Three sociologists are central to our account of British sociology and policies of social reconstruction. These are Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford, and Sybella Gurney, who developed complex and enduring personal partnerships. Geddes was the dominant intellectual figure of the trio, influencing a whole generation of writers in sociology, geography, urban planning, and biology. Branford was the faithful disciple and proselytizer, initially a “son” and later a “brother” to Geddes, developing his theoretical and political ideas and giving them organizational form in a sociological society. Gurney met Geddes and Branford through her work on cooperative housing and garden cities. She eventually married Branford and contributed substantially to his ideas and to the ongoing development of the Sociological Society. These interpersonal relations solidified Geddes, Branford, and Gurney as the intellectual leaders and organizers of a larger collaborative circle of writers and practical reformers committed to a particular version of sociology and social reconstruction.

In 1932, the year of his death aged seventy-seven, Patrick Geddes remained the energetic and dominating presence that he had been throughout his life. Wiry in build, yet agile and with piercing eyes, he was also somewhat shaggy and disheveled in appearance: due in large part to his beard and his trademark long hair, parted in the middle, both once dark and reddish. His appearance, perhaps deliberately cultivated, was that of the eccentric professor. In lectures and conversation alike he spoke in a continuous and rapid flow that not infrequently became an indistinct mumble as his disquisition turned into active thought and reflection. At other times, carried by his own enthusiasm and passion, he would burst into high volume and electrifying ferocity. Geddes was sociable and outgoing in company and
could be both witty and mischievous, though his enthusiasm and intellectual certainty tended to cow, or to alienate, those who disagreed or misunderstood him. He was, however, a charismatic figure, attracting much support and loyalty, and he was surrounded by disciples who were all too willing to proselytize on his behalf and to abase themselves to his needs.

This devotion he received from others was an essential condition for his work. Geddes was himself chaotic and disorganized. He produced a constant stream of ideas, but had neither the inclination nor the discipline to work them out systematically or in detail. A man of enthusiasms, he flitted from one to another and worked on each only so long as he felt that he was contributing some shaping or directive insight. He was invariably interested in the next project rather than the current one, his mind racing ahead to future endeavors, and he left his disciples to undertake the systematic and detailed work that he eschewed for himself. Some of these disciples, as a result, became closely associated with his ideas and innovations, claiming that all they wrote had been derived from or inspired by Geddes. In practical matters—especially financial ones—Geddes would take on commitments or undertake expenditure with little thought for how the costs were to be met or how they were to mesh with other commitments. In these matters, too, he relied on his devoted followers to sort out his practical arrangements and deliver him from disaster: though he rarely acknowledged their role or recognized their efforts as necessary. His commitment to his projects blinded him to the chaos that he frequently caused.

Agnostic about ultimate religious truths, his interest in religious systems was, nevertheless, as enthusiastic as his interest in scientific projects. He had a deep sense of the importance of spirituality to human affairs and of the contribution that the search for spiritual meaning could make to social reconstruction and moral renewal. Thus, he explored the variety of religious systems of the Victorian and Edwardian new age: Theosophy and Bahá’ísm, for example, he saw as active centers of exploration into the nature of human existence in the world.

When Victor Branford had died at sixty-six, just two years before Geddes, he had only recently lost the energy and dynamism that had previously sustained him. He was short—around 5 feet 5 inches—slight in build, with blue-grey eyes, sharp features, and, in his youth, reddish brown hair. He had been left rather frail and delicate by a bout of consumption in his thirties, but was full of energy in all he did. He was regarded by many who met him as Scottish: he had spent twenty-five years of his life there and must have spoken with a noticeable Edinburgh accent. He was nervous and rather shy: feeling tense in public, he smoked and had the habit of fingering his neatly trimmed beard and biting his moustache. Despite his frailty and nervousness, he threw himself wholeheartedly into a series of major ventures.
Branford’s nervousness was the result of an enduring sense of insecurity acquired during a childhood in which he learned to apply himself diligently in his work as a way of proving himself to others. Emotionally, he was rather repressed and he exhibited a somewhat stern self-discipline. He came across as dry and hardheaded, and in public he would probably not be mistaken for anything other than the accountant that he was. Despite the tension he felt in public, he was comfortable and confident in business meetings and at meetings of the Sociological Society, where his expertise gave him a great sense of authority.

