
Looking Back



From Lauterbrunnen. to Mürren
begin, the ladies are not yet in training.

F's troubles

ROSEMARY GREENWOOD

A Mountaineering Heritage

(Plate 50)

In 1802 my great-grandfather Francis Tuckett was born at Frenchay, now a suburb of Bristol but then a country village. It had long been a Quaker enclave and the Tucketts were among a number of Quaker families, such as the Frys and the Barclays, who lived there and worked in Bristol. In those days certain professions were closed to them and many Quakers went into business, manufacturing and banking where they prospered and established a reputation for scrupulous fair dealing and a caring attitude to their employees.

Francis was a leather merchant and a keen traveller. He married Mariana Fox in 1833 and had four children: Frank, Lizzie, Mariana and Charlotte. Born in 1834, Frank inherited a love of travel and a keen interest in natural science. He first visited the Alps with his father in 1842 at the age of eight, and an excursion to the Mer de Glace kindled his passion for mountains. In 1853, aged 19, he returned to the Alps with his future brother-in-law, my grandfather Joseph Hoyland Fox, and they walked and scrambled prodigiously, covering enormous distances all over Switzerland. Three years later they started climbing. In Chamonix they engaged Victor Tairraz, three other guides and a porter for the Col du Géant. Their provisions consisted of three fowls, a joint of veal, two large loaves and four bottles of *vin ordinaire*. No wonder they needed a porter. Later, Frank Tuckett did a number of seasons with Victor Tairraz; he scarcely ever climbed without a guide and usually took two and a porter. In those early days guideless climbing was rare, and my grandfather remarked on the great feat of a party of well-known English mountaineers who had climbed Mont Blanc without guides in 1855.

Although Frank Tuckett worked in the leather business in Bristol and walked there every day from Frenchay to keep in training, he was able to go climbing most summers for two months or so, starting much earlier in the season than we do nowadays. In 1859 he and my grandfather were elected to the Alpine Club which had been formed two years earlier, and they often climbed together during the following years. As far as I can ascertain, none of my forebears in the last century ever did any rock-climbing in Britain. But in 1865 an Easter party of 13 Alpine Club members, including my grandfather and great uncle, stayed at Pen-y-Gwryd and climbed Snowdon and the Glyders!

