

Sir Julian Corbett

1854 - 21 September 1922

Julian Corbett was born in 1854. His father was C.J Corbett of Thames Ditton

Julian, the next eldest brother to Charles Joseph Henry Corbett (1853 - 20 November 1935), was without doubt the most talented member of the whole Corbett family. Born at Imber Court in 1854, he followed Charles to Marlborough, and then went to Trinity College Cambridge, and was then called to the bar, with no need to practise, he devoted himself to the study of British Naval History, publishing many books on the subject, of which "Drake and the Tudor Navy" was the best known.

He lectured on Naval tactics at Greenwich and Portsmouth. Guns and armour had increased, but the basics of war at sea had not. So highly was he regarded that he was asked to join the Committee of Imperial Defence, along no doubt with Kitchener, the Service Chiefs, the Prime Minister and the Minister of War.

On 5th August 1914 he was called urgently to the Admiralty in London, and played a key roll in the strategy of the desperate war at sea. When the U Boat shipping losses became so great that starvation and defeat were threatening, it seems that he played a key part in three great steps.

A talented artist himself, he worked on the techniques of marine camouflage, making it far more difficult to gauge the course and type of target, especially through a periscope. He played a leading part in pressing for, and designing the belated introduction of the convoy system which saved us from defeat.

He also pressed forward with the Q ships. These were battered old tramp ships, harmless and not worth a valuable German torpedo. The U Boat would surface and order the crew to the boats. A specially trained "panic party" would disembark in utter confusion, while the U Boat looked on with contempt as its gun crew came on deck to sink its prey.

As the panic party rowed clear, down crashed the screen, and the 4" gun crew fired at the U Boat's vulnerable hull. Only one hit would make it unable to dive. No longer could U Boats save their torpedoes for more valuable targets.

For these great services, Julian was knighted, and he was also asked to write the Official Naval History of the War. By the time of his early death in 1922 he had only completed the great work up to the Battle of Jutland. He was elected a Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge. (The only Danehill Oxbridge Fellow).

Sir Julian, his wife, Elisabeth and Richard lived at Forest Farm at the northern end of the Woodgate estate; He died on 21st September 1922, aged 67, at Stopham, Pulborough. He was buried at Danehill cemetery on 25th September 1922. Fate took a strange revenge for all the lives he had saved in our war with Germany. In World War 2 a German bomb, intended for London was dropped by a nervous airman over Danehill. Sadly it scored a direct hit on Sir Julian's grave, not a stone of which survived. There is however a bronze plaque in his memory inside the church. He was a worthy citizen of a great Christian community.



**Sir Julian Corbett is buried at
Danehill cemetery**



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Dame Margery Corbett Ashby DBE

My Mother was so well known and loved in Danehill that I offer these brief notes for those too young or new to have known her.

The three children of Charles and Marie Corbett; Margery, Adrian and Cicely - were all educated to University standard entirely at home at Woodgate. Charles taught them Maths, Latin, Greek and History, and their Mother taught them Scripture and Music. French, and later German, were taught by Governesses.

Deeply religious, Margery devoted her life to the cause of others. This was mainly directed towards the rights and welfare of Women throughout the world, and in this cause she visited and spoke at meetings and Congresses in about 27 different countries.



**Dame Margery
Corbett Ashby**

In 1924, when only 42, she was elected to be the new President of the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship at a huge international congress in Rome. Mussolini had only come to power the year before and was not yet a villain. Alas, like Hitler was later to be, he was regarded as a national hero and saviour. He was presented with a bouquet of flowers by a little blond English boy whose identity I wish to remain secret.

A crisis arose at the Congress as not a single speech had been made in Italian. Margery sensed the growing anger of national pride and rose to make the concluding speech, nervously facing the rising tumult in the great hall, -- "Signore e Signora" a deathly hush descended, Italian at last! After only three weeks in Rome, and a good knowledge of Latin and fluent in French, Margery began her thanks and best wishes for the women of Italy. Each time she hesitated for the loss of a word, the excited press sitting below the platform whispered the right one up for her. The day was saved, and the new young President sat down to thunderous applause.

