Was Commissioner George Hirst a socialable person? His visitors' book, which was handed over to the National Archive by his grandson Mr. Stephen Gamble in April, suggests he was a man who enjoyed a little privacy. The first entry shows "the good and the great" from George Town calling on him. The next entry is not until four weeks later, with a further month's gap before more visitors follow.

On the other hand, as he was both Commissioner and Medical Officer for Grand Cayman, he may have visited rather than hosted. His diary for 1912 (the year he died), which was also among the documents handed over by Mr. Gamble, shows visits to patients almost daily, along with dance classes, nursing classes and a host of other activities.

The visitors' book is no leather-bound volume, but sheets of paper, folded and hand-ruled in pencil to make up a rough-and-ready book. First among "the good and the great" to sign the book on 4 April 1907, was C. J. H. Goring, followed by Mr. and Mrs. A. Bodden, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur J. Roberts, William Coe, Edmund Parsons, A. Parsons, Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Webster, Mrs. Thomas Parsons, Miss M. Saunders and Mrs. Burrleett Ulley — a strong gathering.

Four weeks later, on 2 May, those who called were considerably fewer in number. Thomas Coe, Mrs. Arthur Bodden and Ethleen Eden.

The next small parties appear on 8 June and on 4 July with W. B. Pouchie giving his address as "The Manse", and 1 August, which included Mrs. Rennie Eden of Mobile, Alabama, and Mrs. Thomas Redpath, wife of the Bodden Town minister.

One might wonder whether the Commissioner and his wife had a small "at home" each month to meet a selected group.

Overseas visitors

Visitors were not just limited to residents: on 22 December the Commissioner welcomed Mr. Norman

Continued on page A2
Commissioner George Hirst with his daughters Helen and Christine on the veranda of Government House.

Dr. George Hirst with his wife and in-laws. Seated, from left, Betty Jenner, wife Gertrude, Frank Jenner and mother-in-law Jenner. At the front is daughter Helen. The photograph was taken in 1902.
The photograph was taken in 1901. (Photo courtesy of Cayman National Archive)

Dr. George Hirst with family, in-laws and friends. From left, unknown, mother-in-law Jenner, Hirst, Ester Jenner, Elizabeth Jenner, Frank Jenner, wife Gertrude with Helen, unknown. The photograph was taken in 1901.
The Days of Hirst

from page A2

no indication who Paulina was, nor any entry to show whether she came back. Helen's memoir reveals nothing.

On 25 March the SS Skogland was “wrecked” off the manse at Bodden Town. The next day he goes to Bodden Town to inspect it. Two days later it is floated off the reef.

The following day (29 March) in the Victoria Hall he is giving nurses a lecture on typhoid.

Easter that year was 7 April. The Sunday before Easter (31 March) he notes morning prayers, apparently with eight in attendance.

On Easter Day it says “11 am-8”. Presumably a service was held in the chapel with eight in attendance.

Telephone

Cayman's first telephone system is being installed. On 10 April, Hirst notes “telephone tested at Dillion Thompson's, Red Bay. Communication through to Georgetown Police Station.” On the 23 April, he notes “telephone opened at Spots. First mess 11:57 am to G'town.”

There is a strange entry on Monday, 15 April: “Sheep to Crewe Road pasture.” Sheep? Whose sheep?

He holds a series of women’s nursing classes (18, 25 April, 2, 9, 16 May), with the nursing class exam beginning on 30 May and ending the next day.

On 15 May there is the entry: “Drunk’ at Mrs. Scott’s house”, with a blue tick. What this means we can only guess: was it an admonition of himself, or did he treat a drunk at this house?

Father Joseph arrived on the Majestic on 25 May from the Isle of Pines and there are series of notes of religious services attended. On Sunday 26 May he attends Mass at 8 am, with nine present. On 28 and 29 May he attends Mass on 7.15 am, with six and seven present, respectively. Also on 29 May he attends Benediction at 6 pm. On Saturday, 1 June, he attends Benediction at 6 pm, with eight present, and on the Sunday, 2 June, he attends Mass at 8 am and Benediction at 4 pm.

