

## THE NURSING CAREER OF JEAN MARY CHECKSFIELD

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### OVERVIEW

Jean Mary Checksfield was born in 1927 at Romney Marsh, the daughter of Cyril Albert Checksfield (1895-1977) and Rose Ovenden (1896-1999). Jean spent her childhood and received her early education in Romney Marsh. Her parents were still living in Romney Marsh in 1939 but Jean was not living with them at the time.

Jean decided that a career as nurse what she wanted to do the rest of her working life and when her elementary schooling was done she received her training at St Bartholomew's in London.

The Nursing Register of 1949 recorded " Jean Mary Checksfield residing at 8 Council House, Burmarsh, Dynchurch, Kent. Registration date: November 26,1948. At the County Hospital, Pembury, Tunbridge Wells 1945-1948. Certified by examination."

An interesting account by Jean's second husband Philip Handsaker, that appeared in the Pembury News of Summer 2000 ,provides a romantic account of him meeting Jean at the Pembury Hospital in 1945 when he arrived there and remained a patient for 8 months, having been wounded while serving with the army in WW2. Although nothing came of his meeting Jean at the time he remembered her well and after his first wife (Margaret Joan Handsaker) passed away in 1998 he sought her out and managed to find her but by that time she was a widow, her first husband Bert Morphett( 1904-1975) who had been married before, having passed away in Tunbridge Wells in 1975. Jean had married Bert late in life at Folkestone in 1966.

Philip made contact with Jean in April 1998 and quickly resumed their friendship, a friendship that developed into them getting married in the 4th qtr of 1999 at the Jarvis International Hotel in Pembury. Jean's mother passed away August 15,1999 in Tunbridge Wells.

Philip stated that when he met up again with Jean in 1998 that she was living within a half mile of the Pembury Hospital where she had spent most of her nursing career. She later moved to Tunbridge Wells and worked up to the time of her retirement at the Kent & Sussex Hospital.

Philip Handsaker passed away In October 2004 and was cremated at the Kent & Sussex Crematorium. He was survived by his wife Jean who was reported to still be alive and living in Tunbridge Wells October 2018.

In this article I present information about Jean's life and career. Also given at the end of the article is some brief information about the Pembury and the Kent & Sussex Hospitals where she worked.

### THE MEETING BETWEEN JEAN AND PHILIP HANDSAKER

The following information is reproduced from an article by Philip Handsaker that appeared in the Pembury News Summer 2000. In the following sections I fill in the story with genealogical information and some information about Jean's nursing career.

"My introduction to Pembury was sudden and unexpected. In 1945 I was a soldier stationed at Staplehurst but on 28 July of that year I found myself in Pembury Hospital where I remained a patient for eight months. I have happy memories of that period. One vivid memory is of nurses walking in procession through the wards on Christmas Eve, carrying lanterns and singing carols. A more important memory is of the nurse who was specially assigned to care for me, Jean Checksfield. After I was discharged from hospital and invalided out of the army I travelled several times from my home in Essex to meet Jean, staying overnight at the Camden Arms. But in 1947 we agreed to go our separate ways. I eventually married someone else. I heard no more from Jean and did not visit Pembury again. At the beginning of 1998 my wife died. After a few months I resolved to try to trace Jean. Having had no contact whatsoever for 51 years I realised that this was a forlorn hope. Jean might well have married, thus changing her name and making my task far harder and probably pointless. She might have emigrated to the ends of the earth. She might even be no longer alive. Most frustrating of all my search might, after several months, come to a dead end. But most of

my misgivings were unfounded. In less than a week I made contact. To my astonishment she was living within half a mile of Pembury Hospital where she had worked for most of her career (the remainder being spent at the Kent & Sussex Hospital in Tunbridge Wells). She had married and metamorphosed into Jean Morphett but had been a widow for many years. She had cared at home for her aged mother for nine years. We met again in April 1998 and quickly resumed our old friendship and, after the death of Jean's mother last year at the age of 103, this culminated in our wedding on 30 October 1999 at the Jarvis International Hotel, Pembury. I trust that I may end this story with the traditional words ". . . and they both lived happily ever after."

### JEAN'S PARENTS AND EARLY LIFE

The birth of Jean Mary Checksfield was recorded in 1927 at Romney Marsh with her mother's maiden name given as 'Ovenden'.

Her mother was in fact Rose (sometimes given as Rosa) Ovenden (1896-1999) and Jean's father was Cyril Albert Checksfield (1895-1977). An image of Rose is given below.

