

The London Hafters in 2002

The second part of the “Geschichte der Haffter von Weinfeldern” which appeared in 1998 included the story of the London branch of the family as far as it was known at that time, but like the stories of the other branches, (both single “f” and double “ff”) in very brief form. Brevity was necessary given the wide spread of the various branches of the family.

The present note seeks both to expand and bring up to 2002 the development of the “London” branch of the family, as well as to expand the details of the female lines of descent, given the less sexist approach to such matters now accepted. It is still, however, perhaps inevitably, overweight on detail of Gordon and Barbara’s family, but that stems from the authorship. Further contributions from other family members would be welcome.

The “London” branch was founded by Henry (christened Johann Heinrich) Hafter, (4 May 1871 to July 8 1952) who emigrated from Switzerland to Great Britain in 1896. Henry had taken up a commercial apprenticeship in Basel, relatively late it must be assumed, as although born in 1871, he was still an apprentice in 1895, at the age of 24 when his employers told him that they were unable to offer him the extended experience which they felt his talents justified, and recommended that he spend his last apprentice year with a firm in London with which they had relations.

The arrangement was made and he came to London in 1896, as a last year apprentice with the firm of fur dressers and dyers named C.W.Martin and Sons, of Upper Thames Street in the City of London. At the end of the year, the company was pleased to offer him a permanent position, which he accepted, and he remained with the company as an employee and later a director until he stepped down from the Joint Managing Directorship in 1940, remaining an adviser to the Company until finally retiring in 1942..

There is little record of his early life in London except that it is known that he started in lodgings in Canonbury and became an enthusiastic member of the then recently formed Cyclists Touring Club. Of his other professional and leisure pursuits there is no record, except that he became a member of the City Swiss Club, and of the Nouvelle Société Helvetique, nor of any friendships and relationships which he may have formed, but in 1911 he met (allegedly under the clock at Liverpool Street Station) Else Heymann, (11 November 1885 to 2 September 1964) the daughter and 7th child of Solomon Heymann and --Wagner, originally of Hamburg, but then living in Jersey (Channel Islands), to which Else had been taken with the family, as a teenager.

It was a whirlwind romance culminating in marriage only three months later. Else was $\frac{3}{4}$ Jewish, (it is believed her mother had one Danish protestant parent), but converted to Christianity before her marriage, being baptised at St.Martin’s parish church in Jersey. They were married on 23 June 1911, but there is no record of the time and place, though their first home was in the Stamford Hill/Stoke Newington area of London.. After the war

they moved to Palmers Green, then to Grange Park and finally to Cuffley in Hertfordshire.

In the 20s, Henry became a member of the “Kirchenpflege”(PCC) of the newly established German speaking community Swiss church in London which was accommodated in the City church of St. Anne and St. Andrew with St. John Zachary in Gresham Street in the City of London. Previously the only Swiss Church in London was French speaking.

Weekday services there were conducted by the C of E vicar, but on Sundays and various holy days, it was made available to the Evangelical Reformed Church of German Switzerland.

St Anne's was destroyed during the bombing of the City of London during the second world war, and the Swiss Church moved for a time into the premises of the Methodist Central Hall in Kingsway, and later, again through the courtesy of the C of E, into another city church adjacent to the Mansion House.

Their first child, Margot Ilse, was born on 31st August 1912, and at the time of writing is 90 years old, still painting and living alone in New Galloway. Their second child, also a daughter, Helen Marjorie, was born on 2nd September 1916. There was a miscarried pregnancy about the end of the war, and their third child, Gordon Henry was not born until 18th May 1921. All three children were, of course, British subjects by birth, but Henry and Else never took British citizenship although remaining UK residents until their deaths in 1952 and 1964 respectively. All three children acquired Swiss citizenship by descent in addition to British citizenship. Helen acquired US citizenship by marriage and residence, (of which more later) and now lives in Maine with her daughter Veronica (Roni) .

