successful efforts you made in those years for the comfort of Tommies who trained there. What fine cheery times we had in the garden of The Chine? What excellent little concerts we had at the same happy rendezvous. Also at the Church Hall at the corner of the Common! Also at the other hall down the road beyond the ‘Stag Gates’? Many of the boys who enjoyed your hospitality and that of other Southampton residents are now no more: some returned to ‘Civil’ life crippled or blinded, some found themselves ‘out of a job’ and with another Campaign to fight, some returned safe and sound and have successfully picked up the threads of commercial or professional life; but I think all, were they able to do so, would like to pay a tribute of grateful and appreciative remembrance to the kindness displayed to them by you and your fellow townsmen during their passing sojourn in Southampton. Never was individual and collective hospitality and encouragement better offered or more appreciated.”¹²

One of the worst horrors of the Great War was the use of gas on the battlefield. **15029 Gunner Fred Newton** (spelling uncertain in script) of 160 Signals Battery suffered this fate and, soon after the war, wrote about it to Mr and Mrs Brown from the SS Cormorant in the port of Antwerp (envelope dated 22.Sep 1919).

¹² We do not know whether this was ever sent to the Echo or otherwise publicised

“This is a very belated letter from one of the boys who once enjoyed the hospitality of The Chine in the summer of 1917. I was included in the draft who left Southampton in the middle of September and wrote o you once. Sometime, later, about November I believe, I received a very nice letter, which Miss Georgina wrote in return mentioning amongst other things that two boys, one whom I remember was Hildredth, was gassed. --- I met many of the old S.H.S.D boys in the subsequent few months, one or to of whom you may remember, Malory for one, Manuel, Costain and Oh! Too many to go through.

Manuel, who you may remember, was an exceptionally tall boy who played cricket for A company, seemed to follow me around. I met him first in St Omar I believe, later I came across him several times on the Somme last year, but I was amazed when, after being gassed myself last August, going to hospital in Glasgow and eventually to Crownhill (spelling?) convalescent Camp, Manuel as camp orderly took my name and particulars in the usual way on entering the Camp.

While in France, my battery 160 Signals, was the one to which the former Sgt Major Oakes of 'Q' and latterly 'D' company, though reduced to Sergeant, was sent.¹³ In the battery, he had nothing to do with signals. Eventually he was wounded in the thigh in a particularly fierce ‘strafe’ of Fritz one night in the period following the retreat in March 1917. That was outside a little village named Bresk, lying just off the Albert-Amiens road. What terrible days some of those names recall.

Another of the old “Chine” adherents, Albert Cork, was also gassed the same night as I, though I think that he suffered a far worse dose than I, poor lad. Through being gassed, more than anything, I was demobbed in February this year, returned to business, but found that my chest would not stand city air (my home is in Manchester) and on doctor’s advice I went to sea. Now I am assistant steward on a ship making a fortnightly trip between Manchester and Antwerp and I find that the sea air has improved my health, as I believe nothing else could. Of course, I am not feeling my old self but that will come in time I suppose.

On reviewing my stay on the other side, (and though it was not very long we had a rather rough time) I am thankful that I got off so lightly. An elder brother, whom I met at??? (spelling?) near Ypres in November 1917 and who had been in France since November 1914 with Kitchener’s army, went through with just one trivial wound and a younger brother, in the 'Young Soldiers', did not land out until it was over. All three of us (there are no more) made home quite safely. Now that it is all over and by many people almost forgotten, it may seem unusual for me to write to you now. The last time I was home, while rooting through some old letters, I came across one which you sent to mother accompanying a photograph of the draft I was in. I had not seen it before and that was what prompted me to write, though it has been my intention times uncountable.

I have often wondered what the average Tommy’s life would have been without the kindness which was to be met with at such places as ‘The Chine’ but more particularly there, a far as RGA Signals were concerned anyway. Thinking over old

¹³ Clearly there is an untold story here.

times with one of my comrades of those days whom I dropped across in Manchester recently, the question came; "Do you remember 'The Chine'? They were good to us there." I do and for the sake of those memories please accept the very best wishes and thanks of yours very sincerely

Fred Newton. (33 Zachariah St. Howard St.??? Manchester)"

There was a policy of recruiting troops from specific towns so that they all served together. While this certainly created comradely units of 'Pals' the results could be disastrous when the toll of war eliminated virtually complete regiments at a go leaving a whole town profoundly grief-stricken at the loss of most of its men. The men always found strength in the presence of comrades and, in some letters; the importance of having a friend serving in the same unit is mentioned. This is especially true of **Gunners Roper and Tyrer**, old friends from the same town, both married and with families. In his several letters, Roper always mentions his friend Tyrer so that the letter is virtually a joint one. The first of four letters from Gunner Roper is to Georgie. It is a mere end-script as the main part of it has been removed – presumably being in some way confidential. He has just left for France," We all felt leaving dear Mrs and Mr Brown and yourself yesterday and shall never forget all your great real kindness to us all while in Southampton. The sweet sound of the click of 'The Chine' gate is still ringing in our ears."

On February 17th 1918, he is ashamed at not replying sooner to Maud for "your most beautiful helpful letter to Gnr Tyrer and myself at Christmas time. It is truly kind of you to take this continued interest in we of the RGA and we should indeed feel really hurt if you even thought of placing some other boys in front of us. ---We in our dug-out often and often ask, 'How would you like to have been at The Chine today?' Yes Mrs Brown, they were happy days, truly the thoughts of them must make you and yours most happy." His wife is a 'brick' and she and son are doing well at home in Westcliff while; "We two old friends are both very well and going on I can say A1, and really appreciate much being together, for we share (each) other's joys and sorrows. It makes such a difference being with those one knows. --- We are both very fit and as happy as position allows --- This is Sunday, it is hard for us to keep going with the days and our mind will go back to your beautiful garden on Sunday evenings, they were perfect and I do hope it may be our good fortune to once again be with our beloved ones to spend an hour or so with you there."

On 11th 1918 with the war at last on the wane, Roper again tells Maud she is not forgotten and how they remember happy hours spent at "our Chine." He is again quite possessive and asks her not to forget that the boys of his draft were "your first love"! He continues, "We have been out just on a year and with every confidence hope to be home in a week or so for leave. Both Gnr Tyrer and myself have kept wonderfully well, our worst trouble seems too be home sickness, and somehow or other time does not seem to heal that, but much has been to our favour and its been a great joy to have kept together. We are all delighted at the news and do feel now we may claim to have the end in sight. --- We know how thankful you feel at this great turn of the tide, for the lads will we feel sure soon start marching not down from the Common but up to the Common."

On February 26th 1919, Gunner Roper again writes to Maud from 115 Hamlet Ct Rd, Westcliff to say he cannot return to civic life without writing in thanks for all he

received at The Chine: “memory of which while out the other side served to brighten the rather rough days and nights, now thank God for ever past.” He had just got home after demobilisation but “Was sorry to leave my dear friend Gnr Tyrer with the Battery but hope he will soon be as happy as I in his return.”

Mr Roper never forgot his experience of The Chine. During World War II, he wrote again twenty-four years after the war, at Christmas time 1942 from 14 Alexandra Rd, Southend, once more recalling his experiences at The Chine and wishing the Browns well. The note in the archive accompanies a small gift and reads “Mr, Mrs and Miss Brown were so very kind and beautiful to we lads training for 1914-18 war at Southampton that at this Holy season when our dear country is again facing so nobly its dangers, one at least would write to say Thank you. And as I know you have some good object particular to your own hearts may I send oh such a tiny gift towards it. --- B. Roper of R.G.A.