Cyril had been born August 7, 1895 at Romney Marsh. The 1901 census, taken at Grand Gate Farm in Burmarsh listed Cyril. He was living with his grandfather Alfred Checksfield, a farmer, age 60, and his grandmother Mary, age 61 along with five of Alfred's children.

The 1911 census, taken at Eaton Farm in Burmarsh gave Cyril living with his grandparents Alfred and Mary Jane along with two children of Alfred. Alfred was given as a farmer/grazier employer and his two children Edith and Percy were both working on the farm.

Cyril served in WW1 (68233) with the machine gun corps. He was given as single with the occupation of cordite worker and living at Station Cottages at Cliffe, Kent. He had enlisted for service at Maidstone August 16, 1915. His next of kin was given as Arthur Checksfield (father) although he was actually Cyril's grandfather. It appears that Cyril's parents were deceased sometime before 1901.

In the 4th qtr of 1922 Cyril married Rose at Romney Marsh.

Rose Ovenden was born April 17, 1896 at Elham, Kent and was baptised October 4, 1896 at Lympe, Kent and given as the daughter of Walter Ovenden (1858-1944) and Annie Ovenden, nee Sparks (born 1879). Rose was one of six siblings and nine half siblings in the family. Shown below is a photograph of Rose (on the right) with her half-sister Esther.



At the time of the 1901 census Rose was living at Romney Marsh with her parents and nine siblings. Her father at that time was a shepherd. At the time of the 1911 census Rose was living with her parents and four siblings at Burmarsh on Rothchild Farm in 9 rooms where her father worked as a farm bailiff.

Jean grew up at Romney Marsh and received her basic education there. Later she trained as a nurse at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London. Shown below left is a postcard view of Romney Marsh and to the right is a view of St Bartholomew's Hospital. Romney Marsh is a sparsely populated wetland area in the counties of Kent and East Sussex in the south-east of England. It covers about 100 square miles.



A directory of 1939 gave Cyril Albert Cheksfield as a roadman heavy workers for the County. With him was just his wife Rose doing unpaid domestic duties.

For some nine years when Jean was a widow she was living about a ½ mile from the Pembury Hospital and had been caring for her widowed mother.

Cyril Albert Cheksfield died December 8,1977 at Burmarsh Romney Marsh, Kent. Probate records gave Cyril of 5 The Green Burmarsh Romney Marsh who left an estate valued at 4,806 pounds.

His widow Rose died August 15,1999 in Tunbridge Wells and was cremated at the Kent & Sussex Crematorium August 23rd.

### **JEAN'S FIRST MARRIAGE**

Marriage records report that Jean Cheksfield married Bert Morphett in the 1st qtr of 1966 at Folkestone, Kent. At the time of the marriage Jean was already age 49 and it appears there were no children from the marriage.

Bert Morphett (1904-1975) had been born in Pembury October 7,1904 and had nine siblings born between 1894 and 1914. Bert was the son of Walter Morphett (born 1870) and Edith Morphett (1870-1940). Bert was living with his parents and siblings in Pembury at the time of the 1901 census and was still there at the time of the 1911 census.

His brother Walter Morphett (1895-1918) served in WW1 (G.5006) with the 2nd Btn (92nd Foot) Queens Own RWK and was the eldest son of Walter Morphett of Stone Court Farm in Pembury. He had been born in Pembury and attended the village school. He enlisted for service in Tunbridge Wells December 16,1914 and served with the Expeditionary Force in France from April 14,1915 and was wounded by shrapnel under his shoulder and gassed at Hill 60. He was invalided home where he spent time in hospital at Cheshire. He then proceeded to Mesopotamia December 1915 and died of Malaria October 22,1918. He was buried at the Bagdad (North Gate) War Cemetery in Iraq. His name is recorded on the wooden plaque at the Baptist Church.

Bert's first wife was Hilda Mary Powell (1902-1984) and with her had three children, the eldest being his son Keth I Morphett(1942-1958). Hilda Mary Powells was born December 18,1902 and was the daughter of Arthur Ernest James Powell (1880-1904) and Florence Powell, nee Fullman (1877-1952). Hilda's father died in Tunbridge Wells March 22,1904. Hilda died in the 2nd qtr of 1984 in Tunbridge Wells.

The death of Bert's mother was registered at Tonbridge in the 2nd qtr of 1940. Bert's death was recorded at Tonbridge in the 4th qtr of 1975.

