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DOWNER, R

19.

MRS. R. DOWNER.
12 WALTHAM AVE.
GUILDFORD
SURREY.

A BYGONE AGE

I started my career as a Dressmaker after nearly three years Apprenticeship. During this time I made my own dresses and those of my sister and also did some evening gowns for a General's wife and daughters.

The lady had a statuesque figure and I made her a gown of creamy white brocade, the bodice lined and boned with whalebone and laced at the back with silk laces drawn through eyelet holes. The daughters had net dresses, some black with many frills and some edged with ribbon.

When I was 17 I heard of an Army Officer's wife who needed a Dressmaker to make a Trousseau for her daughter who was to be married to a famous literary critic. I worked at this tall Georgian house for some time, and as they had been in India for some time they told me many stories of interest and about the natives and their faithful copying of any clothes (even to a patch). The wedding was quiet and only the near relatives were asked to the Reception which was held in the large Dining room. There were only two maids and I was asked if I would like to help wait at the table. I had not done this before but thought I might try it. I had a nice black dress, probably made for mourning for Queen Victoria. I was given a pretty white apron and struggled into a stiff white collar. As I was taller than the other maid, I was asked if I would carry the turkey. This was very large on an

enormous dish, and as the kitchen was in the basement, I had to go up the rather steep staircase with this and (I hope) placed it nicely on the table.

I soon knew how to do the other part of waiting and was told I had done very well. I was rewarded for this effort with a gold sovereign and afterwards was recommended as a Dressmaker to two Army Officers wives in the near neighbourhood. One of these was the most lovely woman I have ever seen, with lovely auburn hair, and an oval face and the most lovely skin and figure. She was very kind to me and increased my pay to 2/6d a day. Very often she would tell me to catch a bus home early as she knew I also did some work at home.

Then one day when I was working at home, came a very young looking lady, very pretty, with the bluest eyes I have ever seen. A gentleman was in the carriage with her and she asked me if I could go to her Hotel and fix a gown that she wanted to wear to a Ball that evening. I went and found that the gown had been her Wedding dress and was lovely, with a train and trimming of real Brussels lace. It was large at the neckline and would not stay on her shoulders, so I went to a near draper and bought some ribbon and beading, and soon fixed it for her. She surprised me when she showed me a lovely miniature which she wore round her neck of two lovely children, a baby of three months and a little sailor boy of 2 years.

Then came my big chance to travel. I must refer to her as

Mrs.X. as she played a big part in my life. Would I like to go down to her home in Kent as she wanted a lot of work done? This I did and found she had a delightful house and garden. She was a most charming lady to work for. While there I travelled to her Mother's home, another lovely place in Kent. This gave me a further introduction, and she was a very wealthy woman indeed. I eventually went to work for her and was met at the station by her carriage, and I remember that it was rather a cold snowy day and there was a fire in my bedroom, also in the morning room where I worked.

I did some lovely dresses for her and we used to go to London to get materials from Libertys, Dickens & Jones and many of the best shops. Also with her I went to the late Queen's milliner in Bond Street. This was a lovely salon in pale grey and silver. The girls all in grey and signed Certificates autographed by the Queen and other Royalty. "Madame" was French and very emphatic about her sale of hats and knew just what was suitable for her customers. We bought a lovely feathered hat in various shades of red to match a gown I had made for the Mrs.X., who was her daughter. We usually had lunch at Dickens & Jones or some other good Restaurant and bought the lovely materials that I made up.

There were many Bridge Parties at this house and the work was interesting, often with beading on velvet and many frilled dresses. While there I had my first experience of the Telephone & Electricity. I was treated very much like a Companion and when I went out took the two King Charles Spaniels with me for a walk. "Bijou" and "Mimi"

were well known in the town and were taken to the shops and given spongecake. "Yummy" - a lovely little pug - would sit by my chair hoping I would have a bone for him. The food was lovely here and there was always a glass of claret on my tray. The garden too was lovely and I learnt about roses; I used to enjoy walking round with this lady.

These visits went on at different periods for many years and I remember spending my 21st birthday while working there.

The General's wife that I have mentioned, spoke of me to a lady living in a lovely house near the South Coast called Craigwell. One of our late King's stayed there, and I remember the lovely hall had a beautiful organ and staircase. Here I worked with the French maid and made some beautiful velvet coats and gowns. The maid was very friendly and told me a lot about Paris and various parts of France. She gave me a pretty set of buttons, saying "Put them on a blouse in membrance of me"! I had my meals in the Servants Hall, sitting on the righthand side of the Butler, the French maid on the right of the Housekeeper. I felt rather shy here at first, but someone remarked that I was like Viola Tree the actress that had been staying there. She had been bridesmaid to one member of the family. After this everyone was quite friendly and I enjoyed by stay there.

