

Lancelot C. G. Gilling

OBE 1985, B. Sc., F. I. Biol., F. R. Ag. S.

1920 – 2004.



Lancelot Cyril Gilbert Gilling

Born in 1920 in Rooksbridge Somerset

He dedicated his life to the education and improvement of
Rural life and Agriculture

Lancelot “Lance” Cyril Gilbert Gilling was born at Ashlawn Farm, Rooksbridge, East Brent in 1920, into a long established and respected agricultural family.



He was the second son of farmer Gilbert and Esther Gilling. His siblings were Joseph Robert Gilling b: 1915 and Esther Rosina Gilling b: 1911.



Left to Right: Joseph, Rosina and Lance.

The Gilling family had originally farmed at Mark and Wedmore in Somerset for several generations.

Lance’s father, Gilbert Joseph Gilling, was born at Theale Nr Wedmore in 1877. Gilbert was the son of Joseph and Mary Anne who farmed at Theale Nr Wedmore. Lance’s grandfather Joseph was the son of Henry Gilling of Mark.

Soon after the birth of Gilbert, His father Joseph and the family moved to Wiltshire where in 1881 Joseph was a farm bailiff living with four children in the hamlet of South Marston in the parish of Highworth Nr Swindon Wilts.

In 1901 Gilbert Gilling was working for his father who was now farming at ‘Lower Farm’ Liddington Wick, Nr Highworth, Wilts.

Gilbert married Esther Marianne Clapp in East Brent in 1908. Esther was the daughter of dairy farmer Robert and Esther Clapp who farmed at Alston Farm, Alston Sutton Nr Weare Som. Soon after their marriage in 1908 Gilbert took on the tenancy of Ash Lawn Farm in Rooksbridge, where their daughter Rosina was born in 1911 followed by Joseph in 1915 and Lancelot in 1920.

When Gilbert came to Rooksbridge in the early 1900’s he became an ‘Elder’ at the local Baptist Chapel in Rooksbridge. (Gilbert is believed to be the tall chap wearing a straw boater hat) in the centre of this 1910-20’s photo taken outside the chapel in Rooksbridge. The family later transferred to the Methodist faith and are still heavily involved with the East Brent Methodist Chapel



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Esther ‘Rosina’ Gilling married a Raymond House from Biddisham in 1936 and they moved to Westbury in Bristol where Raymond worked in a bank. At the time of the 1939 National Register they were living in Vaughan Road, Exeter. Raymond was a bank clerk there. This might have been a temporary arrangement due to his work. Sam House died in 1980 and Ester in 1997 in Bristol.

Lance’s brother Joseph and Gilbert his father, farmed a dairy herd at ‘Ashlawn Farm’ along with sheep and pigs. In 1940 ‘Joe’ married Olive Helliard and took over the tenancy of the ‘Old Manor Farm’ in Rooksbridge from Alfred Denne after Alfred retired. From here ‘Joe’ bred prize beef cattle. He also expanded the dairy herd to 100 plus by 1995.

Breeding South Devon show cattle was his retirement hobby and he did a lot of showing with them including at the Great Yorkshire Show when Lance was President. Joe was also a knowledgeable and enthusiastic beekeeper.

In 1945 Joseph was made chairman of the Somerset N.F.U. He also served on the local parish education committee, and also played an active part on the Lower Axe Drainage Board.

In summer of 1951 Lance married Brenda Copp in Bristol.

Brenda was born in Chorlton Lancs.  
They had two daughters Jenny and Hilary.



Lance and Brenda met at Reading University where Brenda was studying Agricultural Chemistry.

When their daughters were born Lance and Brenda were living at the College in York.

Brenda took up a part time teaching post at St John's College, York, where she taught rural studies. She was made redundant when the

college was reorganised and would have liked a job at the college at Askham Bryan, but married couples were dissuaded from working in the same institution. So Brenda started her own scientific rural studies of various sorts: weather, hedgerows, and birds etc.. She did her best to influence the College to preserve hedgerows and not enlarge fields etc, and was successful to some extent. Nowadays general thinking on such matters is much more nature oriented.

