

“A GREAT FRIEND AND BENEFACTOR TO ALL OUR REFUGEES”

The Reverend Philip Gray, Rector of Albury 1930-1944, has always been hailed in my family as the very best example of Church of England charity. He went out of his way to support and befriend the hundred or more “Sudeten German” refugees from Czechoslovakia who arrived in his Surrey parish from late 1938 onwards. He raised funds for them, especially for clothing and books; introduced them to English life and customs; arranged English lessons for the adults; set up a domestic science school for the women; established a boarding school for the children (which my parents Herbert Lowit and Theresie Schneider attended) and enrolled the boys into the Scouts.

Both sides of my family were “freethinkers”, coming from a Jewish background on my father’s side and a Roman Catholic background on my mother’s side. Rev. Gray seems to have been a particular friend of my father’s parents Karl and Johanna Löwit. He blessed the civil marriage of their oldest son (my uncle Ludwig) to his Jewish/Lutheran German bride Anneliese before the couple emigrated to Canada in 1939. Rev. Gray and my grandfather kept in touch after Karl and Johanna moved to Yorkshire and he wrote a letter of condolence to Karl on the death of my grandmother in 1951.

As another child refugee wrote later in life from his home in the USA: “No mention was made of anyone’s religious preferences nor did he seem to dwell on that subject . . . This was a perfect example of a man practicing what he preached. I, for one, will never forget him.”

Here is what I have been able to find out so far about Reverend Philip Gray, and his wife Ruth who was a teacher and I would guess a great influence on her husband’s efforts for the refugee children. With thanks to Trevor Brook of the Albury History Society (AHS) and a couple of refugee families for some additional material. Any more information about – and photographs of – this unsung hero of Albury are welcome!

Sylvia Daintrey née Lowit, January 2019, updated February 2022



BEFORE ALBURY 1888-1930

FROM FIND MY PAST WEBSITE:

Philip Gray born 24 August 1888 in Wokingham Berkshire

1891 census (age 2): Living at Vicarage, Woodley Green, Sandford and Woodley, Wokingham, Berkshire – father Ernest A Gray, Vicar of Woodley, born in Marylebone London in 1845 – mother Edith Barnardiston Gray née Brown, born in Billericay/Shenfield Essex in 1856/7, married in 1884 in Wokingham – 4 female servants. Philip had 2 older sisters and 2 brothers; by 1900 he had 2 further brothers and 1 further sister.

1901 census (age 12): Living and going to school as a patient at a sanatorium in Dunsden near Reading, Berkshire – 8 other patients ages 11-42, all female – also in household: nurse, cook, housemaid - in charge Dr Esther Colebrook who 3 years earlier had begun open air treatment of tuberculosis [From https://oxfordshirehealtharchives.nhs.uk/hospitals/peppard_sanatorium/]

Educated at Magdalen College, Cambridge, and Wells College [Surrey Advertiser 21 December 1929]

1911 census (age 22): Living as a boarder at a lodging house 21 Vicars Close Wells, St Andrew, Somerset – theological student – 1 fellow student same age – also in household: landlady, widowed boarder, domestic servant

Ordained deacon in 1912, and priest in 1914 – Curacy in Martock Somerset before Chiddingfold Surrey [Surrey Advertiser 21 December 1929]

From Surrey Advertiser 15 May 1916: "The engagement is announced of the Rev. Philip Gray, Chiddingfold, and Miss Ruth Arnold, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Arnold, of Pook Hill, Chiddingfold. Mr. Gray has been assistant curate in Chiddingfold parish for about two years."

From Surrey Advertiser 22 January 1917: "A Popular Curate: At Chiddingfold Parish Hall on Thursday evening, the Rev. Philip Gray, curate of the parish, was presented with a number of gifts subscribed for by the parishioners, as a token of their esteem, on his departure to take up the curacy of Christchurch, Hants."

