

Amazing Grace
in the Life of
Eric Scolding
(1933–2018):
A Spiritual Biography

Edited by Chris W. Crocker

Preface

Everyone has a story and every story is as unique as the person it speaks of. Yet a life story (or biography) that doesn't take into account our relationship, or lack thereof, with the greatest of all beings, the Triune God of the Bible — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — has not truly told one's whole life story. To truly tell someone's story one must include the spiritual dimension of biography.

When Christians speak of such spiritual biography, of telling the story of their encounter with the living God, they often speak of sharing their testimony. A testimony is when a Christian testifies to their personal experience of the grace (unmerited favour) of God and forgiveness of sins they've experienced through faith in Jesus Christ. Every authentic 'testimony' is of equal worth, yet some stories are so unique that they capture the grace of God and glorify Him in special ways.

Whilst a simple man no more worthy of receiving God's grace than the next, I believe the spiritual biography, or testimony, of Eric Scolding is a story worth telling.

Looking back over the 85 years of his life, one can discern four spiritually significant moments in Eric's life, times when the grace of God was displayed toward Eric in extraordinary ways: three instances of His common grace and then of course of His saving grace.

What do Christians mean by these terms 'common' and 'saving' grace? Why do we need God's grace at all?

When our ancestors, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God the human race became worthy of eternal punishment and separation from God. Romans 6:23 says that, "the wages of sin is death." (ESV

throughout). As sinners, we are only deserving of God's wrath. However, whilst God is holy and just He is also gracious, and this means He continually gives us things that we do not deserve.

Christians refer to this generally as 'common grace,' the undeserved and immeasurable favour that God pours out upon the earth, but which is not part of salvation. Jesus said, "*He [God] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.*" (Matt 5:45b). From the rising and setting sun and the life and beauty it gives the earth, to the rains and seasons, and even the order given by governments, physical talents or culture that humans enjoy — these are all God's gifts of common grace that no one deserves. Why does God show this grace? He shows it so all people might come to see His mercy and His goodness, seek His forgiveness through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and receive His saving grace. 2 Peter 3:9b says, "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

Eric experienced three great acts of God's common grace that can be seen as preparatory works for his receiving of saving grace: 1) being spared the bombings in Harwich during WWII, 2) being placed in a nurturing Christian home in Cromhall, and 3) in the blessings of family and in receiving an earthly inheritance in Varley Farm.

Yet as amazing as common grace is, there is yet a form of grace that is more amazing still. This is the grace which John Newton spoke of in the hymn by that same title:

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost, but now am found,*

Was blind but now I see.

After years of only living with the benefits of God's common grace Eric came to receive God's saving grace. Ephesians 2:8–9 speaks of this when it says, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."* Salvation from our sin is a gift and it can only be received by faith, through trusting God's provision of salvation in Jesus (Jn 3:16). He died on the Cross so the believer's sins might be forgiven. He rose from the dead so the believer might gain eternal life.

Why was it necessary for God to take the initiative? Eph 2:1 tells us the reason is because we are spiritually dead. So, Jesus did what we could not do and earned salvation for the believer. In saving grace God breathes His Spirit into us (Ezk 36) causing us to be born again (Jn 3:3), and then draws us to Himself (Jn 6:44), and applies to us all the benefits of salvation Christ won on the cross when we believe. This free gift is available to anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord for salvation from their sin (Acts 2:21). Once we have been justified (made right with God) by faith we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to sanctify us (progressively make us holy like Jesus), whereupon we are baptised as an outward sign of our allegiance to Jesus, testifying to this new inner reality (Acts 2:38).

This is the grace Eric came to know later in life and a grace you can receive today, by faith. In reading this booklet my hope is that you may marvel at how God worked in this man's life and come to seek and know this same God of grace yourself (Dt 4:29).

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Amazing Grace in the Life of Eric Scolding

The Bible tells us that every child, from conception, is a blessing from God (Ps 127:3). The little (and never robust) boy to the right was no different. Eric William Scolding was born on April 3, 1933 to the loving but non-Christian parents, Henry Victory (1891–1960) and Rose Annie Scolding (1891–1985?) of Dovercourt, which is adjacent to the harbor of Harwich, Essex. His siblings were all much older than he was.



Living in a haven port Eric's father worked as a steward on the



rail & passenger ferry that crossed the North Sea between Harwich and the Netherlands. His father had served as a lieutenant in WWI. Tragically, the storms of war were brewing once more and the Scolding family, as with many families, would not be left untouched.

