Pets and family relationships in twentieth-century British diaries

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ABSTRACT
During the twentieth-century British family life was transformed through changes in family size, relationships and the development of new expectations about emotions and behaviour. But in this important social transformation one factor has gone almost entirely unremarked by family historians – the role of animals in family life. Sociologists and psychologists have demonstrated that pets played an important and complex role in British family life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. However our investigation of the interactions between household members and their pets up to 1960 shows that the personal and familial relationships of pet-keeping could be just as charged and multi-valent. We use three long-run diaries from 1925 to 1960 to investigate the place and role of pets in the family. In spite of some methodological problems, diaries remain a crucial source for investigating pet-keeping in family life. Although, in these cases, the entries were sometimes perfunctory they were also at times rich in expressions of emotions and affinities in relation to animals, allowing us to explore the role that animals played in family dynamics. The long chronological coverage of each diary has provided the opportunity of examining the role that pets played at different stages in the lives of the writers, and how animals became more or less important for the families at different times. All three diaries demonstrate the emotional attachment that individuals had with their pets but also, crucially, how bringing animals into family narratives adds to our understanding of the relationships and interactions in modern family life.

1. Introduction
In the 1960s, the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations looked at the nature of the satisfactions that a pet provided and the psychological needs it met, suggesting that these would be different for people in different circumstances, and according to changing family structures and cultures. Pets, it suggested, might offer company, affection, stimulation, and perhaps security for people living alone, as well as providing the opportunity for giving care and affection. A survey of the family life of 203 old people in east London in 1954–55, which found that 56% of interviewees had a pet, described them as ‘compensatory things’ for the housebound and infirm in particular; along with heat, clothing,
radios and newspapers, pets satisfied a ‘special’ family, social or personal need and were a priority claim on the income of the elderly (Townsend, 1957, pp. 157–9). In this article we will argue that, as these reports and our wider research on diaries suggest, pets could play an important role in the emotional life of families in mid-twentieth century Britain. There was an expectation that within a family household, a pet might relate to an individual’s needs – such as providing an opportunity for the expression of maternal needs or, indeed, being a child substitute – but could also often mediate human-to-human relationships, or allow the direct or indirect expression of feelings. It might also – as the Tavistock Institute found – facilitate relationships between the family and the outside world.2

The first half of the twentieth century has been seen as a period of change for families in Britain, as the lifecycle and kin relationships were transformed through increased longevity and falling family size (Anderson, 1985; Davidoff, 2012; Davidoff et al., 1999). Relationships within the family, patterns of intimacy and emotional norms also shifted as Britain moved through two world wars and developed new models of parenting and new expectations about behaviour (Davis, 2012; King, 2015; Strange, 2015). But in this important social transformation one factor has gone almost entirely unremarked by family historians – the role of animals in family life. Animal historians, however, have noted their evolving cultural and emotional roles at different times. Ingrid Tague’s important study has shown how emotional investment in pets became a subject for acceptable public display by the end of the eighteenth century (Tague, 2015). Harriet Ritvo and Kathleen Kete have revealed the centrality of pet-keeping to ideas of modern class and gender in the Victorian era (Kete, 1994; Ritvo, 1986). Katherine Grier has demonstrated the fundamental part that animals played in childhood socialisation in nineteenth-century North America (Grier, 2006). Most recently, Philip Howell and Hilda Kean have argued that by considering human emotional entanglements with pets we can come to a ‘more-than-human understanding of collective emotional life’ (Howell & Kean, 2018). While Tague has usefully sounded a note of caution here – drawing attention to the difficulties inherent in interpreting the historical experiences of animals (Tague, 2018) – in this article we draw on this approach to examine how pets could play a significant role in the emotional lives of British families.

The emotional role of animals and their contribution to family relationships has been more clearly mapped by sociologists and psychologists in relation to the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Charles, 2014; Tipper, 2011; Walsh, 2009). Erica Fudge, in her animal studies work, has noted that animals in the twenty-first century are often described as ‘kin’ or family members (Fudge, 2008, p. 16).3 An American study by Alexa Albert and Kris Bulcroft in the 1980s found that pets could be an important source of affection for ‘divorced, never-married, and widowed people, childless couples, and empty-nesters’ and could offer emotional substitutes for children and spouses and support during ‘critical life course transitions’. In ways that resonate strongly with this article, the authors stress that the importance of the pet as a source of affection and attachment was related to household structure and changes over the lifecycle (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988, p. 545). Not that this supports the cliché of ‘the pet as child substitute’, since several recent studies have noted that pets are most frequently acquired in family homes where there are already children (Charles, 2014, pp. 721, 726; Tipper, 2011, p. 91). And, in her work on human-animal relations, Nickie Charles points out that ‘while close emotional bonds between humans and their pets are understood in familial terms, they
have a different quality from those with human kin’ (Charles, 2014, p. 716). Her analysis of descriptions of pet-keeping finds that respondents described their relationships with their pets in terms of ‘sensory affinity’, with ‘touch and physical contact’ as central features of an embodied relationship (Charles, 2014, p. 723). Human-animal affinity is therefore perceived as distinctly different to the affinity between human beings. This recent scholarship understands such complex and emotionally intense pet-keeping as a distinctive feature of the twenty-first century and some sociologists have argued that it is a response to an increasingly unstable modern society, although this has been debated (Charles, 2014, pp. 724–6).

However our investigation of the interactions between household members and their pets shows that the personal and familial relationships of pet-keeping could be just as charged and multi-valent in the first half of the twentieth century. We are not arguing that animals at that time transformed every family. Many families had no animals. For some, they remained peripheral. But, as we go on to show, in some families, at certain times in the lifecycle, the role and presence of animals was fundamental – and it is important that we take account of this when we write histories of the family. In this article, we use three long-run diaries from 1925 to 1960 to investigate the place and role of pets in the family, paying particular attention to the contribution of pets to the emotional lives of families and their relationship with the lifecycle. The diaries allow us to explore how pet keeping intersected with marital relationships and the development of different emotional styles within ‘companionate’ marriage, the contribution made by shared emotional investment in ‘family dogs’ to shoring up a sometimes dysfunctional family, as well as the particular emotional role of pets in a very small family unit focused on a caring relationship. The acquisition of a pet could mark a new point in the lifecycle or the setting up of a new household, while continued shared investment in pets could be a bridge in transitional periods such as when children left home. The long chronological coverage of each diary has provided the opportunity of examining the role that pets played at different stages in the lives of the writers, and how animals became more or less important for the families at different times. Pets, then, help us better understand the way in which families negotiated new patterns in the lifecycle and emotional norms – they were a part of the transformation of families in the twentieth century. But these non-human family members made a distinct contribution which we will also unpack. Humans perceived their relationships with their pets as embodied, sensory and tactile. The behaviours and actions of animals intersected with and altered the daily lives of human families. As the diaries demonstrate, the lives of pets – their arrival, presence and eventually their deaths – were entwined with the way that humans wrote their own family histories.

