

**The life and family of
George Penrose Woolcombe
1867-1951**



Records of our direct line go back seven more generations to William Woolcombe in the parish of Plympton - St Mary 1497 - 1569

REV. WILLIAM WOOLLCOMBE
b. 18 Dec 1754 at Ashbury House (the last of GPW's line at Ashbury)
d. 1796 East Worlington

ANNE WALKER
d. 1790

ROBERT CARTHEW REYNOLDS

JANE VIVIAN

REV. WILLIAM WOOLLCOMBE
b. 1790
Vicar of Christow and Hemock in Devonshire
d. 1862. Hemock

ELIZABETH REYNOLDS
Christened 14 Dec 1785 St. Clement's, Cornwall
sister of Rev. J. D. Barrington & the Rev. J. Barrington
Niece of Joshua Reynolds the great painter & Christow 1856

REV. GEORGE ANDREW JACOB
b. 16 Dec 1807
Headmaster of Christ's Hospital
d. 7 May 1896

SUSANNA PIDSLEY

1. CARTHEW REYNOLDS W.
b. 1820

2. REV. PHILIP W
1821 - 1898

3. JANE VIVIAN
1823 - 1892
married Rev. Wm. Boyce

4. FREDERICK W.
1825 - 1855
Royal Navy
died at sea

REV WILLIAM PENROSE WOOLLCOMBE
b. 13 Nov 1827 in Bellingham, Devonshire
Vicar of Roadwater 1865 - 1897
d. Ramsgate Kent 20 Mar 1899
Father of GPW

HENRIETTA JACOB
baptised 9 Jan 1838
Bromsnoye, Worcester
bore 12 children between the ages of 25 and 43
died 1900
mother of GPW

1. ELIZA JULIA
b. 19 May 1863
d. 9 Oct 1866
aged 3 years

2. MARGARET ELIZABETH "Daisy"
b. 6 Aug 1864
m. Rev. P. A. DAVIS
d. 1956

3. HENRIETTA JANE "Hetty"
b. 28 Oct 1865
m. Rev. J. A. Burgess in Auckland, NZ
d. after 1962

JULIA ACRES
1863 - 1898

REV. GEORGE PENROSE WOOLLCOMBE
b. 21 May 1861, Roadwater
1888 - moved to Canada
1891 - 1933. Founder and headmaster Ashbury College
d. 2 July 1951, Ottawa

WILLIAM EDWARD
b. 5 Oct 1868
came to Canada 1890
NWMP, then Canadian Army.
Deserted. changed names to "Wanda". Forest Ranger in Sask.