God's Common Grace, No. 1-*Evacuation*

On September 3, 1939, Britain once again found herself at war with Germany. The rapid advance of German forces through the Low Countries and into France overwhelmed the Allied forces, but providentially these forces were spared so they might escape via Dunkirk. The miracle of Dunkirk was such that 338,000 soldiers were ferried back and forth across the channel on every vessel Britain could muster. As a ferry worker Eric's father took part in this great evacuation. With the fall of Western Europe came the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940. Given Harwich's close proximity to Norther Europe it was not spared the German bombing.





***DON'T do it,
Mother—***

**LEAVE THE CHILDREN
WHERE THEY ARE**

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Rightly fearing that the German *Luftwaffe* would bomb English cities, beginning at the start of the war, the government ordered the first wave of the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of children to the countryside. During one such wave three schools in Harwich were evacuated by train to Thornbury, Glos. Arriving at the Thornbury station the



children were taken by coaches to the surrounding villages. 20 children came to the small village of Cromhall, Glos., and were dropped off at



the village hall in the evening. From here they awaited collection. Eric was a part of this evacuation and he arrived in Cromhall on June 2, 1940. He came with nothing more than a small brown case (above). As Eric was one of two boys out of the 20, and most people preferred the 'hassle free' help of a girl, no one wanted poor little Eric.

God's Common Grace, No. 2- *The Kimbers*

Eric, aged seven, was the last one waiting to be collected at the village hall wondering if anyone would come for him, whether anyone would love him enough to take him into their home. Then it so happened that Mr. Kimber, one of the few villagers with a car, who had just finished distributing the other 19 children, took Eric around the village to see if anyone wanted him. Since no one else wanted Eric they just kept him and that was that. They went to gran's for a cold Sunday meal and Mrs. Kimber joined them after the evening Chapel service (she was



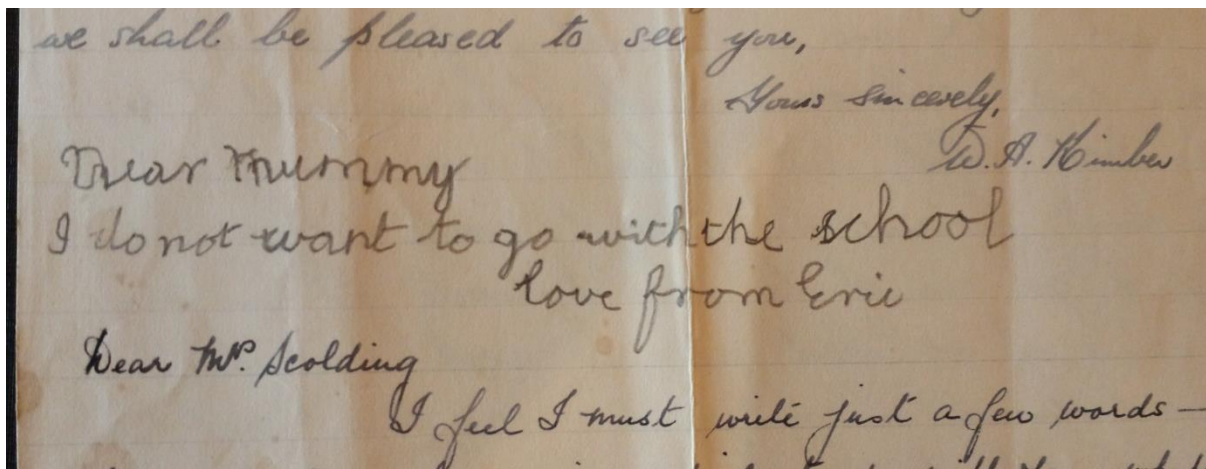
the organist). It was a perfect fit, for the Kimbers had married late and were childless. It was also a blessing for Eric to be accepted into their welcoming Christian home. Transitioning from sea side town to country life was an easy switch for Eric. He named all the animals on the Kimber's



mixed farm and often rode on the back of the big pig. He helped milk cows morning and evening. As it was still term time, Eric and the other children from the Catholic School he had come with attended a temporary school (run by Catholic nuns) set up at Heath End Court until school broke in July for the summer.