Indeed the memories of those who had been at The Chine were often long. A cutting from the Southern Daily Echo saved among the letters, is headed “He came back to say Thank you”. “The hours Mr Wright spent in the gracious house and beautiful garden became some of his most treasured memories--- Last week, 32 years later, Mr Wright, who lives at Wally Range, Manchester, was in Southampton again. He had tea at The Chine and, at last, told Mr and Mrs Brown what their war time hospitality meant to him.” He told the Echo” I am hopelessly lost to express properly what kindness given with such sincerity means to one who treasures kindly actions” That must have been in 1949 or 50, the cutting has no date on it.

Not everyone had a tough time. On June 13th 1918, **Horace C Higham** of 203 Siege Battery could consider himself a fortunate man. “The weather is simply beautiful and the (French) country is looking at its very best. We are not in the present activity but are still snugly ensconced in the village we arrived at three months ago. It is quite a pleasant spot with many trees. We live in the cellars of the ruined houses, which, although inclined to be damp, can be made comfortable enough. Our dwelling has attached to it a fine garden, which has been stocked, quite recently, with all kinds of fruit trees, raspberry canes, currants of all kinds, strawberries. There is the promise of a lot of fruit but the chances of any of being allowed to ripen are rather hopeless. We rather consider ourselves the occupiers, if not the owners of this delectable property, but of course, we cannot keep anybody out, especially as there are countless ways into the garden. We have given up all hopes, although I have my meals there from breakfast onwards. So you see we do not spend our whole time in mortal combat, as a matter of fact my sole lethal weapon is nothing more deadly than a telephone exchange. Not that I am thirsting to get at the foe, as you know, I am a man of peace and devoted rather to the liberal arts.”

Sydney Crevald writes to Georgie “Dear Miss Brown” on 18th January 1918.” At present we are out on rest, some little distance behind the line and here have been various other batteries here as well and The Chine has been well represented – Bdrs Lea and Batterell and Gnrs Anderson, Booth and Bradbury are amongst those whom you would probably remember. We came out on rest the day before Xmas and had a fairly decent time for Xmas. We had a good Xmas dinner and officers arranged a concert for the evening so we enjoyed ourselves as much as possible. The weather has been rather bad since Xmas. We had about 3 weeks hard frost and snow, which broke

a few days ago. The day before yesterday, we had a terrible rainstorm. The wind and rain were terrific and last from the afternoon until next morning with the result that a lot of the low-lying country round about is flooded. Today the snow fell heavily all the morning and it has been bitterly cold, it changed to rain in the afternoon and is feeling slightly warmer now.”

He tells her that he tried to write before but was so cold ”my fingers were too cold to hold the pen. I know it will please you to know of the ways in which your efforts are still effective out here. I have met signallers in many strange places under strange circumstances and wherever it is I can almost always count on one at least of them who has spent pleasant evenings at The Chine and that is sufficient introduction and soon we have forgotten our surroundings in exchanging recollections of those happy days”

One of the more unusual documents in the collection, returned duly signed from a **2nd Lieutenant J.E Nichols** then serving in France (Field Censors pass on the envelope), is a declaration of acceptance of the duties of a godfather. The original document is in the form of a certificate written in Georgie’s hand. It reads:

“I, the undersigned, hereby declare that I have promised to become the sole Godfather of - Pompom - Jellicoe, and I agree to accept all responsibilities appertaining to such office. I bestow upon my Godson the name of -- Pompom – (it being my privilege to do so) and I approve of his other name Jellicoe, which has been given him by his God-mother (Mrs J Williams). Given under my hand this 29th day of October 1916. Sealed (fingerprint on wax) and signed: J. E. Nichols 2/Lt R.F.A.O.O.32nd Brigade R.F.A.¹⁴

Witnessed Cvl Vallentine. Lt. R.F.A. Adj. 32nd Brigade R.F.A.
GOD SAVE THE KING”

This document has a note attached; ”To Miss G.M.Brown. Please find attached completed and returned as requested. Signed J.E Nichols 2/Lt. R.F.A. 29.10.1916”

This interesting document is an early indication of Georgie Brown’s interest in cases of child poverty in Southampton. She was later to become a heartfelt supporter of Dr Banardo’s homes for orphaned children. The paper, seemingly prepared with a solicitor’s advice, can only refer to the ‘adoption’ by willing godparents of an abandoned Southampton or perhaps Portsmouth foundling for whom no parents had been traced. A Mrs J Williams had agreed to be the Godmother and had chosen the name of the then famous Admiral Jellicoe as suitable surname. Second Lieutenant Nichols (who might have been a distant relative of the Browns as this was a well known Southampton surname related to the Browns – see family tree) agrees to be the Godfather of the little boy and gives him the name Pompom – inserted in different script into Georgie’s document. The Adjutant of his unit is the witness (note the adjutant is a Lieutenant, quite a low rank for this military role, suggesting perhaps many casualties in his unit). Sadly, we have no further information regarding Pompom or his Godparents.

Sometimes a group of men clubbed together to send a collective letter of thanks and, in this case, Xmas wishes were signed by no less than nine soldiers and sent from Egypt (2nd November 1918. Tent 26.44 Coy. AOC. Base Depot. Alexandria.)” ---now

¹⁴ 2nd Lieut = Second Lieutenant. Lt= Lieutenant. R.F.A = Royal Field Artillery.

that we are in a foreign land we think about you, we also miss the comforts you supplied – believe us to remain,“ Sgt Chamber, 2Cpl Methewson, Ptes Whitcott, Smith, Scott, Conway, Watson, A. Martin and Meredith, C, 010444.

Wives and families.

The men’s letters have often shown that they were sometimes visited by wives or relatives while awaiting draft – not only at one or other of the holding forts, but also at The Chine. Clearly, they were received with as much kindness as the men. In addition, however, there are letters from wives and family directly to Georgie and Maud Brown expressing their appreciation of the resources they were making available to husbands and fathers. The men had evidently reported on their visits to The Chine to those at home and it had been a relief to them. There are fifteen letters of this category in the archive.

Due to security controls, censoring, military discipline and natural self restraint born from comradeship in combat, the men’s letters rarely revealed how they actually felt personally about the war in any depth, although the deprivation, depression and loneliness are often mentioned obliquely. The mothers and wives left at home were under fewer constraints yet a comparable quiet resilience and courage comes through. Their vocabulary is less cautious however and strong feelings of loss, attachment and love are movingly apparent making these letters the most touching to read in the archive.

Two of the envelopes have black edges denoting a grievous loss and the writing paper is likewise so marked around the rim. **Mrs E.M Ashman** of School House, Pampisford, Cambridgeshire writes on Jan 5th 1919. ”Dear Mrs Brown- It is in great sorrow I write to thank you for the Xmas card you sent to my husband and to tell you he died from shell wounds in France on Sept 26th. I received a Telegram on Oct 2nd with the awful news. I had heard from him only a few days before, he seemed so cheerful and full of coming home again - but alas ---The loss of my dear one is a terrible and bitter blow to me, one I hardly know how to bear. We were so happy, it seems so utterly cruel, but I have to be brave for baby’s sake, which he has left me to tend and care. He was so looking forward to seeing her. Dear Mrs Brown, my husband told me all about you and your great kindness to him, please accept my very grateful thanks. Pen cannot word all I would like to say or feel. I am sure you brightened many what would have been very lonely hours for him and you will for ever have my gratitude ---What a great relief it is to feel the war is at last over but I fear it leaves many of us to grope through life with broken hearts.”