JESSIE MICKLE
1865 - 1947

6. MABEL
b. 19 Dec 1869
m. Percy Felce
d. 23 Feb 1926
mother of Dennis Honor

7. MADELINE LOUISA
b. 16 Apr 1871
m. Rev. Henry Karslake

8. WINIFRED
b. 7 July 1872
d. 26 July 1872
aged 3 weeks

9. FREDERICK
b. 4 Oct 1873
d. 6 June 1945
m. Daisy Beatrice Gilman
moved to Canada 1871
Bank manager

10. LIONEL
b. 2 Mar 1877
m. Ethel Connel
banker
d. 1962

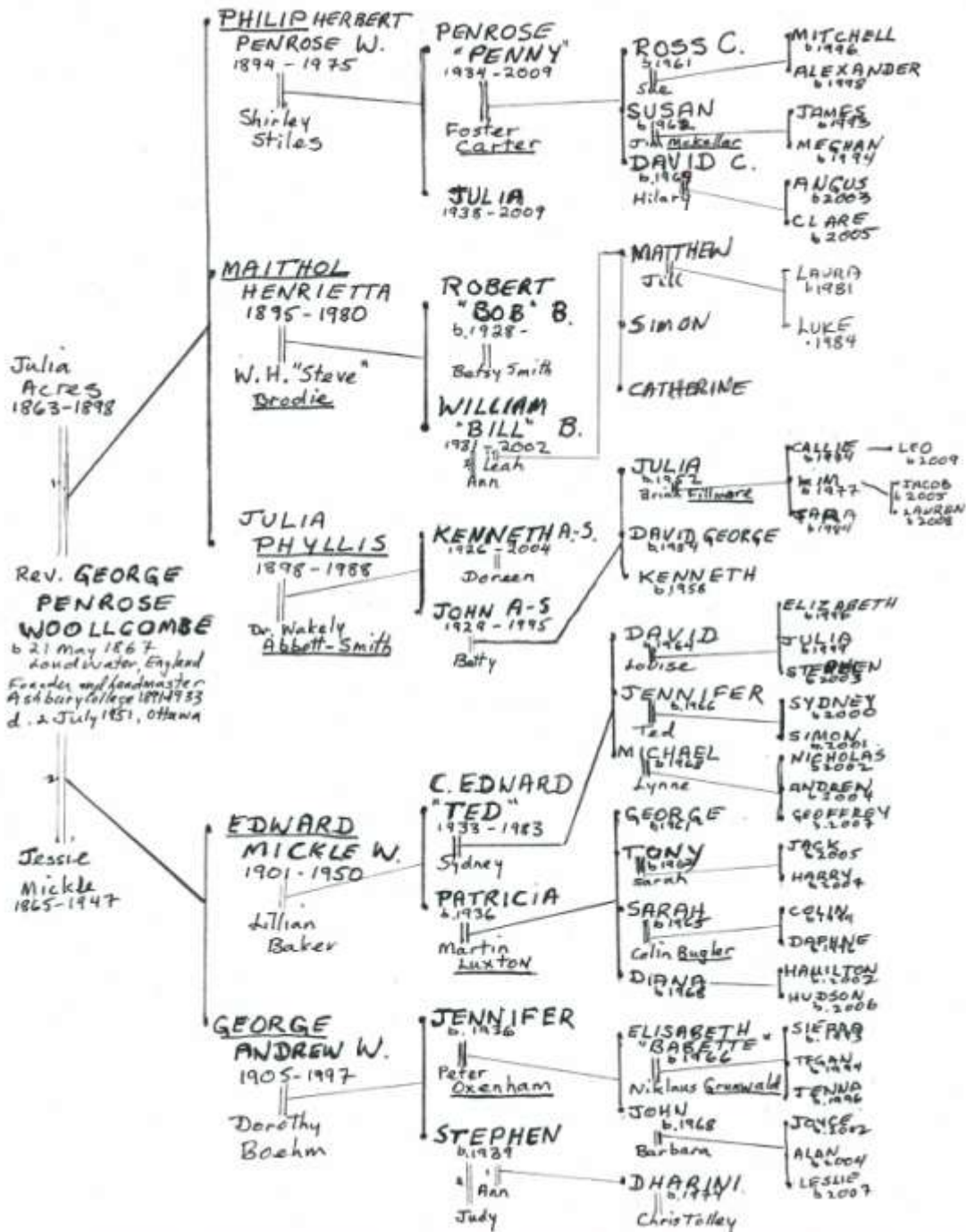
11. ELEANOR MARY
b. 22 May 1879
unmarried pharmacist
d. 1944

12. JOHN VIVIAN
b. 18 Feb 1881
d. 25 Oct 1954
Vicar of Roadwater
Father of Joan and Philip

FAMILY TREE I
ANCESTORS AND