Not only did Eric take to country life but also to his wartime parents William Anthony Kimber (1900–1971) and his wife Edith Amy Kimber (1902–1994). Shortly after coming to Cromhall his parents visited from Harwich and the families began a lengthy correspondence, of which the letters remain. On July 14, 1940, Mr. Kimber informed Mrs. Scolding of the heat of summer, Eric's progress and the effects of war on the Bristol area. He said he hoped "Hitler's Parasites" (likely paratroopers) would land in their thistle patch if they invaded, or better still a deep lake. Mr. Kimber said he, "didn't like the dark nights, especially black out ones." At midnight,

when he was writing the letter, the Bristol sirens “went on and [there were] search lights all around. Then we saw the bombing...”



Eric liked Cromhall so much that when he learnt that his school was to relocate to Michinhampton, to be nearer a convent, he did not want to leave. Mr. Kimber informed his parents in a letter from July 22, 1940 that, “He is still just as happy as when you were here, and all we can get from him is that he will not go. We told him that he would miss his school mates, but he says he does not like them [the girls] very much.” Mr. Kimber assured the Scoldings that he was welcome to stay and that they were welcome to visit him at any time. Eric added his own bit, “Dear Mummy, I do not want to go with the

school. Love from Eric.” (as seen above). Eric began attending St. Andrew’s CE



1942.		James
<u>Names</u>		H 11 18
Brian	Santham	1 / 1
Eric	Scolding	1 / 1
Henrich	Baker	1 / 1

School, Cromhall, in September 1940 and liked it very much. Mrs. Kimber made sure he was also soon attending Sunday School at the Chapel. The Register shows that he was rarely absent from the time he began in 1940 until 1948. Mrs. Kimber would also lead Eric in ‘family worship’ each evening (songs, Bible reading and prayer).

After the war the Kimbers were very happy for Eric to stay on and work at the farm. This he did as he attended Wotton Grammar School, finishing in 1949. Upon completion Eric began to work full time on the farm. It was something Eric said he “couldn’t get into quick enough.” In 1949 Varley Farm was small, comprised of only 50 acres and 12 milking cows. Eric continued to regularly attend the Chapel, yet the good Gospel teaching he received fell among the thorns, “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches” choked out any potential for saving faith (The Parable of the Sower, Matt 13:22). This illustrates a valuable lesson: that just as sitting in a barn doesn’t make you a cow, neither does sitting in a chapel make you a Christian.

God’s Common Grace, No.3- *Family & Varley Farm*

Though Eric considered himself a Christian at this time in his life, still his nominalism continued post-1949 as he busied himself with life more than the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:33). In spite of



this God was gracious to him in his life in Cromhall and on the farm. “His mercies” were “new each morning” (Hymn- “Great is Thy Faithfulness,” Lam 3:22), even if Eric didn’t recognise them. There were three such events: his marriage (previous page: his wife to be), children and farm life.

Ten years after finishing school Eric married the lovely Sylvia Joy (Winstone) on September 3, 1959. Sylvia was from Oldbury-on-Severn and they had met at the Thornbury Young Farmers Club. After they married they moved in with Aunty Kimber (1904–1985, Mr. Kimber’s sister) who lived at Oriel House (now Varley Farm). A family soon followed.



Phillip was born in 1963, but sadly died. Timothy was born in 1964 followed by Sarah in 1965 (pictured above with the Kimbers).

Tim and Sarah were dedicated by Pastor John Mills and brought up in the Chapel where the family continued to attend. Eric also enjoyed the blessing of four grandchildren (pictured left in 1999). Shortly afterwards Sylvia began a B&B at Auntie Kimber's. During the busy decades of the 50s–80s Eric was chair of the Parish Council and also treasurer for the Village Flower Show, but it was the farm where he busied himself the most.



Whilst
Varley Farm was
only a 50 acre
mixed-farm in
1949, Eric helped
grow the Kimbers
farm to the 240
acres and 120



pedigree Holstein herd it is today (pictured over left in 1969). This required a lot of hard work, work that kept him busy during the 50s and 60s (but also distracted him from the deeper things of God). However, this work was rewarded with various cattle awards. When Mr. Kimber died in 1971 Eric's boyhood farming dreams were fulfilled as Mr. Kimber left the farm in trust to Eric. It is now completely organic and the cows are milked by robots. The Kimbers had first built Oxford Cottage in 1890. This is where Eric had lived as a boy. When Mrs. Kimber died in 1994 it was left to the Scoldings and passed to Richard and Sarah (who renamed it Yew Tree House). The Kimbers then built Oriel House in the late 1890s. This is where Eric and Sylvia lived after they were married. Oriel House was changed to Varley Farm when the herd became pedigreed. It was left to them after Auntie Kimber died in 1985. Eric and Sylvia moved into Kimbers Lea (built in 1988 in the Kimbers old orchard) in 1991. Tim and Janette moved into Varley Farm when they were married in 1991.