Married Ruth Wakefield Arnold on 23 January 1917 in Chiddingfold Parish Church, Hambledon, Surrey. Ruth was born 19 December 1890 in Kensington – father was Edward Augustus Arnold publisher, great-uncle was the poet Matthew Arnold, great-grandfather was Thomas Arnold headmaster of Rugby School – 1911 census: Ruth a student at Oxford University, living in Kensington with family

From Surrey Advertiser 29 January 1917 (abridged): "A Popular Wedding: Both bride and bridegroom are very popular in the parish. The former is now leaving to the regret of those among whom he has worked. The bride has also taken an active part in parochial work, particularly in connection with the Fisher Lane Mission Room. The ceremony was performed by the [former] vicar of Martock, Somerset, an old friend of the bridegroom."

Son Antony Thomas Arnold Gray born 18 September 1918 in Hambledon, Surrey

1921 census: Antony (age 2) listed as a visitor at his maternal grandfather's house at Pook Hill, along with 2 young sons of Ruth's sister Mary (wife of composer Thomas Dunhill – Mary was staying in Kensington with her mother and new baby daughter) – also in Pook Hill household: nurse, governess, 2 servants and Ruth's twin sister Nancy Wordsworth Arnold.

No trace so far of Philip and Ruth Gray in 1921 census. Perhaps they were on holiday outside England & Wales? Or even visiting the new Commonwealth War Grave of Ruth's oldest sister Margaret Trevenen Arnold who had died in France in 1916 while serving as a Red Cross nurse
[\[https://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/margaret-arnold/\]](https://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/margaret-arnold/)

From Surrey Advertiser 21 December 1929:

- 1917-1920: Curate at Christchurch Priory, Bournemouth including temporary chaplain to the Forces for two years
- 1920-1924: Senior curate at Holy Trinity Church, Guildford – “Mr. Gray was exceedingly popular in the parish, especially among the younger members of the congregation and the Holy Trinity Guild, for which he worked hard”
- September 1924-January 1930: Vicar of Woodley near Reading where his father had been for 10 years. Confirmed in 1925-1928 Electoral Registers that Philip and Ruth Gray were living at The Vicarage, Parish of Woodley & Sandford

RECTOR OF ALBURY 1930 – 1944

FROM A TALK “[ALBURY AND THE CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC CHURCH](#)” delivered to the Albury History Society on 21 March 2007 by Dr Tim Grass:

Philip Gray (1930-44) built a close relationship with the dying congregation, extending eucharistic hospitality to members and generally keeping a pastoral eye on them. He did much to assist the conversations between Anglicans and Catholic Apostolics, providing source materials for a perceptive analysis of the movement by the clergyman Reginald Somerset Ward, ‘The Death of a Church and the Problems arising therefrom’, a copy of which is held in Lambeth Palace Library.

FROM AHS ARCHIVE 8261/5/2 (housed at the Surrey History Centre in Woking):

Weston School Albury: Weston School for girls was established in the early 1930s in Wescott with 6 pupils by Ruth Gray (née Arnold), wife of Philip Gray, rector of Albury. In 1933, the school (also known as Weston House School) moved to Albury Rectory, Church Lane, taking in around 80 pupils.

SUDETEN GERMAN REFUGEES ARRIVE IN ALBURY 1938

[Link to “A Spectator’s Notebook” items on Surrey Refugees Appeal November/December 1938:](#)

I have an appeal to make to readers (if any) of this column. I drove last Sunday to see a party of Sudeten German refugees (Social Democrats) for whom temporary quarters have been found in a remote corner of Surrey. They had escaped from their homes as the German armies entered; otherwise they would be in concentration camps. They could not go out, for it was pouring with rain, and they have no mackintoshes. They could not read, for they have no German books and only one or two understand English. They have only the clothes they stand up in; most of them have not even pyjamas; and they have, of course, no money. In this party there were nineteen; not far off there is a larger party, of professional men mainly, also temporarily installed in makeshift quarters; others will be quartered near as accommodation can be found; they are all men. Many of us in this country felt that Munich had brought us peace at other people's expense; these are some of the other people, and here is an opportunity of a small practical expression of gratitude for our own immunity. These refugees are having their bare board and lodging paid by the Czech Refugee Committee in London, but they want waterproofs, gum boots (and other boots or shoes), German books, German-English dictionaries, pyjamas, and old suits (for rough work, since most of them came in their best clothes). I hope someone who reads this may be moved to supply some of this need. Any of the things I have mentioned (or for that matter money to buy them with) may be sent to the Rev. Philip Gray. The Rectory, Albury, Guildford, who has undertaken to receive them and distribute them equitably. I think I can feel confidence that *Spectator* readers will lend a hand.

