

Atworth
A People's History

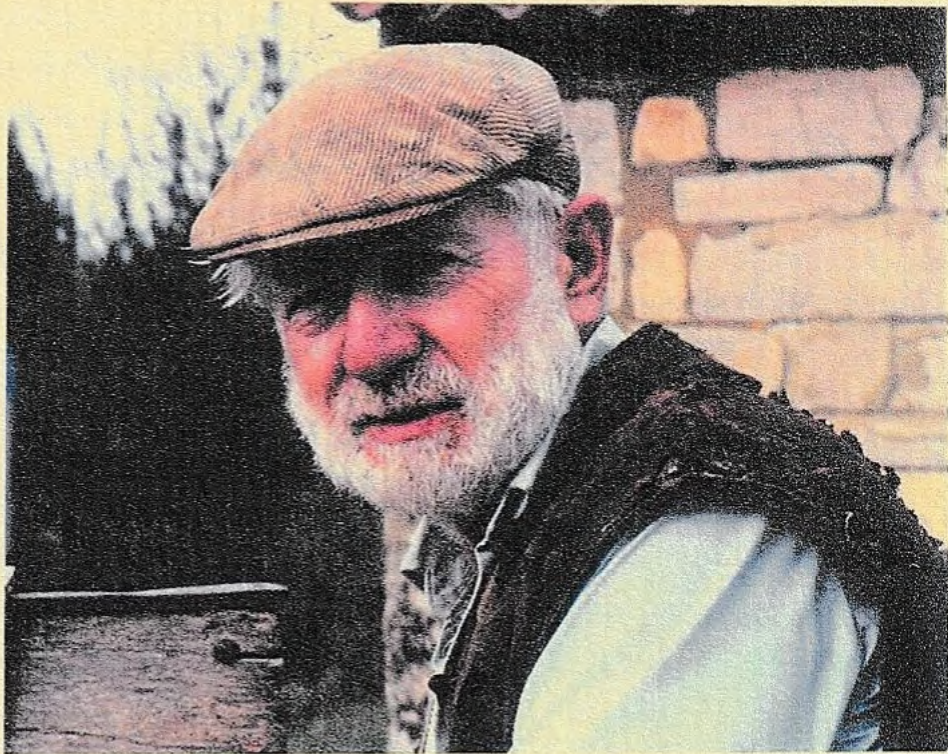


A Brief History of the
Rawlings Family.



By Joan M. Cocozza

Sidney James Rawlings



1926 – 2008



'Atworth - A People's History'
Rawlings Family of Poplar Farm



With sincere thanks to those who contributed
personal accounts and photographs.

Sidney James Rawlings, Sue Rawlings,
Helena May Raithby & Norman Williams



Rawlings Family History

Generation 1 -

Great, great grandfather of James & Helena -

On February 13th 1820 in the county of Wiltshire ¹Thomas Rawlings married Ann Hancock. Ann was born in Redstocks in the early 1790's. Sometime between the birth of her youngest child in 1837 and when the census was taken in June of 1841 Ann had been widowed. She was recorded as being of 'Independent Means'. In the household were eight children between twenty and four years old. Over the following years Ann was listed as 'Pauper' and later as 'Laundress'. She died in 1875 aged eighty-four.

Children, generation 2 - ²Thomas born 1821, ¹Jacob about 1824, 'Agricultural Labourer', Mary 1826, ¹James 1829, Sarah 1830, Mercey 1832, Louisa 1844 and George 1837.



Generation 2 - son of ¹Thomas & Ann-

Great grandfather of James & Helena -

¹Jacob, the son of ¹Thomas and Ann, was christened on October 3rd 1824. He married Elizabeth Cox on April 10th 1847.

According to the census returns of 1851 ¹Jacob, an 'Agricultural Labourer', and his wife were living in Redstocks. A decade later, 1861, the address for the family was given as Snarlton Lane, Melksham. Sometime within the following ten years ¹Jacob had become a 'Farmer of 170 acres employing 1 man and own family'.

It was after 1878 that the Rawlings family moved to Atworth. ¹Jacob's name first appeared in Atworth in the Kelly's Directory published 1880.