The other letter fringed in mourning black does not refer to her loss but rather to a visit made by **Marjorie Nixon James** of The River House 3, Chelsea Embankment, London SW3 on Feb 11th 1919.” --- It is so nice to have seen where my dear man spends so much of his time - & the kind friends who have made the very trying conditions of army life so much more ‘possible’ by their consideration and the attractions such places as the Rest Rooms at The Chine afford.” She refers to the serious ‘flu epidemic of the time and wishes ”you will all keep free from any further attacks of this terrible flu.”

Mrs Capon of 105 Plashet Grove, East Ham. London E 6 writes to Georgie on Oct 26th 1917 about her visit to The Chine. “Dear Miss Brown, Thank you ever so much for your cheery little note, and will you thank your mother for the snapshot. --- Mr

Capon looks rather serious, generally he has a smile, but he felt it terribly at parting, but we are trusting to providence to be reunited in the near future, which I hope will not be long." She thanks Mr and Mrs Brown for the good times her husband had at The Chine and goes on:" I accompanied him several times, whilst I was staying in Southampton, to the concerts and one evening you impressed me very much when you sang (God save our men). I shall never for get it"

On July 17th 1917, **Annie Wilcocks** wrote from 14 Hubert Place, Lancaster. "I have heard so much about you and your wonderful kindnesses to the soldiers, from my husband.---He told our little daughter you had taken a snapshot of 'Daddy' for her very own and how she's looking forward to having it – you will know my husband is now in France (at the Base) --- My Husband did so appreciate it (your kindness) and so did I – before this dreadful war we were never parted – he never used to leave me for an hour alone, after his day's work was done, we were companions as well as wife and husband. My long long prayer is that he may safely return to me – in Gods good time."

Catching the evening post, **Mrs E.Abbott** of 109 Pitchford Street Stratford. London E.15 writes on Aug 31 1917 (postmark) to thank Georgie for a photograph. She goes on, "Gunner Abbot is my only son and such a dear good boy he is to us that I feel it very much to have to give him up to the Army. I think they ought not to have taken him as he has an invalid father for 14 years and I also have a very bad leg, but this is a terrible war. I do trust please God it will soon be over and my dear boy spared to me. He was very down on leaving home. My son had told me about the lovely garden and how kind you were to them and I am sure he was very grateful for it; he says he felt it very much leaving, it was very touching. I am very pleased to know he is with a nice lot of soldiers as he is very steady and I was afraid some might tempt him. --- Yours sincerely E. Abbott. In a NB added in Georgie's handwriting is the following: "Gnr Abbott later won the MM for great bravery."

From 12, Claribel Street, Princes Park, on writing paper headed **J. Melvey**. Tenor Vocalist (crossed out), we have the following note. "Dear Mrs Brown just a little note to thank you for your kindness to my Daddy. I'm crocheting some curtain bands for mother's Xmas present love from Edith XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX some for Mr BrownXXXXXXXX" ¹⁵

Other wives and mothers express themselves similarly in the restrained and respectful language of the times.

Writing on July 23rd 1917, and sent by the morning post on July 25th **Margaret Birchall** thanks Georgie for a "kind and comforting letter" and photograph of Edward (her son I think). She mentions "the motherly care which Mrs Brown gave him during his stay in Southampton. Edward told us all about it and of the deep interest Mrs Brown so very kindly took in him --- It was his first thought at home after greeting us."

A further letter reads; "It is a splendid work to help the men over what is to the majority a dreadfully trying time. Personally, I shall always carry the memory of the Band and lawn and trees and the wind just stirring the casement curtains and all the

¹⁵ XXX stands for kisses!

khaki figures dotted about. It is all so sad and yet there is great beauty to be found. I sincerely hope for everyone's sake it will come to a speedy end" **(D.M Lawrence** from 26 Milkwood Rd, Herne Hill. London SE on Nov 5th (i917?)

And again; "I am sending you this afternoon a tea cloth, and shall be very pleased if you will kindly accept it as a little appreciation for your kindness to my son during his stay in Southampton and hope you will like it. My daughter has made and worked it and his young lady has done the crotchet work.--- When Richard came home on his last leave he brought me a large photograph of the group in your garden. I have had it framed and it has made a lovely picture which will be very nice for him if he is spared to return --- I am so thankful to let you know that my sons in France are all keeping well ---" **A Haston** of 10 Heaton Rd, Lostock.Bolton. Oct 1st (1917?)

" Dear Madam --- I hope you will not think it presumptuous on my part in writing to thank you for your previous kindness and hospitality to my son ---We also hope with you that he may be spared to return safe, as being the only son we have felt his loss very keenly, for a better and more dutiful son could not have been given to parents than he has been to us and we feel that any kindness or consideration you have shown him and others has been personally given to us --- Hoping this dreadful war will soon be over ---and that you may long be spared to minister to the needs of others in this war and after. We have the honour to remain **Mrs and Mr Kay**. 278 Edge Lane Droylsden, Manchester. 27th October 1917

"I know my husband will be very sorry to leave Southampton. I can assure you I shall be too, for I feel he is safe whilst he is in this country. His love and devotion for me is boundless and no husband could be kinder or more thoughtful for his wife. I only wish that circumstances could have been such that I could have been able to be at Southampton too, but instead I am in Business." **Mrs Bruce Smith**. 27 Outram Rd Alexandra Park. London N22

"Dear Mrs Brown, --- I hear in all his letters how welcome you make him and different little kindnesses you show him almost daily and it is a great comfort to me to think he has such good friends while compelled to be away from me. ---The separation is hard to bear in any case but mine is made much easier by the knowledge of your goodness. --- I enclose a happy 'snap' of our little girly with some wounded boys, who were being entertained at the friend's house where we are staying. She is such a blessing and comfort to me these terrible times that I fell I cannot be sufficiently thankful to God for His great gift. ---I am just longing for her Daddy to see how she has got on since he went away." **Nora Wheeler**. Ingleside. Bocking's Farm, Clacton on Sea. Sept 20th 1917.

Americans.

When the Americans came over they were certainly invited to The Chine but we have no records in any detail of their visits. Cyril Weller refers to what must have been a somewhat negative comment in Georgie's letter to him (above p 19). Probably, for the most part, they had their own 'rendezvous' in town and their own resources. Never the less, American troops had been informed of The Chine as the following typewritten slip from the US Consul makes clear:

THE CHINE
Northlands Road
Soldiers Recreation Rooms
(Off the Avenue, Foot of Common. Mr and Mrs Brown.

At the above house, all Americans will find a real welcome. There are rooms provided for Reading, Writing (Stationery provided), Cards etc Concerts are frequently given by local talent. American papers and magazines are provided by the American Y.M.C.A. Sandwiches, Pies, Fruit and other light refreshments of a solid and liquid nature can be obtained at about two cents each, -in English money.