As Joe Moran has argued recently, diary-keeping, which was first established in the early modern period and became more widespread amongst the literary middle classes of the Victorian age, appears to have increased substantially in the first half of the twentieth century (Moran, 2015; Feely, 2010; Twells, 2016). He suggests that ‘diary keeping came to be imagined as one way of making sense of changing notions of the self, individual privacy and the value of ordinary life, and that it was accompanied by daily rituals and material practices that were seen as rich and meaningful in themselves.’ (Moran, 2015, p. 139). We selected these three particular diaries, out of a much larger number surveyed, because their writers kept pets at some time in their lives and, crucially, mentioned them often and in considerable detail.4
There are, however, well-known difficulties with using diaries as an historical source (Summerfield, 2019). We cannot take our cases as being representative of the broader population since there seems to be a degree of exceptionalism about most diarists (Moran, 2015, p. 158; Summerfield, 2019, Chapter 6). Even at this period of increased diary-keeping, it was an activity that required particular circumstances: a certain standard of literacy, pleasure in writing, persistence, available time, and, perhaps, privacy. In Moran’s sample of the ‘day surveys’ made for the social research organisation, Mass Observation, from 1937, nearly three-quarters of the diarists were unmarried (Jolly, 2001; Moran, 2015, p. 146); our research also indicates that, in general, more single people kept diaries than those who were married. Men and women both kept diaries, but married women with young children typically had less time to do so. Additionally, the survival and preservation of diaries, whether in private or public collections, is not a neutral matter; it can be affected by the gender, class, and race of the diarist, by the purposes of the collectors, and by serendipity. The three diaries investigated here were written by authors from different fractions of the middle-classes; two of them remained single throughout their lives. Moreover, the very reason that we chose these diaries for examination – that they were written by pet-keepers who were interested enough in their pets to mention them – immediately makes our three diarists special. Nonetheless, while appreciating the singularity of the cases, we read the diaries against the broader social and cultural context in which these particular households existed, considering, for example, gender-, age-, and class-related expectations and changing family structures and relational norms and we have no reason to believe that these households or even the diarists were radically different in their attitude to their pets from other similar sorts of households at that time.

As Penny Summerfield points out, historians use diaries in various ways (Summerfield, 2019, Chapter 3). Here we take two approaches, running them alongside each other, keeping a narrow focus on pet-keeping in family life in both cases. Firstly we read these diaries as sources of empirical data, backed up with further biographical and other research. We have noted every occurrence of pet animals and what they were doing or what was being done with or to them. Our aim is to find evidence for daily routines and rituals, including minutiae such as the purchase of pet food or dog licences that are unlikely to figure elsewhere; repeat events such as dog walking, games, or the provision of treats, allow us to see the activities through which people built relationships with their pets (Fudge, 2008, pp. 91–94). In addition, still in the realm of social observation, we focus on the inter-personal relationships that the diarists directly recorded as involving pets in some way, such as squabbles over who might walk or train a dog, thereby turning the incidents harvested into a narrative that addresses the sorts of questions that this paper is concerned with. Secondly, we take a more openly interpretative approach to the relationships within the households and to how pets were used to articulate those relationships. While using the words that the diarists themselves produced, we take the liberty of further interpreting them, allowing ourselves to be more ‘knowing’ than even the more avowedly self-aware of the diarists both about their relationships but also about their world views and moral outlooks. In this paper we quote extensively from the diaries to enable the reader to consider the extent and validity of our interpretations.
2. Alan Withington (1900–1992)

The first set of diaries was written by Alan Withington, who was born in 1900 to a wealthy upper-middle-class family. In 1933 he married Morag Morison, a doctor’s daughter of a similar background, and they moved into their first marital home opposite the golf club in St Anne’s, Lancashire. Alan Withington had inherited sufficient wealth from his father to enable the couple to live a well-to-do upper-middle-class life; in the 1930s they employed a live-in cook, ran two cars, and had a phone and a fridge. As was increasingly common in such families by the early twentieth century, they went on to have just two children, born in 1934 and 1936 (Great Britain, Census Office, 1935; Baines & Woods, 2003, pp. 28–31). From 1932 until almost the end of his life in 1992 Alan Withington kept a lengthy, carefully crafted, self-fashioning but not always self-aware, and often humorous diary. He intentionally presented a picture of himself as modest and somewhat intellectually limited yet at the same time he appears to have had a strong sense of entitlement to be a leader by virtue of his class, education, and gender. His long and detailed daily entries provide a great deal of information about his pets, often depicted in mundane activities but sometimes in what were to him more meaningful encounters. Here we focus on the first 10 years of his marriage. There were two dogs in that decade, one after the other. Alan frequently mentioned them, often noting his and Morag’s disparate attitudes to them, both in relation to the animals themselves but also in a way that reflected the human couple’s different marital roles and sometimes competing ideas about their children’s upbringing. The negotiations that the young pair undertook in relation to the treatment of the dogs were part of the dynamics of their relationship and paralleled, and perhaps contributed to, the way that they dealt with their children.

Soon after moving into their new house, Alan and Morag were given a young Cairn terrier bitch as a wedding present. There was debate about her name. Alan favoured the anonymous and perhaps rather masculine ‘Smith’. Like others of his social status at that period, he had been to boarding-school where it was the practice to call boys by their surnames. But, by the next day, she had a female name: ‘Sally as I suppose I’ll have to call her’. The discussion of what to call the dog was a tussle between husband and wife in which Alan seems to have given in to Morag. Subsequent entries reveal that Sally’s care and treatment continued to be a subject of negotiation between the couple. Many historians have argued that from at least 1918 there was a general shift away from the patriarchal authority of the dominant Victorian husband towards ‘companionate marriage’ (Szreter & Fisher, 2010, Chapters 1, 5; Bingham, 2004). The exact meaning of this is still being debated but one interpretation, which applies to the Withingtons’ marriage as revealed in Alan’s diary, involves the notion of a partnership with equal but different gendered roles – in work, child-rearing and, as appears here, in pet-care (Light, 1991, pp. 123–4). In the Withingtons’ case, achieving such a partnership could involve conflict and challenge. Alan could apparently recognise the appropriateness of what he considered to be his wife’s feminine or motherly feelings but his upper-middle-class masculine world-view made it difficult for him to acknowledge that such feelings should hold weight in determining matters of rational, social, exigency.

