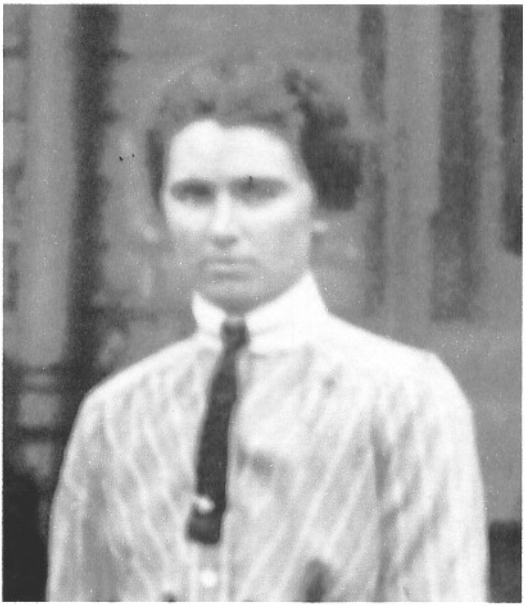
There are still residents who remember the late Eva and Dorothy Gillett who lived at the bungalow at 95 High Street, known as 2The Moorings"
Janet Lewis who now lives at 95 High Street has provided Spotlight with this fascinating account of the family, focusing particularly on their mother Edith, who lived in Clophill all of her life and married Cdr. William Gillett RN (D.S.O.)



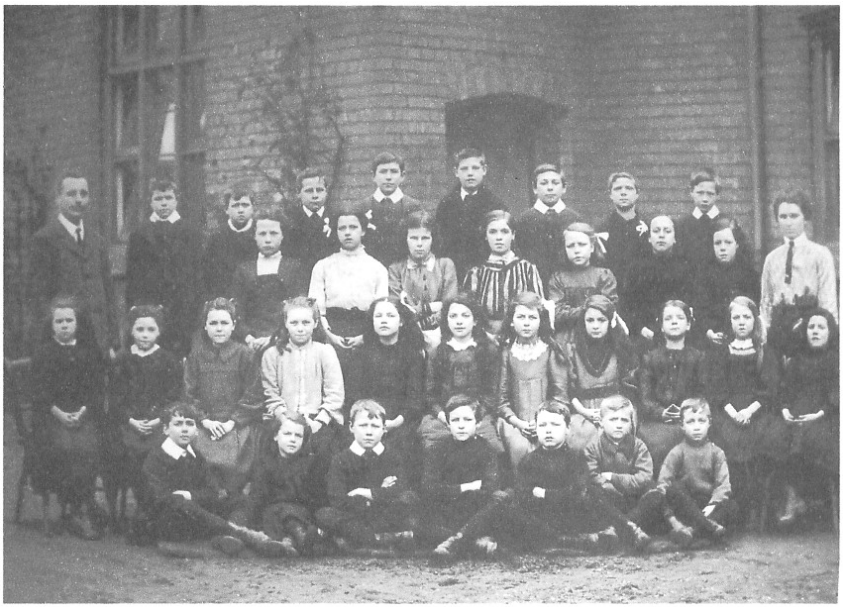
The story of Edith Victoria Appleby

Assistant Teacher at Clophill School 1904-1912

Edith Victoria Appleby was born in Clophill on 6th April 1885. She was the daughter of George William Appleby and Emma Appleby. They lived at 87 High Street, Clophill, the large house on the corner of Great Lane. When Victoria was 18 years old she entered for the Kings Scholarship Examination and obtained her certificate in 1903. The following year 1904 -100 years ago this year she was accepted as an Assistant Teacher at Clophill Voluntary School. The large photograph below shows Victoria on the right with a class of schoolchildren outside Clophill School around 1910.



Clophill Old School ***(Photo Circa 1979)***



At this same time a young man who'd joined the Navy in 1904 came on a visit to Clophill with a Naval friend and he liked the village very much. His name was William Gillett and he was born on the 15th January 1886 in Walton-le-Dale in Lancashire.