The I went to another member of this family, to a house in lovely country. The weather was so fine that I worked nearly all the time out in the summerhouse with a table and my machine. Here,

Mr. and Mrs.S. drove a dogcart with two horses tandem and both rode and hunted. They kept hounds, a groom and kennelman, so there was plenty going on in the garden. The nurse with the baby in the pram would come in to have a chat. Mrs.S. was very tall and there was a lot of work in her gowns.

While here I had my first holiday since working. My Mother had a visit from my Uncle and Aunt who with my cousin were on a visit to England from Canada. They wanted us to spend some time with them and I returned home for a glorious week when we first went to Goodwood Races, and after a picnic on the Trundle, went to the lawn round the Grand Stand and saw many Royalties and ladies in beautiful gowns walking about. The next day or so we went to Cowes Regatta where the Royal Yacht was racing, then on to Arundel and over the Castle with tea in the park. Our Canadian folk were thrilled with our beautiful countryside and also with our sea coast which we visited during this glorious summer weather. I remember that my Uncle was rather impatient of the service in some of the restaurants, but was very enthusiastic about our scenery and weather.

I returned to my work again, still working outside, and then went on to Mrs.X. where I made some lovely evening gowns. I particularly remembered a grey chiffon over satin with handmade flowers, the stamens made of silver beads, and also a lovely floral chiffon. Mrs.X. suggested that I made a dress like a fuchia, the red chiffon over mauve and this was a great success and suited this very pretty lady very well. All dresses were trained then ^{but} ~~and~~ before

long trains were out and I had to shorten some of the dresses. Mr. Mrs.X. was a very keen sportsman and had a very straight eye. He would often come in criticise the fitting, always very pleasantly. Although at one time this made me nervous, I became used to it and I think it may have helped the perfection that Mrs.X's gowns were famous for.

There was always a big dinner party and dance given on St. Patrick's Day, and I made several lovely emerald green dresses for this event. Some were chiffon or marquisette, sometimes richly sequinned. With these dresses she wore a lovely diamond necklace with an emerald pendant in the shape of a shamrock.

I worked for many weeks another lovely summer when I had breakfast in the summerhouse with the two nurses and the children. I often worked in the day nursery and was often taken to the 'Meet' by the children.

I made about this time a very lovely fine linen dress with a broad band of Venetian Point lace inserted in the skirt and a narrow band of the same lace trimmed the bodice. I never now see such beautiful linen as this was; it was as soft as silk. As the lace had to be let in by hand there was some close hand sewing and Mrs.X. suggested that I took it down to the beach to do. The children were going there too and I wonder however I managed to keep it spotless, but I did.

A white taffeta dress with a crinoline skirt embroidered with many coloured carnations was very pretty, veiled with a very thin

silk net. At this time there were no electric irons and I had to put the irons on the kitchen range, and of course they had to be kept very clean. The staff were very friendly and did not mind me troubling them.

Mrs.X. played Bridge sometimes and I made some pretty afternoon dresses - one of fine pale blue cloth (such as we never see now) so supple. It was trimmed with amythest coloured velvet collar and cuffs and buttons. There was also another dress in dahlia red; both were much admired.

About this time I was asked if I would make a trousseau for a relative who was going to marry a millionaire. She was one of three daughters, very tall and graceful. My journey to her house has always amused me for I got out of the train at the wrong station. They had sent to meet me, and I found no conveyance other than a Hansom Cab. As I had a tin trunk and hatbox and was about four miles from my destination, I had to take the Cab. I saw myself in the mirror in front of me and thought I shall not have enough money to pay for this! After paying my train fare I had only a few shillings left for stamps, etc. I told the driver of my predicament and he accepted what I had, which I knew was not the full fare.

This was a quiet house with only two maids, but I was well looked after and very interested in the pretty dresses, etc. that I made. After this wedding and the honeymoon, Mrs.S. wrote to ask if I would go to her new home. Her husband had bought her some lovely materials when they were abroad and she wanted me to make them up.

This house was a mansion built like a castle with a lovely hall and staircase leading to a gallery where most of the bedrooms had dressingrooms and baths. I worked in a wing of this house near the nursery but did not go into the servants' hall. My meals were brought to me by a housemaid and I should have been lonely if I had not been near the nursery. I was asked to use the front staircase and my bedroom was near the billiard room. I use to look through the glass door and watch the guests playing. There seemed to be a big house party quite often and I often met some people that I knew on the staircase.

Some of the materials I used were floral chiffon, gauze, brocade. I had no patterns for the dresses but some were copied from various London shop catalogues or just a picture in the 'Tatler' or some other magazine.

Here, Mr.S. would often be present at the fittings and I thought he seemed very proud of his young wife. I stayed here for some time and once met the Housekeeper on my return from Church one evening. It was dark and I could not find the front entrance but got round the shrubbery to a side door and was greeted by the Housekeeper very pleasantly. She told the housemaid that brought my meals that I was just like her daughter and after that sent me lots of very dainty food for my supper, also ice cream!