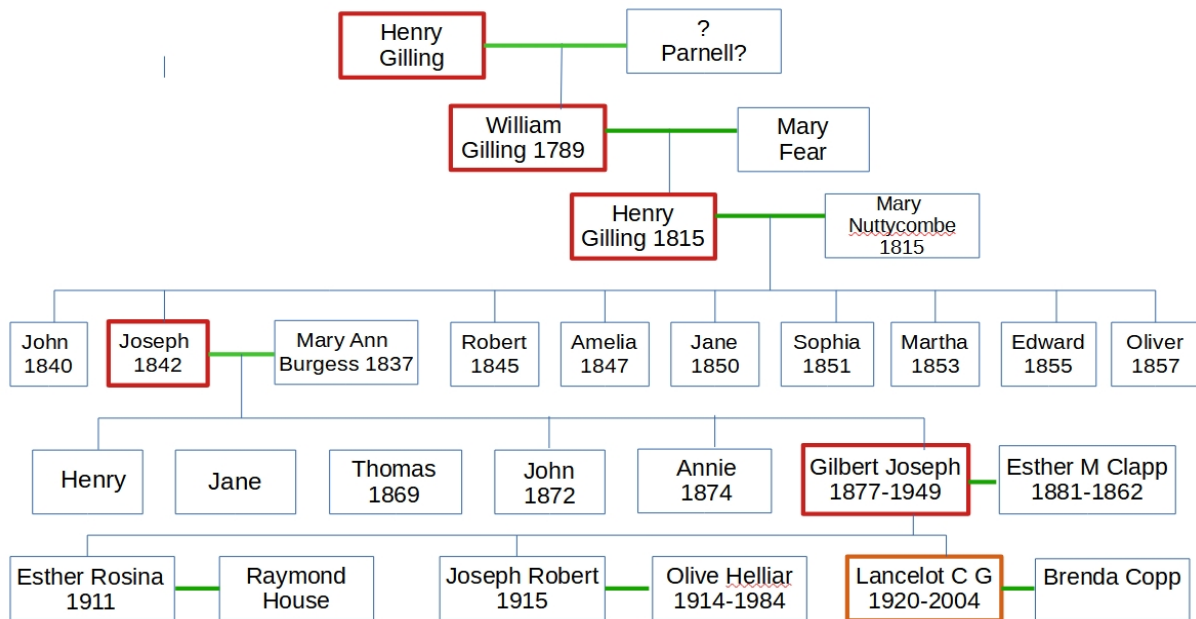
After a lifetime career teaching and lecturing in agriculture, Lance died in Hull Yorks in 2004 aged 84 and Brenda died in York in 2017 aged 93

A keen sports man, his first love was cricket.

Among his interests in his later years were tennis, badminton, music and conservation.



## Paternal ancestors of Lancelot Gilling



## Education

At the age of 11 after his elementary education at East Brent, he followed the footsteps of his older brother Joseph and attended Shebbear College. An independent Methodist boarding school near Torrington, in Devon. The College was founded broadly on the Methodist teaching of evangelism and temperance and specialising in finance and agriculture.

Founded in 1829 Shebbear was originally a Bible Christian church school called Prospect College. – the ‘PC’ emblem is still engraved on its main gates – The Bible Christian movement eventually merged into the Methodist Church.



This school was no doubt responsible for giving him a thorough academic education and knowledge of finance and agriculture, which encouraged and enabled him to pursue a long lasting career in agricultural education in which he excelled. He gained his school certificate in 1936.



From an early age he was kept on sports.

Soon after arriving at Shebbear he was picked to play for the college Juniors football team.

Seen here in 1933 seated 2<sup>nd</sup> from the right.

He also played for the college 1<sup>st</sup> eleven cricket team while at Shebbear.