SIBLINGS
OF GPW

Family Tree 2

GPW and his descendents



Chapter One

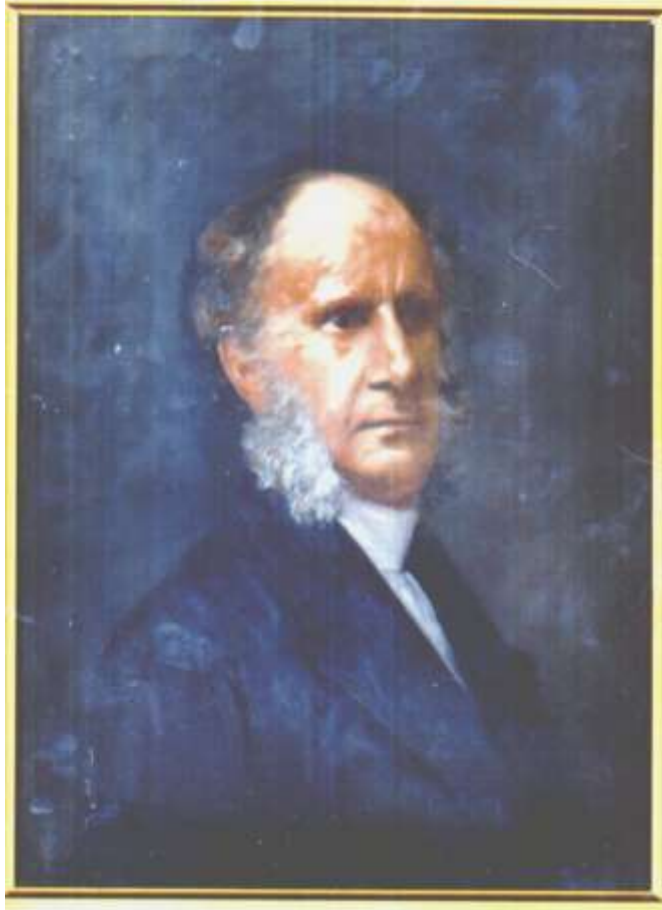
His English Roots

Ashbury House in Devonshire



This was the seat of the Woollcombe family from 1684 until it was sold and demolished in 1934

GPW's maternal grandparents



Rev. **George Andrew Jacob** (1807-1896), Headmaster of Christ's Hospital School



Susanna Jacob, née Pidsley, mother of Henrietta

GPW's Parents



William Penrose Woollcombe for many long years was Vicar of Loudwater, a small English village in Buckinghamshire. He was a stern and traditional Victorian patriarch.