The difference in their attitudes towards the dog soon becomes clear in the diaries. Shortly after she arrived, the couple went out for the evening, as they almost always did: ‘Sally locked in kitchen, & her joy on our return was pathetic to see. Was afraid this would
happen, Morag’s quite ridiculous where dogs are concerned.' Alan did not specify the form of Morag’s ridiculousness but we can imagine it. For Alan the problem lay with Morag’s emotional attachment to the dog, and her worries about leaving it alone, which threatened the couple’s life outside the home. They must have discussed the matter and come to the decision to return the dog but, the following day, Alan got back from work and ‘Found Sally still firmly planted, & I really believe that Morag is making up her mind to harden her heart over leaving the animal alone from time to time. In that case Sally stays, & I for one shall be very glad if things do work out that way.' A week later: ‘Sally went quite mad when we let her out for a bit, but Morag seems to have a bit more control now.’ It is not clear whether Alan meant that Morag had more control over the dog or over herself; perhaps both. At this point Sally had been with them for about two weeks and, as is often the case with the arrival of a young dog, a lot of adjustment and negotiation, between all concerned, seems to have been packed into that time. Alan obviously had expectations of the way the dog should behave, to which Sally did not conform. He presents the dog as being too emotionally expressive and Morag as too much in sympathy with her; both Sally and Morag needed, he seems to think, to learn to – or be trained to – curb their emotions, as Alan had done at his public school. Alan was relatively free to express his opinions in his diary but this does not mean that he always, in fact, triumphed in the negotiations; it seems to have been Morag who prevailed over the dog’s name and whether or not they should keep her. About three months later there is an unusually long and emotional entry in the diary:

Poor Sally’s had rather a bad day. She asks for her ball – ad nauseam – and when she gets it deliberately pushes it under the couch. Sloshed her one on the rump today for a particularly blatant example of the latter nuisance, & think it had a beneficial effect. But I’m afraid Morag thinks I’m a bit savage with her, & of course it’s no use at all being firm at the weekends [that is under his regime] if she’s allowed to develop annoying habits the rest of the time [when he is out at work]. Not that Morag gives way to her: on the other hand, in view of her sentimental ideas about what’s inside a dog’s head I think she’s commendably strict; nor do I approve of much corporal punishment for a thing Sal’s size. But a dog’s just like a child, & will go on doing what it wants until you make it quite clear that it’s not going to be allowed to. Naturally a dog takes longer to understand & learn. But understand & learn it will, provided one is sufficiently firm & persevering. And it’s kinder in the end to be VERY firm and VERY persevering right from the start. Sally’s got plenty of doggy intelligence. Still, maybe Morag doesn’t think I’m unduly unkind – in which case I apologize for the foregoing.

This passage shows that Alan believed that consistency and a firm insistence on the required behaviour – backed up if necessary with light corporal punishment – were the way to produce a dog that behaved acceptably. His diaries give virtually no evidence about where he acquired his views but the approach avowed here was very similar to that suggested by Miller Watson in Your Dog and How to Train Him, which came out a few years later (Watson, 1938). Watson’s approach to puppy training boiled down to patience, more patience, repetition, and kindness; physical punishment was an absolutely final resort, and then it was to be no more than a smack with a newspaper. Although Alan did ‘slosh’ Sally, it is possible to read his diary entry as expressing his own feeling of guilt at having done so; he was not at all sure that Morag thought he was unkind and, in fact, it was he, Alan who raised the matter with himself; but this would not have tallied with his view of his masculine role and he had to attribute it to Morag. It is not clear whether Alan
conceded that dogs have thoughts, emotions or intentions, but he certainly did not agree with Morag’s ‘sentimental’ reading of Sally. Interestingly Watson himself raised the problem of sentimentality: ‘I may be called a sentimentalist – but the truth is that I have had so many good “doggy” friends, that I feel it is time I did something for their fellow-creatures.’

This passage can also be read as Alan worrying about his and Morag’s potentially different ideas about how to bring up children. The latter was relevant because Morag was at this point three months pregnant, apparently by mistake. He feared that here, too, Morag would be too soft, resulting in an annoying nuisance of a child. Alan’s diaries frequently demonstrate his belief that it was normal – and perhaps right – for women to want to be close to their children but that fathers of their social class have to temper their wives’ softness to fit the harsh realities of life. This is particularly explicit in Alan’s later record of the apparently quite bitter dispute between the couple over whether or not their children should be sent to boarding school: ‘… in my opinion (for what it is worth), the finest preparation for a career is to be found in a Public School as a Boarder. … Family Affection (the sole ambition of Mother Love apparently) … has little to offer towards a career in the modern world. … [But n]o mother, except a rare few … ever really want their children to go to Boarding School.’

Laura King (2015, pp. 3, 31) has argued that, as a generalisation, the paternal role came to be, both ideally and in reality, more highly valued and more emotional during the middle of the twentieth century, especially after WWII, although it did not necessarily imply an increased practical or physical engagement of fathers with their children and that it was standard for men of the middle classes, at least before WWII, to try to achieve the best (private) education for their children. But in the Withingtons’ case – and probably many others – that parental partnership, which encompassed ideas about appropriately gendered roles, had to be negotiated. Sally’s presence in the Withington household allowed Alan to begin to test out ideas about child-rearing and to develop a paternal role and there seems to be an attempt here to acknowledge and accommodate Morag’s views alongside his own more authoritarian perspective.

Sally, who had lived with them for almost all of their married life, died in July 1940 after a short illness. She had been to the vet’s for a couple of days but was thought to be rather better and released. However, on the way home in the car ‘… she just quietly & painlessly died in Morag’s arms. I’m not sentimental about such things, as you may know, but I’m glad she went like that. I’d like to have seen her again myself of course; but Morag was the one she always loved, & she couldn’t have been other than happy lying in her arms as the world slipped away. Poor Sa! … ’ As Nora Schuurman has shown, in her 2018 study of the experience of pet death in present-day Finland, being physically present with an animal at the moment of death, and being able to hold its body, can be an important part of grieving for pets (Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2018). Alan here writes fondly of Sally, even, uncharacteristically, imagining her feelings. And, as he recorded, his wife was distraught: ‘Morag, very wisely, left her at the vet’s, – & has spent the rest of her birthday in tears. Everything’s wrong these days, poor Morag.’ The pain of losing Sally was compounded by the fact that just a month earlier the couple, by this time living in wartime London, had evacuated their two boys (aged three and six) to Canada. Morag had resisted this move but had come round to agreeing with Alan that it was in the children’s best interests. On the day that the children left:
I led Morag from the station, not knowing or caring where she went, crying out loud in complete & utter misery. She’s been so brave up to the time of parting too, it was all tragically pathetic. But she’s done a fine thing, both for England & the Boys, by letting them go; a thing for which she can never be repaid; for come what may, & whatever future happiness there may be in store, she’ll always feel she’s lost something out of those childhood years so dear to a Mother . . .

The loss of Sally so soon afterwards left Morag trebly bereft while also suffering the hardships and uncertainty of war-time conditions. This might account for the Withingtons taking in, almost immediately, an orphan kitten, which died after a few days. A couple of weeks later they, at Morag’s instigation but with Alan’s acquiescence, acquired a puppy that some boys were selling at the door. We might interpret Morag’s keenness to take on a new baby animal as a response to the loss of her sons as well as the previous dog. Her maternal role, as Alan often mentioned in his diary, was important to her identity; a puppy could offer an outlet for giving care and affection as well as providing a source of company and unqualified love. Perhaps this was a bereavement response; at exactly this point hundreds of thousands of other people, especially in cities, were putting their dogs and cats down because of disrupted home life, the bombing, and stringent restrictions on food for pets (Kean, 2015).