Margot, who married a London Scot, William (Bill) Mackintosh, a timber importer and amateur Rucker player, has two children, a daughter Helen born on 1 Nov 1940, and herself married and now like her mother a painter, and living near Castle Douglas in Scotland, and a son Alastair, born 12 Sept 1944, who became a scientist and later a teacher and is now living in New Zealand. Bill succeeded to the control of the firm (C.W. Mackintosh and Sons) and eventually sold it retiring to Corsock near Dumfries in Scotland, where they built a house with a studio for Margot's painting activities.

Helen also had two children, a son Christopher, born in the USA on 12 May 1945, and a daughter Veronica (Roni) born 17th Jan 1948. Helen had married Herbert Piening in 1936. Herbert was born in the USA and had the right to US citizenship, but his parents were German and he was brought up in that country as a German, where his father was an employee of the Hamburg America Line.

Herbert followed his father into that occupation, and shortly after his marriage to Helen, was posted to the company's Panama office. The high temperature and humidity affected his asthma severely, and he was invalided home to Europe at very short notice in 1938.

The Nazi party regime had become less and less acceptable to the couple, and he resigned from the company having decided to move to the USA and there reclaim his US citizenship.

In the meantime, Helen returned temporarily to the UK where she found herself, at the outbreak of World War II living with a German passport. British (and Swiss) women at that time lost their original citizenships when they married foreigners. The UK authorities eventually provided her with a document stating that although the holder of an enemy alien passport, she was British by birth, and was not to be treated as an enemy alien.

With this document in her passport, she secured a passage to New York in the early months of the war and rejoined her husband. There, she had a number of jobs eventually joining the wartime New York office of the BBC.

She and Herbert returned to the UK after the war and continued to live in Mill Hill, both of them working in the travel business, partly self-employed and partly for various specialist tour operators.

Her son, Christopher, although born in the USA was brought up in England where he took British citizenship, and kept this although most of his career was spent in Luxembourg and Belgium as an EU official, eventually becoming head of the European Parliament Office in London until his untimely death at the age of 56 in 2001.

Her daughter Roni entered the hotel trade, there meeting Mario de Pietro, the son of a Swiss innkeeper who was in the UK learning the language and broadening his trade experience. They emigrated to the USA where Mario became a Chef of note and later manager of a group of restaurants. Roni, throughout her life in the USA has worked, partly full time and partly part-time as cabin crew, for various airlines. They have two children, and have recently established a country "Inn" (not quite the same thing in the USA as in the UK) in Maine.

Gordon, the third child of Henry and Else early became seriously interested in transport in general and particularly in railways. While at school, he sought the assistance of his housemaster in making contact with a distinguished railway engineer, W.S.Graff-Baker who was at that time Chief Mechanical Engineer of the London Underground. As a result of that and other advice received, he attended Faraday House Electrical Engineering College after leaving school. He was always of the opinion that he should have spent a further year in the upper sixth and then gone on to Imperial College instead.

When war broke out in 1939, Gordon had just completed his 2nd college year (3rd year including the year spent as a student apprentice with Plenty and Sons of Newbury, Berks) and the position of young men still engaged in higher education was ill defined. Rather than continue with the fourth year of the "thick sandwich" course as a student apprentice with another electrical engineering firm, he instead entered the RAF as a Wireless Mechanic in 1940, it being explained to him that in spite of his completion of the

academic part of his electrical engineering course, he could not be considered for a direct entry Electrical Officer or Signals Officer on account of his foreign parentage. (He later learned that this was not strictly true).

After courses and some service, in the UK, he was posted to the Middle East in 1941, where he joined the Desert Air Force, in support of the 8th Army in the Western Desert. Victory in North Africa came in 1943, followed by the invasion of Sicily in July of that year and the long Italian campaign ending with the Desert Air Force and 8th Army being in Veneto and on the Austrian frontier by VE day.

In 1942, he had been recommended for a commission as a Signal Engineer, and interviewed in Cairo for that position, but the papers were lost between the Middle East and the Air Ministry on London, and did not surface until his repatriation from Italy after the end of the European war.