Open from 5.0 pm to 9.30 pm daily. Sunday –all day.Refrshments 4.30 pm
Mr and Mrs Brown and their many voluntary helpers do everything they can
for the Boys, - and do it good!
American Consulate, Southampton. England.

One of the most interesting of the ephemera in the archive is a pink coloured card on the back of which an American serviceman (rank not given) has scrawled his name and address. He was William Ellis Ames of 104 US Inf, Headquarters Co.Signal Section.26th Division.52 Brigade. American Expeditionary Force whose home address was 30 Partridge Avenue, Somerville Mass.USA. dated Sept 27th 1917. He seems to have been in a hurry for the card on which he wrote is one he was given on embarking on the ship that brought him to Europe telling him where to find his berth on board and when and where to eat. This brief memento evokes a strong sense of his probably over-crowded voyage under military discipline and at risk from submarines. As with many of the letters, to hold it in hand seems to take one back almost personally into those times. Voyage over; this was to him just a scrap of paper on which to write an address. Nearly a hundred years later it survives! We know nothing more of him or his mates. The front of the card reads:

S.S. LAPLAND
KEEP THIS CARD
Your quarters are in
COMPARTMENT G.

You will occupy one berth.
You will mess in 217. Forward Dining Room. Section G.
2ND SITTING

Commanding Officers' acknowledgements

We have seen that The Chine was a home from home for many soldiers on their way to France. Officers were rarely involved but this does not mean that the commanding officers were unaware of what the Browns were contributing to the welfare of their men. On 5th November 1917, written from Astor House, Banister Road, a rather curious note came to The Chine. It may have accompanied a gift because it is not a

letter in normal form. It reads, "On behalf of all ranks of the detachment, Royal Defence Corps, Southampton, **Lieut Colonel J.H Christie** tenders his best thanks for the hospitality offered to the men in the Reading-Recreation rooms at The Chine." The ink fades away towards the end of the last sentence but no correction was made as if it was written in haste.

The recreation rooms were closed on May 10th 1919 and, in recognition of the occasion, **the CO of the Royal Army Ordinance Corps (RAOC)** writes from The Coliseum, Southampton on that date:

"My dear Mrs Brown,

I note that today you are closing the Soldiers' Recreation and Writing rooms at your house and I feel must show (in some inadequate manner I feel) my gratitude and appreciation as Comm. the R.A.O.C for the immense benefit and kindness which you and your husband and daughter have given so ungrudgingly to our men - and others - during all the years that you have housed the Institution - nor must I forget the Committee of Ladies who have so very kindly assisted you in your work - I have heard so many expressions of gratitude from our people. It was not only the rooms and the comforts they found there - material comforts I mean - that the men appreciated so much but it was the personal way in which you all devoted yourselves to getting into the men's private lives. So many of them had been dragged away from comfortable homes and from their wives and children that they felt very acutely the aridness of the billet house. This you made up for at The Chine. You have all done a great work if you will allow me to say so and have formed as rallying point for the men in many an hour of loneliness, depression or want of sympathy - and as a result many have I feel sure had help in 'fighting the good fight' -

I am sure you enjoy the gratitude of many-

With kind regards yours sincerely **C.J. Alment** (? Signature difficult to read)"

This warmly sincere acknowledgement underlines what has been apparent in the letters from the men and accounts for the depth of their gratitude. Maud Brown and Georgie together with Fred Brown supplied what today we would consider psychological support through informal 'counselling', during a war in which such concern for the welfare of troops was barely considered. There can be little doubt that it was this kindness of heart in listening to and understanding the restrained distress of a variety men and boys (often following that up in letters to the front) that comprised the deep contribution that the Brown family offered to men about to face the near unendurable face of war in the trenches of France.

Indeed, it transpires that the Colonel felt this contribution so personally on behalf of his men that he made two representations to the authorities recommending the award of an OBE to Maud. Eventually a copy of his letter of recommendation reached Georgie's files in an OHMS envelope addressed to Mrs Brown dated 11 February 1920. In the Colonel's hand, it reads:

"Copy-

To Mil.Sec. Southern Cd (i.e. Military Secretary, Southern Command)

With ref to our telephone conv' this morning', I venture to submit a second representation on behalf of Mrs Maud Mary Brown (but not at her request) for recognition of her admirable and highly appreciated work for the rank and file during some three years.

As practically the last survivor of the Southampton garrison (as it was late in 1917) it devolves on me to see that the excellent work done by Mrs Brown and her husband and a small staff of ladies during nearly the whole war shall be duly represented.

I made a previous representation on this matter a year ago, but I learn from you that it cannot be heard (sp?) and Mrs Brown's excellent services have thereby failed in evoking military commendation and it is this mischance that I am now endeavouring to correct.

I have only been three times in Mrs Brown's house, the first two occasions to inspect the recreation rooms and the last to felicitate her on the good work done, when the place was finally closed.

All the rooms were in Mr Brown's handsome house and the fine garden was also at the men's disposal. Every day the rooms were open, regardless to a considerable extent of the sacrifice of family privacy and the rooms given up were excellently suited to the purpose. Not only that but the personal as well as the social side was greatly cultivated and Mr Brown would play cards etc with the men whilst all were encouraged to confide any domestic difficulties and family matters of interest to their kind helpers.

I have had numerous proofs of the way these family men torn from their homes turned to this comfortable and friendly club.

Mr Brown is a leading local merchant of Southampton and must have sacrificed a great deal of his home comforts all these years the house was open.

Needless to say, Mrs Brown had no knowledge of my previous representation on her behalf. It was forwarded by me in secret and it was only a few weeks ago when I feared her services had been entirely overlooked and when I desired to show that at least one CO appreciated her work.

I very earnestly hope that her services will now be rewarded in some slight measure (admission to the Order of the Brit Empire)

Col; C.J. Anent (signature uncertain).

Since no OBE was awarded, we can only assume that the good Colonel's representations were, as he suspected, insufficiently supported or in some way inadequately directed. Yet, the work of the Brown family was acknowledged from another source, the highly influential Southampton figure, **Sir Sydney Kimber**, who on 15th November 1918 had just become Mayor of the city. He writes from the Mayor's Parlour, Municipal Buildings, Southampton:

"Dear Mrs Brown,

It is extremely kind of you to write us such a nice letter of congratulation, and the Mayoress and I are very glad to get it.

We continually hear from one and another, and particularly from Mr Ryder, the great success that continues to crown your efforts in connection with 'Our Boys' at 'The Chine'. When the whole thing is over, the memory of the great work you have done and are doing, at the present time, will be a great possession to all of you.

With our kindest regards

Yours sincerely **S.G. Kimber**. Mayor.