It is from the census returns taken on the night of April 3rd 1881 we

find the family were occupying 'Old Barn Poplar Farm, Atworth'.¹*Jacob* was recorded as a 'Farmer 180 acres 3 Labourers'. By 1891 sixteen-year-old granddaughter, Elizabeth M. Selfe, had joined the household and her position was recorded as a 'Domestic Companion'. Shortly after this ¹*Jacob* and Elizabeth moved back to their old home in Snarlton Lane, Melksham where their married daughter Mary Jane Selfe cared for them. It was here that ¹*Jacob* died in 1899 and Elizabeth in 1907.

Children, generation 3 – ²*John*, born in 1849 and *Mary Ann* born 1851, *Sarah Louisa* born 1854, ²*James* born March quarter 1858, ³*Thomas* born December 1860, *Elizabeth* born September quarter 1862 and *Maria* born September quarter of 1864.



Generation 3 - children of ¹Jacob & Elizabeth -

²*James* was born in the March quarter of 1858. From a young age he was working on his father's farm. In the autumn of 1880 ²*James* married Sarah Sealy. Sarah, the daughter of Albert and Ruth Sealy was born in Grittleton in 1856. She was one of seven Sealy children to be christened in St. Michael & All Angel's Church on April 5th 1863. Sarah's father died in 1878 and her widowed mother became the first Postmistress in the village when she opened a Post Office in the family home in Leather Lane.

When the census was taken on April 3rd 1881 ²*James*' occupation was given as 'Farmer' residing in Main Street, Atworth. By the early 1890's the family were living in Streets Green and a few years later, after his elderly parents had left the village, ²*James* and family moved to Poplar Farm.

In 1899 when Rosa Burry arrived in Atworth to take up a position as teacher at the local school she boarded at Poplar Farm and became one of the family. Rosa lodged there until 1935 when the now elderly ²*James* and Sarah moved to live with their eldest daughter Mrs Alice Edwards at Crewekerne, in the county of Somerset.

²*James* died at the age of eighty and he and his wife Sarah were interred in Atworth Chapel yard. Having served as a trustee and local preacher a plaque dedicated to the memory of ²*James* was placed in the chapel.

Children, generation 4 – *Ernest James* was born on December 13th 1881. Ernest died on February 21st 1882 and is buried in the Chapel yard. *Alice Elizabeth R.* born 1883, *Annie* 1885 and *Edith Henrietta* 1887.



In her book 'My Memories' Elsie Sealy (the daughter of Charles and niece of Sarah Rawlings) recalled - "... as we grew older, my Dad got a pony and cart and we used to visit our grandmother (Ruth) at Atworth, and were guests of her married daughter, (Sarah wife of a farmer at Poplar Farm. His landlord was Squire Fuller of Neston Park. I remember devouring fruit cake given to us by the cook, and we were sent back with a large slab of dripping from the large joints of English beef."

Norman Williams recalled – "I spent many happy hours at Poplar Farm. From the malthouse was a wooden staircase to where Florrie Evans, the domestic servant, had her bedroom. The right room at the front of the house had a large polished table on which Cedric (grandson of James & Sarah) and I used to play table tennis. Mum used to make sponge sandwiches and cakes for Auntie Sarah, which she placed on a plate tied up in a tea towel making a handle for me to carry to the farm. I remember it was April 21st 1926, my sixth birthday, when I went to the farm with a cake. There was great excitement as

they heard on the crystal set that Princess Elizabeth (now Queen Elizabeth II) had been born that day."



Grandfather of Sidney James & Helena-May -

³Thomas the son of ¹Jacob and Elizabeth was born about 1860. In the June quarter of 1887 ³Thomas married Helena Kate, daughter of Josuha and Sarah Hosier. Helena, known as Kate, was born in the December quarter of 1867.

Sometime between the birth of their first child in 1888 and the second child in 1889 ³Thomas and Kate had moved to Manor Farm, Buckland in the county of Somerset. By the turn of the century they were living at Stanley Heather Farm, Chippenham.

³Thomas died on February 25th 1925 and Helena-Kate in June of 1960. She was ninety-two years old.

³Thomas & Helena Kate Rawlings,



Children - generation 4 - Mary Jane Eva Maria, was born in Theale in the county of Berkshire in 1888 Arthur Jacob born in Buckland in the county of Somerset in 1889. Olive Doreen, born September quarter of 1893, Thomas born 1895, Sidney William born 1898, Reginald born about 1900, Bernard John born 1902 Jacob born 1904 and George 1907.