The puppy – again Alan wanted to call her ‘Smith’ but compromised on ‘Miss Smith’ – was sweet; he was involved in her care and, especially, her training and discipline. Her arrival represents the Withingtons’ attempt to create a new human-animal family in the face of loss and disruption. But the animal also exposed the household to new strain and posed challenges to comfort and domesticity that were difficult to deal with. It was a very stressful time. There were bombing, blackouts, and shortages. Both Alan and Morag, an ambulance driver at this point, were working shifts; Alan was also fire-watching and from the end of 1941 was in the Home Guard; he spent any spare time in growing vegetables, an endeavour often compromised by Miss Smith, who dug them up and fouled the beds. The couple were exhausted. By the latter part of 1942 the young dog was a considerable strain on their resources and they were thinking about re-homing her: ‘ . . . In the present circumstances we’d really be better off without the animal. She’s all alone in the house every other day from 08.50 to 19.00 hrs. (about), & on the other days when Morag is at home she can’t get on with her work until the canine appetite for a walk, & a short one’s no good, is satisfied. And the dirt she brings into the house! Not to mention the feeding problems & the false burglar alarms. . . .’16 After several unsatisfactory re-homing attempts she was finally, in late 1943, taken by a distant relative, an officer in the WRNS, to live on the base at Hove: ‘ . . . So – she’s gone. Morag changed her mind of course this morning & there were floods of tears after the departure. But that’ll pass. . . .’17 Again, Alan presents the couple in their usual roles in relation to the dog (and the children) – Morag as grieving and emotionally expressive; Alan as rational and doing the right thing for the lonely, bored, animal as well as the humans – and as achieving agreement in spite of their different points of view. But the loss of Miss Smith does not seem to have caused long-term sorrow; after hearing that the dog had settled in well, Alan made no further mention of Miss Smith or of Morag’s grieving; perhaps he and his wife were both, in these very difficult times, relieved. It seems there was a mutual acknowledgement that this attempt to create a human-animal family had failed. The Withingtons did not get another dog until 1961, when one
of their sons (both of whom had by this time left home) gave them another Cairn terrier puppy, who was soon taken into the heart of the home and became a major feature of the now retired Alan’s diary.

3. Florence Turtle (1896–1981)

Our second diarist is Florence Turtle, who never married and who set up her own homes while remaining close to her family of origin in south-west London.\(^{18}\) She was born in Lambeth in 1896, the eldest of eight children of whom seven survived into adulthood.\(^{19}\) When her father, a commercial clerk with a grammar-school education, became crippled with rheumatoid arthritis, seventeen-year-old Florence went out to work to support the family; she held a post for a short time at *The Times*, moving in 1917 to a public library and then W. H. Smith, and joined Harrods’ Book Department in 1921.\(^{20}\) Her mother (also Florence Turtle) ran a fur shop, Turtle & Sons, from the family home, which was by then in Putney in south-west London; her mother’s father, a former merchant sea captain, had managed two fur shops on Clapham Common in his retirement.\(^{21}\) The class story in this case was complex and presented in the diaries (on several occasions) as one of downward trajectory, due largely to what Florence characterised as her parents’ fecklessness; before and after she left home, her resentment about these circumstances was sometimes expressed through comments on the household pets. While Florence herself became more middle-class, in terms of the lifestyle which her income supported, she believed that but for her ‘miserable poverty stricken childhood’ and the need to provide for her parents into old age, she might have been married.\(^{22}\) Florence progressed to a well-paid and secure job as Book and Stationery Buyer for Barkers Department Store in Kensington, later going on to senior buying positions at Derry & Toms and British Home Stores. In 1930, at the age of thirty-four, she and her sister Barbara left the parental home for a rented mansion flat nearby. Two years later, they moved to a house in Wimbledon Park, which Florence had bought from her brother. This home was shared with different siblings and extended family until her death in 1981, an arrangement that seems more akin to the long families of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than to what we might think of as typical twentieth-century domestic set-ups from the interwar years (Davidoff, 2012). It was considered unusual at the time. As Florence’s close friend Connie said in 1936, ‘she thought the Turtle family were a very extraordinary family to want to live together the way we do’, with so many of the siblings unmarried and living either with Florence or with Mother.\(^{23}\) Turtle kept a diary briefly from 1917 to 1919 and then again from 1929, continuing, with some breaks, until 1980. Pets – her own and others’ – were the subject of regular, frequent entries chronicling routine events and everyday exchanges with family, friends, colleagues and strangers, which, together with more sustained passages, help illuminate the dynamics of the immediate and extended family. Here we focus on her entries after she had set up her own household, from her mid-thirties until her mid-sixties.

By the inter-war period it had become increasingly common for unmarried middle-class women to create their own households but was perhaps more unusual among the lower-middle and working classes. However it was also still the norm for adult children, especially daughters, to provide support for older people at this time (Todd, 2005; Thane, 2000, pp. 299–301). As Selena Todd remarks, it was in parents’ interest to develop a reciprocal relationship with their children (Todd, 2005, p. 808). Florence’s desire to set
up on her own was complicated by considerable misgivings about leaving home. Animals, dogs especially, had been very much part of her childhood and her diaries show that continuing interactions with the family pets were part of negotiating this transition and staying part of a family that she often felt to be dysfunctional. Later on, when she established an independent household that included siblings and other relatives in various configurations, she acquired her own pets, who also played an important role in the household dynamics.

When Florence left the parental home in 1930, she and her mother remained close. But, although she felt guilty about it, Florence avoided sharing her own house with her, even after Mother was widowed and her sons had married or moved out. She remained closely attached to her mother’s dogs, Brunhilde (Brunnie) and Coney, visiting her mother at least twice a week and often taking the dogs for a walk – this helped create a routine connection with the family home and without the need to see and walk the dogs she may not have visited so much. The dogs served as a bridge between mother and daughter at this time but her diary reveals that Florence sometimes felt the dogs were more welcoming than her parents, and that she herself found the dogs, especially Brunhilde, more rewarding: ‘Then home where they looked miserable – the place was in a great muddle which depressed me very much … Brunnie was the only one who seemed pleased to see me’. She also suspected her mother cared more for the dogs than for her father, who, in 1932 went to live permanently at the Putney Home for Incurables: ‘Mother says she still misses Brunnie – in fact more than when Dad went in to the hospital – what a thing to say but no doubt true!’ Florence often gave lively descriptions of the dogs – ‘merry & bright’, ‘very bonny’ and ‘coats glossy and eyes bright’ – in contrast to frequent negative comments about her human family. When Brunnie died in 1936, Florence was distraught and spent some time in the diary considering what the relationship with the dog had meant to her:

I have been reflecting that this has been a tragic year & that five people whom I have known including poor Miss Cretchley & George the Fifth have died – some of these deaths have grieved me very much but none have affected me with a sense of personal tragedy & deep loss as that of darling Brunnie or Toddie-Tan-Toes of any of the other silly names I used to call her – misplaced maternal instinct or frustrated sex your Freudian cynics would say – but I don’t think so, after all I have only seen her once a week for the last six years.

