

Childhood memories of 26 Cornet Street

By Marie-Louise Webb née Le Poidevin,
descendant of the Le Poidevin family of 26 Cornet Street



The Le Poidevin Family in March 1902

Back L-R: Anstice, Andrew, Mary, Ernest, Isabella, Frederick. Front L-R: Elizabeth, William Sr., Mary (née Denning), William Jr.

Saturday afternoons spent going to "The Aunts" was a regular weekly occasion for my younger sister Suzanne and myself as children in the 1950s, as our Dad and Mum, Ernie¹ and Hilda² Le Poidevin were busy in their shop, 'Hauteville Stores'. The Aunts would look after us for the afternoon and we also stayed on for tea with them.

The thought of going down to 26 Cornet Street came with mixed emotions, mostly happy but also knowing we would have to be on our best behaviour, as would be expected from our strict and religious maiden aunts who lived in this very old-fashioned, quiet house.

"The Aunts" were Aunty Cis (Anstice Le Poidevin³) and Aunty Lena (Lena Le

Poidevin). Aunty Bella (Isabella Le Poidevin⁴) was an invalid and in a home by the time we used to visit.

The shop at 26 Cornet Street had been closed for some years by the time of our Saturday afternoon visits, as Aunty Cis and Aunty Bella, who ran the shop, had retired a few years after World War II when Aunty Bella became an invalid. Aunty Lena, as a companion and housekeeper, looked after both Cis and Bella.

The closed shop was a mysterious place to Suzanne and me as there were dark curtains drawn over the windows and the door leading into the parlour. The Aunts used the shop as a pantry and also for storing things like paraffin oil and such-like. We were only allowed into the shop on odd occasions to look around and only under strict supervision.

1. Ernest Linard Le Poidevin, was born at 14 Hauteville, St. Peter Port, on 22 June 1918. Register of Births, Guernsey, folio 137, record 134.

2. Information supplied by Nadine (Le Poidevin) Le Pelley, to Chris Sackett, February 2009.

3. Anstice Sarah Le Poidevin was born at 26 Cornet Street on 10 February 1881. Register of Births, Guernsey, folio 254, record 88. She died there aged 80 on 15 December 1961 about a month after falling downstairs at night, not wanting to spend money unnecessarily by switching on the light. Information

supplied by Jimmy Marr to Chris Sackett, August 2001.

4. Isabella Bridle Le Poidevin, was born at St Sampson's on 9 June 1871. Baptisms Register, St. Sampson's Church, Guernsey. She died aged 83 at the Town Hospital on 7 February 1955. Bella was unmarried and never recovered from the tragic untimely death of her fiancé. She lived for many years as an invalid. Information supplied by Jimmy Marr to Chris Sackett, August 2001.

The counters, which are still the same today, appeared so high to us, which shows just how small we were. The smell of paraffin oil, kept in large containers, hit the nostrils as soon as the parlour door to the shop was opened. On even rarer occasions and as a special treat, we were shown how the shutters to the front windows worked. It seemed so magical at the time.

We came and went to 26 Cornet Street through the large door at the side of the shop and, entering into the hallway, there facing us was a grand, or so it seemed to us, staircase.

On the left-hand side were two doors, one leading into the closed shop and the other into the parlour, where the range was always lit, providing heat to the room and for cooking. There were a large table and chairs sitting between the two windows at the back of the room and also there were a few pieces of occasional furniture and a small Victorian couch. Two armchairs were positioned each side of the range and most times this was where you would find Aunty Cis sat with Bonzo the large ginger cat at her feet. Aunty Lena had been a Nanny in her youth so she applied her skills to us and taught us many practical things, like sewing and darning, embroidery, making rag-rugs from wool, how to knit and how to reuse wool from old jumpers, by making it into skeins. She showed us how she ironed clothes with steel flat-irons of different weights and sizes, which were placed by the fire and how to gauge their heat, by applying a small drop of water to the hot iron, so she would know the temperature by the amount of steam coming off the iron.

Downstairs, at the far side of the cellar in the part of the house which had a lean-to, was a stone washing copper which had a small hole at the base through which a fire was lit, to heat the water in the copper.