## JEAN'S SECOND MARRIAGE

Marriage records report that Jean Morphett, nee Checksfield, married Philip Handsaker (1921-2004) at Pembury in the 4th qtr of 1999. Philip reported from his article that the marriage took place October 30,1999 at the Jarvis International Hotel, Pembury (image below).



When Jean and Philip met after many years in 1999 Jean was age 82 and retired from nursing. With her was her widowed mother who she was caring for and by this time Jean had already retired from nursing at the Kent & Sussex Hospital where she had completed her nursing career.

Philip had been born August 30,1921 in Bromley. He was the son of John Thomas Handsaker (born February 27,1877) and John's second wife Adelaide Amelia Handsaker, nee Ray (March 31,1884-1955). John's first wife was Emily Bolingbroke Martin Handsaker (1878-1915) with whom he had two children between 1908 and 1910. John had married Emily April 17,1907 at Holy Trinity Church,Chelsea. His father James was given as a farm bailiff. Emily's father was not recorded. The marriage was witnesses by William Henry Handsaker. At the time of the 1911 census John was living with his family in 3 rooms at Beckenham, Kent, where John ran a grocers shop. John's marriage to Adelaide took place June 15,1919 in Kent. John died June 30,1961 at Maldon, Essex. Before WWII Philip was living in Essex with his parents.

Adelaide Amelia Ray was born March 31,1884 in London. Adelaide passed away April 25,1954 in Colchester Essex. Her probate records gave her of Tudwich Road Little Totham, Maldon Essex (the wife of John Thomas Hansaker) and that she died at Severalls Hospital in Colechester. Her husband was the executor of her 491 pound estate.

A directory of 1939 gave Philip at school and living with his parents John and Adelaide at Tudwick road in Maldon, Essex, John was given as a small holder of a farm and a heavy work gardener/labourer. His wife Adelaide was given as born March 31,1884.

Probate records note that John Thomas Handsaker was of Rovers View Beeleigh Road in Maldon, Essex when he died June 30,1961. His executor was his solicitor and his estate was valued at 4,002 pounds.

In the 4th qtr of 1952 at Willesden Philip married Margaret Joan Bulluck. Margaret was born September 28, 1919 at Chippenham. Wiltshire. Her mother's maiden name was given as ' Muzzell'. In 1930 Margaret was living at 2 Holtwhites Hill in Enfield, Essex with her parents Cecil William Bulluck and Daisy Eva Bulluck and her brother William. Margaret Joan Handsaker, nee Bulluck, died in the 1st qtr of 1998 at Bromley.

Philip's marriage to Jean in 1999 sadly did not last long for he passed away in the 3rd qtr of 2004 in Pembury. He was cremated at the Kent & Sussex Crematorium October 5th having died on September 25th. Philip was survived by Jean who is stated to still be alive in October 2018 and living in Tunbridge Wells.

## **JEANS CAREER**

-She trained as a nurse at St Bartholomews Hospital -Although not confirmed she may have been working before WW 2 at Guys Hospital and if so would have been one of the nurses moved to the Pembury Hospital.

-The Nursing Register of 1949 gave "" Jean Mary Checksfield residing at 8 Council House, Burmarsh, Dymchurch, Kent. Registration date: November 26,1948. At the County Hospital, Pembury, Tunbridge Wells 1945-1948. Certified by examination."