Margery was a co-founder of the Townswomen's Guilds, and I hope you will forgive her, a Vice President of the Liberal Party.

At the ripe old age of 85, Margery was asked by the Prime Minister if she would accept the honour of a Dame of the British Empire. Margery did indeed accept with surprise, and even greater curiosity, as to which of her many activities it could have been due. It was only as HM the Queen laid the sword upon her that she heard her say "For Services to the Empire"!

Margery had indeed worked hard for the Hundreds of Millions of women in India, Ceylon and all over the World, stressing the need for them to work for peace, and their duty to strive for their civil rights and family welfare.



Many of you may remember that the last honour she received was to be made co-founder and first President of your Danehill Historical Society. Long may it survive and prosper, as also your flourishing Church community.

NB: Biographies written about Sir Julian Corbett and Dame Margery Corbett Ashby were written by Doctor Michael Corbett Ashby, taken from an article entitled 'Two Danehill Honours - Sir Julian Corbett and Dame Margery Corbett Ashby'. It was published in the Danehill Parish Historical Society Magazine Volume 4 No. 8

Dame Margery Corbett Ashby (1925)



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Footnote by P. G. Lucas:

At some time in the 1980s I was at Haywards Heath Station forecourt on my way to Victoria when a Reliant Robin parked. Out stepped Dame Margery and her gardener, in whose car she had been driven... She greeted me with her usual warmth adding "Where are you going, Mr. Lucas". When I told her she said to her gardener "I am sure Mr Lucas will see me safely to Victoria". We chatted about things during the journey. Dame Margery told me she was going to the Albert Hall for a special meeting of The Townswoman's Guild. On arrival at Victoria she was met by a bevy of well dresses ladies and whisked away.

When we next met I asked her about her visit to the Albert Hall, her reply went as follows

The ladies in whose care you left me took me to a taxi. As we drove along I realised that we were not heading in the direction of the Albert Hall. "Where are we going?" I asked. They explained that they were taking me to a nearby flat until it was time for the meeting. I was getting anxious that we would be late "Do not worry" they said "There is plenty of time." Eventually we drove to the Albert Hall and I was ushered in and along an unfamiliar corridor. After a few minutes wait I was shown through a door and found myself in the Royal Box. Everyone in the packed Hall rose to their feet and applauded me. I can tell you, that was an experience I will never forget".

Charles Joseph Henry Corbett (Batchelor of Civil Law)

1853 – 20 November 1935

Charles was born in 1853. He was a son of C. J. Corbett of Thames Ditton.

He was educated at Marlborough College and New College, Oxford, and was subsequently called to the bar at the Middle Temple.

He married in 1881, Marie Gray, daughter of George Gray of Tunbridge Wells. She was an English suffragist, local government worker and supporter of the Liberal Party.

They had one son, Adrian and two daughters, Cicely and Margery, an international feminist campaigner and Liberal Parliamentary candidate.

He was a British Liberal Party politician in the radical tradition who was part of a prominent family who supported women's rights. Charles Corbett strongly supported votes for women. He was a partisan in Parliament of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and a vigorous campaigner outside. In 1913, he helped to form the East Grinstead branch of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage.

Charles was a Liberal candidate in East Grinstead in the elections of 1895 and 1900, but was unsuccessful. He sat as Liberal MP for East Grinstead Division of Sussex from 1906–January 1910, having been elected in the Liberal landslide win of 1906, when he became the first and only Liberal to win the division. He was defeated at the January 1910 General Election. East Grinstead was traditionally a safe Conservative seat and the crowds were usually very hostile. A survey carried out in 1911 suggested that less than 20% of the women in East Grinstead supported women having the vote in parliamentary elections. This may have been one factor in Charles Corbett's loss of his seat in the January 1910 general election where the Tory candidate was said to have inflicted a crushing defeat.

He died on 20th November 1935



Charles Corbett



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Cicely Corbett Fisher (née Corbett)

1885–1959

Cicely Corbett was born in 1885 in Danehill, East Sussex, to Charles Corbett, a Liberal Party politician and barrister, and Marie Corbett, a suffragist. Cicely and her older sister, Margery, were taught at home by their parents and another local woman. Both parents were outspoken supporters of women's rights, and at fifteen years old, Cicely formed a society with her sister and their friends called the Younger Suffragists.