There was something of a division between Branford’s public and domestic demeanor. In the city he conformed to current dress style and wore pinstripes and top hat, while in the country he preferred ragged tweeds. Indeed, he was completely relaxed at home in the country. To friends and houseguests he offered courteous hospitality and could be both witty and relaxed. He was, however, no bon vivant, preferring plain and unpretentious fare. The fond nickname used by those close to him, “Veris,” was perhaps a play on his middle name, Verasis, that may have reflected both its root meaning of “true” and a love for the spring. He enjoyed country life and, like his father, was an accomplished horseman. He was a good dancer and an effective skater, winning skating competitions even late in life. He enjoyed golf, and his final home was conveniently located with private access to the first hole of the Hastings golf course. He was somewhat frugal in his personal habits: he had the habit of reusing old sheets of notepaper and of cramming his messages onto every spare corner of paper. He was a competent typist for professional matters, but his personal correspondence was written by hand in an almost indecipherable scrawl. In later life he employed both a personal secretary and a typist who worked from an office in his Hastings home.

Branford had an immense attraction to ideas and intellectual concerns and had a lively inner intellectual life. He became animated in scholarly discussions, enthused by intellectual debate far more than by domestic matters or business concerns. His reflection on his accountancy work was concerned more with its intellectual implications than with the practical tasks undertaken. He was, however, far from eloquent in his writing. His poetic and allusive style failed to convey his intellectual insights: indeed, it tended to obscure them. It was as if he felt the need constantly to demonstrate the seriousness and cultural respectability of his arguments, even if this be at the expense of clarity. His intellectual output was also marked by an over-developed sense of loyalty to Geddes that reined in his own originality. He tended to present his own insights as mere glosses on those of his mentor and would effusively praise even the trivial or insignificant remarks of the latter. He perhaps transferred to Geddes some of the feelings that he was unable wholeheartedly to express toward his father.
Branford was a rationalist but not a secularist, holding firmly to the importance of the social role of religion. Though he was probably not a believer in the conventional Christian idea of God, he was deeply spiritual and had a great respect for the religious beliefs of others. Espousal of a spiritual belief was seen as an essential escape from the degradation of human life that he found in contemporary industrial civilization. He regarded himself as a man of vision and thought of his vision as something implanted deeply within himself and as providing his vocation in life. He had listened to the inner voice that had called him to sociology, but he remained, perhaps, agnostic about the ultimate source of that voice.

Sybella Gurney, who had married Victor Branford in 1910, died four years before him after a long illness. At 5 feet 6 inches she was just slightly taller than he and seven years younger. She had a dark complexion, brown hair, and brown eyes. Lewis Mumford (1982, 261) described her as an “ample, buttery sort of woman.” From an early age she had lived an independent life. Though she may have been intimately involved with Henry Vivian during the time they were planning and building the Brentham housing estate in Ealing, West London, she lived alone until her marriage to Branford in her mid-forties. She seems to have been thoughtful and kindly toward others, with a “smiling wit” and a “gracious personality” (Vivian 1927). She enjoyed art, games, and dancing.

Gurney provided the intellectual partnership that Branford had not found in his first marriage. Though enthused by Sybella’s quick mind, he seems also to have been exasperated by what he regarded as a certain wooliness in her thought. Sybella did, however, make a number of important contributions to their shared intellectual enterprise. She was always the more practical of the two, being especially concerned with housing and community reforms and less likely to engage in wide-ranging intellectual disquisition. Nevertheless, they seem to have had a comfortable and happy life together. She was undoubtedly fond of him, as he was of her. Both enjoyed the garden that they established at their Hastings home.