On his return to England, the offer of a Signal Engineer's post was re-confirmed, but with the condition that he be willing to serve a further two years, a condition he was unwilling to accept, and after further short service as an Educational and Vocational Instructor, he was granted relatively early release on account of his long continuous service abroad.

He had been mentioned in despatches at the end of the Desert campaign, primarily for his work in turning captured Italian and German equipment to use by the RAF in desert conditions. Towards the end of the Italian Campaign, when conditions improved and a little more time off-duty was available, he made contact with both 190 and 154 Railway Operating Companies of the Royal Engineers (Transportation Branch), and spent much of his spare time with them, eventually learning to drive Italian State Railways class 424 electric locos.

On demobilisation, he attempted to obtain employment both with the then Southern Railway, (which had the greatest amount of electrified lines in the UK) and with London Transport on the Underground, and was accepted by the latter as a trainee engineer in the then Chief Mechanical Engineer's Department.

This was an era in which progress through the ranks was usually a very slow process, but Gordon was fortunate enough to be promoted after the end of his first year's training, though after that there was a serious setback which was overcome by the very firm intervention of his original "tutor" Graeme Bruce, who subsequently became Chief Operating Manager.

Progress after that was initially quite rapid, and he filled in sequence the posts of Progress and Planning Assistant for Acton Works, and Line Engineer for the Northern Line with the depots of Golders Green, Morden and their various sub-depots under his control.

Immediately preceding this period, he was seconded for a spell on exchange, to the RATP, (the Paris Metro) which had a considerable effect on his later career and approach to his jobs.

He was promoted Divisional Engineer in 1964, in charge of the maintenance of all the “Tube” lines rolling stock except the Bakerloo, but stagnation (in grade at least) lasted until 1973. The period included not only the initial spell as Divisional Engineer, but later, by exchange of posts with a colleague, some years as Traction Engineer, in which position he was much concerned with the initial testing and commissioning of the Victoria Line, and also with international work with the UIC (International Union of Railways).

Later, he returned to the position of Divisional Engineer, taking on all the tube lines again, including this time also the Bakerloo and the Victoria, as well as the Breakdown emergency organisation. As the senior Divisional Engineer, he deputised as required for the Rolling Stock Engineer (then Graeme Bruce), and on the latter’s becoming Chief Operating Manager, assumed the Rolling Stock Engineer’s position.

A feature of this progress, was that having stagnated as a Principal Executive Assistant for so many years, and seen many of his colleagues overtake him when acquiring junior officers positions, with this single promotion he by-passed both the junior officers grades and became immediately a senior officer.

One of his first concerns was that this situation should not repeat itself, and he lobbied hard, and eventually successfully, for his Divisional Engineers who had taken over his own former position to be appointed junior officers themselves rather than Principal Executive Assistants.

It was during his period as Rolling Stock Engineer, that London Underground’s worst train accident ever took place, when, in February 1975, a Northern City Line train was driven at speed into the dead end of the tunnel at Moorgate, killing 43 people. The responsibility for dealing with this tragedy fell fairly squarely on Gordon’s shoulders and he was appointed an OBE for that work..

Later, he took on other responsibilities in addition to rolling stock, being redesignated successively Operating Manager (Engineering) and Deputy Operations Director, before being asked by the Managing Director (Railways) to take on the position of Director of Mechanical Engineering.

He retired from London Transport in 1985, a year before his 65th birthday to facilitate a major re-organisation which saw the whole of the engineering functions re-arranged, with the positions of the three Directors of Civil, Mechanical and Signal & Electrical Engineering abolished.

Since retirement from London Transport, consultancy work both at home and abroad has never been lacking, and even as this is being written, he is engaged in a minor consultancy for the new “Transport for London” body. Consultancies have taken him to Tunisia, Algeria, India, China, Singapore as well as a number of places in the USA, Canada and at home. “Home” includes for this connection both the UK and France, since

much work was done for the Channel Tunnel which was perhaps his primary love, though a subsequent disappointment in its commercial operations so far as the main European railway systems are concerned.