Generation 4 son of³ Thomas & Helena-Kate -

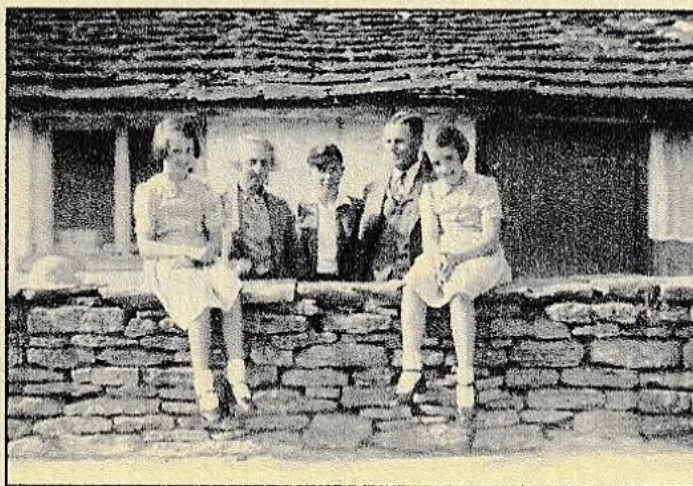
Father of Sidney James, Doreen Elizabeth & Helena-May -

Sidney William was born on April 3rd 1898. During the Great War he served with the Wiltshire Regiment in the rank of Private - regiment number 2840.

About his wartime service *Sidney's* daughter, Helena May, recalled - "I know he served in Egypt and caught Malaria. He also rode a camel." And granddaughter Susan remembers grandfather telling her about his time in Egypt - "We washed plates in sand and early in the morning I groomed and polished the horses ready for the officers." (See entry 'Those Who Served')

On January 14th 1925 *Sidney* married Elizabeth Sarah Flack (née Greenaway) in the church of St. James, Plumstead. Elizabeth Sarah, the daughter of John and Rhoda Greenaway, was born in Purton in December 12th 1889.

Shortly after the marriage *Sidney* and Elizabeth, who was known as Bessie, moved to Poplar Farm. For ten years *Sidney* and family shared the house with ²James and Sarah until they moved in 1935 to live with their daughter in Crewekerne.



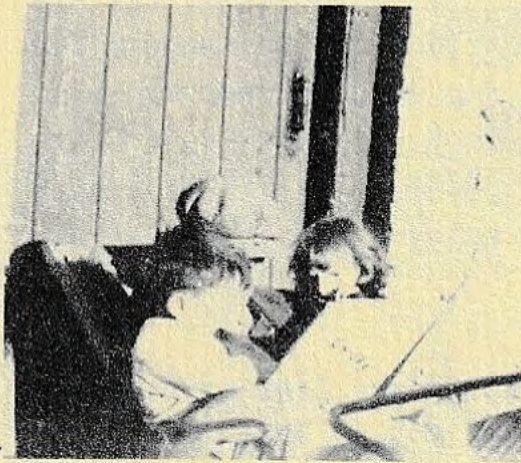
Sidney, Bessie & children at Poplar Farm.



George and Bernard Rawlings had motorbikes and on Sunday evenings would visit Poplar Farm where Sidney and his brothers discussed farming matters.



Sidney William Rawlings.



Sidney reading 'Chick's Own

About her father, Helena May recalled – “For breakfast he had bread and milk followed by egg and bacon. I would stand by him while he ate and he always put a bit of egg and bacon on a piece of piece of bread and give to me. On Sunday morning father would read the comic ‘Chick’s Own’ to us.

When Jim was asked for memories of his father he recalled - “Dad was in the Wiltshire Yeomanry and served in Egypt. One of his duties was to load the broken down guns and pack them on the

back of mules. He told of times of leading the mule trains up the snow-covered Golan Heights. While out there he had Malaria and in later years he suffered from a bout of the illness that tailed off over the years.”

Golan Heights



Jim continued – “I remember that father would get up and before his working day began he would cut the grass for the next day when with the two farm labourers they gathered in the hay. Some years later we had one of the first mechanical hay loaders in the village. I remember the pleasant times when on fine summer nights the whole family would walk all around the farm. Sunday mornings Arnold Webb, of Manor Farm, used to come round to see dad and the two of them would retire to the top hay barn with a bottle of home-made wine for the purpose of ‘sampling it’. I remember during the war the Americans used to send things over and Arnold Webb had the first combine harvester in the village. When it arrived I think the whole village went to see it.”