William Gillett with his mother

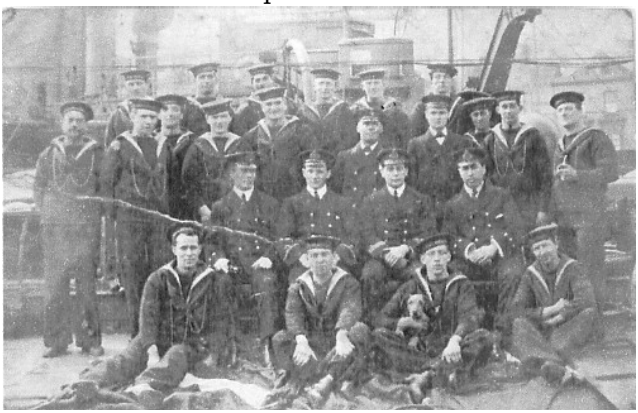
After a few visits to Clophill, William met Victoria and thought what a lovely girl she was but Victoria wasn't sure about William. William played lots of tricks to get Victoria's attention and a favourite story told by their family is when William climbed up to the window of the classroom where Victoria was teaching - the windows were very high up in the old school to prevent the children looking out and being distracted from their work. William opened the window and allowed a pigeon he was carrying, to fly into the classroom, which startled everyone. Victoria was quite cross and told William to go away.
He was full of tricks and Victoria's anger turned to laughter and finally love and she agreed to marry William.
William and Victoria were married on 7th December 1912 at Clophill Church. After their marriage they lived at Glebe Cottage - now Taylor's Cottage -106 High Street.





They were very happy and especially so when their first child was born on the 5`h Oct 1913. She was named Dorothy after William's mother.

The very next year William was called to serve in the First World War as a Gunner Warrant Officer see picture 3. He rejoined his ship HMS Mermaid at Dover where everyone was preparing for action on 0 August 1914 and on August 4th war was declared. William's full story will be told in Spotlight soon. His medals and many of his records are to be seen at the Imperial War Museum in London.



HMS Mermaid- Circa 1914



William as Warrant Officer with his mother

Victoria and William's second child was born on 24th June 1917, her name was Eva.

Victoria, Dorothy and Eva missed William very much when he was away at sea, they loved him dearly and had great respect for his work defending their country. The family continued to live at Glebe Cottage until 1925. William had bought land in 1923 at 95 High Street for £ 200 from Cyril Roberts of Beadlow. The family built a bungalow on the site and called it 'The Moorings'!



Glebe Cottage –now Taylor`s Cottage –106 High Street



`The Moorings` taken from Clophill Church tower Circa 1930

They were a happy loving family and Dorothy and Eva were so proud of their father and his achievements. William and Victoria were kind to people in the village, they bought property and rented it out to young couples less fortunate than themselves.

The whole family loved animals and plants and started a garden and eventually an orchard. They had dogs, cat's geese and chickens.
The family spent their summer holidays in Lancashire & Cumbria staying with relatives, the photograph below shows such an excursion to Blackpool.



Dorothy with chickens at 'The Moorings'

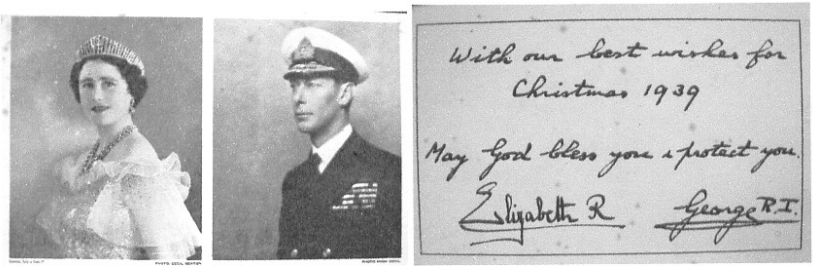


Shopping in Bedford – mid-late 1920's

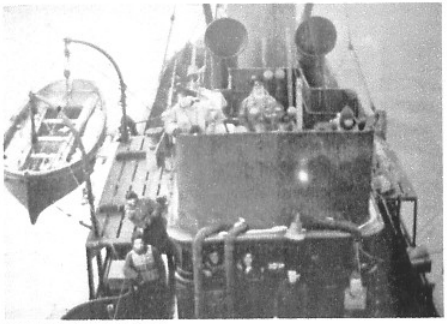
Eva always helped her father with the jobs outside, she would mix cement and point the bricks whilst Dorothy helped her mother in the house. She made wonderful fruit cakes and many of us remember her mince-pies at Christmas laid out in a basket with a message "To be eaten straightaway!".
Dorothy also studied music and taught the piano, Ann Jeffrey -the current church organist- was one of her pupils. Eva loved to visit her neighbours, Dorothy was much more shy but they both loved people to visit them and have a chat. The family continued to live happily at "The Moorings" and looked after Granny Appleby in their home for many years. When the Second World War came William once again was involved in action and was in charge of mine sweeping from Dover up to the Thames at Kew.