It seems however that the AOC Commandant's interest in The Chine did not cease with his request for some recognition of the work at The Chine. The speech opening a fete at The Chine in August 1920 (or 1921?) in support primarily of finance for a window giving thanks for peace to be placed in St Mark's Church seems clearly composed by him. The Colonel was ultimately unable to be present himself and his

text has been re-worded to this effect and presumably read aloud on his behalf. He describes his intention of offering the workers at The Chine "a few words of thanks on behalf of the thousands of men who passed through The Chine during the war. --- It is some comfort to me to know how universal was the gratitude of those you helped and that in possibly thousands of cases thanks have been given you personally here and there by the men who derived such solace and recreation from the rooms at The Chine. --- I know that could those you befriended be present today they would be very pleased to know that their officers had on their behalf taken the advantage of a public opportunity to act as their unofficial spokesman --- When I first came to Southampton in November 1917 in the course of my enquiries I asked about the men's recreation rooms and I was told they had none but did not need any as they had the YMCA in Ogle Road and The Chine social Centre. Naturally, I asked what The Chine was, and was told of the very kind hospitality so freely given by Mr and Ms Brown in their beautiful house and of the unselfish service of those ladies who attended on the soldiers. I resolved at once to go and visit The Chine and both I and Major Davenport were charmed with the cleanliness and brightness of the recreation rooms and, afterwards, with the invariable pleasure which any reference to The Chine gave to its habitués. Their tongues were quickly unloosed. Most of these men you will recollect were middle aged and family men uprooted from their peaceful surroundings and thrown into billet houses with an entire absence of peace or quiet or of course anything home-like. Many of them have told me of the haven of rest they found The Chine to be and I was more than touched to hear from some of them of the personal and human atmosphere which existed here where not only their confidences as to domestic matters were sympathetically encouraged, and this gave them great pleasure, but further that when their families were able to come to see them they were proud to bring them along and present them to you kind people. --- As one of the Ordnance men once said when making a little speech, "When things go wrong in the Army we say 'Thank God we've got a Navy but when things go wrong with we soldier boys in Southampton we say 'Thank God, we've got a Chine.'" He concludes by referring to "Mr Brown coming down so kindly to teach them Parlour games" and to the special "Sunday evening Service full of reverence and welcome, regularly held here by your vicar, Mr Bates, who has had special opportunities of learning at first hand elsewhere the special loneliness and difficulties of men serving in the ranks."

The Colonel was happy to hear that the work of The Chine would continue in other directions now that the war was over. And it is to these that we may now turn.

Lord Mayor Treloar's Cripples Hospital at Alton, Iron lungs, child patients in need of support and other charities.

Lord Mayor William Treloar of London, a philanthropic Cornishman whose father had set up business in the city, was the founder of an important hospital dealing mainly with non-pulmonary tuberculosis at Alton north of Southampton. Its supporters eventually claimed it to be the best in the world because of the essential long term, health-renewing support it gave to child patients suffering from this and other causes. Maud Brown had known of the hospital in 1914 because we have a programme for a fête in The Chine garden supporting it in that year. When the need for working with the troops came to an end, Maud began looking for other targets for her charitable disposition. It was this hospital, very much a novel venture at the time and much in demand among the poor families of the Southampton and Portsmouth

slums, that attracted her attention and she suggested to her band of helpers that they began collecting funds through activities designed to support it.¹⁶ With their characteristic enthusiasm and inventive genius, The Chine Helpers set to work. Their work-load was considerable and took several interrelated forms. Apart from fortnightly meetings at The Chine, straightforward collections by appeal to the public and notable Southampton citizens, Maud devised a novel method of collection carried out by children in support of those less fortunate than themselves. Quite small ones became hard workers in the cause and, partly because of their age and sweetness in appeal; they contributed well to the funds. The extensive Chine grounds became home to fêtes more or less annually in summer at which military bands and orchestras played, stalls were manned, amusement gardens constructed, singers sang and children from the Miss Bird's dancing academy performed. Sometimes the large lawn became a theatre for a summer evening performance of Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer's Night's Dream' by professional players, the wooded auditorium being lit by coloured lights suspended in the tall trees. Then there were 'At Home' gatherings of the interested, collectors and various distinguished local people; held at first at The Chine but later at the large South Western Hotel near the docks. A feature of these events was an introduction to the event and its purpose by someone concerned with the hospital, at an early event, one of them being Sir William Treloar himself and always, notably, the 'winding' of The Chine Clock.

I am not sure to whom among the ladies the invention of Chine Clock may be attributed but it may well have been my mother, Georgie Brown. It consisted of a strong cardboard clock face a yard in diameter with black numbers on a white background and long hands that could be turned. Every minute represented one pound. It stood on a high blackboard stand before the assembled company. Donors stood up and moved the hands revealing their donation. A characteristic happening, of course, was the turning of the minute hand by one or more of the child collectors or by parents on their behalf – one was as young as three. It was an ingenious and productive device well admired in all the newspaper reports.¹⁷

Georgie Brown, as secretary to the Helpers, kept many documents including invitation cards, Southern Daily Echo news reports, letters, old programmes and other ephemera and it is from the especially comprehensive newspaper records that we

¹⁶ Lord Mayor of the City of London in 1907, Sir William Purdie Treloar, had created a fund to build a hospital and teaching facility outside the city of London for child sufferers from non-pulmonary tuberculosis especially of the spine, a common ailment in the early 1900s. In 1907, Queen Alexandra opened a fete in aid of the fund at the Mansion House. Treloar's Cripples' Hospital and College was established in Alton, Hants in 1908. In 1948, the National Health Service took it over, 75% of its funds being absorbed by the state. The Trust purchased a new site nearby to continue the education of physically disabled young men and in 1965 a school for girls was likewise opened. The schools were amalgamated in 1978 as Lord Mayor Treloar College and became co-educational. The college continues to develop today but the hospital was eventually closed, its operations being dispersed among modern NHS facilities elsewhere.

¹⁷ The "Clock" survived in dilapidated form in storerooms at Tudor Wood until the sale of the house in 2002. Maud's great grandchildren were intrigued by it.

know how this charitable endeavour worked, where and when. We know which orchestras and bands played, who conducted and who sang, what company of actors gave their time to present theatre and which notable local persons sponsored the occasions or opened them. The essay-length news reports are written in a literary, journalistic style of the period, very different from the brief notices in journalese such as an event might get today and showing very clear 'deference', acknowledging 'class', essentially wealth, contrasts among those named. A focus on 'charm' is noticeable to a modern reader; a somewhat sentimentally detailed touch to descriptions of children and of certain aspects of an occasion, such as would hardly figure – perhaps regrettably - today. Indeed, the expressive vocabulary and prose construction in these reports, as in the letters, suggests a public writing ability that compares favourably with what might be similarly expressed today.¹⁸

In 1922, the Echo noted that Alton Hospital was the only one to which children suffering from tuberculosis of spine, joints or bones could be sent, some 35 Southampton children being treated there. The idea and practice of using The Chine Clock was being established, Mrs Brown expressing the hope that it would never stop 'ticking'. By 1924, some £400 had been raised for the permanent endowment of a Chine Helper's Cot at Alton. The use of the 'clock' was begun at an annual event in memory of the recent death of Lord Mayor Treloar and funds in excess of those needed for the cot were given to Shirley Children's Hospital, Free Eye Hospital, Waifs and Strays Society, Sunshine Home for Blind Babies, Highfield House Hostel and St Mark's Mission to Children.