Conscious of contemporary psychological understandings of single women as potentially frustrated by their inability to have sex or become mothers, Florence was playing with the idea that the dog was a substitute for a child or a husband. The diaries reveal that she weighed up the benefits of ‘ideal companionship in marriage’, noting that few of her friends had found it. She also appears ambivalent on motherhood but again composed her thoughts on this in relation to human-pet relationships. Sentences sketched in a blank section of the 1933 diary, under the title ‘Journal of a Respectable Life’ read: ‘She would sooner be a dog breeder than a child breeder. It is more interesting, less painful – the profits higher & risks less’. In the light of this comment, and despite or perhaps because of several relationships she had with men, we might assume that her single status was, in part, a choice, though one very much framed by her family background. Thus, although Florence rejected the substitute idea, her comment that she had seen the dog every week
(although actually she returned home at least twice a week) is significant – regular visits to see the dogs and to share dog-walking with her mother had made a sometimes conflicted environment more palatable for Florence and constituted one of her main connections with her old home. Whether or not Florence was conscious of the animals’ role in this is not discernible but what is certain is that she loved the animals for themselves, as physical, tactile beings with different characters, and not just as intermediaries.

While the pets eased tensions between mother and daughter, on occasion, Florence also wrote about them in ways that reflected her resentment of her parents. She blamed her mother (more rarely, both parents) for ‘The criminal selfishness of having too many children’,30 and the family’s depleted income and decreasing social status which had driven her out to work. She wrote in 1936 that

My life seems to have been nothing but work & worry since I was 11 years old – nothing coming to me without striving for it – father always ill & bad tempered – mother always in debt . . . think of the mentality of which insists on having another baby when she already had four children – father earning 50/- a week – we were living in four rooms . . . 31

Florence was exasperated by what she judged to be her mother’s poor financial management and low domestic standards – and angry that she had to support her parents financially into old age. A political Conservative, there was a strong class dimension to her opinions about her mother, her mother’s house, and her fur shop – ‘that dirty old shop’, ‘that hole’, ‘that terrible pig-stye’.32 The last two comments appeared in 1940, alongside others which claimed the childhood home had ruined ‘any chance to have a life of our own’ and that ‘had our home been different I might have been married’.33 They were made in response to the siblings’ decision that it would now be best for Mother to live with Brian (against his wishes) rather than in Florence’s household, about which she ‘felt awful’.34 Her anger at their domestic circumstances was voiced in contemporary entries and in retrospective comments made later in life. Such feelings about home were also expressed more obliquely in entries about the family dogs. For example, when Brunnie died, her comments reveal feelings that were as much about her mother’s home as her dead pet: ‘It makes me feel depressed to think of her lovely silky brown body & bright eyes rotting in the earth at Putney Bridge Road . . . – would not seem quite so bad if she were under my grass plot at Kingscliffe’.35

Florence also criticised her mother’s care and treatment of the animals. For instance, when, in 1929, Florence rightly suspected that Brunnie was pregnant by a household dog she was furious at the ‘carelessness’ that had allowed it: ‘Feel sure Brunnie is like that I am so furious about it as I am sure it is entirely due to carelessness. With Mother & the girl there is absolutely no excuse’.36 The sequence of entries shows Florence coming to terms with the puppies but not the ‘carelessness’ that caused them and prefigures her comments about the ‘selfishness’ of having too many children.

There were several dogs and cats in the parental home, and consequently many puppies and kittens, which Florence seems to have viewed as further evidence of her mother’s profligacy. The situation also underpinned Florence’s initial decision not to have her own dog because she was at work for at least five-and-a-half days of the week and could not rely on help at home. In June 1937 she was offered a spaniel that its owners could no longer manage. Florence had first asked her mother to take it but she had refused. At this point Florence was sharing her house with her uncle and aunt, her brother
Bernard, and her sister Barbara. As she wrote, ‘... I am sorry to say I wish I could have him – if Auntie & Uncle were different I would have him like a shot’, but, ‘if they were not willing to help with him we could not have him’.\(^37\) This prudence caused her much pain and she resented it; relations became so strained at home that Florence asked her uncle and aunt to leave.\(^38\) However, her longing for a dog continued and in September that year she noted that she found dogs as satisfying as human beings, ‘for company’.\(^39\) Her desire for a dog and her reservations about acquiring one were both produced by her previous experiences at home.

The year from April 1937 was a crisis year for Florence’s household and her health. The fall-out between the Turtles and Uncle and Aunt, during which Florence was ‘bordering on a breakdown’, appears to have drawn Mother and siblings closer, and everyone rallied at Florence’s diagnosis, hysterectomy and recovery in 1938. Interestingly, while the exchanges between households continued as before, the surviving dog (Coney) was not mentioned in Florence’s accounts of these ‘jolly’ evenings, either because the dog wasn’t needed as an intermediary or because she did not have the same significance within the family as Brunnie (Coney’s death received far less attention than Brunnie’s in the diary).

Ivor, the five-year-old son of Bernard and his deceased wife, had gone to live with Mother in 1934. Within a month of Coney’s death in March 1939, Ivor announced that he wanted ‘a dog or an air gun’, to which Florence’s response was ‘fear me he will not get either for a dog is too much for Mother’.\(^40\) In early June, however, Florence presented him with a pedigree puppy.\(^41\) Florence had continued to visit Mother since the loss of Coney, sometimes to take Ivor for a walk and on at least two occasions to see Mother’s new tortoises, but the puppy provided an additional reason to maintain cordial family relations and for the joint dog-walking to continue.\(^42\)

In 1940 Bernard moved to Florence’s house with Ivor and Mother left the old shop and moved into another house nearby with Brian. During and after the war, Barbara, Brian, Bernard and latterly Ivor were all conscripted for war work or civil defence and were often away, and at one point in 1942 both parents, father and mother, came to stay; meanwhile Florence’s job at British Home Stores required her to make frequent visits to branches and suppliers around the country. The combined impact of her paid work, running the disjointed household and disruption caused by the war would contribute to a ‘sort of breakdown’ in 1946 and her already sporadic diary keeping ceased.\(^43\) This was clearly not a good time to take on a pet and we do not know what happened to Ivor’s dog during these years. But by June 1950, when she began writing regularly again, Florence evidently felt in a position to care for an animal and had acquired a cat and an adored Alsatian, Dinah.

Florence Turtle senior died in December 1950 when her eldest daughter was fifty-five. This prompted another merging and division of the two homes the following year. Brian, the youngest child (now thirty-nine), joined Bernard and twenty-three-year-old Ivor at Florence’s house, creating ‘our new household of four’\(^44\); Barbara had married in 1949 (aged forty) and took on Mother’s house. After the move, the circulation of people and pets (Barbara now had her own dog) between the two homes continued as before; these visits and joint dog-walking at weekends may have helped to ease the transition and certainly maintained close ties between siblings. Florence wrote in early 1951 that she thought the new arrangement ‘has gone along smoothly enough & should be better in
the long run but not financially. It’s a great help Dinah being taken out but with the time I have to do more cooking. Entries of the 1950s relating to ‘darling Di’ tell of a growing resentment at having to manage both her work life and the expanded family’s domestic arrangements and meals.

