



Violet Constance JESSOP lived in Maythorn Cottage, Great Ashfield from 1950 to 1971. During her career as a stewardess on ocean liners and as a nurse during World War 1 Violet survived three shipping disasters on the Olympic, the Titanic and the Britannic, all White Star Liners.

Probably the worst of these for her was the Britannic. This was built just before the War and was requisitioned as a hospital ship in 1915. Violet served as a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse with the British Red Cross and on 21st November 1916 she was on board the Britannic when that vessel hit a mine and was sunk in the Aegean, killing 30 people. Violet attributed her survival to her thick auburn hair. As she was dragged under water the keel of the ship hit her head and she was later discovered to have suffered a fractured skull. When she lost her hair completely she disguised her baldness with an auburn wig.

Much has been written about her and there are several web sites and books which tell her story. One of these is Violet's own memoirs, published under the title of "Titanic Survivor". Writing in the New Preface to the 2011 edition John Maxtone-Graham writes:

It has been 42 years since my first encounter with dear Violet Jessop at Maythorn, her thatched retirement cottage near Suffolk's Great Ashfield. Our only meeting took place one wet Sunday afternoon in July 1970...

...It pleases me that Maythorn survives more or less as it was, renovated by its new Irish owners with an expanded and up-to-date kitchen. I remember Violet's cottage, perhaps crowded and small, but the scene of that long and fruitful afternoon in July 1970 that would usher an endearing Titanic voice into the light.

Violet retired in 1950. Her sister Eileen's daughter Mary Meehan was working in an estate agency in Mayfair and found out about the thatched cottage, Maythorn, on Wetherden Road in Great Ashfield. Violet sold the house at 22 Vallis Way in Ealing where she had lived with her mother, hoping that there would be enough money left over to supplement her State pension.

At first she kept hens so that she could sell the eggs to raise income. In later years when she no longer sold eggs her sister Eileen helped her both practically and financially. Her brother Patrick sent money monthly from Australia. Her brother Jack, (*local knowledge says John, is this the same person?*) a carpenter, came back from Australia in 1956 and repaired the wooden piggery at Maythorn Cottage where Violet had hoped to, but never did, grow mushrooms.

She hired a local pensioner, possibly (Herbert) John Rodwell of Rodwin, Daisy Green, who helped her in the garden and they filled the front garden with bulbs and she grew vegetables. She let out the field to a neighbour who kept a horse there. George Rose remembers his red tricycle which she sold to his father, Great Ashfield resident Arty Rose. Violet's nieces Mary and Margaret Meehan, who lived and worked in London, sold for £60 her fitted pigskin dressing case fitted with tortoise shell combs and silver topped crystal bottles which she had been given by a grateful passenger and she returned to writing her memoirs which she had put aside in the 1930s.

In the mid-1950s she learned to drive and bought a second hand baby Austin which was written off when a young man drove out of a lane into the side of it. She kept the insurance money and travelled by 'bus from then on.

Her sister Eileen together with her husband Hubert Meehan moved to Suffolk (Brick House, Hartest) when he retired. Eileen was deaf as a result of suffering from rheumatic fever in

Argentina and a mastoid operation so they were unable to talk on the telephone. Violet made friends in Great Ashfield and spent Christmas and Easter with Eileen and Hubert as Maythorn was too small for family reunions.

As her health declined her nieces Margaret and Mary found a ground floor garden flat for her in London but Violet would not leave Maythorn. She slept downstairs in the sitting room as she could not manage the stairs and caught the Jolly's bus weekly from Daisy Green to Bury St. Edmunds to sell eggs and buy groceries. Eventually she could not manage that so relied on a local mobile grocery van for supplies.

In the Spring of 1971 she fell and lay on the floor overnight until a neighbour found her and called an ambulance. Her hip was not broken but she stayed in hospital for the last few weeks of her life, during which time she was visited by her nieces Margaret and Mary to whom she related a story, saying how amused she had been when a nurse had suggested she might be more comfortable if she put her teeth into a glass overnight, and had to explain that she could not do that as all of her teeth were her own. She died from congestive heart failure on 5th May 1971 and is buried at Hartest with her sister Eileen and brother-in-law Hubert.