**North Devon Journal 30 May 1935**

Top scorer, not out!

| SHEBBEAR v. PLYMOUTH BOHEMIANS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Shebbear College won a close match against Plymouth Bohemians on Saturday, the issue being in doubt until the last over. Scores:—                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
| Shebbear College—M. Fowlston, b Callicott, 1; C. K. Barrett, b Callicott, 0; Mr. Newsham, b Callicott, 3; K. Collins, b Callicott, 9; D. Farley, b Callicott, 9; Mr. Westwater, b Callicott, 7; L. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">Gilling</span> , n.o., 24; Mr. Johnson, c and b Lee, 7; F. Bayalgate, r.o., 0; K. Allen, b Blowey, 0; D. Gibbs, b Callicott, 1; extras, 4; total, 65. (Callicott 7 for 19.) |  |
| Bohemians—G. Watts, b Farley, 0; W. Horwell, r.o., 0; G. Haydon, b Farley, 5; N. Blowey, c Farley, b Fowlston, 11; L. Froute, b Fowlston, 0; E. Garland, lbw., b Farley, 4; J. Leech, c Farley, b Fowlston, 1; F. Lee, r.o., 19; H. Callicott, c Gibbs, b Fowlston, 15; E. Palmer, b Farley, 0; R. Cresswell, n.o., 0; extras, 2; total 57. (Farley 4 for 23, Fowlston 4 for 32.)                                                     |  |

Shebbear College Cricket team 1936.

Lance seated 2<sup>nd</sup> from right.





Here he is playing in the college rugby team in 1936-37.

standing at the rear 4<sup>th</sup> from the left.

Utd. Banks II. v. Old Bristolians II.  
 At County Ground. Match drawn.  
 Scores:—  
 United Banks II.—C. E. McCarthy, b Esbester, 20; L. G. Johnson, c Gell, b Esbester, 28; **L. C. Gilling**, c and b Gell, 23; W. G. Grove, c Gale, b Gell, 44; V. G. Parker, c Richards, b Gell, 33; H. H. Meehan, b Gell, 29; G. A. Willson, b Gell, 8; G. P. Wilson, c Bush, b Gell, 17; D. Wainwright, c Richards, b Gell, 0; D. Perrott, not out, 5; V. B. Clarke, b Gell, 2; extras, 14; total, 215.  
 Old Bristolians II.—E. R. Davies, b Perrott, 1; E. I. Bush, b Meehan, 30; B. J. Dennis, b Johnson, 42; G. F. Dennis, b Johnson, 2; J. Esbester, b Perrott, 19; E. Daunton, b Meehan, 0; G. Coleman, b Groce, 19; L. Richards, not out, 26; J. E. Franks, c **Gilling**, b Perrott, 2; P. S. Gale, b Grove, 1; R. Gell, not out, 0; extras, 12; total (for nine wickets), 151.

After he left Shebbear college he moved to Westbury on Trym while working in the National Westminster Bank.

While working in Bristol before his military service he played for the 'Bristol United Banks' cricket eleven.

**Weston Daily Press 14<sup>th</sup> Aug 1939.**



## Military Career

At the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, 19 year old Lancelot was a bank clerk living in Westbury on Trym. He was there in early June 1940 when he received his military call up.



Lancelot Gilling was enlisted into the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1940 at Bodmin where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion were resting after the retreat from Dunkirk.



He was posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, where he was placed on the Admin staff. He soon became chief Education Officer for the battalion, no doubt due to his academic qualifications. (Being education officer to a battalion consisting of men with heavy 'Geordie' accents could not have been an easy task)!

He progressed quickly through the ranks and In May 1941 he was promoted and granted a commission to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant.

### *R. North'd Fus.*

Geoffrey Basil COBB (189170).  
 Ernest James Bowen RAYMOND (189171).  
 William Edwards Maynard ANDERSON  
 (189172).  
 John Walford COMMON (189173).  
 Lancelot Cyril Gilbert GILLING (189174).  
 Peter Shaw GREEN (189175).  
 John Anthony KYSH (189176).  
 Douglas Clifton LEVIN (189177).  
 Joseph MARTIN (189178).  
 Ronald Victor STONE (189179).  
 Basil Laurence VAUGHAN (189180).  
 Royce WRIGHT (189181).