SURREY HILLS REFUGEE CAMP

FROM WALTER E LUFT'S MEMOIR – sent to my father Herbert Lowit in 2002 from his USA home

[On arrival at Surrey Hills in mid-November 1938 age 11]: “The first bright spot in an otherwise gloomy scene was the arrival of Dr. Phillip Gray [*sic*], the Vicar of the local and only Anglican Church. He spoke some German and soon had our attention. He enquired of our well-being, especially the children. No mention was made of anyone's religious preferences nor did he seem to dwell on that subject. To our surprise he invited all of us to attend Sunday Morning Service at his church. Many of us accepted the invitation because we were impressed by his attitude. On Sunday morning he informed his congregation that they now had fifty refugee families as their guests and the offering would be used to relieve some of the shortcomings of our existence. That afternoon we were astonished to see car after car arrive at the camp and invite whole families to their homes [for High Tea] . . . and we gladly accepted.

“The following Tuesday a bus pulled up in mid-morning with Vicar Gray and two ladies, who also spoke some German, to take the kids to town. The Vicar had previously inquired of the mothers what the kids needed most. In town we were taken to the largest clothing store and each child was provided with what he or she needed, warm socks, sturdy shoes, gloves, scarves, caps etc. A lunch was also provided at a school lunchroom. This was a perfect example of a man practicing what he preached. I, for one, will never forget him.”



Sudeten Refugees at Surrey Hills - February 1939
My grandfather Karl Löwit 2nd left, possibly Rev Philip Gray 3rd left

FROM KARL LÖWIT'S ENGLISH JOURNAL (written 1940-1941)

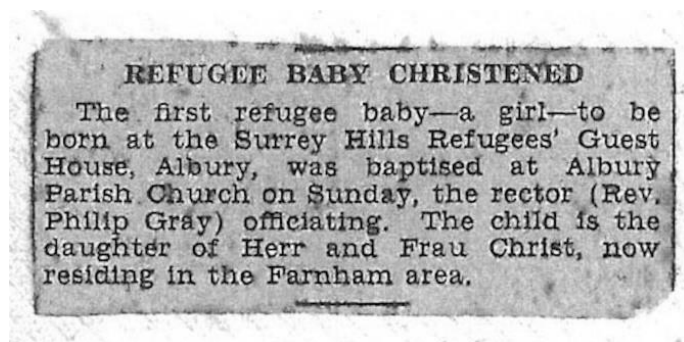
[Link to Karl Löwit's An English Journal](#)

For 21st November, 1938, our great friend and benefactor, the Reverend Philip Gray, Rector of Albury, had arranged a trip to Windsor. In two motor coaches all the refugees then living here were taken there. Windsor Castle and its rooms filled with unconceivable treasures of every description was like a dream. It was here that I could usefully act as an interpreter again, translating the explanations of the official guide who led the visitors through the vast rooms. What a splendour everywhere! And what a lot of reminders of important historical events! By the way, I was really glad to find in some of the voluptuous state apartments magnificent big lamps made in my home country of Bohemia. And then the interior of St George's Chapel, and the marvellous choir who sung there the Evensong! Words are not sufficient to describe all these deep and powerful impressions. All this is unforgettable.

The Rev. Mr Gray had invited us also to attend an intimate recital of the Choir in his own home (the Rectory) on [Sunday 18th December 1938]. So I went there, together with Dr Fischer (living in Shalford now). When we walked up the rather steep road to the rectory in the early darkness of that Sunday before Xmas – as there was just New Moon it was pitch dark – a gentleman nearly knocked against me, and then asked me for the way to the rectory. In the course of the conversation it appeared that he was the conductor of the “Fleet Street Choir”, trying to inform Mr Gray the choir would be a little late, owing to some difficulties with their motor coach. He was grateful when I undertook to inform Mr Gray, who then heartily laughed when just I, as a refugee arrived here a few weeks before from abroad, brought him this message after having shown the right way to the conductor.

