

**Transcript of a letter (from a typed copy, not the original) from ‘Mrs Metcalfe, aged 89’
to her niece Elizabeth Parker May, written on 25 June 1880**

Elizabeth May (1823-1901) was the great-aunt of Muriel Tidman née Wedd. Her aunt Elizabeth Metcalfe (1791-1885) was also born Elizabeth May. This letter is written in answer to a question from her niece about former inhabitants of West House, West Square, Maldon, Essex (pictured below, present day). According to the letter, the younger Elizabeth is now living there with her brother George Parker May, Muriel Tidman’s maternal grandfather.



Despairing of an uninterrupted opportunity of writing quite leisurely, when my short day begins; I must begin before I apply myself to the business of attending to my personal appearance, which is very fatiguing especially dressing my grey hair which however is rapidly falling off. I shall, like my dear sister Fanny do the best I can with it as long as a few hairs remain though my dear daughters have provided me a successor (a grey hair front) in store.

Enough of myself, I am longing to answer your interesting and entertaining letter – especially that part which brings to my recollection a whole host of the scenes of my childhood and associates of that period. First I must congratulate you on having the companionship of your dear Brother, and the improved state of your Katie’s¹ health, and the subsequent movements of others, especially that your sister was able to be of the party. My belongings are just now bearing the burden and heat of their day with health and strength imparted equal to their need. If dear Fanny suffers much from asthma she will not let me know it, nor will Elizth let me tell her sisters about the pain and uneasiness she often feels in her leg and back, otherwise she is well and looks well – and so is Anna and also her Mother

¹ Probably Kathleen Wedd, nee May, 1849-1916. Daughter of George Parker May and wife of Edward Arthur Wedd; mother of Edward, Muriel and Aubrey Wedd.

to whom they have given a birthday present of a light garden chair in which she can guide herself which (with a person behind propelling) prevents her feeling just like a Baby in a Perambulator.

Now for some account of my/our Grandmother Rutt who was the earliest occupant of West House that I can remember! Our Grandfather was, from all I could gather a very superior man to whom my mother was devotedly attached; she took me once into Friday St.² where they had a town house which she pointed out to me, it was old fashioned with a door in the middle, two windows on each side, five above, the middle window which was most interesting to my mother as my grandfather's place of retirement, where she was frequently his companion. Their country house was at Lambeth (no longer country) there they had a field and kitchen garden. The tradition connected with it is that their cook was accustomed to rise early, walk there for vegetables when the family were in Friday St, shelling peas on her way back, by breakfast time, also that our Grandfather used to perform on the French horn on his way to and from his Drug Mills, to which he went on the Thames, and was a good performer upon that instrument. You have doubtless heard of the sad close of his life by an accident with the machinery employed. He left good property, as it was then considered, upon which I believe our Grandmother lived till her 3 daughters were married.

The Drug Mills were left to my uncle Rutt, who being a very literary man, had no turn for carrying it on but entered upon it –

25th 6 o'clock in the morning. Having had a good night, I awoke much refreshed, and I believe very thankful to my Almighty Preserver. I find that I have rambled far away from my intended reply to your question which was, 'Was it not Grandmama Rutt that lived and died at West House?'

When that house was vacated, my parents were very desirous to get her mother to Maldon to which she consented, and my mother went to London to accompany her on her journey travelling post half way, stopping at an Inn to which my father had sent 2 horses to continue the journey, before they were put on, my mother and her aged companion were overturned (not having alighted) by a vehicle driving up and running against your grandmother's carriage, though agitated they escaped injury and reached West House in safety.

I ought to end here, but must indulge myself and perhaps entertain you by one use we children made of the above mentioned carriage which vehicle I was not acquainted with until after it was no longer used by her, and strange to say I do not remember any one else who kept a 4 wheeled carriage except my great Aunt Joseph Pattisson³, who lived in the house where Mrs Captain Pattisson now lives. The great folks drove in post chaises as they were then called.

² Friday Street in the City of London

³ Probably Elizabeth Pattisson née Wallman, 1732-1825. Subject of 'The Strange Tale of Miss Wallman' in the section 'Tidman and Wedd, other documents' on The Mackarness Place website

Would you like to know anything about your great grandmother Rutt? As little children we were sent to a very respectable Dame School which stood all by itself very little nearer West House than yours (Mrs Kings') occasionally we dined there, but did not see our grandmother often excepting when her maid came for us to say we were to go in to see her – she was always sitting in the same chair and my impression is that she wore dark silk dresses, with sleeves just over her elbow, and white lace ruffles at the bottom, sometimes black silk mittens, at other times a pretty plump arm was exposed. I never remember seeing any work she was doing, though much younger than I now am, in fine weather she walked up and down a very broad walk where there was only one unaccommodating garden chair painted white in which she rested herself, and when we bid her good-bye she often said to her attendant: Give the children each a (what she called) a 'posy', at other times we had full liberty out of doors, we set open the coach house doors and the old carriage doors were set open that we might chase each other in at one door and out at the other till we were tired.

I was the last of the large family who was inoculated [sic] for the smallpox⁴ and to prevent it spreading G.mother took me into West House, was very kind to me, and let her maid exercise me in the wide passages as I was not allowed to go near the fire, so much praise was bestowed upon me for keeping to medical rules, that I could not do otherwise than obey, and got through the complaint with only two or three satisfactory pustules.

I doubt not that my grandmother read her Bible daily, but I observed that on the Sabbath a large quarto copy of the 'Whole duty of man'⁵ was laid on a table ready for her when she came down. I remember amusing myself by finding it lettered on the back 'Duty of Man's Works'.

Imagine me sitting over my paper nodding, which is generally my occupation before I have luncheon and can scarcely keep awake till finished – Attribute to this propensity the many mistakes I make, leaving out words, my faulty spelling through my forgetfulness and being too lazy to consult the Dictionary, but in writing to a dear niece, I say to myself she will excuse me at the age of 89. If Elizth were present, who spells correctly, I should appeal to her, she is a great assistance to me, as I have been to her. I have not now alluded to Frank's engagement, I can only say that if he had asked me to chuse for him (which was not likely) I could not have made a better choice, I should think you know her? I pity you to have so long a letter to read but I was led on by the subject you gave me.

Next page: some inhabitants of Maldon, taken from the **Post Office Directory of Essex 1874**, whose surnames appear on the Tidman/Wedd family tree or in this letter.

⁴ Smallpox inoculation was invented or discovered in 1796, when Mrs Metcalfe would have been about five years old. It was widely used during the 1800s..

⁵ 'The Whole Duty of Man is an English high church 'Protestant' devotional work, first published anonymously, with an introduction by Henry Hammond, in 1658. It was both popular and influential for two centuries, in the Anglican tradition it helped to define. - Wikipedia

Miss Elizabeth May, London Road

George Parker May, M.D. J.P., West House

William Nash, draper, High Street

Charles Parker, coal merchant and ale and porter stores, High Street

Stephen Rutt, High Street

Mrs. Pattisson, High Street