The undermentioned Cadets from O.C.T.U. to be Second-Lieuts. (May 31): — Royal North'd. Fus.—Geoffrey Basil Cobb, Ernest James Bowen Raymond, William Edwards Maynard Anderson, John Walford Common, **Lancelot Cyril Gilbert Gilling**, Peter Shaw Green, John Anthony Kysh, Douglas Clifton Levin, Joseph Martin, Ronald Victor Stone, Basil Laurence Vaughan, Royce Wright.

### London Gazette 20<sup>th</sup> June 1941

His promotion was published in the London Gazette on 20th June 1941.

He first saw service in the North Africa campaign. By mid 1942 he had been promoted to Lieutenant and later to Acting Captain during the Italian and Greece campaigns.

His war medals are r-l: 1939-1945 War medal, Defence medal, Italy Star and the 1939-1945 Star.

(When he was awarded his OBE in 1985, he attached it to his medal bar. Seen here 1<sup>st</sup> left).



## North Africa

As 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion education and training officer to the Northumberland Fusiliers he first went to North Africa.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion R.N.F. was attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, and saw action in Tunisia, Tobruk and Egypt etc. Then in 1943 after the North Africa campaign, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Div. moved on to Italy in preparation for the Salerno landings, which commenced on 9<sup>th</sup> Sept 1943.

The Italian battle was fought in harsh and mountainous terrain. Completely different to the North Africa campaign that he had used to..

As Captain he was in command of a mortar platoon there and later a machine gun platoon.

## Italy

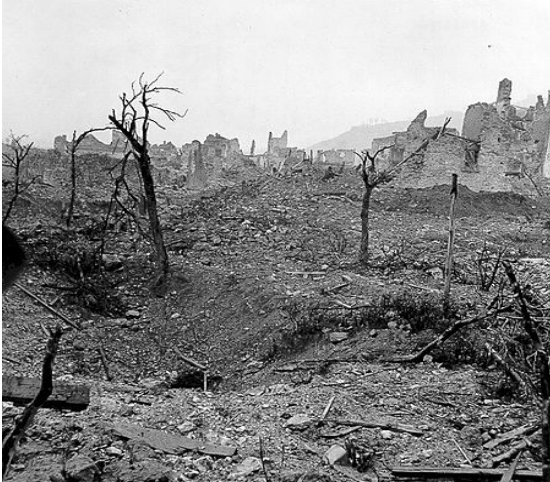
Italy had surrendered to the allies on the 8<sup>th</sup> Sept, – the day before the Salerno landings – Believing that the Italians had withdrawn from Salerno, the allies were unaware that the town was still heavily defended by German Panzer Divisions. The allies especially the British sustained quite heavy losses. However British commandos eventually captured the town.

After the capture of Salerno, with the Germans on the defensive and in retreat, Lancelot moved up through Italy with the 4th Div. As part of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army under Field Marshal Montgomery, and moving on to Monte Cassino and then onto Naples.

In early January 1944 24 year old Captain Lancelot Gilling was now involved in the battle for Monte Cassino.

After being pinned down by accurate German artillery fire, the allies were certain that the monastery perched on the summit of Monte Cassino was being used by the enemy

as an observation post on movements below. The Americans made a decision to bomb and destroy the monastery. It was later found that, although the Germans had plundered the monastery of its art and valuables, there was no evidence that it had been used by the German military. In 1966 the allies finally admitted their mistake!