It was a wonderful evening in the rectory. Dr Fischer and I joined a merry party there, the conductor of the choir and the Rector delivered witty speeches, and finally there was a funny celebration of Mrs Gray’s birthday. Thus, I could watch another feature of English social life, and gather some more nice impressions apart from the “big” tea with various kinds of very nice cakes, buns etc., and the crackers. When then the tables had been cleared, we enjoyed a number of recitals by the Fleet Street Choir, and in order to show us their interest in our fate, they repeated the Czech carol of the afternoon. The conductor told me that the choir had visited Prague in Summer, 1937, and held a very successful recital there, in one of the largest halls which was crowded. He loved our Bohemian music and was delighted with the beauties of our “Golden Prague” (Czech: “Zlatá Praha”, German: “Goldenes Prag”).

On Thursday, 5th January, 1939, we had in our camp the first Lantern Talk on “England and the English”, the first lecture of a series of at first six talks, followed later by six more lantern talks. The lecturer was Mr Sallmann of London, an employee of Messrs. T. Cook & Sons, and all was arranged and paid for by our great benefactress Mrs Cook of Wonersh, thanks to Mr Gray’s suggestions.



This baby girl had been born on 31st March 1939. Her father had been on the same transport from Czechoslovakia as my grandfather Karl Löwit which had arrived in England on 8 November 1938

BROOK LODGE SCHOOL AND SCOUTS 1939

FROM HERBERT LOWIT ARTICLE written for the Sudeten Jahrbuch in 1999

[Link to "Exile in England – The First Two Years"](#)

. . . the Anglican vicar of the village, Reverend Philip Gray, had made the wellbeing of the refugees his responsibility. He devoted particular attention to 'his children' and, with the active support of his parishioners and of the [Czech Refugee] Trust Fund, managed by the middle of January to open a school . . . On Sundays we were led into church – the only thing Reverend Gray expected from his pupils. He knew of course that he was dealing with heathens and had therefore designated the Sunday service as additional English tuition.

FROM HERBERT LOWIT'S MEMOIRS - taped interviews with Dr A Grenville 1998

The local parson took us under his wing, the Reverend Philip Gray. He took a great interest in refugees, although he knew we were not one of his flock. He said that doesn't matter, he saw that we children were just roaming around with nothing to do. So with the help of the [Czech Refugee] Trust Fund and local people he organised a proper type of boarding school, originally just for boys, things being what they were in those days, and about a dozen of us had a proper school for the whole of 1939.



Refugees and children in front of the schoolhouse, Brook Lodge, 1939. My father Herbert Lowit front second right in white shirt. His future father-in-law Josef Schneider back right (with cigarette!)

FROM HERBERT LOWIT ARTICLE written for the Sudeten Jahrbuch in 1982

[Link to "The Red Scouts of Brook Lodge"](#)

When [the Albury] hostels filled up towards Christmas 1938 there were nearly as many foreigners as locals in the village. Understandably, the villagers regarded the influx of foreign guests with mixed feelings. Not so, commendably, their Anglican vicar who, since the arrival of the first refugees, had made their care his priority. Reverend Philip Gray, being fully aware that the majority of his foreign charges were estranged from his beliefs and church, should be properly honoured here for his selfless care and efforts for his "refugee children". One of his greatest achievements was a school for them. . .

Not long after school time and free time had been satisfactorily organised we found ourselves embarrassed by a suggestion from the staff. In their efforts to acquaint us with the English way of life as quickly and thoroughly as possible Reverend Gray and Mr Cobbold [the headmaster] suggested we should join the Boy Scout movement. Our tactful misgivings were dismissed with the comment that Scouts welcome all youngsters into their ranks regardless of their political or religious opinions. And so it came about . . .