Whilst his farm and family thrived, spiritually Eric admitted he was dry and dead. There was a long period when Christianity did not mean much to him at all. He began to attend Chapel only intermittently, never attending the evening service, camp meetings or prayer meetings. He especially did not like the latter and said, "I can't put up with all that praying." Yet he still considered himself a Christian, though Jesus said, "not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt 7:21). He mentally believed in things like the Virgin Birth and that Jesus died and rose

from the dead but belief in such things alone are insufficient to be a Christian. Just because you sit in an implement shed does not make you a tractor any more than merely considering yourself a Christian makes you one. Despite the riches of God's common grace: being spared from WWII; being received into a loving Christian home; and receiving a wife, family and farm; still he was not fully grateful to the Lord, nor had he personally trusted in the Gospel. But praise be to God, this was all about to dramatically change!

God's Saving Grace

In the late 1970s Sylvia became a Christian and this radically changed things in the family—for the good. She was raised in a home with a nominal Anglican father (who even served as a church warden) and a mother who was part of a strict Christian sect. As a result she was taught to read her Bible and pray. After she was married she began to attend the Chapel with Eric. It was not until the ministry of John Mills and the various speakers he invited that she began to grow spiritually through the continual drips of sound preaching. Her spiritual trouble had been submission to God's will, being herself (as we all are) a lover of her own will, of making her own decisions. One day she became in such a state as a result of her strivings that she went into her bedroom to pray. She wrestled with the Lord for forgiveness and assurance of salvation and ultimately cried out to Him seeking forgiveness for everything she'd done. It was an emotional event and soon a great burden was lifted and she could physically feel a warmth in her chest, Christ in her, the hope of glory.

This was in the late 1970s, but not being a lover of water, she delayed being baptised until 1980 when she was baptised by immersion at Old Down Chapel by John Mills (Cromhall Chapel did not yet have a baptistery). There was an evident change in Sylvia's life, Eric recalling how she was "much nicer and more loving" than she had been before.

With these life-changing events, Sylvia began to go to Chapel regularly and took the children with her. One evening, as she was getting ready to go, Tim asked her, "Where are you going mum?" She replied, "I'm going to build my house on the rock Tim." Tim decided to come along too and attended regularly after that. Sylvia became involved in the Chapel YPF (Young People's Fellowship, named the '78 Club for the year it was started). Tim and Sarah became Christians as teenagers, largely influenced by a Dick Saunders (1930–2018) tent crusade held at Old Down, and were baptised by immersion upon the profession of their faith by John Mills in 1982 at the Old Down Chapel. When it came to their father's religion—true saving faith— Tim and Sarah would often come to their mum and say, "Dad just doesn't get it, does he?" But not only was God secretly working on Eric through the goodness of His common graces, many Christian friends began to speak to Eric about the Gospel and other spiritual matters as well. He just couldn't get away from it.

One Sunday in 1992, Mike Henger, a preacher from Newent, said something in his sermon that Eric couldn't get away from. Eric also went on a fishing trip with his son-in-law, Richard, who asked

why he had never been baptised to which Eric responded, “I don’t feel I’m ready” (and he wasn’t because he wasn’t a true believer yet). These were at least two sparks that set in motion his conversion, of Eric’s Gospel-penny dropping moment. In the winter of 1993



Eric decided to go on a one week Master Ski Christian Holiday in Salsburg, Austria. Sylvia had come before but didn’t ski anymore and so she and her friends, Nat and Gwen, flew out at the same time for a two week trip to visit missionary friends in Kenya.