**The aftermath of the battle for Monte Cassino**

## Greece

The German occupation of Greece began in April 1941 after Nazi Germany invaded Greece – so called to assist its then fascist ally Italy--. Italy had been at war with Greece since October 1940. Following the conquest of Crete by the Germans, all of Greece was occupied by June 1941. The occupation in the mainland lasted until Germany and its ally Bulgaria were forced to withdraw under Allied pressure in early October 1944. The allies remained in Greece until 1946

Mainland Greece was liberated in October 1944 when the Germans withdrew in the face of the advancing Red Army, while German garrisons continued to hold out in Crete etc, until after the war's end. The country was devastated by war and occupation, and its economy and infrastructure lay in ruins. The Greek Communist party called for revolution against the government.

Lance entered Greece with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion N.F. in December 1944

But not before he had picked up a fair knowledge of Italian!

The Battalion remained here during the second phase of the Greek Revolution, which took place between Dec 44 – Feb 45 and then until the end of the war.

He was finally released from the military service in August 1946.

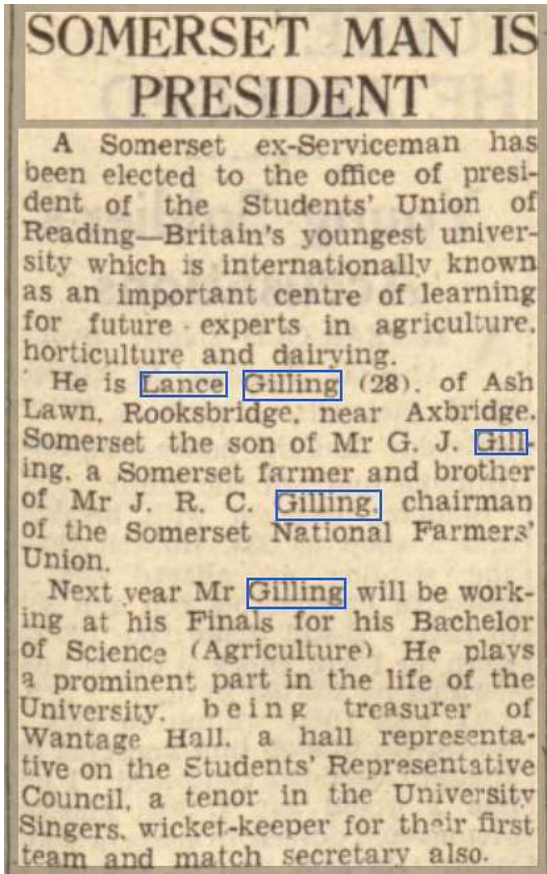
## **2nd Battalion, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers**

### **A brief outline.**

At the outbreak of the war, the 2nd Battalion, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers was an infantry battalion, attached as a machine gun unit to the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry division. It joined the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France in October 1939 and served there until June 1940 until the retreat from Dunkirk. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion RNF was attached to General Headquarters (GHQ) and was assigned to divisions as required.

It took part in the North Africa campaign and fought in Tunisia and Egypt. In 1943 after the Italians surrendered it took part in the Salerno landings and fought to drive the Germans out of Italy. The 4<sup>th</sup> division then went on to Greece, during the early stages of the Greek civil war. In 1945, the division returned to Italy and marched into Austria at the end of the war.

## University



Before his release from the army In August 1946 he had already applied for a place at Reading University.

On leaving the army he returned to Bristol for a short while, working in a bank until he was accepted at Reading University. There he studied agriculture and trained to be a teacher. It was here that he met his future wife Brenda who was studying agricultural chemistry.

He played a prominent and active part in the student life of the University. He was treasurer to the Wantage Hall there and was representative on the Students Council. He also sang tenor in the University singers and played wicket keeper for the University first team.

In March 1948 he became president of the Students Union of Reading University and in 1949 he gained his Bachelor of Science degree

in Agriculture.

**Western Daily Press 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1948**

### A career in agricultural education.

After leaving university in 1949 he was offered a job as warden and lecturer in agriculture at the Dorset Farm Institute. A new agricultural college which had been set up by a fellow wartime colleague at Kingston Maurward near Dorchester.