"I was about seventeen when father had an accident. He was sawing off a branch of a tree and although he had a rope around it it fell and hit him breaking his leg. He was hospitalised and spent several months in St. Martin's Hospital, Bath. This happened during the war and I had been called up to work in the coalmines in Wales. However, my call-up was deferred until father was able to take over the farm again."

Sidney & Elizabeth had three children Sidney James born 1926, Doreen Elizabeth born April 21st 1928 and Helena May born 1930.

Sidney died on April 4th 1987 just one day after his eighty-ninth birthday. Elizabeth spent her final years at Bybrook House, Middlehill, Box. She died on February 7th 1994. The funerals of Sidney and Elizabeth were held at Haycombe Crematorium, Bath.



Left to right Doreen, Helena & Sidney



Childhood Memories



Sidney James, the eldest child of Sidney and Elizabeth, was born at Poplar Farm on February 11th 1926. About his young life Sidney, known as Jim, recalled –

"From my birth until I left in 1952 the family lived in Poplar Farm. I remember in the old milking shed there were poles, which the cows were tethered to at milking time. Along the top of the poles ran a length of timber. One day while the cows were being milked a fox, being chased by the Hunt, ran into the shed and over the top of the cows trying to escape. Sometimes when the foxes were chased they would get into the cellar. We cured bacon in the cellar and I frequently went down to salt and turn it. In one of the kitchens there was a beam with nails in it where some bacon was also hung."

Jim continued "My friend Jack Sealy and me used to get out of the attic windows and walk round the balustrade to pick the pears. From there the staff used to knock the pears off. At night you could hear scuffling in the attic and we used to say it was the rats playing football with the apples and pears that were stored up there. One day we drilled a hole in the ceiling in the old part of the house and got showered with wheat chaff. I remember Uncle Jim making a bow and arrow for me. He used to dole out sweets to the children.

I started school at the age of three and enjoyed my school days. I passed for Fitzmaurice Grammar and rode to Bradford-on-Avon with Joe Barker who lived at the New Inn. I enjoyed Chemistry and got to A Levels in MATHS and PHYSICS AS WELL.

Miss Burry, who taught at the village school, used to live in the



house. There was a stream that came down from Neston to Waterloo Bottom and Miss Burry used to take me there to sail my little boats.

Miss Rosa Burry .

On Saturdays I used to go rabbiting with Alan Daniels and caught up to a 100 a day - some single burriers and some large warrens with 70 + rabbits in. I also picked gage and plums

from loaded trees. These and the rabbits we sold locally for pocket money.

We made trucks from a box and pram wheels- steered by feet. There were no cars on the road so we would start at the top of the hill and let the thing go.

Over many years the farm staff hoed up coins. I dug some up that I thought were Roman and took them to school. I showed them to the school-master Mr. Hobday and he contacted Mr. Shaw-Mellor. I took both of them to the field and showed them where I found the coins and in the end Shaw-Mellor started the dig.

We found a good Hypocaust and much coloured plaster. I also found a short bone handle, which looked to be part of a dagger. Jack found an oval seal ring with a red carved stone. Jack hung on to it so I don't know where it went. The handle eventually went with my collection to Devizes museum. On Sunday mornings Jack and I did regular trips to the excavation for our own little dig. Jack was interested in buildings. He used to charge batteries and was good at virtually everything.

There was ROMAN roof stone everywhere. My father used the stones for farm tracks. There was a large amount of oyster shell in a hedge. In an adjoining field there were two small Tumulus (mounds). These were excavated at the same time but only yielded a cross of local stone slabs so were refilled. They were ploughed out and levelled.

During the war I was drafted into working down the coalmines. Labour politician, Ernie Bevin was Winston Churchill's Minister for Labour and National Service and he was responsible for drafting young men to replace miners who were serving in the armed forces. We were known as 'Bevin Boys'. I worked down the Lady Windsor Ynys mine near Pontypridd. Afterwards I went into the Army serving with the Royal Signals. I trained at Catterick, (North Yorkshire) and ended up in Launberg Germany."