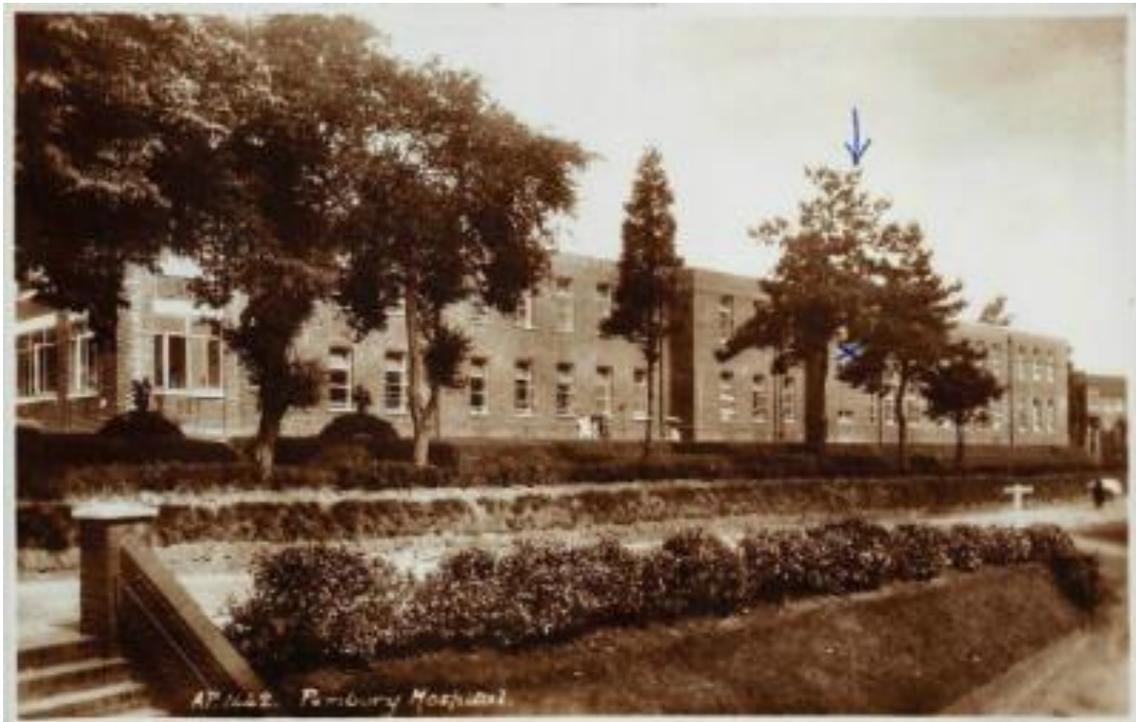
-The article by Jeans second husband in 2000 stated that Jean was a nurse at the Pembury Hospital when he arrived there with his injuries in 1945.

-According to her husband Philip she worked all of her career or at least most of initially at the Pembury Hospital and later at the Kent & Sussex Hospital in Tunbridge.

-She retired from nursing at the Kent & Sussex Hospital sometime before 1977 based on her age in that year of 60.

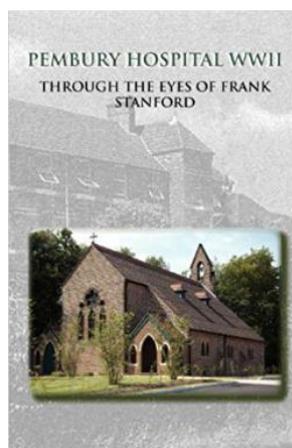
## **PEMBURY HOSPITAL DURING WW2**

The following article by nurse Susan Taylor (nee Goldschmitt) dated July 13,2005 appeared on a website about WW2. In part she stated "Guy's Hospital and all other major hospitals also evacuated their patients and staff to safer hospitals in the country, away from London. Our hospitals were in Kent and they all, had to start building prefabricated huts to be used as wards and as housing for staff, operating theatres, x-ray units etc. We nurses were put up in Bell Tents in a place called Pembury not far from Tunbridge Wells. This was fine during the remaining summer months but when the cold weather started they put in stoves so give us some heat. But they smoked us out and so we had to be moved again. This time it was to an old Workhouse which had only just been evacuated by the "down and outs". Not very pleasant. But eventually we were able to move to the newly built huts. When in June 1940 the evacuation of Dunkirk started, we were one of the front line hospitals who took in the wounded soldiers and the doctors and nurses were working round the clock to help as many people as possible and relieve their suffering. We all were kept so busy and working overtime was part of our daily life in London. People continued to live as normally as possible. Many of course were called up to the Army, Air Force, Navy and those in reserved occupations e.g. doctors, dentists, nurses, coal miners, farmers and key workers in industry continued in their current jobs. Others were directed to Munitions Factories, arms factories, Land Army and other jobs of national importance. And we lived in this sort of atmosphere, never knowing what each day would bring, continuing our daily work, saying hello or good bye to friends new and old as we were being sent from place to place, from Pembury to Orpington and Farnborough for my 2nd and 3rd year of training."



Shown above is a photograph of nurses standing outside the Pembury Hospital in the 1940's but whether Jean is among them in this image is not known. Also shown is a photograph of the bell tents referred to by Jean.