I went to a young officer's wife soon after this to make some evening gowns as she was in England for the birth of her baby. She was returning to India shortly and I had to work on a Sunday (this

was unusual) to get the dresses finished. While working for her the monthly nurse had left and she was waiting for the nurse she was going to take back with her to arrive. The baby was screaming loudly when her Mother came to see her in a lovely carriage with Coachman and Footman with cockades in their hats. This lady was Mother to eight children and she immediately went off in her carriage to the chemist to buy a dummy, which stopped the crying at once! I had thought this was a thing of the past until a few months ago when a modern mother arrived at our house with a very bonny baby with a dummy!

My next visit was to Mrs.X. who always dressed for dinner, which was a full course affair. For winter the dresses were usually velvet, mostly blue or red. The blue shades were sometimes difficult and we were always careful to choose them by artificial light as they could change colour.

One early Spring Mrs.X. was Organiser of the Hospital Ball which was held in the local theatre. For this I made her a daffodil yellow satin dress veiled with chiffon and embroidered with pearls. She wore a diamond tiara on her dark hair and looked lovely. I helped to decorate the theatre with her and Mr.X. We took lots of daffs from the garden and I was sent out to buy lots more flowers from the women with their baskets of Spring flowers. I, with Mrs.X's personal maid had charge of the Dressing Room and Cloakroom. There were a great number of guests and many County people who

remarked on the pretty dressing table with silver accessories. We had some casualties - torn frills, a broken heel and other small repairs. The waiters brought us Champagne and meringues several times and when supper was nearly over we were asked to go in for supper. We had Lobster Mayonnaise, Chicken & Turkey in various forms, creamy sweets and ices and more Champagne. During the evening Mrs.X. came to the Dressing Room and saw the little silver tray on the table. She said "Oh, they must not forget their tips because you are my people". She took from her little bag some silver coins and placed them in the tray. After this we collected quite a lot which amused us and we divided it. We went home about 4 a.m. and the Ball was a great financial success.

Soon after this I went to Kent to make summer dresses for Mrs.C. We went to London to get materials and I was able to look around for fresh ideas. Mrs.C. loved pretty clothes and I made some dresses with a lot of work in them. She had her writing desk in the morning room where I worked and she used to say she liked to watch me at work and see the dresses grow! This was a luxurious house to be in and I quite liked it and often went for drives with her, also to Church on Sunday morning.

One lovely June I went to the G.C.H.Q. to Mrs.A. (a famous Army family). This was very interesting: two sons at Sandhurst and a young daughter. I had breakfast with the two sons who were always very pleasant and friendly. Otherwise my meals were sent to me on a tray. Mrs.A. had travelled a lot and spent some time with me.

She took me to see the Polo and afterwards to tea in a large tent with tables laid beautifully with strawberries and cream.etc.

I went for many bicycle rides with the young daughter and I made several pretty dresses for her. I went to the Church Parade with the family and afterwards the Band would play on the lawn outside the Camp H.Q. I made several day and evening gowns for Mrs.A. She led a very busy social life.

The trouble there was the Staff as many girls did not like going to an Army Camp. One episode that I remember - a new cook had arrived and during the dinner there was a long wait between the courses. When the maid eventually brought mine she said "I shall not stay with her, she is drunk!" Later on the Military Police were called in and the cook was carried forcibly downstairs screaming. After this things went on normally and I thought the cooking was excellent.

I heard from Mrs.X. while here, asking me to go to her Hotel and help her dress for a dance at Sandhurst. Also, she wanted me to make some summer frocks. One of these was floral voile, trimmed with real Malines lace, very dainty. Real silk Shantung was much used and I often made tailored suits of this material. I also made a tailored suit in white heavy-weight Viyella to be worn on occasions when the weather was chilly. I remember an incident here. I had made a very pretty draped afternoon gown and it was on the model made to Mrs.X's measurements when she came in and said how very nice it looked. She then went to her room and brought a small real lace

collar and put it on the dress. I was sitting on the settee sewing and just glanced at it and thought 'Oh, that will spoil it!' She soon took it off and went back to her room. When she came in again she said with her lovely smile, "Of course I couldn't have that collar - her little face was suffused with wrath!"

This was a very happy house to be working in and in the Spring and early Autumn I went with the Nurse and children to the private woods that belonged to the family estate. The gardener's boy would bring the lunch basket and we would put the little boy to sleep and gather either flowers or blackberries. The Nurse would put the children to bed and then we would have a bath and always a lovely supper. Also, when Mr. and Mrs. X. had seen a play that they thought good, they would give us tickets for this. I remember seeing 'The Only Way' with Martin Harvey acting as Sidney Carton. I enjoyed the wonderful acting but finished up in tears. 'The Breed of the Greshams' was another good one, and 'His House in Order' with George Alexander acting was very good.