Henrietta Woollcombe, née Jacob, gave birth to twelve children over eighteen years. GPW was her first son. She was gentle and much beloved by all her children.

The Vicarage, Loudwater



This is the house in which GPW was born on May 21st, 1867 (the year of Confederation), and where he lived with his family until he was 18 years old.

Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe



GPW received all his primary and secondary schooling here. He would ride his penny-farthing bicycle there every day for the three miles along a country lane from his home. His brothers, being younger, had to walk. The school received its royal charter from Elizabeth I in 1562. The picture is from an 1880 print.

George Penrose Woollicombe , aged 17



This is the first extant photo ever taken of GPW. Here he is sporting his new moustache.

The Oxford Years – 1885 to 1888



When he was 18 years old, GPW gained entrance to Christ Church, one of Oxford University's constituent colleges. He read classics, modern history and political economy and graduated with his BA in June 1888. Here he is seated (on the left) with fellow students at Christ Church.

Chapter Two

He moves to Canada and founds a school.

When he was 21 years old, in 1888, GPW sailed to Canada and was hired as a teacher at Bishop's College School, Lennoxville, Quebec and then Trinity College School, Port Hope.

In 1891, at the tender age of 24, he was asked by Ottawa notables to start a school in Canada's new capital.

Mr Woollcombe's School for the Sons of Gentlemen

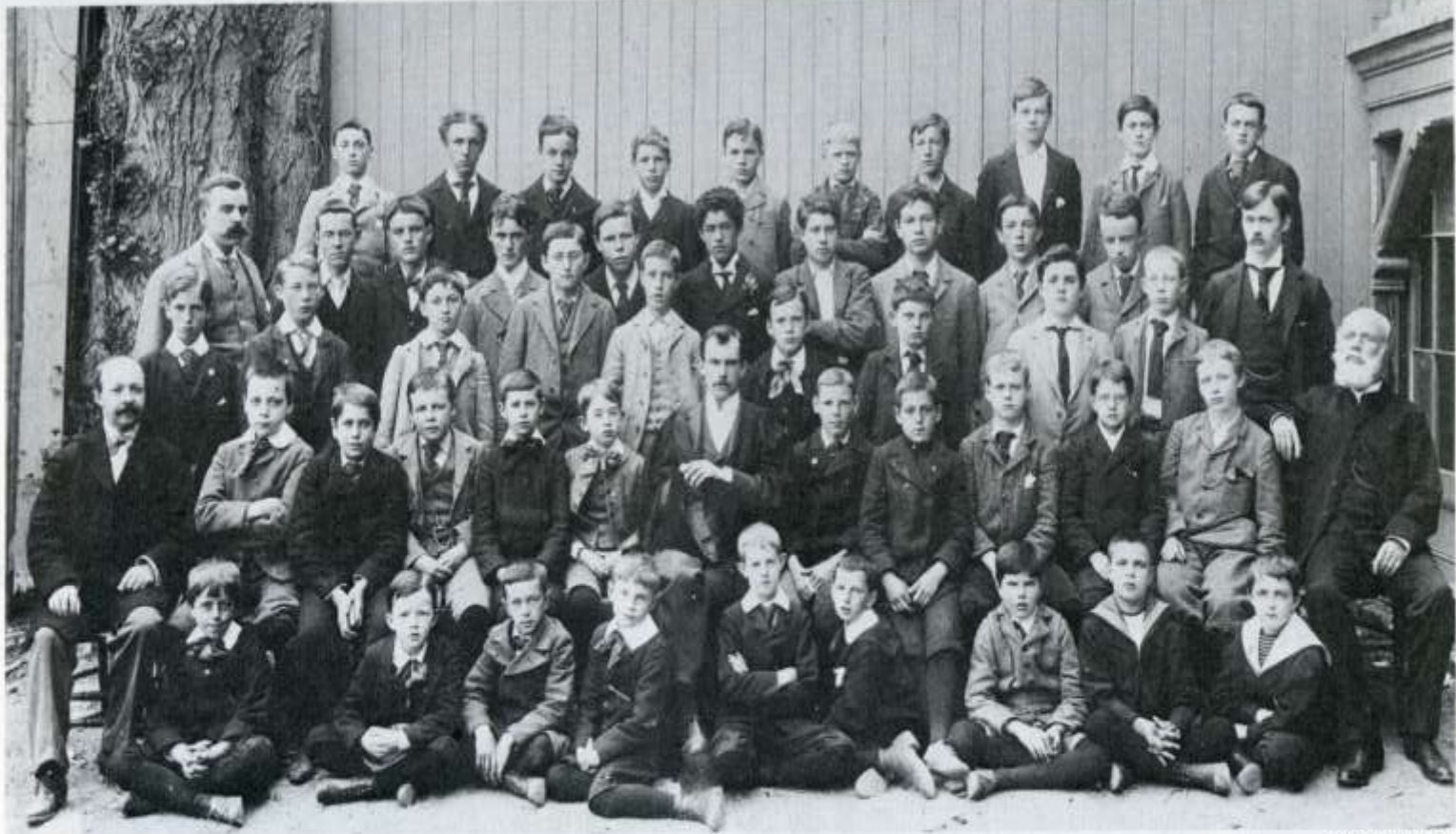


So he moved to Ottawa, and in September 1891, he opened his school with 17 boys and two other teachers in a rented room directly across from Parliament on Wellington St. at the corner of O'Connor.

Ashbury House School 1894 - 1900



Three years later, the school had grown and he had to move to a larger house, one block further west on Wellington at Bank. He decided to name the school after the Woollcombe family estate in Devonshire.



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The Staff and Students of Ashbury College in 1896

Top row, left to right — Ernest Montague Anderson, Harry McLean (killed in action overseas), Phillip B. Toller, Geoffrey G. Chrysler, Robert Devlin (dead), S. Robertson, Louis Malloch (dead), Cyril Currier, Delamere Magee and Allan Keefer.
 Second row — Mr. Hickens (master), Thomas C. Keefer, Charles H. Tupper, Robert G. Gormully (dead), George Ferris, Leonard Slater (dead), Edward H. Stewart, Rex Walters, Arthur Smith, James Slater, A.Z. Palmer (dead), O.R. Dickie, Mr. Cyril McGee (master).
 Third row — Louis T. White, J.A.C. Macpherson, Percy Anderson, Smith Henderson (dead), L.P. Sherwood, Louis Pattee (dead), Allan Dale Harris.
 Fourth row — Mons. M. Fleury (French master), Harry Wooding, J. Montague Bate, Horace Dickie (killed in action), Hugh N. Fraser, Walter Millen, Rev. G.P. Woolcombe (headmaster), J.A. Symes (dead), P.R. Moore (dead), E. Dyson Currier (killed in action), Elbert N. Soper (dead), Spencer Dale Harris (dead), Dr. McMeekin (teacher of elocution).
 Fifth row — Philip H. Chrysler, A. Smith, Ray Avery, Charles Coursol (dead), Fred A. Blackburn, Alfred Warren Symes, Noel S. Fleming, Charles Malloch (dead), H. Nelson.

Ashbury College, 70 Argyle Ave. 1900 to 1910



In 1900, in a further expansion, GPW, with support from some well-to-do Ottawans, purchased a large house and moved his school again. He and his family also lived here.