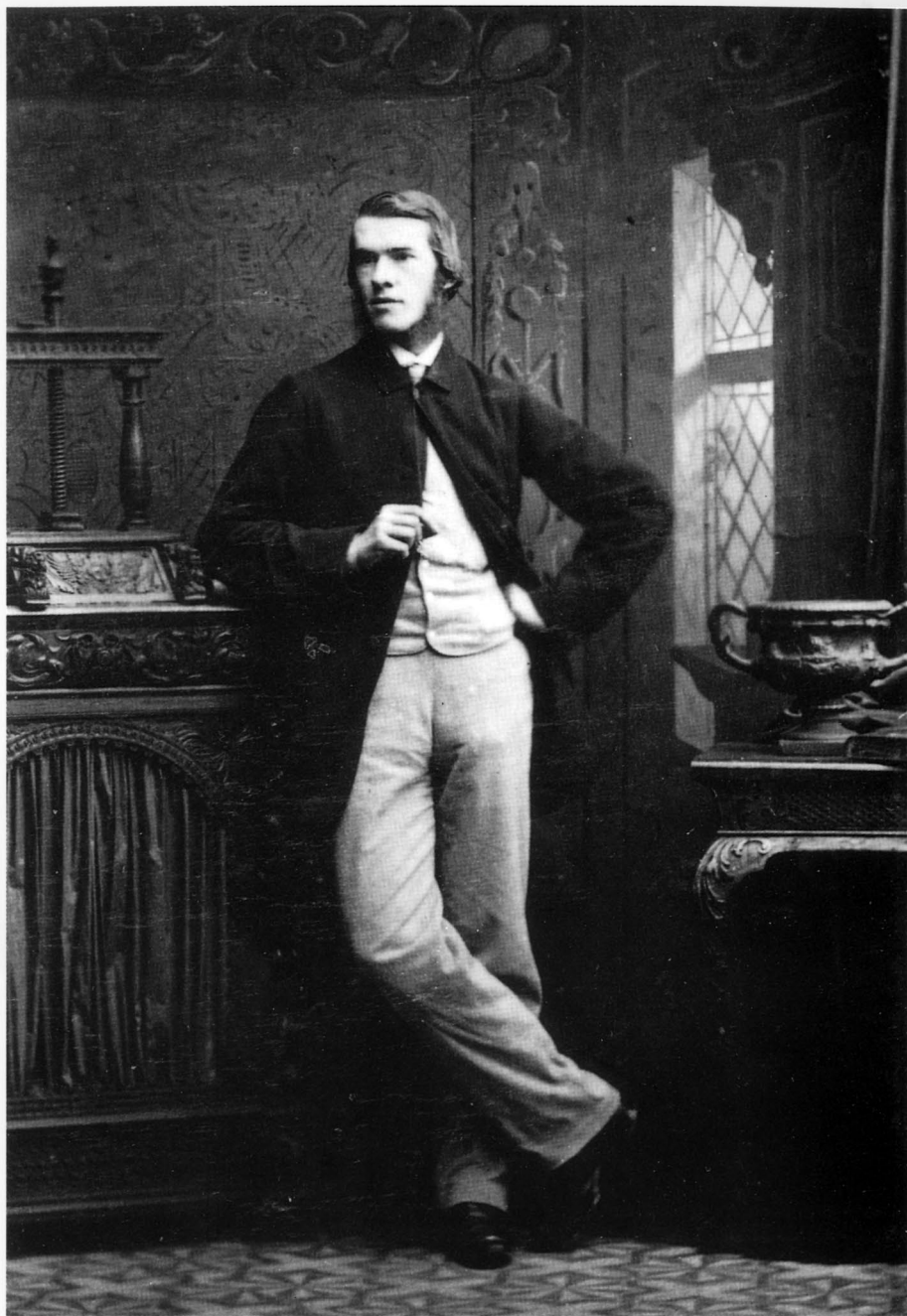
The Tucketts often made up parties for their summer holidays – Frank and his sisters, cousins and Alpine Club friends. Some of these holidays

were recorded by my great-aunt Lizzie, a gifted artist, who sketched their adventures amusingly in *Voyage en Zigzag*,* *Zigzagging in the Dolomites*, and other books. They toured from place to place – several times in the Dolomites and Tyrol – Frank and his climbing friends going over the tops of the mountains and meeting up from time to time with the ladies and the less energetic men, who went round by road or mule track either riding or walking or in primitive conveyances. The accommodation was often extremely poor and verminous and food sometimes hard to come by. Sunburn was a menace, particularly for the climbers, and they protected their faces with veils and masks when on the snow. Umbrellas were carried in the rain. Lizzie wore what she described as a ‘waterproof habit’ and Frank wore a plaid. The ladies looped up their skirts and the porters carried their hoops (one cannot ride in a crinoline).



They prepare for dirty weather

* The drawings on these and following pages are from Lizzie Tuckett's sketch-book, *Voyage en Zigzag*. Longman (London), 1864.



50. Frank F Tuckett, 1834-1913.
(From Rosemary Greenwood's family album, by permission) (p171)



Tradition has it that Frank always wore elastic-sided boots for climbing; a small room at Frenchay used to be filled with his climbing boots.¹ They often met other English parties on their travels, and there were more English tourists in the Alps in those days than any other nationality. Large hotels were built in the second half of the century, not only at the resorts but also at isolated viewpoints such as Riffelalp, Belalp and Eggishorn.