I was kept very busy and had a job to fit in all my appointments. I went to a lovely house in a Sussex village to make for a lady and her daughter. I was going to post one day, and as a stranger I asked my way to the Post Office. I was told to go down the lane and through the "Quezers" which would take me across a field. I found these were V pieces of wood used instead of stiles. I have never seen them anywhere else.

I was soon back with Mrs.X. and very busy. I was trying one night to finish off a pretty dress for her, when she saw my light on and came into my room, saying, "You are not to stay up to finish this!" I had another appointment the next day and I tried hard to keep the dress. However, I had to give in and she took it to her bedroom. In the morning I went in to see her and she asked for my account, which I gave her and she paid me. A few days after I had such a nice letter from her enclosing a cheque, and saying, "Your account was ridiculous for all the work you did!" Soon after this it seemed necessary that I should work at home and earn more.

I had many good customers and still kept working for Mrs.X. and Mrs.C. in Kent. I often went to both places for fittings by train and sometimes stayed for a few nights. Locally, I often rode my bicycle with a big dress box, or later on a suitcase, strapped on. I made a very effective dinner dress for Mrs.X. about this time. She had a visitor friend who wanted me to make some gowns for her, and this friend asked me if I would copy this particular dress for her, saying, 'I will never wear it where Mrs.X. will see it'. It was a black dress, very smartly cut, with turquoise georgette trimming. She lived in Berkeley Square and I went up there for the fittings, also for a smart black and gold dress rather like a wasp in colouring. I was not much impressed with the outside of the Georgian houses of the Square, but the door was opened by a very pompous Butler who gave me a gold pen to write my name in the Visitors' Book. Inside the house was beautiful. I completed the

dresses quite satisfactorily as I thought, but there was rather an unfortunate sequel to this order. This lady had gone to their summer house at Richmond and Mrs.X. went for a visit to her and arrived just before dinner and found her wearing the identical dress. Mrs.X. told me she would never wear hers again, and for the future I never copied anything.

It became necessary for me to earn more money as my parents were practically dependent on me. I retained ~~the~~ Mrs.X. and Mrs.C. and often went to stay for a few days for fittings. I very soon became very busy and got in touch with a good wholesale business in London who sent me boxes of patterns of lovely materials. I found all materials there and that helped me a lot. Some new people soon came to me and I had to have a girl to help me who had served her apprenticeship. She lived with us, but I was not able to trust her with the flimsy materials that I used so much, as she had hot hands and that spoilt the fresh look that I always tried to achieve.

However, I think she learnt a lot while with me and she stayed for 18 months. One dress that I remember at this time was a lovely shade of pink georgette, embroidered in Greek key pattern with white silk and small chalk-like beads. For this lady I made a dress of a new jersey-like silk material; it draped well and was very effective. Her husband sent me the cheque for these gowns from his Club in London and wrote me a nice letter thanking me for the beautiful work.

I used the more expensive Vogue patterns and a French book

"La Reville" which was very helpful. I travelled often to Mrs.X. and always had something to do for her.

One outfit to be worn at a smart town wedding was a lovely shade of blue wool georgette, the coat tucked in pin tucks and cut on the cross with a printed crepe-de-chine dress to tone. I was very well known at our station with my big dress box, or later on a suitcase, and on one occasion I was nearly late for my train and found I had left my purse at home. The kindly ticket collector told me to get in the train and rushed to buy me a ticket. I travelled still further by bus without any ticket money. I have often opened my suitcase and put some finishing touches to a dress while travelling to the interest and amusement of my fellow passengers.

I did a very pretty wedding for a popular Rector and Colonel's family. The bridesmaids wore a lovely shade of pink with lace dyed to match, the two little girls were twins and they were much admired. I walked four miles for this fitting, but they sent me home in their conveyance. I was also asked to make some dresses for a game called "Living Whist" which was held in the local park. They were Tudor Period with puff sleeves, tight waists and short, shaped basques. I was interested at first but did not want to repeat the style very much. Mrs.X. went to a Fancy Dress Ball as a Dresden Shepherdess- very pretty with pannier skirt and laced bodice and powdered hair. I also made a ballet dancer's dress that gained a 1st Prize at a dance. The net that I used for this came from a good firm in Nottingham and was very fine and stiff. The frills

were trimmed with small wreaths of rosebuds. A lady with two young daughters was sent to me and I made Mrs.K.some lovely evening gowns. She was tall and very good looking. One gorgeous green dress with sequins suited her well and a silver grey satin princess gown was veiled and draped with a very fine silk net in misty grey. The drapes were edged with silver. This dress had to be covered freshly each time she wore it. I made the daughters white satin evening frocks, lovely pure silk satin that we seldom see now, also white cloth coats - very smart.