It was in Austria where Eric had his mountain top experience, where all the Christian teaching he had learned and experienced for decades finally ‘clicked.’ The Bible topic for the week was Jonah. As Eric went up the gondola of Westerdorf Mountain he realised that just like Jonah he had been running away from God all these years. Just as the gondola emerged from the shade, he saw the sun shining in all its brilliance on a lone cross at the top of the mountain. All the other



lone crosses (a local feature) were indeed crucifixes and not crosses (i.e. Jesus still hung on the cross). But this one was correctly empty because Jesus was no longer there. He had risen! It was at that moment that something ‘clicked’ and he came to personally trust in what Jesus had done on the cross as he repented for the forgiveness of his sins. By the grace of God at work in Eric’s life he had become a real, genuine, authentic Christian! The date was February 5, 1993. He had looked down from the “lofty mountain grandeur” his soul having sung, “my Saviour God, to Thee, how great Thou art, how great Thou art!” Little did Eric know at the time, but far away in Kenya, Sylvia, Nat and Gwen had prayed for his conversion as they travelled from one mission station to another.

When he returned home, his family didn’t quite know what to make of him—in the best of ways—for it was evident there had been a dramatic change in his life. He truly was a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Christ had come to dwell in his heart by faith (Eph 3:17). He had been given that spark in his eye that he was so well known for. The first Wednesday he was back there was a special Wednesday service at the Chapel, at which the visiting speaker took requests for hymns. Eric’s hymn book fell open to “When I feel the touch of your hand upon my life.” It brought tears to his eyes. He was so delighted by his new found faith in His Lord and Saviour that his excitement was difficult to contain. He was baptised by immersion on November 25, 1993 in the ‘new chapel’ of Thornbury Baptist Church by John Mills. He now eagerly threw his energy into the ministry of the

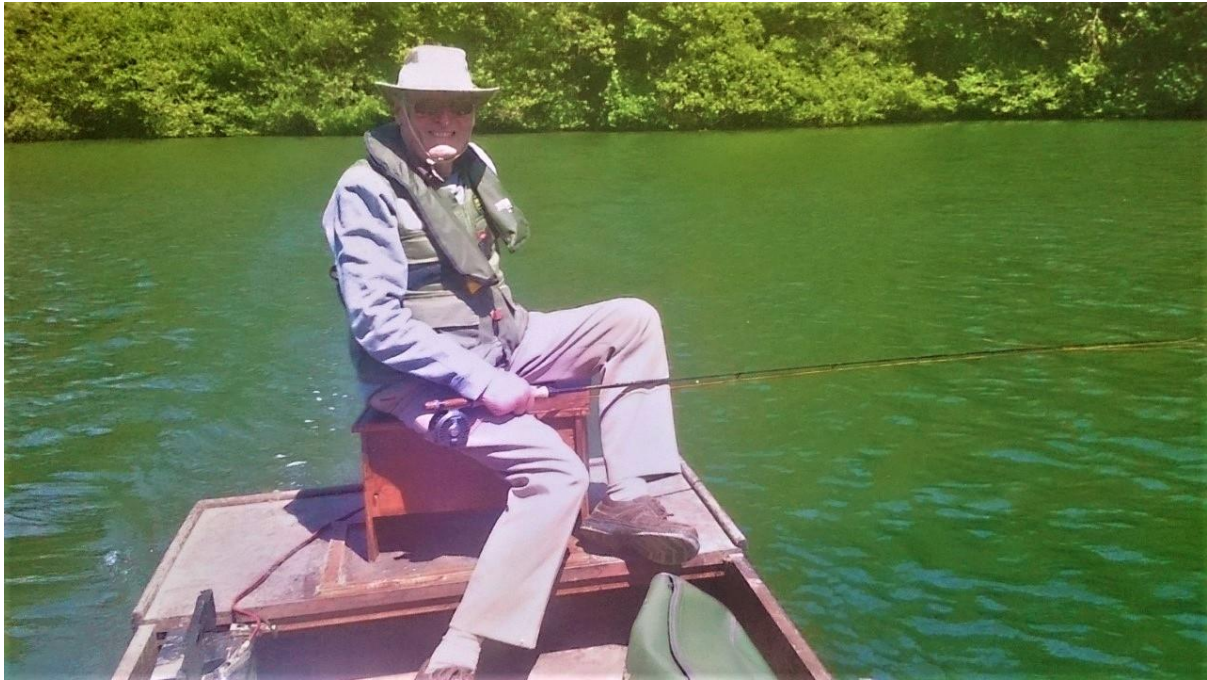
Chapel, becoming Treasurer in 1997 and also an Elder soon after. From this time onwards he would never miss a prayer meeting unless there was good reason. In hindsight Eric believed he was:

...so privileged to be able to live and work in a wonderful part of God`s Creation, to see the Seasons come and go and to be able to work with them, to see the various crops grow and be harvested, to see the animals and birds being born and watch them grow to maturity. As I look back over the years I can see God`s hand at work all the way through...even if we didn`t know Him until we were in our 40s and 60s.