She began studying modern history at Somerville College, Oxford, in 1904 and there she became involved in the Oxford branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. She and Margery left the Women's Liberal Federation due to their disappointment with the Liberal Party's commitment to women's suffrage and, with their mother, they established the Liberal Women's Suffrage Group.

After leaving university, Corbett began working for Clementina Black's organisation, the Women's Industrial Council, which campaigned for improvements in wages and conditions for working women. She also organised conferences on behalf of the National Anti-Sweating League to demand better working conditions in certain trades. She often organised speeches by exploited women workers and spoke out against child labour.

Corbett married Chalmers Fisher, a liberal journalist, in 1913, and they both adopted the surname Corbett Fisher. They had a daughter, Bridget Gilling, in 1922, and frequently housed students and refugees in their Sussex home. In her later life, Cicely was an active member of the Labour Party and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom before her death in 1959.



Cicely Corbett Fisher



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Bridget Sabina Gilling (née Fisher)

1922 – 2009

Bridget was born in London and raised in Sussex amid a politically active family. Her grandparents, Charles and Marie Corbett, were active in the Liberal Party; her mother Cicely and aunt Dame Margery Corbett Ashby were prominent suffragists. Her father, Chalmers "Pat" Fisher, was an Irish Quaker who worked as a journalist and businessman. Bridget spent a year in Geneva in the late 1930s before serving as a nurse with the Voluntary Aid Detachment during World War II. During this time she met Douglas Gilling, an Australian serving in the navy; they were engaged three days after they met and married eleven days later, and they both moved to Australia in 1946.

The Gillings settled in Castlecrag, and had four children. Bridget graduated from the University of Sydney in social work in 1971, and was appointed to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal, the Mental Health Review Tribunal, and as an ombudsman in the New South Wales prison system. She was chair of the Australian Consumers Association board, and was also involved with the Prison Reform Council, the Australian Council of Social Service, the Women's Electoral Lobby, the Council for Civil Liberties, and Zero Population Growth. She was president of the Humanist Society and the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, and ran for several elections during the early 1970s as a member of the Australia Party. In 1975 she joined the Australian Labor Party, remaining an active member until her death.

Gilling received particular attention as a campaigner for birth control and abortion law reform. She was also involved in the campaign against the Hawke Government's Australia Card proposal in 1987, becoming a trustee of the Australian Privacy Foundation. She separated from her husband in the 1970s. She died at a nursing home in the Blue Mountains in 2009.



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Marie Corbett (née Gray)

30 April 1859 – 28 March 1932

Marie Gray was born on 30th April 1859 in Kennington, London, the daughter of George Gray and Eliza ? from Tunbridge Wells. George Gray was a successful businessman who became rich through importing fruit and producing confectionery. He and his wife Eliza were strong supporters of the Liberal Party who championed many progressive causes.

In 1881, Marie Gray married Charles Corbett. They had two daughters and a son. Their daughters were Dame Margery Corbett Ashby, an international feminist campaigner and Liberal Parliamentary candidate, and Cicely Corbett Fisher, a suffragist and workers' rights activist.

Marie Corbett shared her parents' and her husband's politics and was a stalwart member of the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF). She was a member of the Burgess Hill branch (1905-09) and was sometime President of the Danehill and East Grinstead branch.

Like her husband and her famous daughter, Marie Corbett was more radical on women's suffrage issues than the mainstream WLF. She was a friend of Louisa Martindale and close to other Liberal feminists.

In 1904, with Margery and her other daughter Cicely, she travelled to Berlin to attend an International Women's' Suffrage conference and in 1907, again with Margery, she left the WLF to form the Liberal Women's Suffrage Group. The Corbett family's opinions and campaigning on the question of votes for women often attracted hostility in the traditionally conservative area of East Grinstead.