I have omitted to mention two ladies that I did a lot of work for when I first started business at home. They were going to S.Africa and were staying at one of our best hotels. The elder lady was very handsome and a good figure. She ordered many low-cut dresses but always had a very fine net vester made with a high collar supported with wire. She was the only lady I did this for. I often sent orders from them to S.Africa and they often came to England for a holiday. Then I would be very busy for them.

About this time I was married to my girlhood sweetheart with whose mother I was apprenticed. We saw each other whenever possible and we have recently celebrated 60 years of married life.

I still went to Mrs.X. and made everything for her, including suits that had to fit to absolute perfection - also many light-weight coats. One lovely evening gown I remember was in pale blue moiré with a little deeper blue panne velvet coat. This was a great success and with her blue eyes and dark hair she looked lovely.

Mrs.X. had a young sister about to be married and I was asked if I could do the Wedding Trousseau. She was a very pretty girl and there was a lot of interest in this wedding. I was kept busy for some time and I had a charming letter from Mrs.X's Mother thanking me and saying how pleased they were with everything. I had no extra help at this time but my Mother, who had been apprenticed to dressmaking would help with what we called inside work, and would sew on the press studs and hooks and eyes - Zips were not used at this time!

A very nice family that came to me in my home city removed to the seaside place near where Mrs.X.lived. I did a lot of work for them and their very attractive daughter. I made her "coming-out" dresses and they left the designs and colouring entirely to me. The first one was white and gold, very dainty, and another a lovely blue chiffon with accordion pleated skirt, the bodice transparent with wreaths of pink roses showing through.

Another trousseau which interested me a lot was for a young lady going to S.Africa to be married. I made her wedding dress and some very nice evening frocks. One I particularly remember was of fine black lace, with this I made a black taffeta princess slip and also a rose pink one to wear under the lace, with two sashes, one of black taffeta and one of velvet ribbon. This lady came back to England on two more occasions and I will mention her again.

Jacquar made some lovely stockingette materials about this time and I was able to get the plain and matching checks which made

very smart dresses and two-pieces. One plain shade of medium brown was very interesting; the bodices were long waisted and skirts just covered the knee. The bodice part of this dress was embroidered with marguerites in wool, and my husband who was clever with flower drawing did the design for me. Mrs.X. loved this dress and it was much admired.

Mrs.K. who had two daughters came to me a lot and kept me busy. A local lady who saw some of the dresses said "fit for the Queen". She was a lovely lady to work for - tall with a lovely figure. As she lived only a few miles away she often came to me for fittings.

Soon after this my son was born so my travelling was over for a while. I still did quite a lot of dressmaking, mostly for local people. Mrs.X. had another son born about this time and as she was rather ill she was leading a very quiet life. After a while she wrote to ask me to go to her and if possible bring my son, which I did, and they were all pleased to see me again. The children played together in the nursery while we discussed clothes! An entire outfit was now necessary so I was very busy. A flame-coloured chiffon dress was amongst the new evening gowns. In January after the New Year dances and parties there was rather a quiet time and Mrs.X. very often had some dresses made then as she thought it helped me, and cheered her up. When February came I was generally busy again.

I was asked to do a wedding order for an auburn-haired young lady who asked my advice as to what she should wear. She was rather pale with the complexion that often goes with that hair. I thought

she will not look her best in white and I suggested gold panne velvet made up the light shade, with draped bodice and a very full skirt and gold net veil. It was an Autumn wedding and the bridesmaids wore golden brown velvet with little capes edged with ruched velvet. At the hotel where the reception was held these dresses were very much admired and she looked a lovely golden radiant bride.

One day when I was just leaving home to go to Mrs.X. two ladies called to see if I could make some dresses for them. I did not really want any more work then, but asked them in/^{and} on the impulse of the moment said I would do something. They had recently come from London and were delighted when they saw the patterns I had. They were very good people to work for and liked pretty clothes. The daughter was a life long friend to me.

A dress for Mrs.X. of black georgette, an evening gown, was low cut with many drapes which had to be edged with a tiny ball-like fringe. I made this by covering "peas" with the georgette and that made a very attractive finish and was very light in weight. I don't think anyone ever guessed how it was done.

When my little son was about 3 years old I went to stay for a few days with Mrs.X. and took him with me while I did an order for a smart town wedding that she was going to. The children (the two youngest) were destined for the Navy and they had a lovely ship that nearly covered the nursery floor in which they played.

About this time we were able to take our holidays in London, nearly always at the end of August or early September. This was very

good for me as I was able to visit the wholesale house and see all the new materials, also the best shops to give me ideas for the next season. I can remember the determination of my little son pushing his pushchair up the busy Oxford Street in spite of the traffic. I had something else to do besides shop gazing!