Florence had long complained that Bernard did not pull his weight around the home, writing in 1934 ‘why will not that blighter do his share’. These feelings increased in the 1950s and dog-walking became a particular point of conflict: ‘Home to find Brian had gone to bowls & Bernard was in a black sulk because he had [to] come home & take the dog for a walk.’ Prior to his marriage and move further south into suburban Surrey in 1955, Ivor had helped with the house and animals when on leave and this was often contrasted with the lack of input from his father and uncle: ‘Ivor took Di out & Bernard spent most of the day in bed’; ‘the two Bs had gone to [play snooker] & Ivor was out with the dog’. The acquisition of a car in the mid-1950s made dog-walking easier for Bernard, since he now drove to the park, but this did not necessarily benefit his sister:

Bernard took Dinah out in the evening over to Ivors & then to Wimbledon common – I suggested he should take me out for a run but of course he did not do so. . . . they think it is quite fair that I should be the principal breadwinner & stick in the whole weekend cooking & doing household things while they are free to do what they like bar taking the dog out.

Thinking, in 1955, about her future retirement, Florence mused that she did not particularly want to give up business but as I run a home with two brothers a cat & a dog [I] find it a bit of a strain. Ironically, on top of walking, feeding and caring for the pets, Dinah in particular added to Florence’s domestic worries: the dog kept her up at night and took against some of her housekeepers. As she wrote in 1958: ‘I set out somewhat reluctantly because I have no woman & I have lots to do don’t know how I can manage without anyone no hope of Mrs Horner coming back I fear & Dinah will not have anyone else’.

Florence Turtle loved her human and animal family and her home but frequently looked forward, after a weekend of cooking, cleaning and gardening, to Monday morning in the office. Her brothers could infuriate her, but she missed them when they weren’t there, and it was to her three closest siblings that she turned when her pets were at the ends of their lives. When, with much sadness, they decided as a family that their dying pets’ suffering should cease, Florence trusted the animals to their care, to avoid the moment when the vet put down first the cat (Florence went to church) and, two years later, Dinah: when Brian told Florence he thought she should put the dog to sleep, as she recounted at length in her diary in 1958, ‘I said could he ask Perry [the vet] if it could be quite painlessly done – he said he was waiting for me to agree as she was my dog – I said all right but tell Bernard as she is a family dog – It breaks my heart’. This time Florence went to the office, and Bernard and Brian took Dinah ‘for a little ride in Richmond Park & then picked Barbara up to help Brian administer the ten or twelve tablets which were to send her to sleep’ before the vet came to give the final injection and take her away. Florence and Brian had been grieved at the death of the cat but for all four siblings the loss of Dinah seems to have been more profoundly felt. That she was considered to be a ‘family dog’ seems key to these events, in which sibling differences were put aside.
Likewise, although other pets, including other dogs, had eased communication between the two households from the early 1930s, it was through a shared love of family dogs – Brunnie in particular – that cordial relations were maintained between Mother and daughter in difficult periods.

4. Jennie Gauntlett Hill (1904–1981)

Our third diarist is Jennie Gauntlett Hill, who was born in California in 1904. Her parents were English and the family, including her younger brother, returned to England in 1914. Jennie did not marry and lived first with both parents and then alone with her mother after her father’s death in 1944. As Michael Anderson has shown, by the 1960s and 1970s a ‘modern’ lifecycle had emerged in Britain – women and men were more likely to live into old age and women tended to have children earlier – a shift that he notes created a greater opportunity for intergenerational relationships, especially between grandparents and grandchildren (Anderson, 1985). But this change also had implications for relationships between parents and children, especially for single men and women who remained living in or closely attached to the family home (Holden, 2007, p. 218). With the exception of brief periods away from home while at school and on military service during the war Jennie lived with her mother, Ellen, for sixty years – the majority of her life. Her family life – which, after the death of her brother in 1931, was dominated by her relationship with her mother – might therefore be seen as a product of the modern lifecycle that Anderson describes. Jennie began keeping a diary in 1926 when she was twenty years old and the family were living near Eastleigh, between Southampton and Winchester in rural Hampshire. She continued to do so, on and off, for the rest of her life. As her diaries and photographs show, while the Hill family were fond of animals, the role that pets played in their emotional life varied considerably and reached a particular intensity in their final years together, when Jennie cared for her mother in old age. The presence of two cats and two women in the home at this time created a particular kind of human-animal family and the diaries give us an opportunity to explore the role that pets could play in the construction of modern family relationships and in particular the ‘long’ mother-daughter relationship.

Jennie often mentioned domestic animals and pets in her early diaries but they appear to have been peripheral to the family’s emotional life. As well as guinea pigs, chickens, ducks, and a working horse called Hamlet, there was a cat called Tip and a dog called Guess, whom Jennie took for regular walks, which she mentioned as a source of pleasure. From the mid-1930s, when Jennie was about thirty, pets appear more often in the diary and assume more importance. This is clear in the discussion of the loss of Trix, a favourite cat, in 1937, couched in stronger emotional terms than much else in the diary, including the death of her brother. During the Second World War, when Jennie undertook military service away from home, there is a break in the diaries and she did not resume them until 1954. Her father had died in 1944 and after the war she and her mother continued to live together at Hethersett, the home the family had built near Otterbourne, a village near Winchester in Hampshire. When Jennie started her journal again she and her mother had a cat called Richard Andrew, who did not feature much in the diaries, which were dominated by an unsuccessful romance. However, when Richard Andrew was run over in February 1956 Jennie described herself and her mother
as ‘both heart broken’ at the news, and wrote ‘I miss him dreadfully and his sweet ways’.\textsuperscript{59} We get the sense that the animal constituted a shared emotional investment for Jennie and Ellen because on the subsequent Mothering Sunday Jennie presented her mother with a card and framed enlargement of the cat noting in the diary that ‘She v. pleased’.\textsuperscript{60}

In 1957 Jennie acquired a ginger cat named Teddy, who was to become the most prominent pet in her diaries.\textsuperscript{61} The frequency with which Teddy is mentioned in the 1958 diary suggests that pet keeping took on a new significance for her at this point.\textsuperscript{62} Jennie mentioned Teddy every few days – he had a problem with an eye infection and frequently required treatment.\textsuperscript{63} When he had a road accident in May she agonised and delighted in his recovery.\textsuperscript{64} The animal was given new and special terms of endearment – and she frequently called him her ‘poppet’ (a term usually used for little children).\textsuperscript{65} The presence of the cat became integral to her construction of domesticity in the diaries.\textsuperscript{66} On Saturday June 14\textsuperscript{th} she left her mother spending the night with a friend: ‘while I came home to Teddy – He welcomed me so much, & wouldn’t leave me. Had good night.’\textsuperscript{67} Teddy was primarily Jennie’s pet and his care was mainly her work, as is evidenced by an entry from November that notes that Ellen had eaten Teddy’s Kattomeat for her dinner by mistake – suggesting that she was unfamiliar with feeding the cat.\textsuperscript{68}

In January 1959, Jennie and Ellen agreed to take in Tibby, a cat belonging to a neighbour who was moving away.\textsuperscript{69} Almost immediately, Jennie noted the interaction between the two animals with some pleasure, and the liveliness that they brought to the house: ‘A rainy day & both cats sleepy – Teddy & “Tib-Tibs” are real pals and have great fun romping round the house.’\textsuperscript{70} While Teddy remained primarily Jennie’s pet, Tibby tended to go to Ellen, creating a duality in the relationships between humans and animals. The fact that there were now two cats, and it was necessary to refer to them collectively, allowed for a new construction of the pets in the diaries. Increasingly, Jennie did not refer to the animals as cats, but as ‘the boys’.\textsuperscript{71} This anthropomorphic construction was a playful gendering of pets and owners – the terminology brought cats and humans closer together by emphasising sexual difference rather than the human-animal divide. The cats were ‘de-animalised’ by the term. Perhaps most importantly the term also communicated the cats’ role as a form of family – ‘the boys’ would have been in common use in households where there were two male children.