On Wednesday, 5 June, Hirst had Grand Court.

Sussex Cottage as it is today.

The next day there is an entry in his wife’s hand, “Taken ill at 9.30 pm”. The next day’s entry is “Still ill, severe hemorrhages”. The Saturday entry reads “Died 3.15 pm. May his soul rest in peace. Amen.” all entered by his wife Gert.

In her memoir, daughter Helen writes, “By a miracle the priest was there when father died, so he had last sacraments and a Christian burial.”

A daughter’s memoirs

From all accounts Commissioner Hirst was an energetic man, achieving much in the five years he was in Cayman (1907-12). He was both commissioner and medical officer. His duties as commissioner were wide ranging, including presiding at petty sessions and Grand Court. He built roads, installed the first telephone, helped start a newspaper, The Caymanian, and also found time to produce his three-volume Notes on the History of the Cayman Islands.

But what was he like?

His elder daughter Helen wrote some brief memoirs in response to questions from her children. She says, “My father was the strictest disciplinarian anyone could have had. He would have been better pleased with me as a boy. Latin and the Classics were mandatory by age seven, and so many questions (were) thrust at me, usually (at) dinner time that I was in constant fear - terror is a better word.”

She says that her father taught her Latin and was very impatient and cruel. “When he was in a good mood - which I don't remember - there was no one kinder.”

She acknowledges there was a good side to him: “He elected to teach himself each afternoon on the veranda. She was in a constant state of fear.

“I never measured up to his expectations and would be smacked. My poor mother was in her room some five or six yards away and (was) not able to do anything except make it worse by intervention,” Helen wrote.

She acknowledges there was a good side to him: “When he was in a good mood - which I don't remember - there was no one kinder.”

She also says that in later years she was grateful for all the learning she got at such a tender age.

Continued on page A4
from page A3

She remembers her father as “a very heavy man.”

She says her father died of an aneurysm which is a bulging and thinning on the wall of a blood vessel. Elsewhere, she says that an edema (sometimes spelt oedema - dropsy, an accumulation of fluid in tissue space) on his left shoulder went to his heart.

His death certificate lists cause of death as “hemorrhage of stomach and heart failure.”

She says the edema was caused by heavy drinking, obesity and easy living, with servants at his beck and call.

She lists the servants as Clara the cook, Esmer the butler and Elfreda an assistant. She says she adored Clara and felt “she was my own mother, always there to hug me to her ample bosom, heal my wounds, listen to my woes.”

She had a governess Miss Le Frane and when she was about 11, Mr. English, the postmaster, was her tutor.

She goes on; “He liked to go rambling with him studying nature.”

Helen was born 14 June, 1900, in Withern, in Lincolnshire, where her father had a medical practice. He moved to a new practice in Cardiff, South Wales, in 1904. They sailed for the West Indies, for the Turks and Caicos Islands, in 1905.

In the Turks and Caicos Islands, they were on Salt Cay, a small island south of the administrative centre, Grand Turk, almost totally devoted to salt production.

Hirst’s letter of appointment for Cayman is dated February 1907.

Helen would have been six, turning seven, when she arrived in Cayman.

She says the Government House was a two-storey wooden structure, with living quarters upstairs and the offices and her father’s surgery downstairs.

The commissioner seems to have had a small farm. She says she was responsible for every animal they had in their care. This meant goats, sheep, pigs, dogs, turtle and fish. The garden had to grow corn, cotton, tomatoes, radishes, onions, potatoes, etc.

We know Hirst was a religious man from the frequency he attended mass and benediction when Father Joseph was in Cayman. Helen writes that she made her first communion in Havana, Cuba, in 1911.

Her mother seems to have done much “to pull and keep together the social life of the Islands”.

She was, according to Helen, very superstitious. When Hirst died, she was away at Boddlen Town in a little “get away” cottage there.

“She came back and was in (the) buggy with someone and saw a crow fly over: One for sorry,

Two for mirth,

Three for marriage,

Four for birth.

She said Oh, Dear,” Helen writes.