My only sister went to Canada to be married soon after this, and I made her Wedding dress of white broche silk and several other dresses. As I could leave my son in the care of my Mother I was able to go to Kent and take orders & stay for a while with Mrs.C. This was always very pleasant and I usually finished the orders at home.

The First World War came soon after this and lots of social activities were over, but I was always busy with more ordinary dressmaking and we had to have the 9th Hants soldiers billeted with us for a while. They were very nice boys and there is one incident that I cannot forget. Two specially nice boys had to exchange billets and came in to see us. We were about to have supper - only sausages, I think, as we were on rations. Anyhow, we asked them to stay and join us and I came down from upstairs where I was working. The double burner lamp that I used for working with had started to smoke while I was helping Mother with the supper, and when I eventually went upstairs the room was entirely blackened with smuts. I was working on a coat trimmed with fur and it was smothered and had to be cleaned properly. Fortunately all my other work was in boxes and covered up, but it took my Mother and me many hours to get the room clean.

After the war I resumed my visits to Mrs.X. and she needed an entire new outfit. We met at a house in Park Lane when we were on holiday in London and discussed this. The end of the war brought my sister home for a holiday - a great pleasure to us - also the two ladies from S.Africa, so that made me very busy again. One thing that was very sad - the young lady who went to S.Africa to be married lost her husband in the war. I was very fond of her and she had to take up life again and studied for a very useful career. She went eventually to New Zealand and I again made her complete outfit. One evening frock I remember was pale blue embossed material, the bodice cut rather low with a matching coatee. I also made many dresses suitable for that climate.

Many local celebrations made me very busy and the Mayor gave a Victory Fancy Dress Dance for children. My son was invited and we sent him as a Naval Officer (plenty of gold braid)! Our holiday in London after this time impressed me very much and I shall never forget my first view of the Cenotaph and standing with emotion with my husband and son with their hats off, also at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey.

The holidays in London were very useful and interesting to me, as I could visit the wholesale houses that supplied me and see all the new season's goods. My son remembers the long 'waits' he used to have, but he was recompensed by the Science Museum where he spent a lot of time. The Royal School of Needlework was quite handy and I felt very humble when I saw the beautiful work that had been done ages ago.

One lady that I worked for used to admire the lovely materials that I used for Mrs.X's dresses. Suddenly she became wealthy and could afford the very best herself. This gave me pleasure and a lot of work, and she was very good to me over the next few years. Mrs.X. had rather a sad time, for her husband became very ill and for a while she gave up her Sussex home. This would have made things quiet for me had it not been for local work. When she became a widow she returned to her old home in Sussex and I was very soon there taking orders for an entirely new outfit. One evening dress that was to be worn at a Ball on H.M. battleship was of black chiffon velvet with a train lined with silver tissue. The bodice had small insets of silver showing, and the shoulder straps were of small circles of piped velvet. This was a most distinctive dress.

I was the second child of my parents who were married late in life. My Father was over 50 and my Mother was 40 when I was born. My Father had always been connected with horses and had often ridden in the Steeplechasing at Goodwood. My Grandfather drove the four-in-hand Coach from the Dolphin to Brighton. My early school days were interrupted as we were moving from Horsham where I was born. My sister, who always wanted to be a teacher, taught me a lot, so I was not backward when I went to school in Chichester. I found learning quite easy and was in the top Class at 11 years. As we could not leave until 14, I was able to take the Dunces and help the teachers generally. I was also given cutting out garments and needlework to do. I would have liked to have been a teacher, but my sister had

started and my Mother thought I might become a Dressmaker as I was good at making frocks and coats for my dolls. She knew my husband's mother, who had several girls working for her and she took me on. I used to stay to tea with the family and there met my husband. I was very thrilled with the attention he paid me, and I think that helped me to take an interest in the work.

Of course I made some mistakes, and one I always remember was making two sleeves for one arm. They were of pink taffeta, tucked all the way down. I felt dreadful when I saw the mistake (taffeta is the same both sides). I learned my lesson and that never happened again. My future Mother-in-law was always very kind to me and I think I soon became useful to her. In those days there was a lot of inside work in the dresses, and much more decoration outside than the present day. A lovely pansy coloured crepe-de-chine dress had a shirred elastic waist and matching velvet coatee.

The motor car was coming in now and Mrs.X. was able to come in to me, and she would always stop and have a chat with my Mother who was getting on in years. About this time my son gained a Scholarship for a good Grammar School and Mrs.X's second son wrote to congratulate him, which I thought very nice. The two elder boys were at Dartmouth when two of our Princes were there.

Time passed on and when my Mother was 80 years old she had a serious illness and was some time recovering from this. I had to have some help in the house as I still carried on a great deal of dressmaking. People wondered how I did it and prepared the invalid

food that my Mother required for so long. She was a wonderful patient and in time was well enough for me to take her out in a Bath Chair. She enjoyed this and it was helpful with the shopping.