Marie and her two feminist daughters were among those such as Helen MacRae, Lilla Durham, and Mary Sackville who founded the East Grinstead Suffrage Society associated with the Women's Social and Political Union suffragettes and often made public speeches on the subject of women's rights in East Grinstead High Street. At one point, the group were pelted with rotten food on a parade in the town.

In 1908, Marie Corbett became honorary secretary of the Forward Suffrage Movement Within the Women's Liberal Federation, a group founded by Eva McLaren and Frances Heron Maxwell to concentrate the suffrage efforts of Liberal women inside the Liberal Party and through the WLF. As a delegate of this group she attended a congress in Budapest in 1913 organised by the International Women's Suffrage Alliance.

Marie championed poor relief. She was a member of the Uckfield Board of guardians for 36 years, one of the first women poor law guardians and was also recorded as being the first woman to serve as a Rural district councillor in Uckfield. As part of her work she saw to it that all children were removed from the Workhouse and placed with foster parents.

She was a founder of the Ashdown Forest Boarding-Out Committee for Poor Law Children. She also co-founded and was Secretary of the East Grinstead Women's Soroptimist Society.

She died on 28th March 1932



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Left: Dame Margery Corbett Ashby On her 96th birthday, standing below a portrait of herself when she was 8 years old. (Picture by "The Observer")

Below: Dame Margery being driven to open the Danehill Parish Historical Society "1898" Exhibition, 1973.



Charles and Marie Corbett



Charles Corbett working in 1935



Charles Corbett's election poster 1906



Dame Margery: 70 years on



Left: cartoon from the Daily Telegraph. Middle: Margery at 97 years old. Right: Lover of the country life, with her geese, at her home in Horsted Keynes (picture by the "Evening Argus")



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Denys Corbett Wilson

24 September 1882 - 10 May 1915

Denys Corbett Wilson was born on 24th September 1882. He was the nephew of Mr C. H. Corbett of Woodgate, Danehill, and a cousin to Dame Margery Corbett Ashby, the first President of the Danehill historical society. Although he did not live in the parish he spent a lot of time on his Uncle's estate (*now Cumnor House School*). He enlisted as a Lieutenant, No. 3 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps.

He died on 10 May 1915, aged 32. He is buried at Caberet Rouge Cemetery, France.



Denys Corbett Wilson with his dog Jock

Book of Remembrance: "Son of the late Mr W.H.C. Wilson and Mrs Corbett Wilson - born at Imber Court, Surrey in Sept. 1882 - Educated at Lees School, Ashdown, and at Eton - obtained his air pilots certificate at Pau in France 1912 - and subsequently made the first flight across St Georges Channel to Ireland. Entered the Flying Corps on its formation and went to the front in France in October 1914 - served there continuously as air-scout until he was killed by a shell over the German lines at Fournes near Lille , 10th May 1915. He was buried by the Germans at Fournes cemetery with military honours."

A book was produced to commemorate the first flight to Ireland on 22nd April 1912, "*Denys Corbett Wilson Aviation's Forgotten Pioneer*"⁽³⁾ contains details of his life and career.

After leaving Eton in 1899 he joined the 3rd Battalion The Dorset Regiment serving with them in the Boer War, left the Regiment in 1905. Shortly afterwards he rejoined the Army in the Royal Artillery, being made a Lieutenant in 1908. He resigned his commission in 1909 and, with his mother, moved to Ireland. Spending the latter part of 1911 in Southern France at Biarritz, where he learned to fly a Bleriot monoplane and get his pilot's licence.

There is mention of Denys Corbett Wilson in two other books, with information about his 10 months in the Royal Flying Corps.

"*The Airman's War 1914-1918*" by Peter H. Liddle. includes quotes from letters written by Corbett Wilson to his mother which are in the Library at Leeds University.

Dr Liddle writes "A qualified civilian pilot, D Corbett Wilson, was unsurprisingly welcomed into the RFC when he volunteered immediately he had returned from Italy where he had been on holiday. He champed at the bit, eager to get into active service but was "hedged round with Captains and Military ways."