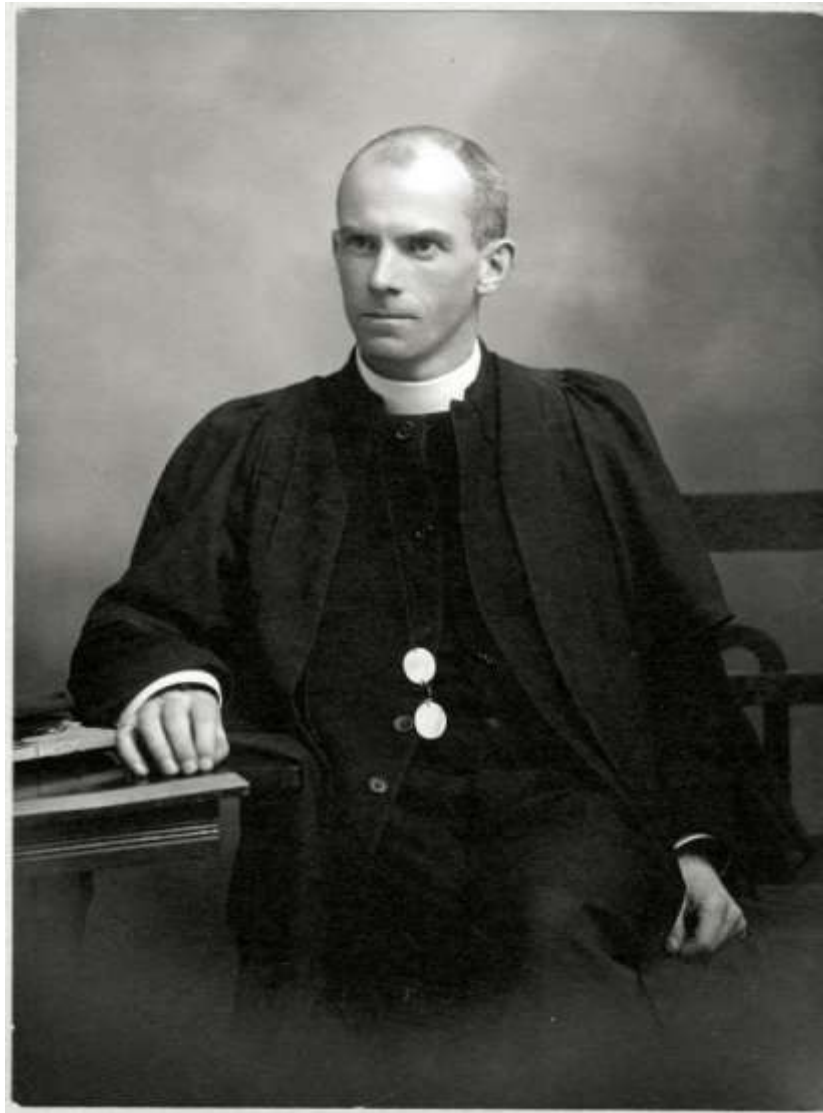
GPW – ordained deacon in 1902



GPW had successfully launched himself as a leading educator, but he was a man of God and had always wanted to be ordained. On December 21st, 1902 he was made a deacon and started to wear a liturgical collar. A year later he was ordained priest. (Notice his receding hairline and his moustache shaved off!)

And his school at Argyle continued to grow!





Intellect and determination exude from this portrait taken in 1908 of (now the Reverend) G. P. Woollcombe when he was 31 years old. He had been awarded his MA from Bishop's University in 1906. He also lectured at Bishops. In 1926, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws by McGill U.

The move to Rockcliffe Park



By 1910 the final move was made, again to allow for expanding enrolment. This time to the countryside, 10 acres of open fields in Rockcliffe Park. This is still Ashbury's core building. The Headmaster and his growing family lived in the "Annex" seen at the near end of the building, in this photo taken soon after construction..

Chapter Three

GPW starts his family

1893 - 1900

Julia Acres

as a teenager



as a young woman



at the time of her marriage



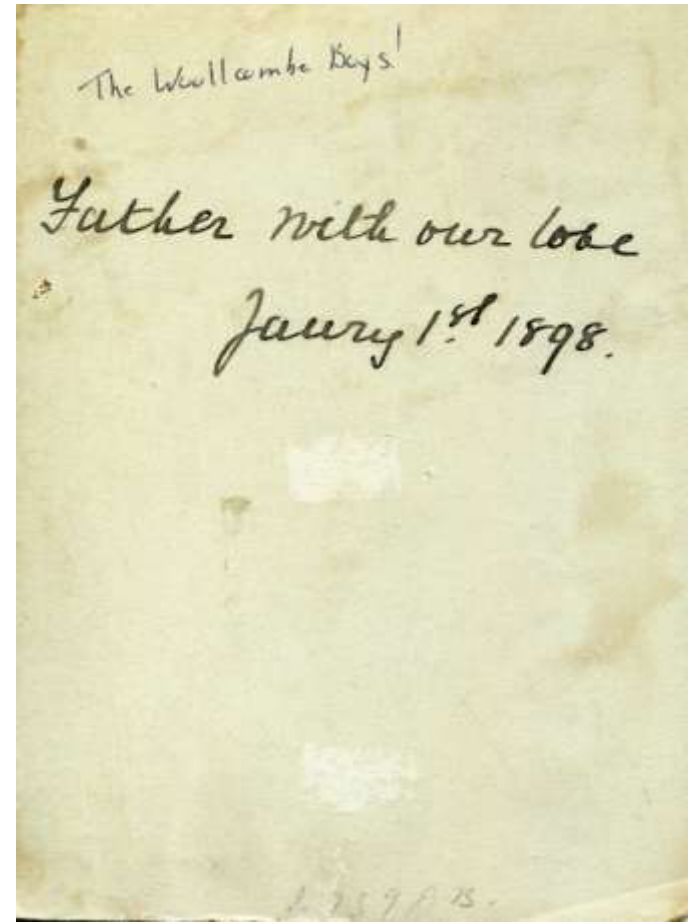
Just as determined as young George Woollcombe was to build a fine school, at the same time he strongly desired his own family. In 1893 he fell in love with an exceptionally beautiful English woman. He married Julia Acres in Liverpool on August 1st of that year. She moved to Ottawa and set up house with him.

Their new little family

They wasted no time! By the following May Philip (Penny and Julia's father) was born, and the next year, September 1895, a daughter Maithol (Bob and Bill Brodie's mother) followed. Here Philip is 1 ½ years old, Maithol 3 months. GPW almost always had a dog as part of his household.