Between the years 1856 and 1874 Frank Tuckett made no fewer than 57 first ascents or new routes on mountains and high passes. Notable among these were:

- 1856 The first tourist ascent of the Mettelhorn.
- 1859 The first ascent of the Aletschhorn.
- 1861 The first direct ascent of Mont Blanc from St Gervais by the Dôme du Goûter and Les Bosses, with Leslie Stephen.
- 1862 A new route on Mont Pelvoux by the Tuckett Couloir. The Col des Ecrins.
- 1864 First ascents of Piz Kesch, Monte Confinale, Gran Zebrù (Königspitze) and Ortles.
- 1867 The first ascent of Civetta.

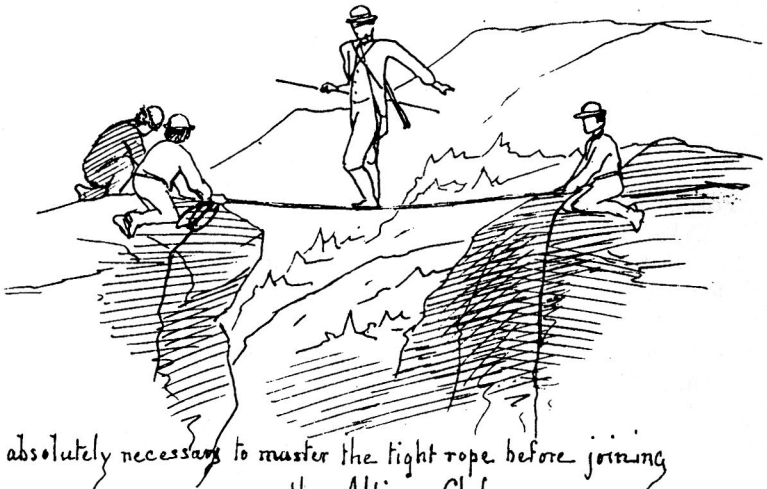
During these years he climbed 165 peaks and crossed 376 passes. Many of these expeditions are recorded in *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers* and the *Alpine Journal*. He also contributed articles of geological and scientific interest. He made a study of glaciers and made observations from mountain summits, boiling his thermometer to calculate the altitude and sketching

the neighbouring mountains. In the Dauphiné and Ortler he did extensive surveys with equipment that included a mercury barometer and water-boiling apparatus which also came in handy for brewing up Symington's dried soup.



*Verandah, Hotel Bellevue. Thun July 5th.
Breakfast, versus mountains.*

Frank always carried with him a bottle of his 'cure all' – a mixture of tincture of rhubarb, sal volatile and brandy – and very effective it was. We were all brought up on it. He designed a sleeping-bag with a mackintosh outer, the top of which could be unbuttoned to provide ventilation, and a red blanket bag inside, plus an extra red blanket which could be buttoned on and a woollen hood. This only weighed 8½ lbs. In 1869 Frank and his future brother-in-law Eliot Howard brought from Styria what are believed to have been the first rucksacks to be seen in Switzerland, and they were soon to replace the old Swiss knapsack. Frank also carried a conjuring set. He was an accomplished conjuror and wherever he went he delighted the villagers, especially the children, with his sleight-of-hand. He also used to take out his teeth, to their mystification.



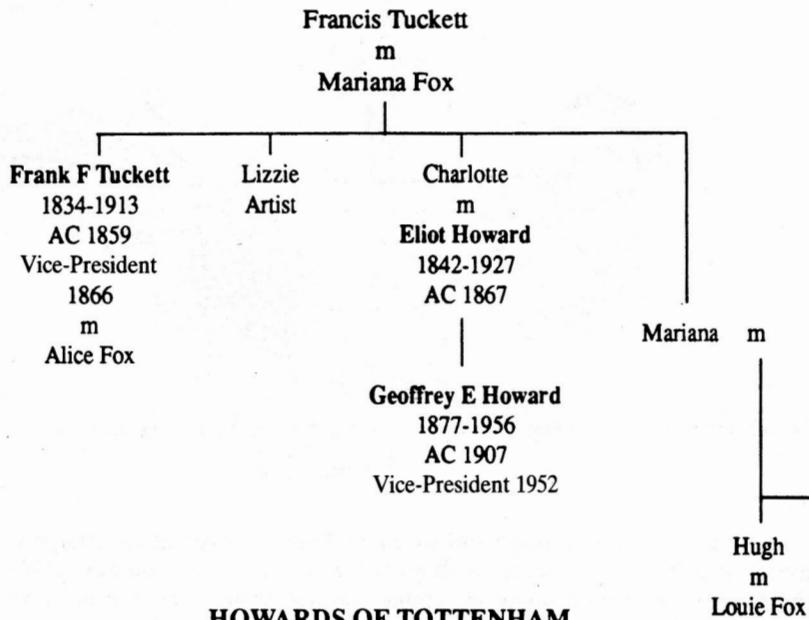
It is not absolutely necessary to master the tight rope before joining the Alpine Club.