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Denys Corbett Wilson after his flight to Ireland in 1912 with his Bleriot monoplane

In one letter Corbett Wilson writes about taking "Dowding, my Captain for a turn." (*Later C. in C. Fighter Command during the battle of Britain.*) He also writes about conversations with "Trenchard, our Colonel" regarding types of aircraft suitable for operations. (*Hugh Trenchard, Commandant of the of the Military Wing of the RFC at the outbreak of war, appointed Chief of the Air Staff in 1915, selected to command the Royal Air Force on its formation in 1919, made a baronet and later a viscount.*) Two very significant figures in the Royal Air Force.

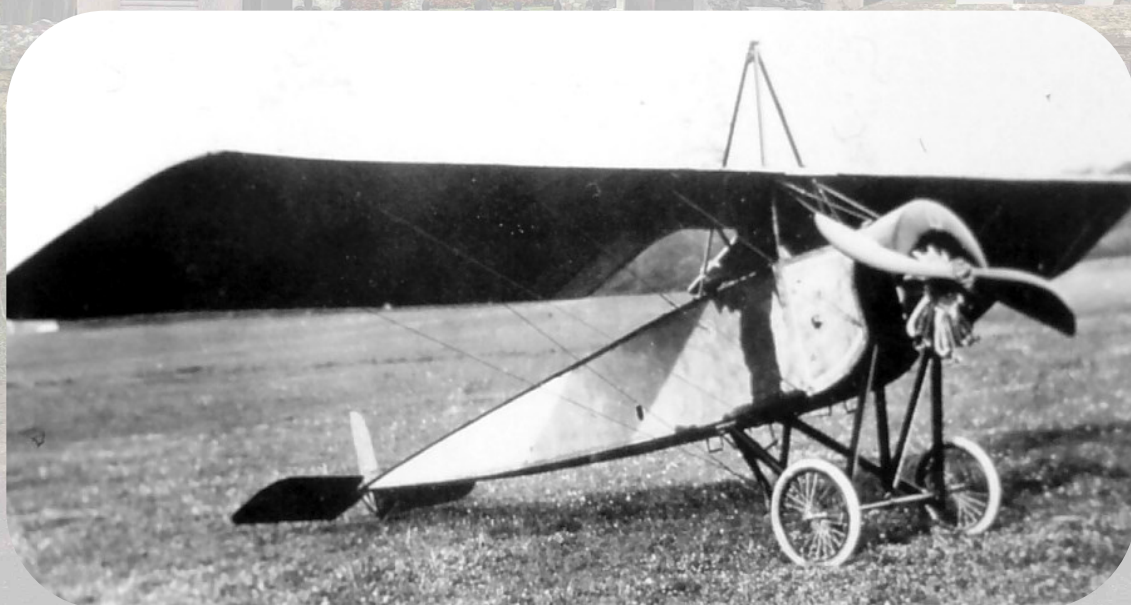
From a December 1914 letter

"-- Commenting upon the lack of progress in the fighting: "I must say at present we can't see any end to it. -- As for the Germans, he was becoming rather "bored" with the newspaper blackguarding of them because after all "they can't help it, poor people, they don't know any better."

"*Flying Fury*" the diary of Major James T.B. McCudden, VC, DSO, MM. and Croix de Guerre, one of the "aces" of the Royal Flying Corps was published in 1973. McCudden rose from the

rank of Sergeant and served in No. 3 Squadron. In the diary he notes that Mr Corbett Wilson flew him over Neuve Chapelle during the battle in 1915., and later that aircraft Morane No. 1872 was allocated to Mr Corbett Wilson and then – "in early May Mr Wilson and Mr Woodiwiss (*his 18 year old observer*) did not return from a mission over the German lines, a German aviator dropped a note on the airfield to say that Morane No. 1872 had been shot down by A.A. fire over Fournes and the occupants had been buried near the village."