The next big event was the marriage of Mrs.X's eldest son. I made a lovely dress for Mrs.X. - an unusual soft shade of pink wool georgette. It had a draped bodice with a tight deep waistline which I embroidered with two shades of pink and two of blue. It was most effective. My son and I were invited to the wedding and the big church was crowded, and a lot of Naval officers in their blue and gold uniforms.

My sister returned home about this time and that was a great pleasure and help to me. I was able to leave home for a short time to visit Kent and also Hampshire where there was a very nice family who took me round to see the various sights. I found all the materials and did the fittings; most of the work I brought home. We had now got electricity, and my son was very interested in Radio and I think we were one of the first people to have a wireless set. Mrs.X. wrote to me and said 'how pleased I am that you will be able to listen to nice music and programmes while you are sewing.' That certainly was a great pleasure to me and I often think that the music and variety turns were better than they are today.

My sister returned to Canada, and as I was very busy I found it necessary to have some help in the house. The two ladies from S.Africa were here again and they stayed at a hotel here. I was able to go to them for fittings and sometimes they came to me. They were like friends and very interested to hear all about us.

After this I was recommended to a Colonel's wife with three daughters. This gave me a lot of work for some time. When I next went to Mrs.X. I heard rumours of a second marriage and she told me all about it. I was one of the few people that thought it would be successful. I made a lot of new frocks, several in blue shades to match her lovely eyes. She wrote on her honeymoon to tell me how happy she was. This was the era of motors and she soon had a lovely car and would often come to me and always had a chat with my Mother who was getting very advanced in years. They had a lovely house, built in a beautiful part of Sussex and I enjoyed going to see her there. I always had lunch with her and enjoyed seeing her beautiful garden with all the new roses and rock plants. She used to meet me in her car and as she now travelled abroad a lot I had many evening and other gowns to make for her. At this time there were rumours of the Second World War.

When they came round to see if we could take Evacuees, I was exempt from this on account of my Mother's age. She was now over 90 years old. My son had been at work for some time on the Telephone Service and was thinking of getting married. My Mother's health at this time was very bad and she spent a lot of time in bed. She needed a lot of care, but I still did some dressmaking. I sometimes went to Mrs.X. and she was most anxious about the war news as her two eldest sons were in the Navy. My Mother passed away 95 years old in the Spring of 1940. This left a blank in our lives as she had meant so much to us. The summer of that year was lovely and we had a very

nice holiday. War was still in the news and in September when war was declared my husband's family 'phoned us to ask if they could bring his Mother down to us as she could not be left alone if the raids came. She came down at once and soon settled down with us, but was naturally very anxious about leaving her family in London. I was kept very busy as she needed a lot of attention and I was unable to do any dressmaking. She was good company and I was sorry when she had another stroke and passed away after a few months.

I went to see Mrs.X. who was anxious about her two sons who were in the Navy. I resumed dressmaking again and my son was married that summer to a girl that we liked very much. I had much more time to spare after this and was pleased to take up more dressmaking. The years slipped by with the air-raids very near us and we spent many times in the shelter in our road. We also had a Morrison table shelter in our front room. I made good use of this when I was cutting out my work and found it most useful. My son was living near the docks which were constantly being bombed and they were often without electricity and bread. My husband took one of our oil lamps to them, and they were grateful for this. During this anxious period Mrs.X. wrote to me that her eldest son had been killed by shrapnel while on the bridge of his ship when the docks were bombed. He was Commander of a submarine and had come through several encounters with famous German battleships. I had always felt very proud of him as I had had a lot to do with him as a little boy. I went often to Mrs.X's lovely house in Sussex and had a pleasant day with her and we always had a lot to chat about.

When towards the end of the War my little granddaughter was born, Mrs.X. wrote to me and said 'how you will enjoy making her frocks, etc.' This I did for many years - coats, bonnets, Pixie caps, in fact everything she wore until she was nearly 16. When she was two years old my grandson was born and these two children have given us a lot of pleasure. When small we loved to have them staying with us. When I was 60 I had an emergency operation and this was my first hospital experience. This held up my dressmaking for a time and I went to stay with my son and daughter-in-law in Surrey. I liked being with the children and could always find something to make for my little granddaughter. I soon recovered and resumed my usual work again. Mrs.X. came to me quite a lot and many local people kept me busy. The young lady who went to New Zealand returned with a friend and they kept me busy for some time. I made evening dresses, coats, suits and many summer dresses. This often made a pleasant evening of fittings and I liked working for them.