While the two previous pages have dealt with his railway career as a continuous story, everything that took place did so within a noticeably successful marriage. Just before demobilisation, Gordon had become engaged to Barbara Henderson, the elder daughter of Charles Henderson and Winnifred Sturt, with whom his own parents were friendly.

Her father, Charles, was the son of an expatriate Scot, who moved to London on appointment as the personnel manager of Keillers, the makers of the famous Dundee marmalade, who had established a London factory. Charles grew up in London and joined the merchant bank then known as Kleinwort Sons and Company, of which he became the foreign exchange manager. Her mother, had received the mid years of her education (from about 9-13) in Paris, by which she had become bi-lingual.

Barbara was the eldest of three children (born 30 August 1916) and was educated at St.Felix school in Southwold, where she became head of house, and later went up to St. Hilda's College Oxford, where she read English Literature and Language.

Barbara had just come down from Oxford when they first became friendly. While this may have been (in the mores of the time), an unrecognised impediment to progress towards a serious liason, Gordon being 17 and Barbara 22, the problem seems to have been realised as non-existent by the time that Gordon was approaching civilian life again.

While Gordon's initial salary as a trainee engineer was nowhere near sufficient to "support a wife", Barbara, was earning twice as much and never considered this a problem. They were early practitioners of the current view of marriage as a partnership having an economic as well as a social and sexual function. Barbara had joined the BBC in 1939, and served with the Monitoring Service and later with the News Division, (which was also responsible for the War Reporting Unit). On its formation at the end of the war, she became a founder member of the BBC's "Third Programme" – now Radio 3 - as the Planning and Compilation Assistant.

It is perhaps a feature of their marriage, that it started just as one conventional life-style was being replaced by another, so that while Barbara resigned from the BBC when she became pregnant with Russell, (in spite of the BBC being in advance of employers generally and the law in making maternity leave and pay available to all its staff), she nevertheless re-started full time employment when Russell was between two and three years old.

When Hamish was born in 1951, the ethos was changing, and although now in private commercial employment, she did take maternity leave. With the birth of Giles, she would

have taken a second stretch of maternity leave, but her employers, the London office of Besse and Co were rather reactionary in their attitude to women, and made it clear that she would not be welcome to return.

The parent Besse company was nevertheless an interesting firm, the original founder, Antonin Besse having started as a coffee exporter in the Horn of Africa and Arabia. He became very rich and built up a large import/export business in that area, as well as his own shipping line, and while remaining a French citizen, acquired a great interest and love for Great Britain.

He endowed a new college in Oxford (St Anthony's) after World War II and tried to source many of his new staff from that university, which was how Barbara came to join the Company when first returning to work after Russell's birth. He also gave a great deal of money to Gordonstoun School, where both Princes Philip and Charles were educated. This was one of Kurt Hahn's ventures and Charles is reputed to have hated it.

Barbara again therefore took a couple of years off and then returned to her first love, the BBC, once another suitable nanny had been found. At first, by way of getting her foot in the door, she accepted a secretarial post with the BBC World Service at Busch House, but soon was able to return to real programme work by becoming an assistant to Michael Barry who was head of Television Drama.

This would have gone on and developed had not the nanny without warning and after quite a period of satisfactory service, suddenly developed facets of unsatisfactory conduct and had summarily to be dismissed. The subsequent birth of twins delayed the return to work still further.

When, however, these youngest children started school, Barbara soon started part time work again. The twins themselves encouraged her so to do, and suitable work enabling her to return home before the primary school day ended was put in her way by the University Women's Appointments Bureau, who told her that a part time secretarial assistant to the assistant editor of "Town and Country Planning", the organ of the Town and Country Planning Association, was required. The Association then was still enjoying the active input of Sir Frederick Osborn, an early co-worker in the Garden Cities Association founded by Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin.