Frank was extremely tough and strong and often exhausted his companions, but he treated his guides with great consideration and was always on the best of terms with them. He spoke German well, so communication was no problem. In 1864 he organised a fund among Alpine Club members for the mother of his guide J J Bennen who was killed on the Haut de Cry, and went personally to Lax to help deal with the family's finances. He was one of the founder members of the Austrian Alpine Club in 1862 and in 1898 he was made an Honorary Member of the Club Alpin Français. From 1866 to 1868 he was Vice-President of the Alpine Club but refused the presidency more than once, as he felt that he lived too far from London.

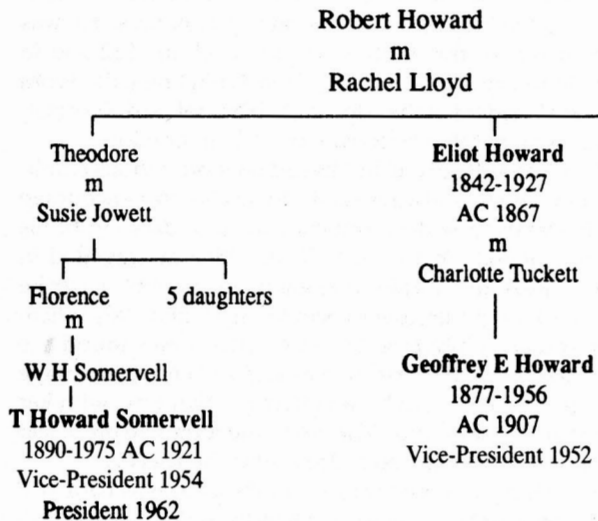
By 1874 Frank Tuckett was still only 40 but he did no more serious climbing in the Alps; however, he was always ready to advise and encourage younger climbers. He travelled widely and continued to do so until his death in 1913 at the age of 80.² Between 1877 and 1886 he travelled in Greece, Corsica, the Pyrenees and Turkey, making many ascents. Later he travelled all over the world, with frequent visits to Egypt and Italy where he indulged his archaeological interests. He went three times round the world. Family legend has it that the first time he had not enough courage to propose to the beautiful Alice Fox, who was living at that time with her brother, a sheep farmer in New Zealand. The next time round he proposed and was accepted and they were married in 1896 when he was 62.

Alice was the sister of Harry Fox who was lost in the Caucasus with W F Donkin in 1888. I can just remember Aunt Alice, a handsome lady in widow's weeds and veil, and my elder sisters have fondest memories of Uncle Frank. There is a charming photograph in the *Alpine Journal* of him sitting in the garden at Frenchay in 1910.³