On June 4th 1924, the presentation of funding for The Chine Helper's Cot was made in Alton bringing the total donations there up to £500. The Echo reported, "The company then adjourned to a solarium in which The Chine Cot is to stand and there, in the sunlight, stood the cot about to be endowed, a Union Jack draped over the rails at the head, and a tiny smiling patient between the sheets. This was three-year-old Wilfred Parkenson¹⁹ of St Mary's, Southampton, who, 15 months ago, had been taken to the hospital by Mrs Brown apparently a helpless case. The progress made under the natural (outdoor sunlight) and artificial healing influences of Alton is remarkable and hopes are entertained of a complete cure. Grouped at the back of the solarium were half a dozen cots containing other little Southampton children. Miss Florence Treloar stood by the isolated cot and, while the curly headed inmate murmured to himself, she spoke the formal words of endowment. --- Canon Lovett dedicated the cot 'to the glory of God and for the healing of little children' and pronounced the benediction and afterwards placed his hands on each of the other Southampton patients and blessed them. ---The little mites in the spinal babies' ward entertained the visitors with action songs as they lay, in many cases strapped to their beds. Other children were lying outside the wards in the sunshine bronzed and smiling and all industriously engaged in basket making, needlework or some similar occupations. Chocolates, pictures and other things dear to the child mind were showered upon them by

¹⁸ The preserved Echo articles, often covering the best part of a page, were published between 1922 and 1932 covering a decade of consistent charitable endeavour by Maud and Georgie Brown and their Chine Helpers. The articles are dated: 1922 : Oct 26th. 1923: Oct 24th. 1924: March 5th, June 7th, Dec 12st and Dec 6th. 1925: Nov 27th. 1926: June 23th, Dec 10th. 1927: July 8th, July 18th, Nov 27th. 1930: March 29th and 1932 April 20th.

¹⁹ He appears again below as a child supporter.

sympathetic visitors who only tore themselves away from the small patients with difficulty to inspect the college, where 50 crippled lads were being taught leatherwork in all its branches, tailoring or boot-making.”

On March 4th the same year, The Chine Helpers arranged a large communal party for poor Southampton children at the Albion Schoolroom, St Mary’s Street. “The little guests came in batches, accompanied by the teachers by whom they were chosen, and they sat at the long tables gazing wistful eyed at the delicacies provided thereon, until the last company arrived, and they were bidden to feast. Iced confections and sandwiches disappeared with amazing rapidity ... It was while the guests were thus busily engaged that a woman, whose care-worn face was eloquent of the struggle for existence, approached one of the organisers and, with a pathetic glance at her three young children, asked, ‘Can they go in? Mister.’ The gentleman hesitated before replying, but the woman appealed again with such earnestness, which was not assumed. ‘Do let them in, Mister,’ she said eagerly, ‘they’ll have a good meal inside. There’s nothing for them at home!’ The children passed to happiness and plenty within.” After the feasting, Professor W.H Woodley presented a Punch and Judy show and then Father Christmas arrived. “Each child received a gift from the tree. Finally, Father Christmas produced a doll of such size and beauty that every little girl held up her hand as though to clasp it .By the desire of the children it was given to a girl of seven years who for four years was a patient at Treloar’s hospital. At the end, bags of fruit were freely distributed. The Chine Helpers had visited over 1000 children over Christmas and given a gift. All this was at the initiative of Maud Brown and her indefatigable daughter.”

At a meeting at The Chine on Thursday December 3rd 1924 the clock hand moved forward by two hours and seventeen minutes yielding £137, again little ones often reached out their ‘tiny hands’ to move it. A medal system for the children was introduced with the Mayor, Alderman McDonnell, presenting bars to their medals to nine children after a second year of service and new medals to eight more. The Treloar's representative stated that 94% of children at the hospital were cured and in the last year, the figure had been 96%. A new development was the provision of light lamps (UV) that were needed in greater numbers and two new wards (for lupus and isolation) were needed. Among other statistics, he reported that 79 cases have been received from Southampton. Only 16 –17 children could be admitted per month and there were 85 on the waiting list. In all 2841 children had been cured.

On November 27th 1925, Mrs Brown invited over 500 people to the Atherley Cinema, Shirley, where the ‘Alton film’ depicting the work of Treloar’s was shown. Sir Henry Gauvain, the chief medical officer at the hospital, was present and gave an explanatory talk to the various great and good of the town assembled there (names listed) and a little boy ex-patient gave a speech saying he had learnt boot making and if anyone needed his services he would be delighted. Other children received medals and bars. The Mayor (Councillor Silverman) gave a speech and Mrs Foster-Welch, Senior Bailiff, seconding, said she was ashamed that more help was not given generally from Southampton.

On June 26th 1926, The Chine Helpers held a garden fete at The Chine. Some £200 was distributed as a result to Treloar’s, the Hampshire Girls Orphanage, Children’s Hospital, Waifs, Strays Society, and the Sunshine Home for Blind Babies. “The

grounds of The Chine were converted for a while into a fairyland with hundreds of coloured lanterns shedding a multi- coloured glow from the surrounding trees. Stalls were profusely stacked with produce and children in fancy dress gave dancing exhibitions ... A fortune teller in a small bower, was tucked away amongst the trees ... A military band and a local orchestra performed and Mr Rodney Brown organised a Bagatelle competition.“

On December 10th 1926, the Southern Daily Echo reports on the reception given by Maud Brown at the South Western Hotel with The Chine clock in action again.” There was a pathetic touch to the proceedings in that one contribution of £1 was made by a little boy named Jimmy, who was the first child to occupy The Chine Cot at the hospital and who has been completely cured of a tubercular disease. Miss Florence Treloar, the daughter of Sir William, presented medals to children. The Sheriff (Councillor Mrs Foster-Welch) remarked that there were some fifty children involved in making collections and that Mrs Brown wanted to raise that figure to one hundred. Again, the mayor (Alderman P.V. Bowyer) and other local dignitaries were present in numbers. Apart from Treloar's hospital, no less than 22 other children's charities were benefiting from funds raised by The Chine Helpers.

In July 1927 a further garden fête was organised at The Chine with funds going to a long list of charities. A special feature of the fête was the announcement that sunlight lamps were to be donated to two Southampton hospitals. “Mrs Foster Welch was to have opened the fete but she had been delayed in London so the fête was opened by a little party of toddlers in smart summery dress from the Nazareth Homes forming a guard of honour along the crazy pavement of the rose garden where four little maids (names given) stood around the sundial looking attractive in the frills and flounces of Victorian dress. The little girls opened the fête by a graceful curtsy and salute. The sunny hours in the evening put everyone in the right mood to buy from the loaded stalls under their trellis of roses. On the tennis court at the lower part of the garden was a miniature amusement park (organised by Mr Rodney Brown) made gay with flags and bunting where a variety of competitions and games had been arranged to tempt people into try to win a prize. Here ... people were so thick that it was at times difficult to pick a path.“ At a dancing display by the pupils of the Misses Bird “the little dancers emerged from behind thickly leaved bushes and trod their dainty, fascinating measures in a sylvan glade where dove-cot and sun bathed foliage created a setting of irresistible charm. The love-lorn shepherdess and her swain seemed to have stepped right out of the picture books to delight the crowd, who also took pleasure in seeing baskets of roses buds come to life in the persons of little pink dressed dancing girls.”

On November 30th 1927, at a further reception given by Alderman and Mrs Brown at the South Western Hotel, The Chine clock ticked again, the project aiming to provide UV lamps for a “Chine corner” in the hospital. Viscountess Burnham together with Miss Florence Treloar opened the occasion, Lady Burnham saying that at the hospital “cheerfulness was the very air the children breathed and happiness was the secret of the common life. When one went there, one felt how much body and mind went together and how good the rays of the sun were for both. The ancients were not so far wrong when they worshipped the sun and in a real and better sense they were all sun-worshippers (at the hospital) now.” The Mayor again presided (Councillor Mrs Foster-Welch) and gave thanks.