Pembury Hospital was heavily used during WWII, although not many remain who remember it as it was then. In fact, when it was advertised to find people with stories from Pembury Hospital's WWII days, only one person came forward: Frank Stanford. His book entitled 'In Pembury Hospital WWII Through the Eyes of Frank Stanford' (image below), Frank openly shares his entertaining and informative memories of working at Pembury Hospital during the war years. Also included are a brief look at Pembury Hospital's history and the new Tunbridge Wells Hospital, which replaced it.



The following account is by Dr Roy Webb who began his medical training at Guy's Hospital in London but ended up at the Pembury Hospital during WW2. Dr Roy Webb served as a surgeon-lieutenant on HMS Kelvin, a destroyer that took part in D-Day, at Sword Beach. In part he stated "I took my bicycle and cycled to Pembury and had all my gear put in an ambulance, which took everyone's gear to Pembury. That's how we got to Pembury, to a hutted hospital from the First World War. It was a hutted hospital which was put on hold for the future, in case it might be necessary to use it. There were quite a lot of them littered about the countryside. We landed in Pembury, and I had some lovely digs. Next door, a very nice couple had a horse. Well, riding had always been one of my hobbies, so I was in clover. I had a marvellous time. I could ride first thing in the morning, and then go into hospital at Pembury. We worked hard and got down to it. I passed all my exams on time. Despite the fact that Guy's was pretty badly hurt, we went back and did periods of three or four months at a time in various specialties, like general medicine, ear, nose and throat and obstetrics. You got much more experience in Pembury because the hutted hospital contained about a thousand patients. One had the pick of the patients. I used to spend two mornings or two days a week making friends with the ward sister, which was always a good thing to do. She let me examine these patients. To a large extent I was experience-taught. I took my experience whenever I saw an opportunity. That's been my life the whole way through." Shown above is a photograph of the huts at the Pembury Hospital utilized for patients during the war. The wooden huts at the Pembury Site were built by the Government in 1939 as an emergency wartime measure and were first used for the Dunkirk emergency. They were still in use in 2007 and some were turned into nurse education & accommodation functions.



On September 3, 1939 London buses arrived in Pembury with staff evacuated from Guy's Hospital in London with the nurses being accommodated in tents on the lawn! Shown below was a report on this event.

The nurses, some hundred of them, camped out in large tents on the lawn in front of 'B' Block and in the woods adjacent to the main canteen.

The Matron of Guy's, Miss Macmanus, recalled the fact that the tents were not of the strong army type needed and, whilst they enjoyed the summer, they: *"slept under umbrellas and ate in flapping darkness. The end surely arrived with the twirl of torn canvas and broken tent poles."*

There was much disquiet about the tents. Dr Grasby summed up the approach of the Sector Matron to this problem. 'Emily MacManus breezed through the hospital in her inimitable style as if no problem ever existed, and I heard her say to her girls enduring the inconvenience: *"My dears! There's a war on - didn't you know? We must make do! We lived in tents in the last war!"*

Soldiers injured and taken to the Pembury Hospital benefitted from a new occupational therapy unit opened in the old workhouse casuals hut in 1943. An interior view of one of these huts is shown with an exterior view above.

### KENT & SUSSEX HOSPITAL DURING WW2



The hospital, located on St John's Road, had been built as a replacement for the old General Hospital on Grosvenor Road built in 1842. The Duchess of York laid the foundation stone for the new hospital in July 19, 1932. The hospital had been designed by architect Cecil Burns and on July 25, 1934 it was officially opened. Andre Page, a local photographer took many fine photographs of it, one of which is shown above.

From the time of its opening it met the medical needs of Tunbridge Wells and the surrounding area and over the years underwent a number of alterations. The complete history of this hospital is beyond the scope of this article and information about it can be obtained from a number of sources.

During WW2 hundreds, if not thousands, of wounded military personnel were treated at the hospital in addition to the normal load of medical treatments required by residents.

In August 1940 the hospital Road was bombed and sustained substantial damage as shown in the photograph below. The Courier article reporting on the events was published under the headline "Hospital badly damaged but nurses remained calm".



The hospital remained in use until it was time that a modern and larger facility was required and as a result the new Pembury Hospital (image opposite) was built on the Tonbridge Road, about 0.5 kilometres to the north-west of Pembury. The new hospital was designed by Anshen & Allen and built by Laing O'Rourke at a cost of £230 million. The first phase of the new hospital, on which construction started in 2008, opened in

January 2011; the rest of the hospital opened on September 21, 2011 at which time all services were transferred from the Kent and Sussex Hospital. It also replaced the old Pembury Hospital.