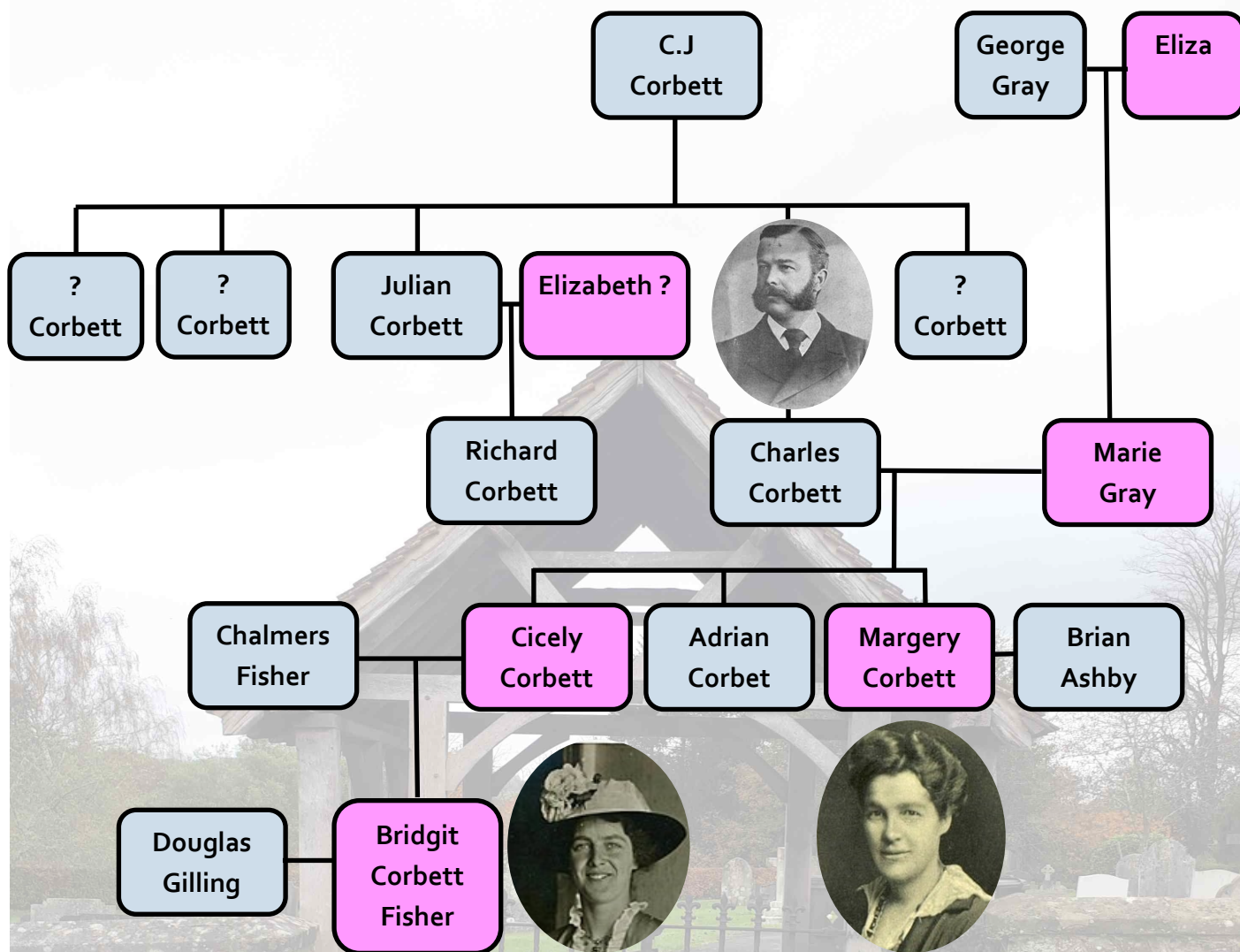
The two airmen were subsequently reburied side by side in Caberet Rouge Cemetery.



Morane-Saulnier Type L (Parasol) Aircraft. The type flown by Denys Corbett Wilson when he was shot down on 10th May 1915.



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Richard Julian Corbett (1910 - 15 January 1995) and Patricia Margaret Anne Corbett (1910 - 27 June 1997) are also buried at Danehill cemetery although their graves are unmarked

If you have any more information about this family that you believe would be of interest please contact the Danehill Parish Historical Society dphs@outlook.com. We'd love to hear from you



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