**Enrolment of the Sudeten Scout Patrol,
Brook Lodge, Albury.**

On Sunday, March 12th, the eight Sudeten German boys, who are being educated in the Refugees' School attached to Brook Lodge, Albury, were enrolled as Scouts, and attached to the 9th Guildford Patrol. The enrolment was carried out by Mr. H. V. Jeffery, the Scoutmaster. A detachment of 30 Scouts from the 9th Guildford were present, and with the Sudeten boys attended a service at St. Michael's, Farley Green, which preceded the ceremony of enrolment, at Brook Lodge. A gathering of Sudeten and English friends of the boys were present at the service and afterwards at Brook Lodge to witness the enrolment. At the close of the ceremony Mr. Jeffery announced that the 9th Guildford Patrol wished to present in the near future a Standard to the Brook Lodge detachment, and a temporary Standard was handed to the Sudeten boys. Herbert Lowit, the senior boy at Brook Lodge, in excellent English, returned thanks, and expressed on behalf of his companions the gratitude which they

felt to the Guildford Scouts for their friendship, and their appreciation of the services of the two Assistant Scoutmasters, R. Longhurst and R. Cooper, who for many weeks have been coming over to Albury to take charge of the Brook School detachment. Mr. Jeffery then called for cheers for the visitors and the newly enrolled detachment, which, at the invitation of Mr. Cobbold, the headmaster, were returned with great heartiness by the Sudetens, and all present, for Mr. Jeffery and the Scouts of the 9th Guildford.

Mr. and Mrs. Bedford kindly provided tea for all the visitors present, and so closed an interesting international event—a gesture of brotherhood worthy of the highest traditions of the Scout Movement—and all present felt, in a very small way, that history had been made in Albury on this occasion. P.G.

The new Standard has arrived—a combination of the Scout Flag with the Union Jack—and is proudly adorning the walls of the School room.

Item by Philip Gray in Albury Parish Magazine April 1939

ONGOING SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES 1939

FROM KARL LÖWIT'S ENGLISH JOURNAL

In such a chronicle must also be noted what had especially been done for our wives. Mr Gray had arranged a "School for Domestic Science" which was held in the Albury Village Hall during the Spring months, 1939. For six weeks there were lessons of English cooking, household, etc. twice a week; and then, for another six weeks, once a week, there were lessons of dress-making. These instructions were of special value and our wives could learn very much of greatest interest and use for them.

FROM THE SPECTATOR 14 APRIL 1939

[Link to Philip Gray's letter to The Spectator "The Surrey Refugees"](#)

[At end of letter] Janus writes: "... I must in bare justice add that it would have been impossible for the Albury settlements to have been carried on as smoothly, efficiently and cheerfully as they have been but for the fact that they were planted (on quite other grounds) in a parish whose rector happens to combine an unusual gift for organisation with an unusual readiness to turn his hand to a work that needs doing, and add it, regardless of the strain on himself, to his normal work. He abundantly deserves any support *Spectator* readers can give."

FROM KARL LÖWIT'S ENGLISH JOURNAL

The trip to Windsor was later repeated, on May 15th [1939], thanks to Mr Gray's renewed endeavours and to Mrs Cook's – another great benefactress towards us refugees – far reaching kindness and readiness to spend money for such purposes. Thus, also our wives and children had the opportunity to see these marvels and wonders unique in the world.



Windsor Castle May 1939



*Anna Schneider (my maternal grandmother)
on right*

FROM KARL LÖWIT'S ENGLISH JOURNAL

Our son Ludwig had made the acquaintance of a German girl at Easter 1939 when she happened to come into our camp, together with a few girl-friends, to watch a football-match. . . . Soon the two young people fell in love with each other, and on Saturday, 1st July, 1939, we celebrated their wedding at the register office at Guildford. . .

On Monday evening [3rd July, 1939], Rev. Gray granted a special blessing to the young couple in Albury Church; this simple ceremony was very impressive.



St Peter and St Paul's Church in Albury, October 2018

FROM THE SEPTEMBER 1939 NATIONAL REGISTER (War-Time Census)

- At The Rectory, Albury: Philip Gray, Minister of Religion, ARP sub-warden - also Ruth W Gray, teacher; Antony T A Gray, student (age 20); Olive M Hallam, teacher; Winifred Allen, servant
- At Surrey Hills Camp: approx. 50 Czech refugees including my paternal grandparents
- At Brook Lodge: approx. 50 Czech refugees including my maternal grandparents (and my teenage parents attending Brook Lodge School)

FROM THERESIE LOWIT NÉE SCHNEIDER'S PHOTO ALBUM



This tiny blurry photograph is labelled "Christmas 1939 at Brook Lodge". Although no-one is identified, we always assumed that the clergyman in the centre was Reverend Philip Gray but now believe he is probably the curate Rev Martin E Tupper. My mother Theresie Schneider is in the row behind him to the right.