The 16th century estate on which the agricultural college now stands was purchased in 1914, by Cecil Hanbury, who had made a considerable fortune in business in Shanghai. Sir Cecil and Lady Hanbury entertained leading politicians and also Thomas Hardy, who had built his own house, Max Gate, just 1.25km south-west of Kingston Maurward.

Sir Cecil Hanbury died in 1937. Lady Hanbury continued to live at Kingston Maurward, despite the requisition of the house and park during the Second World War, when it served as an important base in preparations for the D-Day landings.

The troops returned the property in 1945, and in 1947 Dorset County Council bought the estate from Lady Hanbury to create a new Farm Institute, with the first intake of 30 students arriving in October 1949.

Before the Dorset Farm Institute, later to become the Dorset Agricultural and Horticultural College, opened at Kingston Maurward in 1949. The estate had suffered quite a lot of damage and neglect while occupied by the military and the Institute undertook an extensive programme of repairs and consolidation,

In 1951 after a couple of years running the Dorset Farm Institute, Lance moved on to Essex when he was appointed as a lecturer at Writtle Agricultural College near Chelmsford, now the Writtle University College. He stayed there until 1957 when he was appointed as Principal of the then West Riding Institute of Agriculture and Horticulture at Askham Bryan. Nr York. A position he held until he retired in 1984.

During his time in charge at Askham Bryan he refused in 1967 a place to a young 17 year old student named Alan Titchmarsh! Believing him not to be ready!

Sir Alan Titchmarsh as he is now, went on to study at Kew, and became a patron of Writtle Agriculture and Horticulture College.



## Askham Bryan

### College of Agriculture and Horticulture



MAIN BUILDING at the Yorkshire Institute of Agriculture. The building houses 80 residential students, each of whom has his own study-bedroom.

## YORKSHIRE'S SCHOOL FOR FARMERS

Once the home of the N.I.A.E., the Yorkshire Institute of Agriculture provides comprehensive facilities for 80 resident students to obtain practical and theoretical instruction in all aspects of work on the land.

ANYONE travelling on the Tadcaster-York road cannot avoid seeing the large, modern Yorkshire (West Riding) Institute of Agriculture at Askham Bryan, York. This fine brick building, standing in spacious grounds and possessing an extensive view over the Vale of York, was completed in 1939, but though intended for farm institute training, it was not until 1948 that this purpose was fulfilled. During the war years, it served for a time as a Land

Army training centre. Later it became the headquarters of the National Institute of Agricultural Engineering. But in January 1948 one-year courses were commenced by the Institute of Agriculture. Since that date many students have received their training here.

Until April 1954, the Institute was maintained by the county councils of the three ridings. But since then, the West Riding has been in sole charge. During its years of service there have

been three principals, Mr. Lindsay, Mr. Russell, and Mr. L. C. G. Gilling, B.Sc., who took over the position last September.

There are eighty students, all residential; men aged mainly between seventeen and nineteen. The Institute runs two courses, each lasting a year and comprising thirty-six weeks. Each year's course begins in September and ends in July. At present sixty students are studying agriculture and twenty horticulture. The agricultural students are drawn from the West and East Ridings, but students from all parts of Britain are accepted for horticultural training, though in reality most come from the north.

#### A Practical Outlook

The Institute's aim is to provide trained key-workers for farms and market gardens. Most of the students after completion of training have eventually become foremen with responsible positions and some have become farm managers. But, as Mr. Gilling stresses, the aim, generally speaking, is to provide for a practical career on farms and in horticulture. As such the training is general; there are no specialised courses. Students must have a good general education and have worked on a farm or smallholding for a year before commencing the training; this ensures that they obtain the utmost benefit from their course.

Each student spends approximately half his working time in the classrooms, well-equipped laboratories, and lecture hall, and half on the Institute's Westfield Farm. Mr. Gilling has eleven colleagues who are responsible for technical training. On the agricultural side this consists of crop husbandry, including study of soils, cultivation, farm botany and plant diseases; animal husbandry covering breeding, feeding and study of different farm animals; farm management which is divided into three parts and embraces such practical aspects as farm book-keeping and costings; dairy husbandry and poultry management.