Eva decided she couldn't let him go alone so she applied to The London Hospital to do nursing to be near him. She loved the people of the East End but in wartime London was a dangerous place and a young country girl found it difficult to cope with life in White chapel. She became ill after two years and decided to come home to the peace of Clophill were she grew and sold apples and looked after the geese, hens, cats and dogs. ". William built a wall dividing the garden from the fields to prevent flooding and the bungalow too is built above road level for the same reason.
Because of the strong naval connection and discipline the naval Ensign and Union Jack were raised on St. George's Day and the Monarch's birthday in the garden of "The Moorings."

Below is a copy of a Christmas card sent by His Majesty the King -George VI and Queen Elizabeth with the words inscribed: "With our best wishes for Christmas 1939. May God bless you and protect you."



During the Second World War, William was badly injured. He was wounded on the 20th February 1940 by a machine gun bullet whilst on the bridge of HMS SOLON off Great Yarmouth. He was taken to Great Yarmouth Hospital.



HMS SOLON



Plaque commemorating HMS LYNX

Whilst in hospital William received a mention in Despatches and on the 1S` January 1942 he was awarded The Distinguished Service Order and became Lieut. Commander Gillett D.S.O.RN. The award states: "The King has been graciously pleased to give orders for the Appointments to the Distinguished Service Order and to approve the award for outstanding zeal, patience and cheerfulness and for setting an example of whole hearted devotion to duty without which the high tradition of the Royal Navy could not have been upheld." William rejoined HMS LYNX by request.

During the Second World War, William ran the Dover Sea Cadets between March 1942 and June 1943. From July 1943 he was Commander of Mine-sweeping London and Commanding Officer HMS Yeoman and retired by wish as from the 31" May 1945 owing to his earlier war injuries - unless he was needed again. Victoria, Dorothy and Eva were so glad to have him at home again. . His daughters had joined the Red Cross during the War and the photograph shows the family altogether whilst William was on leave.



The family enjoyed nearly ten years together before William became ill and died on the 20'h February 1955. Victoria and the girls were heartbroken and Victoria died nine months later. Dorothy and Eva continued to hold their father and mother in high esteem and talked of them often with great affection.

In 1982, Eva took William's war medals and written account of his battles in both wars to the Imperial War Museum in London where they can be seen.

His sword was presented to the Dover Sea Cadets. Both daughters continued to live at the "The Moorings" looking after their geese, chickens and cats. Year after year, they picked apples and pears from the trees in their garden, Eva used to enjoy a trip to Bedford on the bus to meet people and do the shopping but Dorothy always stayed at home to do the cooking.



William's Sword Presentation to Dover Sea Scouts



'The Moorings' 1997



Eva & Dorothy with their cats - 1986

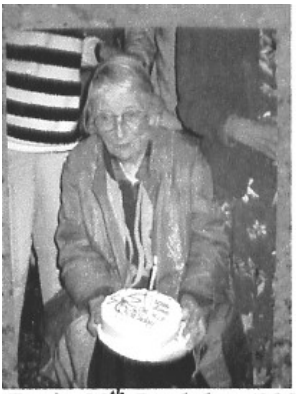


(Circa 1975)

Dorothy lived to be eighty-three and died in 1997. Eva missed her very much and had just one bantam hen at this time called "Chook" who was allowed to come into the house and follow her around everywhere. She was great company for a lonely old lady. Eva celebrated her 80t^{h} Birthday with her neighbours in her garden in 1997. Eva died on the 15th November 1998. Chook was given a good home with other chickens in Silsoe.



Eva with `Chook` -the hen



Eva`s 80th Birthday (1997)