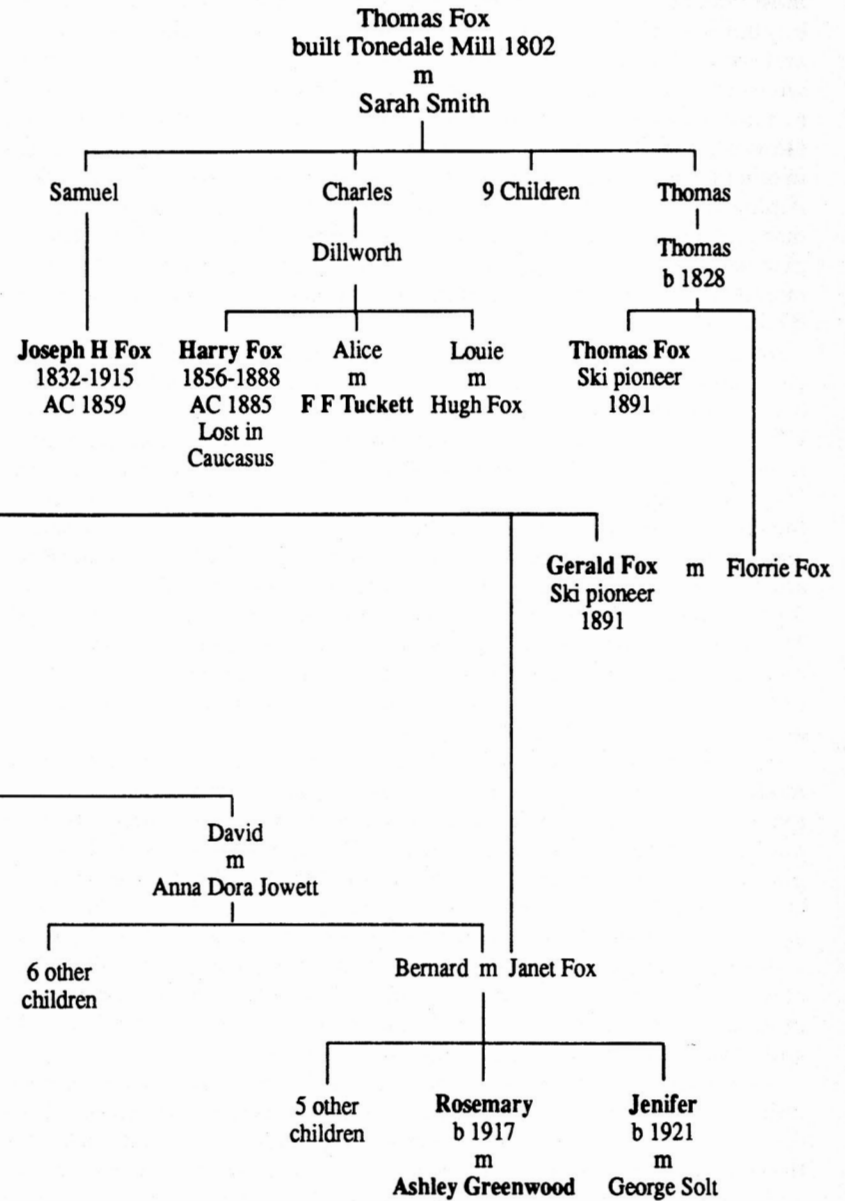
TUCKETTS OF FRENCHAY (BRISTOL)



HOWARDS OF TOTTENHAM



FOXES OF WELLINGTON (SOMERSET)



The Foxes of Wellington are all descended from Thomas Fox who built Tonedale House in 1802 next to the woollen mill, which still exists and is most famous for Fox's Puttees, worn by the army for many years and also by climbers. He had 15 children and some of his descendants still live in and around Wellington and work at the mill. Quakers in those early days were not supposed to marry outside the Society of Friends and they tended to marry cousins, so our family tree is a tangle of cross fertilisation of Foxes, Howards and Tucketts. The daughters were often sent on visits to cousins in other parts of the country so that they could meet fresh faces – the Tuckett Alpine holidays proved an excellent meeting ground. Mariana Tuckett married my grandfather Joseph Hoyland Fox in 1860. Charlotte Tuckett married Eliot Howard, my father's uncle, in 1871 and Lizzie, the artist, married William Fowler, one of Frank's climbing companions, and sadly died in childbirth.