After washing the clothes, cloths and sheets, a mangle was used to wring out the water from the washing. This seemed alien to us as our mother had a twin-tub for all of this type of washing business. Aunt Lena showed us how to use the mangle; first, a large metal bucket was placed under the contraption and a huge wheel at the side was turned as you pushed clothes through the two wringers. We had to be careful as we didn't want squashed fingers!



This part of the basement area was light, as it led out to a small back yard which had pot plants where herbs, and cat-nip for Bonzo, grew. The main part of the cellar, however, was very dark and a foreboding place to us girls, housing coal and in the far corner was a huge knife grinder, like the ones seen in old photos of knife-grinders sharpening knives in the street. It was a place we did not care to stay too long, as the only light came from the small paraffin lamp that our aunts used to light the way down there. Whilst back upstairs, lighting was by gas and when the mantles were lit, a lovely warm glow filled the rooms.

In the summertime, we would be allowed to go up the grand stairs to a front room which had pretty net curtains at the large windows overlooking Cornet Street. The door leading into the room had a large conch shell used as a door stop. Our Aunts let us put the shell to our ears so that we could hear the sea. This lovely room

housed glass cabinets which displayed pretty ornaments and books. There were a few chairs and an occasional table, covered with a lace table cloth, at which we sat to read books or draw pictures. It was a light airy room, which always seemed bathed in sunlight. Our Aunts' bedrooms were also on this first floor. The view from each of their windows was of the sea, which you could glean beyond nearby chimney pots. On the upper floors were empty rooms that our Aunts told us had housed many lodgers in years past.⁵ Being at the top of the house, these rooms were very warm and so our Aunts used to dry their washing on wooden clothes horses on wet or wintry days.



In the parlour, the bosom of 26 Cornet Street, our Aunts taught us how to play Snap, Ludo, Snakes and Ladders and other old-fashioned games which took place on the large table, between the parlour windows, prior to teatime. The table was then laid for tea in a precise way, with silver napkins and cloth serviettes. Placemats were also positioned where my sister and I would sit, so as not to spill anything on the table cloth. These placemats had nursery scenes on them and we always had the same ones. Mine, I remember, was a scene

5. 1881 Census for CI reveals that two unmarried male lodgers, one a pensioner and the other a traveller were living at 26 Cornet Street. 1891 Census for CI reveals records a total occupancy of 24, with no fewer than 17 lodgers at the house, amongst whom were a group of eight bandsmen from Germany.

of Humpty Dumpty and my sister's, a Jack and Jill scene. I remember the teacups and plates being commemoration ware of various kings and queens past. We would be handed starched aprons to wear, so as not to mess our clothes. Grace being said, we could then begin to eat, watched over by a religious tract on the wall which read "Christ the unseen guest at every meal" so we were on our best behaviour! Our tea was simple fare consisting of Marmite sandwiches, followed by fruit in a bowl or cold milk pudding with a piece of Guernsey biscuit. After tea and before our Dad came to collect us, the cloth covering the radio was lifted by one of the Aunts and the radio was switched on for "The Archers".

At Christmas time our Aunts would always give a little party for us, when we were joined by our first cousins Nadine and Teresa who were the same ages as ourselves and who were the daughters of Stan⁶ and Rose⁷ Le Poidevin, Stan being our Dad's younger brother. At this special event we children were joined by our parents and it was a more relaxed time and a bit of

fun. We would play old-fashioned parlour games, such as Postman's Knock, Pass the Parcel etc. So many good times, so many wonderful memories – especially tales of days gone by, as told to us by our Aunts – however, the telling of these is for another time.

Marie-Louise Webb née Le Poidevin

6. Stanley Noel Le Poidevin was born at 14 Hauteville, St. Peter Port, on 12 November 1924. Register of Births, Guernsey, folio 43, record 292.

7. Rose Wilson was born in Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland, in 1927. Information supplied by Nadine (Le Poidevin) Le Pelley to Chris Sackett, February 2009.

These footnotes compiled from 'The Le Poidevin Family of Cornet Street', Chris Sackett, 2009, available to view at 26 Cornet Street.