Jennie had been working at a local bakery but in 1959, when she was fifty-three, she gave it up to care for her mother, who was now eighty-nine. Ellen’s life span created not just a long and intense relationship with her only surviving child, but her frail final years were a period when both women were focused mainly on their home. This played out in Jennie’s discussion of the domesticity produced by the two humans and the two cats. She mentioned the cats almost every day, commenting on when they came in at night, the food she prepared for them, their play, and their minor ailments. We can see that the ritual of bringing the cats over the threshold at night assumed a powerful emotional role in the daily routines of the Hill household and was a way in which they marked the passage of the day.\textsuperscript{72} The women sometimes became quite agitated when the cats did not come in – and argued over it.\textsuperscript{73} The feeding and care of the cats was incorporated into the domestic routines and rituals Jennie and her mother built together – most notably ‘the Sunday titbit’ when the cats would be given a weekly treat of prawns or scampi.\textsuperscript{74} Most importantly Jennie seems to have seen the cats as active participants in the creation of
domesticity; on Sunday 15 July 1959 she wrote: ‘Both boys glad to see us back. Tibs went to mother, & Teddy came to see me – bless them.’

Although Jennie recorded speaking of and to the cats like children and sometimes treating them as such, as pets they were ultimately disposable and played a very different role. As Dafna Shir-Vertesh points out in relation to Israeli households, pets can be ‘flexible persons’ that may be disposed of when owners’ life circumstances change (Shir-Vertesh, 2012). It was Ellen who raised the issue of what was to happen to the cats after her death, and the resulting discussion created one of the few arguments between mother and daughter that is recorded in the diary. Since 1959 Tibs had required extensive veterinary treatment. This placed a strain not just on Jennie’s time, but also on the purse strings of the small household. In 1961 Jennie recorded that Ellen had made her promise that Tibs would be put to sleep on her death; the reason for this is not recorded but it was perhaps because of the prolonged veterinary treatment. Jennie subsequently said she would do the same for Teddy. So from 1961, the women continued to live with the cats, having made an agreement that their lives would end with Ellen’s. It was this perceived disposability of the cats that allowed the women to create a ‘human-animal family’ at this time in Ellen’s life. The nature of this family was conditioned both by Ellen’s long duration and the assumption that modern technology would allow them to dispose of the cats quickly and painlessly, with apparently minimum guilt.

In 1964, when Ellen was unable to walk without help and was often incontinent, the cats continued to play a significant role in Jennie’s life. She still found time for Teddy, trying to lure him in at nights, preparing food, and recounting his exploits. She was not too pre-occupied to give him special care when he had an operation. In the spring Ellen was going rapidly downhill. It became harder and harder to care for her. In July Jennie was heart-broken when her mother was taken into hospital, yet she also feared the heavy burden that would once more fall to her on her return. By October things had become so difficult that Ellen was in a nursing home. Jennie, released from the physical burden of care, seems to have used her diary and the cats to try to keep hold of some normality: ‘... Got Boys crab & tit bits, which they enjoyed, & myself liver & bacon & Brussel sprouts. Very tasty. Got on with house jobs & cooking. ...’

Ellen died in October and Jennie was faced with the difficult task of fulfilling her promise. Now fifty-eight, she needed to build a new, independent life, without her mother. Earlier that year, she had explored the possibility of sharing a house with cousins, without the cats. After her mother’s death she wrote about having had a phone conversation with a friend about the future: ‘Had a good natter & she agreed that the “Boys” musn’t dominate my life’; she seems to have been wavering about putting them down. But, painful as the prospect of disposing of the cats was, she apparently decided that building a freer life was an important way of moving forward. She was planning a trip to Scotland, which would have been impossible in her previous circumstances. Yet the diaries express the immense emotional upheaval that this occasioned: ‘Feel dreadfully depressed over thought of having the Boys put to sleep.’ On 6th November she wrote: ‘A warmer day & a nice bright morning. Usual week-end housework etc. Teddy came in calling to me with a mouse present to me. Bless his little heart. Its pure agony knowing how little time there is left for us together. My love for him is so great & deep – my darling faithful Teddy. Life will be desolate without him.’ On November 11th the vet arrived mid-morning and the cats were put to sleep and
Jennie left immediately for Scotland but the agony continued when she returned two weeks later. On November 28th she wrote: ‘Felt exhausted & weak after a bad night, & the dreadful desolate feeling of loneliness without the boys. Miss Teddy frightfully, & cannot help weeping with overwhelming sorrow. It’s almost more than I can bear, not to see my darling about, & to love him in my arms.’ The diary shows us just how deeply embedded the animals were in Jennie’s emotional life. Yet her decision to end their lives, and the substantial pain that this caused her, was certainly bound up in a wider change and grieving process for her mother – when she let go of the cats she also let go of the home life that they had lived together for so long.

5. Conclusion

The three diaries reveal the extent to which middle-class families could engage with pets in mid-twentieth century Britain. Taken together they reveal complex interactions that share some of the characteristics identified by sociologists and psychologists who have studied pets in families in the twenty-first century. While animals were important presences in these families, and were sometimes given human-sounding names, their distinctive ‘animalness’ added vital qualities to the human-animal households that they were a part of. Florence Turtle for example, delighted in describing her mother’s dogs’ glossy coats and bright eyes – communicating her pleasure in a physical and tactile relationship. Jennie Gauntlett-Hill’s enjoyment in Teddy’s company was usually expressed through physical acts, such as a string game or time spent on her lap. At certain times, pet animals might almost be defined as kin, for example, in Jennie’s depiction of her ‘boys’. And yet, the disposability of pets clearly made them different to human family members. The emotional conflict Jennie experienced when she chose to end the lives of her pets expressed the tensions in this definition. Often the animals intervened in family dynamics – a clear triangular relationship emerged between Alan, Morag, and Sally. Yet pets also have much to tell us about how the specific contours and structures of what has been identified as the mid-twentieth-century family played out: how a dog might become a focus of a husband and wife struggling to adjust to a shift in patriarchal authority; how retaining relationships with pets might help a daughter negotiate the transition into her own private space and how two cats were fundamental to the domestic life of a daughter caring for her mother in her final years.