My grandfather was extremely tough and though he had lost an eye as a child through being shot by an arrow, the accident did not prevent him being a keen cricketer; he used to play sometimes at Frenchay Cricket Club, where W G Grace was often the star attraction. He started his Alpine holidays with Frank Tuckett in 1853 when he was 20, and they climbed frequently together, though my grandfather was never to become one of the great climbers. In 1859 he climbed the Breithorn and the Schwarzhorn; and he created a record by climbing from Riffelalp to the top of Monte Rosa and back in 10 hours and 50 minutes. In 1863 he and Frank Tuckett climbed 5 peaks and 23 passes in the Tyrol, Dolomites and Eastern Switzerland. They both enjoyed touring from place to place over mountain passes, and on many of these mountain journeys they were accompanied by the ladies of the party. In 1871, again with Frank, my grandfather had a narrow escape from a colossal avalanche on the Eiger.⁴

As soon as his children were old enough, my grandfather took them on modest climbs, usually with François Dévouassoud, who was his guide for many years. His sons Hugh and Gerald were tough and athletic, though not outstanding climbers. Hugh was a Rugby international and Gerald played for Somerset. They both often holidayed in the Alps and Gerald brought the first skis to the Oberland with his cousin, Thomas Fox, who also enjoyed skating at Davos and St Moritz in the 1890s. His sister Anna was an indefatigable climber. She climbed the Matterhorn in 1890, Mont Blanc in 1893 and many more. Another sister May was an outstanding mountain water-colourist. A third sister Florrie married my uncle Gerald and died of typhoid fever after only three months.

Another cousin was Harry Fox of Caucasus fame. He seems to have been rather a paragon. Not only was he one of the foremost mountaineers of the day, but he also captained the Somerset Rugby XV and played cricket for the county. He was a partner in the family woollen business at an early age and ran Sunday schools and other good works. He was only 32 when he died in 1888.⁵ He and W F Donkin, with two Swiss guides Kaspar Streich and Johann Fischer, were exploring and surveying in the area of Dychtau and they must have been killed in an attempt on the mountain. Their last

bivouac was found the following year, but their bodies were never found. One of Harry Fox's sisters married my uncle Hugh. Hugh's daughter Cecilia, a GP in Wellington, was another keen climber for many years. Her father always insisted that she took two guides. She was also a gifted painter of Alpine scenes and flowers.

My mother, Janet Fox, was a sister of Hugh and Gerald. The first time she went to the Alps with her father she was 12 and he was 61.⁶ She went up the Brévent with François Dévouassoud and was also taken onto the Findelen glacier. My grandfather climbed the Petits Charmoz with cousin Anna. Another year in Grindelwald, climbs were arranged for my mother with Christian Jossi junior, son of one of my grandfather's guides. Thirty years later, on one of our family holidays, my mother arranged for Christian to repeat the climb of the Rötihorn with the next generation. Jen and I were too young to go, but Jossi had become a fat old man and thereafter his place was taken by his nephew Peter Bernet with whom all my siblings climbed.

My father's family, the Howards, did not have such a strong mountaineering tradition, though my father's uncle, Eliot Howard, was an Alpine Club member and married Charlotte Tuckett.⁷ Their son, Geoffrey Howard, was made a Vice-President of the Alpine Club in 1952, and it is said that this was on account of his witty after dinner speaking rather than his prowess as a climber. He was instrumental in bringing my parents together as he was first cousin to both.⁸ My Howard grandparents often took Alpine holidays and walked energetically. My grandmother and aunts would visit the poor and hand out tracts. Nowadays this would be considered presumptuous.

My father first went to the Alps with his parents in 1899 at the age of 19. Starting from Argentière (pension rate 5 francs, about 20p), they trekked round Mont Blanc to Courmayeur where their pension was considered expensive at 8 francs, *vin compris*. They had terrible weather and thick snow on the Col du Bonhomme. They took two guides and three mules, two for the luggage; my grandmother rode the third with grandfather hanging onto its tail. Father was an energetic walker rather than a climber and took pleasure in forcing his body to the limits of endurance. In Scotland and Norway he did some incredibly strenuous walking and climbing, covering huge distances.