THE 1940s

FROM KARL LÖWIT'S ENGLISH JOURNAL

4th May, 1940: To-day we bid farewell to Surrey Hills though for the moment we are still uncertain about our future home – our good and kind friends Rev. Gray and Mr Coe have promised to get us settled in Albury itself, but it may take them another few weeks to succeed in finding something suitable.

3rd June, 1940: At our deep regret, Mr Gray and Mr Coe have not been able to find suitable accommodation for us at Albury; all the rooms or houses they had had in mind as being or becoming vacant were meanwhile occupied – mostly in consequence of the further development of the war, especially of the evacuation of London.

On Tuesday, September 17, 1940, we had a most agreeable and joyful surprise: Rev. Gray, the Rector of Albury, this great friend and benefactor to all our refugees and especially to us, came to see us. And still another surprise he brought with him. He had got a letter [from Tel Aviv, Palestine], addressed "To the Clergyman at Albury", from a friend of ours who originally had lived at Reichenberg, then moved to Prague, managed to escape from there several months after the Nazi occupation . . . After many adventures he had reached Rumania by way of Hungary, and he was on board the ill-fated steamer "Sulina" which was held up for a long time in the mouth of the Danube.

Mr Gray lent me a voluminous book on gardening which will be a great help to me when I can start my "digging for victory".

This is the last mention of Rev. Gray in Karl Löwit's Journal. In 1944, Rev. Gray was appointed to the chaplaincy (Hospitaller) of the evacuated St Thomas's hospital in Milford. This address, and a private address in Godalming, comes from my grandfather's 1940s address book:

Rev. Philip GRAY, M.A.,
Hospitaller, St Thomas's
Hospital, Hyde St, Godal-
ming Surrey, Station Milford
Telephone Godalming 1228.
Private Address: Weston
House, Ballfield Rd,
Godalming, Surrey.
Tel. No. 301

From Surrey Advertiser 19 August 1944: Albury and St. Martha's Parish Magazine contains messages from the Rev. Philip Gray, who recently resigned the living to go to St. Thomas's Hospital . . .

From Hambledon Village Website St Thomas' Hospital evacuation to Surrey:
http://www.hambledonsurrey.co.uk/?page_id=6214

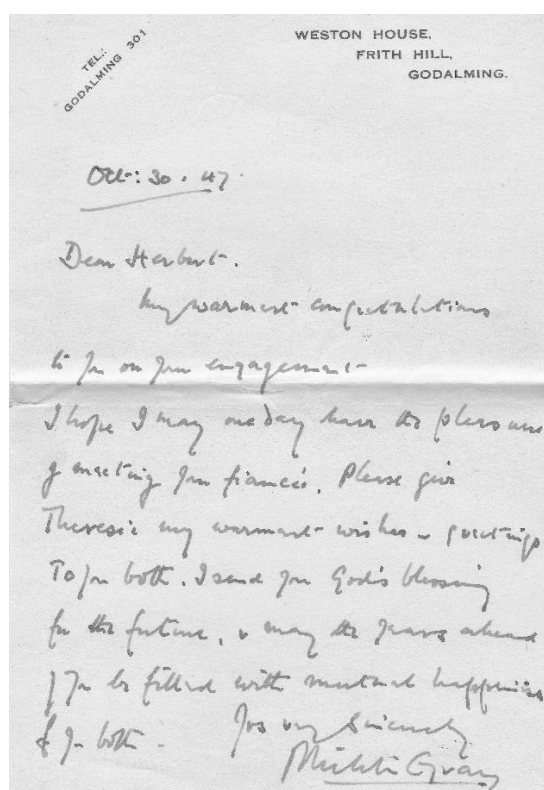


The Chapel in 1955

When her husband was appointed to the chaplaincy of the evacuated St Thomas's hospital in Milford, Mrs Gray moved Weston School to Charterhouse Hill, Godalming in September 1944. The school closed in 1961. [From AHS Archive 8261/5/2 and Surrey Advertiser 20 May 1944]