Family ties



As busy as he was with his school, his wife and children, his religious and academic pursuits, GPW found a lot of time for the Woollcombe family. Soon after establishing himself in Canada, he arranged for all his brothers in turn to come and assisted them to find work. Every summer he travelled back to England and stayed in very close touch with his parents, as well as his sisters. These are the two sides of a greeting card that (L to R) Fred, Lionel and George sent their father. (GPW's handwriting.)

Tragedy strikes the family

Beautiful little Phyllis, Julia and George's third child, was born on April 1st, 1898. Five weeks later Julia died of complications arising out of the birthing. GPW's mother Henrietta, who had come to Canada to help out, was there to comfort and support George and the three children.

However her own husband, the old vicar, William Penrose, was not well and she returned to England to nurse him. A few months later he died. The next year Henrietta followed him to the grave.

GPW thus became the responsible patriarch of the Woollcombe family.



Chapter Four

Jessie Mickle

His life partner

The single father



GPW, so cruelly bereaved, suddenly became a single father. Here we see Maithol (5), Phyllis (2), and Philip (6). On top of his other heavy responsibilities, such as expanding and relocating his school, he struggled with his new domestic duties.

Jessie to the rescue



Jessie Mickle was a teacher at Miss Harmon's School for Girls in Ottawa. She was from a prominent family who had settled in Guelph, Ontario in the early 19th century.



Her relationship with GPW was first as a professional colleague, then as a sympathetic and helping personal friend, and finally, on July 11, 1900, as his wife and new mother to his motherless children.

The family grows

Jessie quickly took charge of the household and the children. She oversaw the move from Wellington St. to Argyle Ave. and soon was adding to the family, with son Edward, born in November 1901, and finally George in June 1905.

This family portrait was taken for Christmas 1903, just after GPW's ordination as an Anglican priest. With him and Jessie, we see, L to R, Maithol (8), Edward (2) and Phyllis (5) and Philip (9).



Chapter Five

HIS MIDDLE YEARS

His family matures,

His school grows

Living at Ashbury, 1910 to 1917



As we have seen, the Woollcombes moved their home to Rockcliffe with the school. Ashbury, under GPW's leadership continued to grow and develop, with support for the Great War (1914-18) affecting and inspiring all plans.

After they had completed their schooling at Ashbury but were still too young to enlist, first Edward and then George were sent off as cadets to the Naval College near Victoria, B.C.



Going to war

Philip, on the other hand, was not too young. Soon after the war broke out he enlisted and went overseas. While serving in the field he was promoted to Sergeant, as we see him here.



At the end of the Great War, Philip, now a commissioned officer, continued to serve overseas, in England, with the Army. On home leave he had this photo taken with his brothers George (about 13) and Edward (about 17).



Phyllis in her teens

But GPW and Jessie did not send their daughters to war!

Here we see Phyllis as a very beautiful young woman in her late teens.



Cloverdale



In 1917, GPW decided to move his family out of the Annex on the school campus. The space was needed for boarder students' rooms. The Woollcombes moved to this house at 2 Cloverdale Ave., about a block away.