This work quite quickly developed into full time editorial work, and eventually Barbara herself became Assistant Editor, eventually with many of the responsibilities of a managing editor, as later Editors were full time academics devoting a very small part of their week to the publication.

So that in spite of all the interruptions, Barbara achieved an extremely rewarding and interesting career by the end of her full time working life which she did not leave until she was 66.

They had five children, though Giles, the middle one, was tragically killed in a cycling accident shortly after his tenth birthday, and just after passing both Scouts and Police cycling proficiency tests. He was also the child who probably had the sharpest brain – certainly the most imaginative.

Of the others, Russell (15 Nov 1947) got himself a scholarship to Christ's Hospital, a school originally founded in the City of London but moved out to Sussex in the early 20th century, read chemistry at Oxford and a PhD at Stirling, and started adult life as a teacher in Scotland. However, he became more and more interested in travel as an occupation, and after some years following both occupations simultaneously, is now a full time niche tour operator arranging walking and motoring holidays in Germany and Alsace. He lives in Cumbria, adjacent to but not in the same house, as his partner, Patricia Carter, who is a Consultant Pediatrician at a hospital in the area.

The second child, Hamish, (25 August 1951) was not academic, and after only a moderate school career, in spite of winning a scholarship to Mill Hill School, during which however he distinguished himself as a gymnast, embarked on what had then become a popular “hippie” trail, starting with a spell on a Kibbutz in Israel, followed by a long trip overland to India and back again.

There were some non-career jobs after returning home, and as soon as he had replenished his reserves, he went to the USA where Russell was at the time doing a post doctoral research year at the University of Vermont in Burlington. There he met (as yet another new girl-friend) Michele Rosset, both of them being interested in Makramé work, and eking out a living by making and selling items of artwork. After buying a superannuated ex bread-truck for some \$200, they embarked on a transcontinental trip across the USA, eventually arriving in San Francisco with some \$4 in their pockets.

They nevertheless got by, and hard work coupled with design flair on Michele's part and a hitherto undiscovered talent for organisation on Hamish's part enabled them to prosper over the years, building up gradually a thriving women's clothing manufacturing and sales business.

A serious attack of breast cancer hit Michele just when the business had reached a considerable size, and although thankfully recovered, forced her to reconsider the time and effort being put into the business and to devote herself full time to her other main interest, painting. A similar fate befell her successor as the design chief of the company, and the reduction in the design flair coincided with increasingly difficult conditions in the American “rag trade” which, in the present recession (2002) has caused the business to be wound up.

Hamish meanwhile has taught himself the craft of picture framing, which he does both for Michele's work and commercially, while also using his expertise as a cloth dyer to take up some consultancy work. Currently they are working hard to keep afloat, but the

family has enormous confidence in Hamish and Michele's ability to pull through hard times.

Their daughter, Geneva, is in her penultimate year at High School, and has turned into an enthusiastic and expert dancer of modern works, having gained two scholarships for summer schools, (one in the UK and one in California where she gained a Governor's Medal award.)

The remaining two children, Grizelda and her twin brother Kevin (2nd Oct 1957) read Geography and Business Economics respectively at university and both joined London Transport and are now with London Underground, Kevin as the Train Service delivery Manager for all the sub-surface lines, while Grizelda, after a spell in Bus Engineering followed by work with London Transport International, (which included work with LTI Consultants Inc. in the USA) is now a communications manager in the LUL-TransSys joint venture introducing "Smart Card" ticketing to London.

Grizelda and her husband Ken Smith have four children and Kevin and his wife Caroline have two, five of whom show a competence for music making, the sixth being still too young to judge.

It is perhaps a further sign of the times that all three Hafter wives, Michele, Grizelda, and Caroline who is both a geographer and a diplomé Landscape Gardener, have retained the surnames with which they were born, so that Barbara's and Gordon's seven grandchildren all have double barrelled surnames.

That is as far as the story of the London Hafters can be taken at the end of the year 2002, but perhaps the younger generation itself will take on the task of continuing the tale.

Isleworth
November 2002.