Gurney was comfortable and welcoming at home though not, perhaps, conventionally domestic. She was attached to their two adopted sons but did not provide them with an intense mothering. In their young childhood the boys had a governess and were later sent away to boarding school. She suffered her long illness during their early adolescent years and the boys were dependent on the secretary, housekeeper, and relatives for routine care while she was abroad in hospital and Victor Branford was traveling on business.

Conventional religion was important to Gurney and she was, like her father, of a High Church persuasion. She remained an active Anglican throughout her life and was committed to the social role of the Church. Her thought and practice brought her close to the Christian socialism that
was emerging in the early part of the twentieth century. While living in Richmond she was a member of its Christian Social Council, and in Hastings she joined the Christian Social Service Centre, becoming secretary of its Housing Committee. Victor Branford regarded the refusal of her parish church to display an elaborate memorial tablet after her death as a significant affront to her memory and her Christian beliefs.

PATRICK GEDDES'S EARLY LIFE

The Geddes family originated in the Scottish lowlands, but Patrick's grandfather, a merchant, had settled in the Highlands. Thus it was that Alexander Geddes, Patrick's father, was born a highlander and brought up as a Gaelic speaker. The family moved to Glasgow when the grandfather's business collapsed at the end of the Napoleonic War, and both grandparents were to die there in a cholera epidemic. Alexander was left in the care of an elder brother and joined the Black Watch as soon as he was seventeen. He served for thirty years, joining as a drummer but rising to the rank of Sergeant Major. He refused further promotion, but when he retired to serve in the reserves—the Perthshire Rifles—he took the rank of Captain and may have been on royal service at Balmoral (Stephen 2008, 3, 19). Alexander married Janet Stevenson, from lowland Airdrie, who worked as a regimental school teacher during her husband's military career.

All the children except Patrick had been born abroad while Alexander was on army service. Robert was born in Dublin in 1839, Jessie (known as “Mousie” and the one daughter) was born in Corfu in 1841, and John (known as “Jack”) was born in Malta in 1844. A further boy died in infancy two years later aboard a troopship to Bermuda. Patrick (always known as “Pat”) was born in 1854 in Ballater, Aberdeenshire, after his father's retirement and shortly before the family settled in Perth. Patrick's brothers were soon to leave home: Jack went to New Zealand in 1860 as a coffee and spice merchant, while Robert went to Mexico in 1864 to work for the London Bank of Mexico and South America (Stephen 2004, 24).

The absence of the older boys meant that Patrick developed an especially close relationship with his father. Alexander was an Elder in the Free Kirk and as such, he took his religion seriously and gave Patrick a strict religious upbringing. The Sunday bible reading bored Patrick, and there was little music in the house. It was through his father, however, that he was introduced to the library and the world of books, and he became a voracious reader. It was through his father, too, that he acquired his love for the countryside. His father enjoyed country rambles, and it was on walks with his father that Patrick developed a devotion to natural history, a knowledge of gardening, and a penchant for field observation. This combination of
books and natural history set the course of Patrick’s later career and shaped his own views on education. His main childhood enjoyment was to take Saturday rambles in the countryside with friends such as Harry and David Barker, often following the Tay valley from Perth into Dundee. It was in Dundee when in his late teens that he seems to have met Martin White, striking up a friendship that was to last a lifetime and was to prove crucial both for his career and for the development of sociology in Britain.

Patrick attended Perth Academy, where he was a good but not outstanding student. On leaving school he followed in the footsteps of his brother Robert and took employment as a clerk in the Perth branch of the National Bank of Scotland. This was largely to please his parents, who wished to see him enter a safe and respectable career. In due course, however, he was able to persuade his father that he should be permitted to study botany. For three years he followed a course of self-education and in 1874 he entered Edinburgh University. The university proved uncongenial, and after just one week he decided to transfer to London to study in the laboratories of Thomas Huxley at the School of Mines in South Kensington.