My parents were married in 1905, Geoffrey Howard being my father's best man, and from then on they had Alpine holidays usually on alternate years when there was no new baby to keep Mother at home. As most of our birthdays are in the spring we like to think that some of us were conceived in the Alps. In 1907, leaving their first baby with our nanny, my parents joined the Fox grandparents in Grindelwald and climbed the Wetterhorn with Christian Jossi. They stayed at the little Hotel des Alpes at Alpiglen, halfway between Grindelwald and Kleine Scheidegg and nowadays the starting point for attempts on the Eiger Nordwand. It was fantastically cheap and became our base for family Alpine holidays until 1934, when my parents rented a chalet in Grindelwald where we had glorious holidays and took up skiing. Ashley, my husband, who was a Cambridge friend of

my elder brother, was a frequent visitor to our chalet and he climbed from there with various members of the family. Before we were old enough to accompany them, many of my parents' holidays were spent hut-to-hutting in Austria and the Dolomites, and even after we had the chalet they usually went off for a few days touring on their own.

Perhaps the most distinguished of my climbing relations was my cousin Howard Somervell. His grandparents were brother and sister respectively to my Howard grandparents. For us, as children, he was a very approachable and entertaining hero and a darling man. We saw him rarely as he was a medical missionary in South India. He qualified as a doctor in 1915 and served in France throughout the war, becoming a very expert surgeon and with a distinguished career ahead of him. His home being in Kendal he had walked and climbed in the Lake District since boyhood, and he soon developed a taste for the Alps as well, where he spent all available holidays. He was therefore a natural choice for the 1922 Everest expedition, as there were so few fit and experienced young climbers left after the war. Though the expedition ended in disaster, with the death of seven Sherpas in an avalanche, Howard Somervell had attained an altitude of 26,800ft.

It was after this expedition, while visiting a mission hospital in Travancore, that Somervell felt the call to use his skills in the service of God and the poor of India. In 1923, having renounced a very tempting offer of an appointment in England, he took up his post in Neyyoor, where he remained for 22 years. He worked incredibly long hours but believed in taking enough holidays to keep himself fit for work. He joined the 1924 Everest expedition and, with Lt Col E F Norton, attained the record height of 28,000ft, in spite of almost suffocating from a frostbitten larynx.⁹ Mallory was a particular friend of his – they shared a tent – and his death was a great sorrow to Howard. While living in India, Howard had a number of Himalayan holidays, sometimes trekking with his wife and sometimes climbing in the areas of Nanda Devi, Kangchenjunga and Nanga Parbat.

Howard Somervell was a considerable artist and some of his mountain pictures are familiar to Alpine Club members. Most of his Everest sketches were done on brown paper in pastel or water colour, which shows up the luminous quality of the snow. He was also a keen musician and while in Tibet collected folk songs which he arranged for the musical accompaniment to the film of the 1922 expedition. He was President of the Alpine Club from 1962 to 1965 and was also President of the Fell and Rock and Vice-President of the Himalayan Club.

Since 1859 there has always been at least one Alpine Club member among my relations, and my sister Jen and I are very proud of our mountaineering heritage.

REFERENCES

- 1 Geoffrey E Howard, 'A Mountaineering Family and Other Memo-
ries'. *AJ55*, 136, 1945.
- 2 Obit of F F Tuckett. *AJ27*, 340-346, 1913.
- 3 Photograph of F F Tuckett. *AJ27*, 346, 1913.
- 4 F F Tuckett, 'A Race for Life'. *AJ5*, 337-349, 1872.
- 5 F F Tuckett, his obituary of Harry Fox. *AJ14*, 132-134, 1889.
- 6 Joseph H Fox, *Holiday Memories*. Privately printed 1908.
- 7 Geoffrey E Howard, his obituary of Eliot Howard. *AJ40*, 150-151,
1928.
- 8 Obit of Geoffrey E Howard. *AJ61*, 197-199, 1956.
- 9 Theodore Howard Somervell, *After Everest: the experiences of a
mountaineer and medical missionary*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1936.
'Mr Somervell's Story' from the Mount Everest dispatches of 1924.
AJ36, 211-215, 1924.