On April 21st 1951 *Jim* married June Pamela Brooke.
Children – Jacqueline Anne born August 6th 1952, Susan Elizabeth December 16th 1954 and Bernard James born August 9th 1959.



Sidney James Rawlings



Doreen Elizabeth, Sidney James & Helena May



Childhood Memories

Helena May, the youngest child of Sidney and Elizabeth, was born on June 30th 1930. About her younger days *Helena* related the following in which she paints a vivid picture of the people and the times –

“I was born and raised on Poplar Farm. To the left of the house was a very large and tall ‘Bishop’s Thumb’ pear tree. Father had to climb a ladder to pick the fruit that he put in an old tin bath and took to the attic to be stored. To the right of the house was a Chestnut tree.”



Helena & Doreen

“In the malt house were two copper boilers heated by wood in which mother did the washing and made the Christmas puddings. There were four doors in the malt house, one led up to the loft. There was an old-fashioned meat safe where we kept tinned food and on top was a large stone jar used for storing block salt, which I liked to cut up. A gothic archway led to a larder then into the kitchen and this is where we lived. The walls were about about three feet thick. There was a gas stove, a small range and a window seat

looking onto the backfields. Opposite was another kitchen looking out onto the garden that had a built-in dresser and a bread oven. It was in this room that on Friday nights we had our bath in a tin tub. From here there were three stones steps up into the 'best room'. On one side of the fireplace was a cupboard where mother stored her homemade wine.

A door from the malthouse led to where the chickens, geese and Khaki Campbells and Aylesbury ducks were kept. Mother loved her poultry. On a trestle table near the coppers was a wooden box where we kept the eggs.



David Webb, Doreen. & Helena

In those days life was happy and easy-going. Doreen and Peggy Hayward and David Webb used to come to play. Doreen and Gwen Fido used to come over and help look after us. When we were in the garden Uncle Jim would throw 'comfort sweets' out of the window for us. We picked primroses which we tied in bunches with strands of wool, king cups growing down in the brook which we put in mother's glass sugar bowl. From the stream running down through the long field we picked watercress.

I remember the water ices in the cardboard wrapping bought from the ice-cream man who used to come on his bicycle and ice-cream made by Mrs. Walker who lived opposite. Mother made delicious butter in a hand-churn. When we had a fridge she made ice-cream using our own cream. Mother was a wonderful cook. She made the Christmas cake and I remember how she mixed the pudding ingredients in a huge crock, which I still have. As tradition dictates everyone 'had a stir and made a wish' before the mixture was put into the basins and cooked in the copper that was filled with water from the rain butt and logs put in the bottom to heat it. For Christmas dinner we had a goose, sprouts, parsnips, peas, baked onions, roast and mashed potatoes and mother's delicious gravy. Supper-time we had sandwiches of ham and tongue, a stick of what I call 'dirty celery' grown on the farm and home made pickled onions.



Helena with her parents & Tinker

During the war we had several families boarding with us so there was always a dozen or more people in the house. We were never hungry and had a happy time. Tea coupons were swapped for sugar. Christmas time we made paper chains, got out the paper balls, which

were used year after year, and hung on the curtain poles. We picked holly and collected sweet chestnuts from Cottles. A Christmas tree was dug up from the garden and decorated with clip-on candles. Christmas Eve I hung a pillow-case on my bed post and used to stay awake hoping to see Father Christmas. But sad to say I never saw him! As all children we woke early and looked at our presents. We had an orange, apple, a pink sugar mouse, a book such as the Rupert annual and a jig-saw.

There was room between the shuttered windows and the curtain for us children to conceal ourselves and prepare before entertaining the adults with short plays, poetry recital and a sing-song. On Boxing Day we would go to see the huntsmen, horses and hounds that met in Market Place."

Father farmed a hundred acres and had two men working for him – Mr. Smith and Mr. Berry who lived by the church. We had twenty-eight Friesians, all milkers and father loved weaning the calves. We had two shire horses, Violet and Blackbird. Poplar Farm was open house. We never locked a door and people would pop in and out."

On December 14th 1963 *Helena-May* married Owen Pete Raithby. They have two sons, **Paul** born October 4th 1964 and **Christopher** born December 15th 1965.



*100th Birthday Celebrations
of
Elizabeth Sarah Rawlings*





Jim wearing first pair of long trousers.



Jim, Helena & Doreen