The Headmaster's House

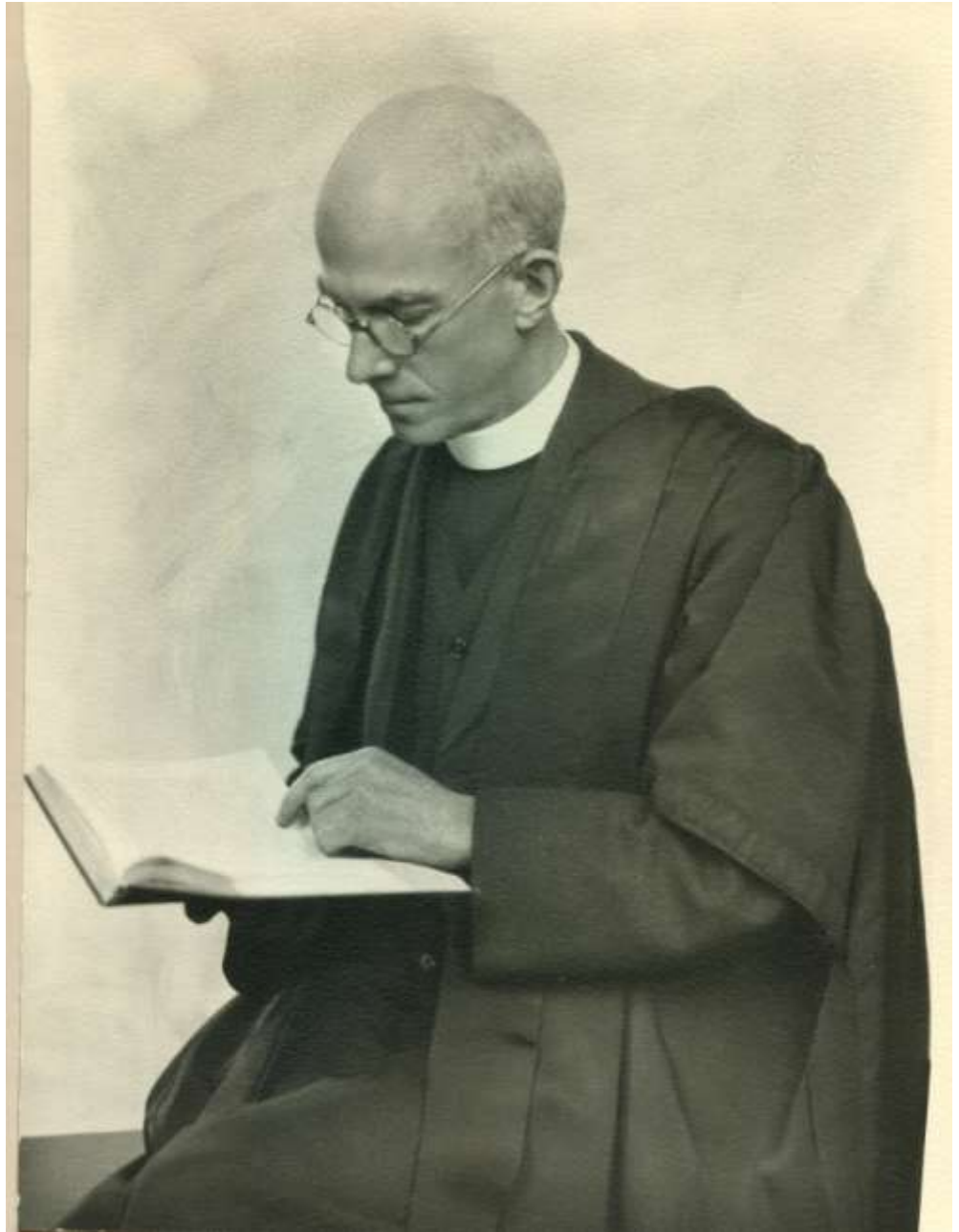


Headmaster's House.

And in 1924 the school built a new house on the campus for the headmaster, where they lived until retirement in 1933. All subsequent heads have resided here.

In 1926 McGill University recognized his achievement by awarding him an honorary Doctor of Laws (LL.D.) From this point on he was “Dr. Woollcombe”.

GPW continued to mature as an eminent educator, scholar and clergyman....



... with Jessie as his closest partner. She was the tender heart and soul of family life and the quiet, effective manager of the boarding school and Ashbury's housekeeping.



Chapter Six

Some scenes of
GPW and family in his latter
years at Ashbury



GPW with his faithful Airedale
“Fouce” on the playing fields of
Ashbury

Phyllis, in her twenties

In 1925, Phyllis then aged 27, married Dr. Wakely Abbott-Smith, and soon bore GPW's first grandchildren, Kenneth in 1926, and John in 1929.



GPW with grandsons Ken and John Abbott-Smith on the Ashbury grounds, winter 1932.



George and Edward, in
front of Ashbury, with
“Fouce”





Jessie with her son George reading in background, in front of the Headmaster's House.

Philip, aged 40.





This is the only photo extant of GPW, Jessie and their five children. L to R : Phyllis, George, Jessie, Philip, GPW, Edward, Maithol. Winter 1930 (?)

Crossing the Atlantic



GPW always talked of England as “home” and between 1888 and 1950 made ninety-one sea voyages to and from England, a record that perhaps few in Canadian history have matched. . And yet he unreservedly put down his roots in Canada. He became a significant member of Canadian society. He made his life’s work here and here alone. In this sense, paradoxically, he was quintessentially Canadian.

Ashbury College, GPW's legacy



His major professional achievement and legacy was of course Ashbury College, seen here at the time of his retirement in 1933. The school now is one of Canada's foremost independent schools, with an enrolment of 680 boys and girls, including 100 boarders.

Ashbury College - values

By his personal example, his decisions, his sustained policies and his determined leadership, GPW imbued his school with its essential values. These have shaped the character of thousands of former students. They still characterize an Ashbury education:

These values include a sense of duty and commitment, of loyalty, of love of learning, of balance between body, mind and spirit, of fairness, of obedience, of courtesy and consideration, of fairness, of self-discipline, of compassion.

In his own words, on Ashbury's 50th anniversary, in advising the students, he summed up the approach he followed over 42 years and dominated his life:

- Do your best. Quoting the Bible (Ecclesiastes) he said "Whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might", which inevitably means struggle, effort and self-sacrifice.
- Devote your lives towards the service of others.



GPW's strongest priority: his family



He was, first and foremost, a family man. Dominating and motivating his life was his love and sense of responsibility for his parents, his brothers and sisters, and above all his wife and his children, and then his grandchildren.

