

More Carnations - and mushrooms 1964 - 1970

Meanwhile, Ryewater Carnations were thriving. George's creative life was developing once again, and his catalogue of large-scale symphonic works growing, thanks to his daily routine of composition. His PTSD symptoms were improving thanks to his daily therapeutic routines, and he and Nancy were able to focus on building their business. After the first couple of years of trial and error with different plants, different varieties and different markets, they began to specialise in tomatoes and carnations for Covent Garden, the biggest flower and vegetable market in the country. With his usual obsessive thoroughness, George investigated every aspect of the business. He would travel to London on the same train as his boxes of carnations, following them as they went, and watching every stage of the journey. Who handled them? Were they unpacked before the auction? Who looked at them? Who bought them? The Covent Garden market was an open, competitive auction, where produce was offered for sale and sold to the highest bidder. The best blooms made the best prices, and there was a limited number of growers competing for the best prices. The blooms from the best growers would sell as soon as they were offered, without even an inspection, because the regular buyers trusted that the best growers would offer only consistent high quality. Reputation was everything, and George learned that he had to grade his produce carefully. He had to be brutally honest when labelling boxes before they were despatched. If low grade blooms were wrongly labelled and sold unseen, even once, it could damage a reputation that had been built up over years.



Chrysanthemums at Ryewater

Prices at the market became a dominant topic of conversation, as they soon learned that although prices might fluctuate widely from day to day – doubling or halving from one day to the next was not uncommon - nevertheless there were underlying patterns which had to be considered. George became keen to find out exactly how the growers who obtained the highest prices could consistently produce such fine blooms. He returns from the merchant showed what prices he obtained, but he could only find out what prices everyone else was getting by watching the market in action. In the early days he would travel to Convent Garden market frequently to watch his flowers being sold, and before long he identified and befriended the men who obtained the best prices. They would sit and talk in the cafes, and talk about new varieties, new greenhouses, or new watering systems. After a year or so of such conversations with one top man, George enquired as to what it was in this man's system that produced blooms which were so clearly superior to the rest. Quality was a complex matter and comprised balancing many characteristics to get the best overall quality. Bright and uniform colour, evenly formed petals, well-shaped and proportional foliage, a strong stem of the right length, the right stage of maturity, and of course the all-important fragrance which could only be retained if some of the other qualities were sacrificed. Flowers had to be 'awake' when they were offered for sale, rather than 'sleepy', so they had to be picked as late as possible the previous day, packed carefully, and of course they had to be free from pests or mildews. Growing flowers was an art as much as a science, and success or failure in any of these criteria could make the difference of a few pennies per bloom or maybe a shilling per dozen. They might send 50 dozen to market, so those shillings could add up to a few hundreds of pounds over a year, and for George and Nancy every penny counted, so they wanted to know how to attract those additional pennies.



Carnation seedlings

George's new friend consistently managed to get all the market criteria just right, or at least, significantly better than everyone else and he was happy to reveal the key to his method. His answer was not at all what George expected, but it had a significant effect on the rest of George's life. His grower friend took care to get the known variables of variety, temperature, humidity, fertility and timing as close to ideal as he could manage, and he trained his staff of seedsmen and pickers and packers very carefully. So far, so obvious, but none of that was enough. The most important factor was simple, if surprising: *The seeds had to be blessed*. The blessing was done not by the grower himself, but by individuals who had a special talent. He employed a married couple, Mr and Mrs Munroe, who both had this special talent, to do the job. He could only obtain the best blooms and the best prices from seed which had been blessed by the Munroes.

George was naturally sceptical, but he was also open-minded. His creative life as a composer, and his first-hand experience in Nancy's treatment of his PTSD, had already led him into esoteric areas of the mind. He was explicit in quoting Carl Jung as being the single greatest influence on his music, and he had explored unusual states of consciousness twenty years before, when he was inspired to write his first opera *Iernin*. That opera had made his name, so he was no stranger to paranormal phenomena. He recognised that it had power in the real world, having had some success with dowsing for water. Nancy's



George in the chrysanthemum house.

therapeutic regime for his PTSD comprised several unorthodox medications and treatments, and he judged each one on its merits, adopting those that were beneficial and discarding those that were not. The revelation from his friend that a blessing was necessary to produce the best blooms was surprising, but not implausible. He told Nancy what he had learned, and they decided that they should try it for themselves.

Mr and Mrs Munroe were contacted and invited to visit on the day following the next delivery of seeds. Terms were agreed – they were to be paid so much per day, in cash, plus travel expenses. The day arrived, and after a few preliminaries and payment in advance, the Munroes set to work. The seeds were delivered in brown paper bags of several thousand seeds, each bag weighing about one pound. A dozen bags were brought in to the

Ryewater kitchen on trays from the packing shed and put

on a sideboard. The kitchen table was cleared and wiped clean, each bag was opened, and the seeds were tipped out onto the table, one bag at a time. Mrs Munro would then lay both her hands on the pile of seeds and gently spread them out widely and thinly until they were evenly distributed and almost all of them visible – i.e. no seeds were covering up other seeds. She would pause and study them closely, sometimes

leaning forward, but mostly surveying them from a distance. Her eye would fix on one area, she would lean in and look closely, and with the end of one finger she would reach in and pick up one particular seed. She would examine it, and then put it to one side on a saucer. That was a bad seed and had to be removed before the blessing could be performed. She repeated the process until she was happy that there were no



George and Nancy on the Channel Ferry

more bad seeds in the batch, then she stepped back, and Mr Munroe took over. He used both hands to gather the seeds back into a mound and then using a small brush and a crumb tray which he had brought with him, he carefully swept up all the seeds and put them back into their bag. After checking the table for stray seeds, the bag was sealed up and placed on the table in front of him. He laid both hands on it, closed his

eyes, and quietly gave his blessing. They repeated the procedure with the next bag.

