

## Field Marshal Lord Harding of Petherton (1896-1989)

Notes prepared for his great-niece, Liz Hebditch 24 June 1979 about his childhood:

Harding-Anstice Family

Notes (from memory) by F.M. Lord Harding of Petherton

1. Harding Grandparents. I didn't know either of them. I think they must have died before I was born or soon after. I have a photograph of my grandfather put away somewhere but it will take some finding. Two of my grandfather's sisters -Sophie and Sarah - were still alive in my boyhood - Both spinsters - they lived together in one of the small houses at the top of Palmer Street in South Petherton.

2. Anstice Grandparents. Jethro, my grandfather had been a draper but had retired by the time I remember him and lived with Dinah my grandmother at the Firs in South Street, South Petherton with two unmarried daughters, Nell and Agnes. They had a large family of 15 children; I think 13 of whom survived. I never got to know my grandfather well - as children we spent quite a lot of our time at his house - it had a large garden, tennis court and stables - but I don't remember his taking much notice of us. My grandmother was tall, slim, handsome woman always very kind to us but they both died when I was still quite young. The business - a shop in the Square and another next to The Bank House, and later one in Ilminster was run by my uncles Harry, Brian and Fred - Later the stationers and book and toy shop adjoining the Bank was added and my mother put in to manage it so we moved from Rock House. The business gradually declined and my uncles died or lived of the others. Ben I think it was went to Canada - Norman was in his Bank - Annie had married another Harding who had a grocers shop - Their son Charlie married Hilda Baker - still living in South Petherton.

3. My Father. Francis Ebenezer Harding always known as Frank spent all his working life as a clerk with H.R. Poole & Son and was very highly regarded by the Poole family and their clients. He was a keen and good gardener, an accomplished musician - piano and organ - a deeply religious man - teetotaler - quiet and unassuming - got a bit crotchety in his later years but always highly respected by everyone in South Petherton and the neighbourhood.

4. My mother. Elizabeth Ellen always known as Bessie - was in my opinion a very remarkable woman - intelligent in a practical way, good looking and with a good figure. A very strong character but always kind and gentle - never forceful or aggressive - we all owe a great deal to her influence and example - I never heard her say an unkind word about anyone - and when she became - at a comparatively early age a victim of rheumatoid arthritis I never heard her utter a word of complaint though she must have been in pain. Mary, my wife, loved and admired her immensely. When

my father did the rates as a spare time job to increase the family income she kept the books and later she managed the book shop almost single handed. She was a good cook, a clever manager, a good wife and mother and a very, very good woman. There is a photograph of her with my oldest sister Dorothy and myself as a baby in my biography.

5. Other personal recollections. My grandfather, Jethro Anstice, as a member of the local District Council or what was the equivalent at the beginning of the century and I have clear recollections of driving into Yeovil with him - I tell the story in the foreword I wrote for "The Book of Yeovil".

I can also remember going the rounds of neighbouring villages - Shepton Beauchamp, Barrington, Hambridge etc - in a horse and trap with my uncle Fred Anstice taking orders from the cottage customers and delivering the previous week's orders, on what then corresponded to the present day credit card system.

My father's oldest brother, William Harding, had a small corn merchant's business and a small farm based on Rock House which I expect he took over from my grandfather - The grocer Harding's business included a bakery run by my cousin - Charlie Harding's older brother who was in the yeomanry - I can remember seeing him ride off with others in uniform etc to camp. One of my mother's sisters - Blanche - was married to the man Herbert Rather who kept The Crown Hotel - the black sheep of the family - who had a few horses.

As children we had a full and happy life - always plenty going on in the holidays -but we weren't allowed to go to visiting circuses and such like and Sundays were very strictly observed - chapel morning and evening - Sunday School in the afternoon followed by a walk - reading restricted to the Bible and Bunyan's Pilgrim Progress - hymns with my mother at the piano before going to bed. We were very well brought up but not harshly.

24.6.79