At the age of 85 (Eric`s age when this was written), he was still following Jesus, still praising Him, still looking to Him for wisdom in life, comfort in affliction, and hoping in His promise of eternal life, a life he already knew in part (Jn 10:10; Eph 1:14). He still had his quirks and he still sometimes sinned, but “there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.” (Eccl 7:20). Christians are not perfect as some wrongly suppose, but forgiven and justified (made

right) with God. Jesus' work on the Cross that made forgiveness possible is sufficient to cleanse Christians of not only their past but present sins that impinge upon their relationship with God along their journey, for "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9).



Future Assurance

Those who knew Eric after his conversion in 1993 will testify that he was much more like Jesus in 2018 than he was in 1993. That is because each day the Holy Spirit changed him from one degree of likeness to Christ to another (2 Cor 3:18). Eric had been set free from the penalty of sin, was being set free from the power of sin, and looked forward to the day when he would be free from the very presence of sin. His inner self was being renewed even as his body aged and decayed (2 Cor 4:16), for Christians still live in a physical

world where death currently reigns. Scripture teaches the last enemy to be defeated is death (1 Cor 15:26).

After a battle with cancer, Eric died on October 5, 2018.¹ On that day, one of two hitherto unfulfilled biblical promises were fulfilled: at his physical death his spirit went to be in the presence of His Lord Jesus in heaven (Lk 23:43). His spirit is now free from the presence of sin! Yet, even in heaven Eric still longs for a far greater day (Phil 3:20–1), for his body still knows corruption as it rests in the grave in St. Andrew’s Churchyard. Ultimately Eric, along with every true Christian (in heaven and on earth), eagerly looks forward to “the Resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting,” as the Apostles Creed puts it, when Jesus will return, the dead will be raised and He will judge the world. Then Eric will spend eternity with Jesus in his glorified body in the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev 21:1). That, however, will be another story, one in which every chapter will be better than the one before. What amazing grace God has lavished upon Eric!

Question: Would you call upon Eric’s God and Saviour Jesus Christ and receive this same grace that he enjoys? This is his prayer for you.

**NB: This manuscript was approved by Eric before he died. It is now commended to you by his widow, Sylvia.*

¹ Eric’s burial and thanksgiving service, which followed at Cromhall Chapel, was on October 16, 2018.

Photos

**All photographs not in a black outline are courtesy of the Scoldings.*

- p.1- Eric as a baby; Eric and his parents on their first visit to Cromhall during the war.
- p. 2- The *Luftwaffe* bombing Britain;² The sweets shop in Harwich where Eric bought sweeties and icecream.³
- P. 3- War evacuee children leaving their families by train; a poster from WWII;⁴ Thornbury Railway Station.⁵
- p.4- Eric's suitcase, which he brought to Cromhall; Eric with the pigs at Oxford Cottage.
- p. 5- Mr. Kimber and Eric at Oxford Cottage.
- p. 6- A letter sent to Eric's parents; Cromhall Chapel; Cromhall Chapel Sunday School register.
- p.7- Sylvia, age 19.
- p.8- Eric and Sylvia's wedding at Christchurch, Downend; Mr. and Mrs. Kimber with Tim and Sarah (mid-70s); the wider Scolding family (1999).
- p.9- Varley Farm (1969); Eric showing a cow at the Berkeley Show (late 80s).
- p.13- Eric in Austria skiing; Westerdorf Mountain.⁶
- p. 15- Cromhall Chapel (2018).
- p.16- Eric fishing with granddaughter, Sophie (2013).

² Courtesy Google Images.

³ "The War Years," *Harwich and Dovercourt*. <<http://www.harwichanddovercourt.co.uk/the-war-years/>> (September 2018).

⁴ "History-WWII-Evacuation," *TES Teach*. <<https://www.tes.com/lessons/APKDk3LcMpQJAg/history-wwii-evacuation>> (September 2018).

⁵ "Former Thornbury Railway Station," *Flickr*. <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/27860036@N03/3256033224>> (September 2018).

⁶ Courtesy Google Images.

