

Living in Harley Street

MAY 1921

‘Do hurry up, darling!’ Joanna’s mother called up the stairs.

At last removal day had arrived, and breakfast could not be delayed.

‘Just coming!’ Joanna still had stuff lying on the floor, so she closed her bedroom door behind her, then ran down the stairs. Most of her things were packed, apart from the last few books and jigsaws. Joanna Stott was excited as she sat down to breakfast. Moving house was an adventure, even if she was moving only a couple of miles. Ever since she heard about it, Joanna had been impatiently planning her new room.

Breakfast was almost finished when the removal men knocked on the door. With four men in the team they made fast progress. Soon pictures were being taken off the walls, rooms were gradually emptied of furniture, and carpets were rolled up. While Joanna was excited, her little sister, Joy, cried. Joy’s toys were being packed into boxes and she wanted them back.

With a nine-year-old trying to help but getting too excited, and a toddler crying, it seemed best for both of them, and their baby brother, John, to be taken out

to the park. John was less than a month old, and went off to sleep as soon as his nanny began to push the pram.¹

By mid afternoon, the removal van was parked outside the Stotts' new house: 58 Harley Street, one of the smartest streets in central London.²

'Bring the carpets off first,' said the chief removal man. 'We'll lay them down, then tackle the furniture.' Dr Stott was in charge of what went into his consulting room and Mrs Stott supervised the rest of the house. Joanna would soon be arranging her new room.

Number 58 Harley Street was a tall, narrow building, on six floors, with servants' quarters in the basement. Dr Stott's consulting room was on the ground floor, next to the family dining room, which had to double as a waiting room. Each day, as soon as lunch was over, the family left, and the domestic staff quickly cleared the table, and placed the chairs along the sides of the room. Appointments started at 2 pm, and people often came early.

Joy and John shared a nursery on the third floor. They played games, had fun, and fought and argued, as brothers and sisters do. Joy was two years older than John, but she didn't have the upper hand for long.

'Are they twins?' people often asked when they were out. John was tall, and Joy less tall for her age. Children always like to be thought of as older than

¹ See Fact File on page 18.

² See Fact File on page 19.

they are, so John liked to be taken for Joy's twin. Joy definitely didn't like it! John was soon taller than Joy, and then people assumed he was the older one.

About four years before he was born, John's parents had suffered a deep tragedy. There had been a third older sister, Rosemary, nicknamed Tubby, who died. Every year on the anniversary of Rosemary's birthday, John's mother would place a sprig of the herb rosemary on each of the children's desks. This little one was remembered with deep affection by her parents, and by her older sister, Joanna.

The children's nanny read them stories, taught them their numbers, and helped them to tie their shoelaces and learn to tell the time. In the afternoons she took them to play in Park Square Gardens at the top of Harley Street. These gardens were private, but all householders in the area had a key to unlock their iron gates. The gardens were very well kept, and the children needed to behave in a demure way. As John got older, he did not always do that. All his life he kept a letter which was sent to his father when he was aged eight. This letter, from the Clerk to the Board of the Crown Estate Paving Commission, complained of John's 'unruly behaviour' and urged Arnold to keep his son under better control.

Sometimes, the children's nanny took them across Marylebone Road into Regent's Park, which is the home of London Zoo. Every season brought its beauty, and the children loved the expanse of lawns

and playing hide-and-seek in the rhododendron dens. In the winter the lake could freeze hard enough for people to skate across it. In Regent's Park they occasionally caught sight of the young princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, being driven around the park inner circle. Elizabeth was crowned Queen Elizabeth II at the age of twenty-six. She was just five years younger than John.

Having a nanny to look after children was common for Harley Street families. The Stott children loved their nanny, whom they called Nanny Golden, and she kept in touch with the family long after the children grew up. Nanny Golden was a Christian, and she no doubt prayed for the children to come to faith themselves. She taught them children's hymns and choruses, and John and Joy would sing these with enthusiasm.

Like most children, John developed a special fondness for animals. When he was about two, he was chasing a squirrel in the park to give it some bread. He fell over, and the squirrel vanished. His sister, Joanna, tells us what happened next. 'John picked himself up and said "poor squirrel". Well, actually he inserted a swear word – having heard it somewhere and with no idea what it might mean! I think our nanny was a bit shocked. We laughed about it for years!'

From when John was small, his father enjoyed the chance to take him on walks. Arnold Stott wanted to help him appreciate and enjoy all the animal life, plant

life and bird life around him, and to learn more about them. John loved these walks, hand in hand with his father. 'John, shut your mouth and open your eyes and ears!' his father said. 'It's the only way to observe nature.'

On Sunday mornings, Nanny Golden took John and Joy to All Souls Church in Langham Place. They sat in the front of the balcony, one each side of her, so they didn't misbehave. But you cannot stop inventive children from misbehaving. During the prayers, they ransacked their pockets for any bus tickets or other scraps of paper, screwed them into pellets and dropped them on the unsuspecting ladies seated below. Then they would duck back quickly.

John was full of fun ideas. One Sunday, as the service reached the Lord's Prayer and Nanny Golden leaned forward to pray, a new idea struck him. From behind Nanny Golden's back, Joy suddenly saw John's hand appear, holding his school cap upside down. 'Collection please,' he whispered, with his voice as low as it could go. Joy burst into uncontrollable giggles.

Undeterred by their morning performance, Nanny Golden took the children to Sunday School in the afternoons. This was held in the All Souls Rectory at 12 Weymouth Street. John never behaved well, and most weeks he was sent out of the classroom for bad behaviour soon after the lesson began. In fact he spent more time outside the classroom than inside! He went

to Sunday School armed with daggers stuck into his socks, and a revolver in his belt to scare the girls. His Sunday School teachers probably despaired of him.

Fact File 1

JOHN ARRIVES IN THE FAMILY

John was born on 27 April 1921, the Stotts' fourth child and first son. His father had grown up in Bolton, outside Manchester, in the north of England, where John's grandfather owned a cotton mill.

Baby John was baptized shortly after the family moved to Harley Street, in nearby Marylebone Church. His full name was John Robert Walmsley Stott, after his paternal grandfather, John Robert Stott, with the addition of Walmsley from Lily's family line.

John's father, Arnold Stott, was a heart specialist. It is still said in the Stott family that the first words John ever spoke were 'coronary thrombosis'. We will never know if that's true.

Fact File 2

HARLEY STREET

Harley Street, built in the reign of Queen Victoria, soon became the best address in the world for medical consultants. One end is just a few minutes' walk from Regent's Park and the other end close to the Oxford Street shops. The film *The King's Speech* made 146 Harley Street famous. It was the house King George VI visited often, to have his stammer cured.

The architect was the famous John Nash, one of the best of his day. Lilius Trotter, the pioneer missionary to North Africa, grew up in Devonshire Place House, a few minutes' walk away; Sherlock Holmes, the fictional detective, had his office about ten minutes' walk to the west, at 221B Baker Street, close to Madame Tussauds; and Samuel Morse, who invented the morse code, lived nearby for a while, at 141 Cleveland Street.