Here he and Jessie sit with, L to R, Ted , Bob B, John A-S, Ken A-S, Bill B., summer 1933

**GPW on retirement from Ashbury,
aged 66**



Chapter Seven

GPW and his family
in his later years

Vicar of Woodford Halse, 1934-37



On retiring from Ashbury, GPW thought he wanted to be a country vicar in England, as his father had been. The experiment lasted only three years before he fully realized , for various personal and family reasons, that his place was still in Canada

However they did have family visitors in England. Their son George and his wife Dorothy were in England for several months in 1937, and one year old Jennifer came to visit.



194 Cobourg St. 1937 - 1951

In 1937 GPW and Jessie moved back to Ottawa, and into this Sandy Hill townhouse. Here they lived with newly widowed Phyllis Abbott-Smith and her two sons. They both grew old and died here, Jessie in 1947, GPW in 1951. Phyllis, who had taken care of them over the years lived on here until the 1980s, while lodging and feeding “paying guests” as well as frequent Woollcombe family members.



GPW's Canadian brothers



As noted earlier, GPW brought all four of his brothers to Canada. Two of them, Fred (on the left) and Lionel (on the right), seen with their wives and one daughter and son-in-law, made their lives here, both starting out as bank clerks. John was a teacher for two years at Ashbury (1904-06) but returned to England to become a clergyman. Willy was the 'black sheep', deserted from the army, changed his name, and disappeared somewhere in Saskatchewan.

GPW in his 70s

Throughout his seventies and into his eighties, GPW continued to serve actively as a clergyman. He was Assistant Rector of All Saints' Anglican Church in Sandy Hill (on Laurier Avenue directly across from Prime Minister King's house.) Among other pastoral duties, he would regularly visit the sick and elderly in their homes to comfort them and give them Holy Communion.

Near the end of his life, recognizing his lifetime service to the Church, in 1948, the Bishop of Ottawa gave him the honorary ecclesiastical title of Canon. He is most commonly still remembered as Canon Woollcombe.



The Athenia adventure



On September 3rd, 1939, the day the World War II began, GPW was sailing back to Canada from his annual visit to England when the passenger liner he was on was torpedoed by a German submarine. GPW was 72 years old but he took the oars of his lifeboat and comforted and led prayers for the others during the long nine hours before they were rescued.

An undying connection with Ashbury

GPW continued until the end of his life to visit his school and closely follow its progress.

In October 1950 Ashbury unveiled a portrait of GPW painted by alumnus Robert Hyndman. Accompanying him for the occasion was the then headmaster, senior Board members, his son George and grandson Stephen, then a student at the school.



Philip Herbert Penrose Woollcombe
1894 - 1975

Philip was the first child of GPW. He and his wife Shirley Stiles lived most of his life in Montreal where he was a senior executive with the Cadbury chocolate company. Their children were Penny (1934 – 2009) and Julia (1938 – 2009). This photo shows him in the year he died, 81 years old.





Maithol Henrietta (1895 – 1980), the second child of GPW, married W.H. “Steve” Brodie who was a teacher at Ashbury and then the CBC’s English language watchdog. She was extremely gentle and kind. Their children were Bob and Bill Brodie.

Julia Phyllis Abbott-Smith – 1898 - 1988

Beautiful Phyllis,
dear Auntie Phyl,
GPW's third child
and mother of
Kenneth and John,
seen here in 1975
with her great
grandchild, Callie



Edward Mickle Woollcombe – 1901 - 1951

Edward was GPW's fourth child, and the father of Ted and Patricia.

He was head of a major engineering firm that made a substantial contribution to the war effort during World War II.

This picture shows him not long before his tragic death at the youthful age of fifty.





Ted and Patricia with their dog, playing their dog in the back yard of their Halifax home, during the war years.

George Andrew Woollcombe 1905 - 1997

GPW's youngest child, seen at

Aged 21



Aged 31



Aged 90



George graduated from McGill with a B.Com, became a chartered accountant, and at the start of WW2 joined the Royal Canadian Navy retiring as a Captain in 1960.

This is Dorothy Woollcombe, née Boehm, the wife of George, seen here with Stephen (1 year old) and Jennifer (3).



Woollcombe family gathering, about 1980



L to R : Stephen, Phyllis, Penny, Dharini, Foster Carter, family friend Pip Green, Ann, Dorothy, George Andrew Woollcombe

Jessie Marion Woollcombe, née Mickle 1865 - 1947



This is the last photo taken of Jessie, GPW's life partner and our beloved Granny, before she died in 1947.

George Penrose Woolcombe

1867 -1951

GPW, the founder and patriarch of our family, sitting in the living room at 194 Cobourg St. not long before he died on July 2nd, 1951.

This was the last photo taken of this great man.