Nancy described it as an essentially a Christian benediction, asking for God's help, followed by a blessing confirming that the seed was now 'clean' and would thrive under divine protection. No signs of the cross were made, but after a short pause, the blessed bags were placed on a separate table, before being carried back to the packing shed when all bags had been blessed. Nancy told how she tested the Munroes by

covertly putting an unblessed bag on the side table with the blessed bags. When it was time to carry the bags back to the shed, Mrs Munroe stopped her, gave her a hard stare, and removed the offending bag.

George and Nancy kept track of the seeds which had been blessed by



Carnation blooms

the Munroes, and after a few growing cycles, they became convinced that their results were superior to those from the seeds which had not been blessed. George insisted that the facts spoke for themselves, and he tracked each batch through planting, picking and marketing, and compared the prices obtained for each batch. His only test was whether the blessed seeds obtained better prices than the unblessed seeds, and he had no doubt that the method worked. Before long they decided to try doing the blessings for themselves. They cut the Monroe's visits by half, and carried out the same procedure themselves, comparing the results in a series of tables and calculations. From the figures they obtained, it seemed that both George and Nancy's blessing had a significant positive effect, although Nancy's blessing was rather more effective than George's.

This discovery of this talent, combined with the indisputable beneficial effect of Nancy's healing on George's mental struggle with his PTSD, and her growing knowledge and practice of psychology, sustained them both for the next 30 years. Nancy began to practice her healing techniques on others, developing a range of skills including radiesthesia, homeopathy, and in particular healing through prayer. (A full account of this aspect of their lives is given elsewhere in this series.) The discovery did however have one negative effect. After they discovered that they could bless the seeds themselves and obtain measurable results, they dispensed with the services of the Munroes, who were so displeased that Mrs Munroe cursed them before she left, and thereafter George and Nancy would often blame the Munroe's curse for any misfortune which they suffered.

These beliefs can be interpreted in many ways, from many points of view, and it is not the intention of this account to judge these practices in any way. Readers must make their own mind up, and it is a characteristic of paranormal phenomenon that there is a general tendency either to embrace them as indisputable or to ridicule them as hocus-pocus, often with very little middle ground. These aspects of



A mushroom house

George and Nancy's religious and spiritual life are simply related as objectively as possible. It may be noted that George was not alone among composers in his esoteric belief in the paranormal, and that the blessing of seed is a common practice in many societies, including rural communities in the contemporary USA.

Ryewater Carnations thrived until the early 1960s, when air freight killed off the domestic market for carnations, which were then flown in from the Channel Islands and Africa. For

over 10 years they had to battle with plant pests and diseases, drought, heatwaves, storms that destroyed greenhouses, broken down machines, and fluctuating markets, so they had no choice but to be adaptable. When the carnation business collapsed due to competition from the Channel Islands and Africa, the carnation houses were quickly modified to grow mushrooms. George spent days in the local library reading up about modern and traditional methods of mushroom cultivation, and before long sales of Ryewater Mushrooms were booming. They supplied local greengrocers, supermarkets and restaurants, as well as Covent Garden.

By the late 1960s, land prices and property had risen sharply, and by 1970, George and Nancy saw a chance of a fresh start in the music business. George was 57, his mental health had improved to the point where he could handle most social situations, and he was tiring of the heavy manual work associated with market gardening. Thanks to Norman Fulton, to John Ogdon and to Charles Groves, his music had not quite vanished from the public consciousness. Although his accessible work was still derided in academic circles and at BBC Broadcasting House, George decided that there were enough positive signs to make it worth another try, and they made a plan to move back to the metropolis. They put Ryewater Gardens on the market and were able to sell at a price which allowed them to buy a third-floor flat at a good address at 199 Clarence Gate Gardens, just off Baker Street, close by Regents Park in London.

In 1969 George finished the full score of his 9th Symphony at Ryewater Nursery, then he packed up 'safety copies' of all his music into two large cabin trunks, which were left in store in the strong room of the bank in Sherborne, there not being room for them in the new flat. He sold the car and the van, rehomed the cat, and headed for London with a bounce in his step to seek his fortune for the second time. George and Nancy's roller coaster of a life was set to take another sharp turn.



Ryewater Gardens



George at Weymouth 1966

Dates

<i>John Socman</i>	1951
Symphony No 6	1956
Symphony No 7	1959
Symphony No 8	1961
Piano Concerto No 1	1963
Piano Concerto No 2	1964
<i>African Shrine</i>	1966
Piano Concerto No 3	1968
<i>Charade</i>	1969
Symphony No 9	1969



After work 1952



In the sitting room 1966