At further receptions at the South Western Hotel in March 1930 and 1932, The Echo again reported that Time was money as The Chine clock ticked again. Present was a little Southampton boy, Wilfred Parkinson who came forward with £1 having being admitted at the age of two, his life hanging by a thread. Alderman Mrs Foster-Welch referred to the debt Treloar's hospital owed to these charitable activities and Sir Henry Gauvain spoke of the way public attitudes towards cripples had changed. "In ancient times, they were malign objects ... of ridicule and evidences of Divine wrath." He referred to the use of UV light in the treatment of Lupus, a terrible disease that ate away noses, lips and eyelids of children. Light cured this, after which surgical repair was possible. The hospital now treated all kinds of cripple not only those suffering from tubercular diseases. One little girl (no name given) had left the hospital after two and a half years going on into higher education and gaining a BSc with first class honours and was now doing research at the London School of Economics.

By this time, Georgie Brown had become Mrs Herbert Crook following marriage in 1929. At the reception in 1932, the author of this essay, aged 16 months, was the first to move the hands of the clock! Viscount Burnham presiding said that The Chine Helpers inspired by Mrs Brown and her daughter had raised around £2000. Nearly 200 children from Southampton had been treated at Alton. "At one time all cases were dealt with personally by The Chine Helpers but for the last year or two this important work has been merged with the public medical services of the borough and excellent arrangements made whereby the surgeons from Alton attend the municipal clinics in Southampton to ensure ... efficient after-care." He referred to The Chine workers four bed Ward at the Hospital and said, "Having known Sir William Treloar well he thought of him as one of the greatest benefactors of humanity this century has known." Little Wilfred Parkinson was again present. His case had been especially severe on admittance but, three years later, he had left Alton and now played like all other schoolboys. Other past patients also contributed to the raising of funds.

In July 1931, the Chine Helpers²⁰ had gathered at Treloar's Hospital in Alton for the dedication of a ward in the hospital that was to bear their name 'The Chine Helpers Ward'. The glowing account in the Echo says that the ward would stand as a memorial to the work of the helpers and of Mrs Brown. In all the Chine Helpers had raised £5000 for children's charities since the end of the war through their various efforts, among which the activities of the "Chine Children's Collector's League" organised by Georgie Brown (now Mrs Herbert Crook)²¹ were also educationally

²⁰ The Chine Helper's party comprised. Alderman F.R. Brown JP & Mrs Brown, Councillor & Mrs H.C. Crook, Mrs Dashper, Mrs G.H. Bishop JP, Mrs Downie, Mrs Edney, Mrs Fellows, Miss Rogers, Mr Rogers, Mr & Mrs Gilbert, Mrs Jardine, Mrs Kinnell, Mrs F. Locke, the Misses Lancasheer, Mrs Morgan, Mrs Nelson, Mr & Mrs T.A. Ponsford, Miss Pearce, Mrs Stranger, Mr & Mrs Stevens, Mrs Mason, Mrs Harding and Mrs Moody.

²¹ In 1929, my mother married Herbert Charles Crook of a Woolston business family (Lankester and Crook Ltd) who was likewise very involved in charitable care mainly through directing the 'Old Folks' organisation of the Woolston Wednesday Football Club that once a year took the elderly and infirm of the working class areas of the city, mostly Woolston near the docks, on a days charabanc outing to somewhere in the

significant for the young people involved. The hospital at the time was in a state of conversion from wooden buildings to brick and stone. The Helpers' ward stood in the newly completed Connaught block. The ward looked out over fields and woodland and it had a bright colour scheme with tiles over a fireplace depicting animal and birds. Folding doors opened to a veranda enabling the ward, as was the case with all others, to become healthy open-air rooms used in the fresh air treatment of tuberculosis. The name tablet was set over the fireplace. Again, in the company of the local great and good, the helpers were warmly welcomed and thanked before being shown around the hospital. Several Southampton children were visited and expressed their happiness. "From the boy's wards came a babble of twenty tongues. Every boy appeared to be having the time of his life. One daring blue-eyed youngster caused a good deal of laughter by asking for a flower from a lady visitor's hat."

After 1932, there are no longer any similar reports in the Echo collection and the reason for this is perhaps indicated in Lord Burnham's speech at the 1932 reception. The extreme need for the type of highly personal charitable endeavour shown by Maud and Georgie Brown and their inspiration to others was no longer so essential in the alleviation of slum poverty and illness. Social concern had passed to the public institutions of the municipality and medical referrals were being taken over by publicly funded institutions in a new way. Maybe the financial administration of Treloar's Hospital and its supporting needs had also changed in form. There were additional reasons. Maud had tripped over one of her long dresses falling down stairs and broken a leg, which took a long time to mend and very much preoccupied her daughter in caring for her at the same time as she was starting her family. This alone was sufficient to take up much of Georgie's time although nannies were employed in those days to help in such situations. Probably, both of them may have felt it was time to let the leadership of such work pass to the public institutions. Through the influence of Alderman Brown JP they were doubtless in close contact with the town council and this gave them some confidence in such a move. Georgie was soon acting independently from her mother, taking up activities in support of Dr Banardo's Homes for orphans in a big way. She continued this work into her old age after the Second World War and was to receive an inscribed crystal goblet in recognition of her services.

Even so, Maud's enthusiasm did not diminish and in 1938, doubtless in part relying on her reputation from her well-known work, she made a major public appeal for funds to present 'iron lungs' to Southampton hospitals. An iron lung was a mechanical bed that, through regular, appropriately adjusted movement, took over for a time the functioning of the chest muscles in breathing, thus saving many lives in various cases of paralysis. On 4th November 1938, the Echo reported a generous response to Mrs Brown's appeal with a complete list of donations by Rotary Club, Southern Railway, firms and individuals ranging from £52 to eight shillings. The collection raised enough funds for two iron lungs for the Isolation Hospital and two oxygen tents for the Children's' Hospital.

Conclusion.

New Forest or similar country location. He warmly supported my mother's efforts. For a short period he was a Councillor for Woolston.

This account of the philanthropic work of my grandmother and mother in Southampton over nearly thirty years between 1914 and the start of the 1939-45 World War has depended on the careful preservation by my mother of documents describing the methods of management and publicity employed in the enduring efforts of the Chine Helpers group which they led. There can be no doubt that the letters received amply demonstrate the great personal value that many ordinary soldiers and their wives experienced through exposure to their kind thoughtfulness throughout the horrors of the 14-18 turmoil. In deciding to carry on this work after the war, focussing on the much needed care of poor children mostly from the slums of the period, they revealed their sensitivity to the general neglect of welfare for poor people and children prior to the advent of greater political concern for the unfortunate. This little study may therefore be of interest to those researching the personal aspects of charitable care for the stressed, the poor and sick over this period. The extensive library of portraits of soldiers may delight those who may be able to recognise some relationship with the men concerned, and the literary style of journalistic reporting in the Southern Daily Echo reveals much about attitudes of the time. Although I prepared this account firstly for family interest, I believe it also has a place in the social history of my hometown, Southampton.