Practical experience is gained on the Institute's own 470-acre mixed farm which is equipped with a good range of machinery. A special feature of the course is the study of farm equipment, its upkeep and repair, under the guidance of Mr. J. Shippem. A full-time estate carpenter, Mr. F. Blunsden, teaches the students joinery and gate-making so that

*Illustrated London News 11 June 1958*

In 1957, Lance was appointed principal of Askham Bryan College, at that time there were about 60 full time students, which over the years has increased to over two thousand and many more part time day release students.

During his 36 years at Askham Bryan College as it is now, Lance took a great interest in promoting agricultural education both nationally and internationally. (It is reported that during his time at Askham he never took a day off sick).

He was also responsible for part-time agricultural education and co-ordinator of the agricultural and horticulture education centres in North, West and South Yorkshire. This included responsibility for the Museum Gardens in the City of York.

He was a member of a Royal Commission advising the government on agriculture and horticultural matters.

He travelled around Eastern Europe during the seventies advising colleges on teaching students agriculture including Hungary which he found challenging.

He gave lectures frequently and was a sought after dinner speaker.

He was also on various committees associated with his position as Principal of the college

In 1984 he retired and the following year was awarded the OBE for services to Agricultural Education.

During and after his working career he held an impressive list of important official and voluntary positions in agriculture and education. Some of these were:

President of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society.

President of the Agricultural Education Association.

President of the Agricultural Staffs.

Vice President of the Yorkshire Federation of Young Farmers Clubs.

President of the Ebor and district Young Farmers Club.

President of the Yorkshire British Friesian Breeders Club.

Vice President and Chairman of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society.

Chairman of the Agricultural advisory committee for Yorks and Humberside Assn. For Further and Higher Education.

Also Chairman of the Examinations Committee.

Past chairman of the Institute of Biology and Agricultural Sciences Division.

Past chairman of the Yorkshire branch of the National Milk Records Office.

Member of the Committee for Nat. Assn. Agricultural Education Officers.

Member of the Joint Committee for National Awards in Agricultural subjects.

Member of Ministry of Agriculture Northern Region advisory panel.

Member of British Council team reporting on agricultural education in France And West Germany.

Member of Council of the Institute of Biology.

Member of the Technical and Development Committee Royal Agricultural Soc,

Member of the Executive Committee and council of the Yorkshire Agricultural Soc.



Member of the National Milk Records Advisory Committee for Milk Marketing Board.

Examiner and Assessor National awards in Agricultural subjects.

He travelled extensively in Europe and the Middle East studying and advising on Agricultural Education.

He was a regular lecturer at the International Centre for Agricultural Education in Berne, Switzerland.

He was also a consultant to UNESCO on agricultural education.

He was involved with the Great Yorkshire Show for many years, firstly as a commentator for the cattle parade in the main ring during the three days of the show, then as treasurer, chairman and in 1981 he was President of the show.

He continued to be involved with the Great Yorkshire Show amongst many other organisations until his death at the age of 84 in 2004.”



Being presented to the Duchess of Kent at the Great Yorkshire Show 1987

The above career information is courtesy of Jenny Rhodes. (Daughter)

## Acknowledgement

I would like to sincerely thank Lance Gilling's daughters Jenny and Hilary for patiently sharing the information about his life, career and achievements and for allowing me to access the family photos and press cuttings etc, detailing the fascinating story of life of Lancelot Cecil Gilling.

Also to Rosemary Gilling and Andrew for sharing their information and local knowledge of the Gilling family of over a century of involvement with the community of our East Brent Parish.

Also thanks to Rosemary for proof reading this article and correcting my typo's etc.

Also to the following sources etc.

FindMyPast

The Genealogist

Family Search

Wikipedia

Forces War Records

and various Agricultural College websites.