During the next few years my husband and I had several periods of ill-health and were in hospital several times. One rather tragic week for us was when my husband and daughter-in-law had major operations on the same day. I remember the kindness of the young lady that I have just mentioned, who had me with her during that day and night. My husband was ill for some time after this, and was just recovering when I fell down and broke my ankle and twisted my leg, which kept me in plaster for six months. My son, his wife and children came up the next day and wanted to take us back with them,

but as I had to go to the hospital for further examination that was not possible. We managed to do for ourselves and I made puddings, etc. lying on the settee and my husband did quite a lot to help. How very thankful I was when I could get about by the help of the furniture, and I soon managed to work my treadle machine with one foot. I did some dressmaking and covered two eiderdowns, which helped to pass the time. Later on we went to stay with my son, and his wife was so very good to us, although she had never completely recovered from her operation. It was a joy to be active again and I resumed some of my dressmaking.

When I was 75 I had an unexpected legacy from a cousin in the U.S.A. and I thought I could then give up dressmaking. This time was made sad for us by the death of my son's wife who had always been like a daughter to us. My husband had now retired and we thought it would be nice to have the house redecorated. This was in progress when my husband had a heart attack and had to be taken to the hospital for two months. When he recovered he needed a lot of care. In time he improved a lot and we were able to go out for morning walks. Mrs.X. would often come to see us and this gave me a lot of pleasure. I did occasional dressmaking for some friends and for my granddaughter who I was pleased to see had very good taste and was able to make for herself the simple styles that were the present fashion.

I had a letter from Mrs.X. telling me of her grandson's wedding and that she had been to it. Two days after this she was taken ill and passed away without suffering. I heard from her husband that they had had over 30 years of perfect marriage. I knew I had lost a

good friend and she often signed herself "always your friend".

Time passed on and my husband was ill again at home, and I was taken ill too and we were both sent to hospital. My husband was found to be very anaemic and was given blood transfusions. After this he seemed a lot better and was more his old self. I was sent to the Convalescent Ward and was allowed to visit my husband twice a day. In this ward there was a lady who caused a lot of interest to the staff. She was evidently wealthy and the nurses said all her clothes came from Harrods. As I was able to walk around I used to help her with her walking-aid and to dress her as she had hip trouble. When talking to her I found that she lived in the Sussex town and knew Mrs.X. and all her first husband's family, as I did. She said what a lovely lady Mrs.X. was and she had always admired her and her clothes which always seemed perfection. I told her I was her dressmaker for over 40 years and we had very many talks. When she left the hospital she kissed me and gave me a bottle of expensive perfume. She went to Craigwell Nursing Home for a while - this was the house that I mentioned before on the Sussex coast, where the King stayed and is now a nursing home. She wrote to me from there and told me she was going to sell her house and buy a bungalow.

My husband and I recently went to Surrey for the wedding of both our grandchildren. My Granddaughter made her own dress and those of the bridesmaids, and I was very pleased with the unusually pretty styles she had chosen.

If I have said a lot in favour of Mrs.X. I must say that it was a great privilege and pleasure to work for such a lovely lady. I am now nearly 88 years old and have lost my husband after 64 years of happy marriage. I am now living with my son in Surrey and have a lovely little Great Granddaughter, 4 months old, who I have recently made two frocks for. She is a great pleasure to us all. I have just had the pleasure of hearing my Granddaughter's husband on T.V., recording a Cantata that he has composed and conducted. Called "The New Creation", it is a mixture of classic and modern music. This was a great success at the Dome at Brighton and two major publishers have started to take an interest in David Fellingham, and his remarkable music. He has succeeded where more illustrious names have failed.

My Grandmother's name was Wimborne - an Irish family who were the owners of a big estate and a lot of land. My Grandfather was a groom there and used to go riding with my Grandmother. They fell in love and ran away and were married. For this my Grandmother was cut off from her family. Grandfather was always fond of horses and when they came to Chichester he drove the coach four-in-hand from the Dolphin to Brighton every day. My Father too used to ride in the Steeplechases at Goodwood and was always working or driving with horses. He often told me "Your Grandmother was a lady, and don't ever forget that"!

When my Grandmother was quite old and nearly blind, she had a visit from two railway officials who wanted her signature to a

document to enable them to run a railway through her land. She was given £5 for this but was too aged to make any complaint. She evidently led a very happy life and was much loved by her eleven children.

I spent much of my early life playing in stables, harness room and loft where my Father was working, and we had a nice cottage. When horses were out and the motor car was in, my Father lost his work and we had to move to a rented house where I knew I had to work to support this, but we eventually bought the house and lived for many happy years there. My Dressmaking was a great pleasure to me and I am so glad that my son brought my machine here, so I can still do some useful work.

It might be of interest to know the hours I worked 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. The pay I received was 15/- shillings a week plus of course my food & travelling expenses.

When working at home I was able to earn more, but often had to work all night to finish a dress for a special occasion.

R. M. Downer.
12 Waltham Avenue
Guildford
Surrey