APPENDIX: The Archival material

The materials upon which this account is based comprise an archive formerly kept by my Mother, Georgina Crook. They consist of:

- 1 Photo album of the Chine soldiers, families etc
2. Visitors' book with signatures, addresses and regimental affiliation.
- 3 Exercise book detailing sales from stores at the Soldiers Rest at The Chine.
- 4 Two exercise books with accounts and balance sheets of the Soldiers Rest.
5. List of attendance by ladies of the Chine Helpers.
6. Southern Daily Echo articles on activities of the Chine helpers.
- 7 Miscellaneous ephemera. programmes, fêtes, invitations, notes etc

The Photo Album is a possibly unique, comprehensive collection of personal portraits of soldiers and one sailor, mostly in uniform, together with group pictures of the men relaxing in The Chine garden, playing clock golf, pictures of the Chine itself and some family groups. Many of these have a note or so on the back giving some information but many are unsigned. This album will be used for a further project. All or most of these men were shortly to be drafted to France to face the rigours of the war.

The Visitor's Book. An interesting set of entries show how the men originated from all over the nation. Detailed addresses are given. Most are soldiers of the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) and many were signallers. There are however others including Lieutenant Gutteridge of the Leicesters, a distant family relative, killed in the assault on Mametz Wood in the Somme, which was visited by my son and I in 2008. There are few officers but a number of NCOs. Most of the men give their rank as Private soldiers or gunners.

Sales and Accounts. These exercise books show what supplies were sold and how much of each at the afternoon and evening sessions at The Chine and also the cost of the items. The balance sheets show the expenditure over a period. The accounting book labelled “Helper’s book, Stores, St Mark’s Room”, shows that the commodities provided were quite basic and included: coffee, coffee essence, tea, cocoa, milk, nestles powder, bread, butter, cake, rock cakes, biscuits, pastries, pots of (meat/fish?) paste, garibaldi biscuits, ginger biscuits, boxes of matches, bananas (occasionally), coconut cakes (rarely), margarine (rarely). It is noticeable that cigarettes were very rarely on sale although some were donated on two dates. Furthermore, few pictures of men smoking are to be found. Most of the donations were cakes and pastries, Victoria buns, lard cakes.

Apart from one or two items, the lists of commodities sold remain invariable throughout the accounted period showing what it was that the men evidently preferred. The books magazines and writing materials provided, all of which are mentioned elsewhere, are not listed. In some photos, men are seen relaxing in chairs reading in The Chine garden near the dovecot.

The accompanying table shows the sales of supplies and their cost per afternoon or evening during a sample of contiguous days in March-April (year uncertain, probably 1917). Afternoons were simple, the men taking cups of tea or cocoa with milk. On a Sunday, cake, bread and butter were also consumed in the afternoon. More supplies were sold on evenings of the same days and included cake, bread and butter, some biscuits, paste cakes and buns. Curiously, jam is not listed. The values of the outgoings are listed per occasion and on the sampled occasions never exceed one pound. Each afternoon or evening is totalised and the sum received placed at the bottom of the list and signed – usually BB, meaning Mr Brookman. From today’s perspective, the quantification is bizarre with pounds (lbs) and ounces (oz), pints, and fractions of loaves. (Remember! Sixteen ounces make one pound and fourteen pounds make one stone. There were twelve pennies to a shilling and twenty shillings made a pound. The arithmetic was demanding!)

The accounting book runs from March 29th till July 18th, each afternoon and evening meticulously accounted for in a variety of hands including those of Maud and Georgie. During our sampled period March 29th onwards (5 days), the sums taken were averaging 3s 6d afternoons and 11s 3d evenings. Near the end of the period (July 14-18th) the sales have increased, the average being 5s 4d afternoons and £1.5s 5d evenings. Some slightly more adventurous items appear on the menu near the end of the period – ginger beer, a cucumber, a lemon, golden S (syrup?), but in general, the supplies are very constant in kind throughout. One evening 36 rolls and salads were sold, the take that evening being £2.1.0.

At the end of the book, there is a complete day-by-day list of all donations in kind given by named helpers for sale to the men. To begin with, these donations were mostly cakes, pastries, some cigarettes, biscuits, a bottle of coffee essence, flowers, watercress, postcards, and then an increasing number of prepared salads. Many people put a lot of effort into this; the names are mostly Mrs with a scattering of gentlemen and several Masters and Miss.

Given that Fred Brown owned one of the largest food emporia in Southampton, it is perhaps not surprising that strictly disciplined balance sheets week to week were maintained for the Soldiers Rest by his daughter. Between March 18th 1917- April 21st 1918, we have complete statements covering varying periods. There are additional

separate balance sheets in what must be Mr Brookman's handwriting. The balance for the first 20 weeks was below £10 per week but thereafter rose to around £15 approximately. The rise in turnover during that period was therefore relatively small. Hardware was of course required. There is a list of cups (20), plates (24), saucers (17), basins (4, perhaps bowls?) Jugs 1 and spoons (19) purchased over two occasions. These figures appear to be in dozens – hence perhaps 240 cups, 288 plates, 204 saucers, and 228 spoons. Accounts in Georgie's hand between December 1917-March 1918 show 6 tables at 6/6 bought from Foy's shop in Shirley, 16.6d spent at Boots, around £3 at Dibbens, 6 covers (chair?) from Permain at 1s.9p. each, around £10 for gas and electric (sic), a casement (meaning?) from Shepherd and Hedger for £1.15.6p, and "extra washing" - 5s. There are also accounts for some chairs (deck?), stationary, pads, beeswax, curtains, paper cloths and Ronuk (a polish?).

It must also be remembered that there was rationing in force during this period. This affected The Chine project mainly with respect to supplies of sugar and jams. Among the papers are some government documents granting Mrs Brown permission to obtain certain supplies of these commodities for the use of the men.

Attendance charts. Clearly, Maud Brown took an interest in the regular attendance of the ladies at the Chine Helpers meetings. Those with total attendance at all events are especially listed. The books are maintained over several pages in my mother's bold round hand.

Table.

UTILISATION OF BASIC SUPPLIES ON A SAMPLE OF FIVE AFTERNOONS/EVENINGS

AFTERNOONS	1	2	3	4	5	EVENING	1	2	3	4	5
Tea	2oz	2oz	2oz	1 1/2oz	3oz	4 1/2oz	3 1/2 oz	1oz	3oz	4oz	
Coffee	0	0	0	0	0	4oz	2oz	2oz	2oz	3 1/2oz	
Milk	1 1/2pints	2pts	1 3/4pts	1/4pt	2pts	2 1/2	3 1/2	1 1/2	2 1/2		1/2gal
Cocoa	2	2 1/4	1	0	2 1/2	3oz	2oz	2oz	1/2 oz	2oz	
Cake	0	0	0	1lb 2oz	0	2lb 10oz	6lb 15oz	3lb 2oz	1 1/2 lb	4lb 10oz	
Bread	0	0	0	1/2 loaf	0	2lf	3lf	5/8lf	2lb 10oz	23/4loaves	
Butter	0	0	0	3oz	0	4oz	7oz	3oz	2oz	5oz	
Other items listed on these days were biscuits, paste, small cakes, buns.											
Total cash receipt	2s/11p	3s/6p	3s/4p	3s/3p	4s/8p	12/8p	14s/8p	7s/7p	6s/9p	19s/3p	