The diaries demonstrate just how much difference animals could, and did, make to the family, its dynamics and relationships. The choice of whether or not to become a human-animal family had a fundamental impact on domestic life. In all three families, pet animals had a clear impact on the emotional life of the family. While it is not possible to discern emotional experiences of animals from the available source material, it is clear that humans believed that they had mutually affectionate relationships with cats and dogs. Pets made a significant difference to the emotional lives of families partly because they allowed humans to amplify and channel their feelings. Thus, for the Withingtons, Sal’s status as a living, affectionate being inspired Morag’s emotional investment, but also became a means, for Alan, to identify what he perceived as the couple’s different emotional styles within the marriage (sentimentality vs. rationality). For the Turtles, shared emotional investment in ‘family dogs’ was vital to cementing ties within what might be
perceived as a dysfunctional family – yet Florence’s affective investment in the dogs also contributed to emotional tensions when she felt her mother was failing in the basic duties of dog care. Shared emotional investment in cats was also an intrinsic part of the family domesticity for Jennie and Ellen, but the conflict over the eventual fate of the cats was also a key source of tension.

How, and when pets came into the family tended to be governed by the progression of the human lifecycle, and the transformation of the lifecycle in the twentieth century came together with the production of human-animal families to create new forms of family life. Jennie and Ellen’s ‘long’ mother-daughter relationship was a product of the new longevity of the elderly in the twentieth century – this relationship was long-lasting, close-knit but increasingly challenged by the need to provide intimate physical care. Arguably, this was the moment at which pets were most valuable to Jennie in her life, as her human circle contracted due to her caring role, the cats became more important. For Florence Turtle, pets were also a crucial means of negotiating a moment of transition in the lifecycle – when she moved out of the family home (an increasingly common experience for young middle-class women from the early twentieth century), the family dogs provided a point of shared focus and an emotional bridge. For the Withingtons, the acquisition of a dog just after their marriage was both a marker of the shift in their own lifecycle and a means of testing the ground for the next stage – the arrival of children. While all three families acquired or disposed of pets according to their own circumstances or position in the lifecycle, the lifecycles of the animals themselves increasingly became a significant factor in their emotional lives. Human and animal lifecycles were thus intertwined. The pain of pet loss was recorded by all three diarists – reflecting the emotional power of the animals and the way in which their presence came to mark periods or epochs in family life.

Notes

1. Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (THIR), grey literature, held at the Wellcome Library, SA/TIH/B/1/2: T367, T501, T159; SA/TIH/B/2/25. The context for the THIR’s concern was the huge growth of the ready-made pet-food business, with the concomitant possibilities of market research in the field.
2. Wellcome Library, SA/TIH/B/1/2/10, T501.
3. Wellcome Library, SA/TIH/B/2/25/6.
4. The diaries were identified through catalogue searches, discussions with archivists, and from Creaton (2003). Other long diaries studied include those held in the Bishopsgate Institute’s Great Diary Project, and by the Mass Observation Archive.
5. Highgate Literary & Scientific Institution, Alan Withington’s diaries, 1932–1992 (hereafter AWD).
6. In 1931 just under one in 20 families employed resident domestic servants (Lewis & Maude, 1950, p. 253). Approximately one in 10 families had a car at the start of the 1930, doubling by the end of the decade (Great Britain, Board of Trade, 1938, p. 78). Even by 1948 refrigerators were present in only 1% of households in England and Wales (Bowden & Offer, 1994, pp. 725–748).
7. AWD, 28 July 1933.
8. AWD, 31 July 1933.
9. AWD, 2 August 1933.
10. AWD, 9 August 1933.
11. AWD, 12 November 1933.
12. Many years later, when Alan was having problems training a subsequent dog, he recorded
that he had asked for hints from someone at a party but, again, he made no reference to
taking advice from books (AWD, 14 November 1961).
13. AWD, 4 June 1945.
14. AWD, 18 July 1940.
15. AWD, 26 June 1940. The disagreement between AW and MW over evacuating the children
prefigured that about whether or not to send them to boarding school (June 4 and ff. 1945).
16. AWD, 15 December 1942.
17. AWD, 29 November 1943.
18. Wandsworth Heritage Service, Diaries of Florence Turtle (hereafter DFT), D103/1; the present
history also draws upon biographical work undertaken by Wandsworth Heritage Service,
which is available on the catalogue: http://www.calmview.eu/wandsworth/calmview/.
19. DFT, family history added by Florence Turtle in the 1970s, in the pages for 2–14 January 1950,
D103/1/20; shorter entries about her family history also feature in other diaries.
20. British Books, Vols. 154–55, 1941, p. 244.
21. DFT, 8 January 1950, D103/1/20.
22. DFT, 16 February 1940, D103/1/15.
23. DFT, 6 August 1936, D103/1/11.
24. DFT, 29 July 1931, D105/1/6.
25. DFT, 25 September 1936, D103/1/11.
26. DFT, 6 November 1931, D105/1/6; DFT, 20 July 1934, D103/1/9; DFT, 28 August 1936, D103/1/11.
27. DFT, 18 September 1936, D103/1/11.
28. DFT, 22 July 1930, D103/1/5.
29. See DFT, 1 April 1933, D103/1/8.
30. DFT, 14 June 1933, D103/1/8.
31. DFT, 7 May 1936, D103/1/11.
32. DFT, 16 October 1938, D103/1/13, 8 March 1940 and 16 February 1940, D103/1/15.
33. DFT, 16 February 1940, D103/1/15.
34. DFT, 15 February 1940, D103/1/15.
35. DFT, 17 September 1936, D103/1/11.
36. DFT, 18 February 1929, D103/1/4.
37. DFT, 25 and 26 June 1937, D103/1/12.
38. DFT, 28 March 1938, D103/1/13.
39. DFT, 5 September 1937, D103/1/12.
40. DFT, 21 April 1939, D103/1/14.
41. DFT, 7 June 1939, D103/1/14.
42. DFT, 16 April 2010 May, 25 May 1939, D103/1/14.
43. Entry made in 1972 at the back of DFT, 1945, D103/1/19.
44. DFT, 10 February 1951, D103/1/21.
45. DFT, 10 February 1951, D103/1/21.
46. DFT, 29 August 1934, D103/1/9.
47. DFT, 14 June 1955, D103/1/23.
48. DFT 7 October 1950, 31 December 1950, D103/1/21; 12 February 1951, D103/1/22.
49. DFT, 8 September 1956, D103/1/24.
50. DFT, 1 January 1955, D103/1/23.
51. DFT, 30 December 1957, D103/1/25.
52. DFT, 23–24 June 1956, D103/1/24.
53. DFT, April-May 1958, D103/1/26.
54. The Jennie Gauntlett Hill diaries (hereafter DJGH) are held at Hampshire Record Office (HRO)
and cover the period 1925–1981, HRO, 130M82/10-49.
55. HRO catalogue. https://calm.hants.gov.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=
82130&pos=1 Jennie Gauntlett Hill's mother, Ellen Barclay, had emigrated to Canada as
a child. Information from personal communication from the Rev. Michael Balchin.
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