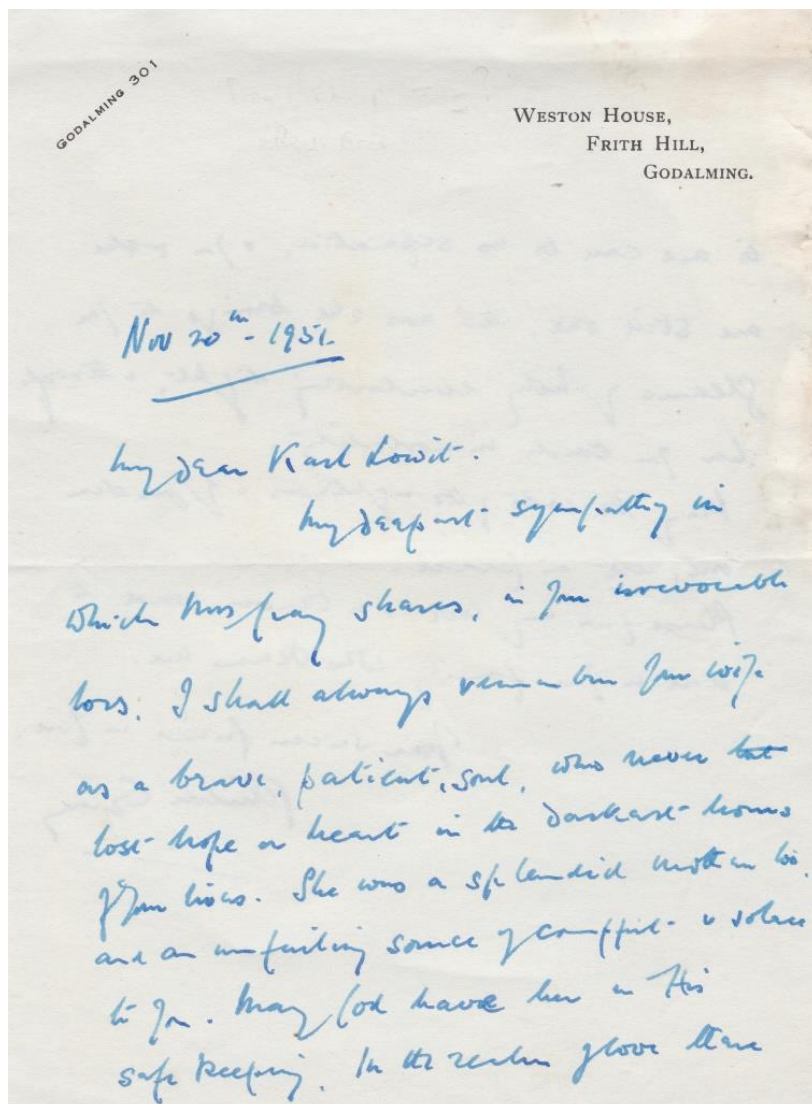
FROM HERBERT LOWIT'S ARCHIVE – October 1947

My father Herbert Lowit, who had been head boy at Brook Lodge School in 1939, paid a visit to Reverend Philip Gray in Albury at the beginning of October 1947. He was on holiday from Prague having served in the Free Czechoslovak Army including at the Siege of Dunkirk. He was about to get engaged to Theresie Schneider whom he had met at Brook Lodge. Herbert's father Karl no doubt informed Reverend Gray who sent this letter of congratulations at the end of the month:



LAST YEARS

HANDWRITTEN LETTER OF CONDOLENCE 20 November 1951



My dear Karl Lowit,

My deepest sympathy in which Mrs Gray shares, in your irrecoverable loss. I shall always remember your wife as a brave, patient soul, who never lost hope or heart in the darkest hours of your lives. She was a splendid mother too and an unfailing source of comfort and solace to you. May God have her in His safekeeping. . . .

Please give my love and a tender [?] word to those in your family who know me.

Your sincere friend in God.

Philip Gray

FROM FIND MY PAST WEBSITE

Philip Gray died in 1963 (3rd quarter) age 75 in Surrey South Western District

Ruth Gray died in 1987 (4th quarter) age 96 in Somerset – buried at All Saints Church, Dunkerton

Antony Gray married Elizabeth B Mills in 1991 in Worthing Sussex (may have been married before?)

Antony Gray died in October 2000 age 82 in Chichester Sussex