While studying in London, Geddes made two trips abroad in the period 1878–79. Seconded to a marine research establishment at Roscoff in Brittany, he visited Paris and encountered the ideas of Frédéric Le Play that were to become the cornerstone of his own theoretical approach to sociology. Later in 1879, he visited his brother Robert in Mexico, where a period of blindness, brought on by intensive microscope work, led him to invent a method of thinking with the aid of folded paper. Thereafter, Geddes was constantly to be found articulating Le Play’s ideas while folding and unfolding sheets of paper.

In 1881, by which time his brother Robert had retired back to Britain, Geddes took up an appointment as a demonstrator in botany and lecturer in zoology in the Edinburgh University Medical School, remaining there until 1888.4 He was an indifferent lecturer, often mumbling into the blackboard, but he inspired his students with his enthusiasm for his subjects. He began to write on scientific matters, presenting a paper on statistics to the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Later in that year he was invited by Martin White to give a lecture to the Dundee Naturalists’ Society, of which Martin and his father had been founder members. White himself had previously presented a paper on research into electricity based on his visit to the Paris Electrical Exhibition (Macdonald 2000, 136).

In Edinburgh, Geddes became friendly with James Oliphant, the head of a girls’ school who was interested in social issues and drew him into practical social work. It was through this that he met Oliphant’s sister-in-law Anna Morton, the daughter of Liverpool merchant Frazer Morton. The
relationship blossomed, and in 1886, following a trip to Greece with Martin White, he and Anna were married at the Liverpool home of the Mortons. They lived initially in Geddes's lodgings in Princes Street before moving into an apartment at 6 James Court in the slum district of the Lawnmarket, where they remained until their move to Ramsay Gardens in 1893. Geddes and Anna had three children: Norah was born in 1887, Alasdair in 1891, and Arthur in 1895. They were brought up in relaxed if chaotic circumstances. Geddes treated them as little adults, talking to them of intellectual matters from an early age. Thanks to Anna, music became important for the whole family and the children played instruments in family recitals.

GEDDES AND THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

Geddes never completed his undergraduate degree, and he was unsuccessful in the applications he made for professorships. He applied for the chair in natural history at Edinburgh University in 1882, the foundation chair in botany at University College Dundee in 1884, and the chair in botany at Edinburgh in 1888. Recognizing that Geddes was unlikely to secure an academic post by conventional means, Martin White used funds made available by the death of his father to endow a chair of botany for him at the University of Dundee in 1888 (Macdonald 2000, 143; 2004a, 20). The university had been desperate for funds and agreed to an arrangement under which Geddes was able to spend the bulk of his time on other work in Edinburgh. Living in Newport during his summer teaching term, Geddes could spend the rest of the year in Edinburgh.

In Edinburgh, Geddes set out to promote his ideas through scientific Summer Schools in zoology and botany for teachers and a general public. He became engaged in literary ventures and helped to set up the Old Edinburgh School of Art in order to contribute to a Scottish cultural renaissance of arts and crafts. He also set up student housing cooperatives near Edinburgh University (Leonard and Mackenzie 1989) and became involved in providing practical relief for Armenian refugees in Cyprus.

Martin White's support was crucial to many of Geddes's educational activities. He increasingly took on the role of patron or sponsor in an attempt to shape Geddes's career. He had been elected MP for Forfarshire in 1895, having failed to gain the nomination in the previous year. What could have been an important national base for Geddes and his associates was short-lived, however, as White was forced to resign the following year because of rumors concerning his private life. These rumors never became a matter of public comment, but concerned a longstanding affair with a woman he had known since the age of twelve. The woman—clergyman's daughter Helen (“Ella”) Grant—became pregnant and refused the abortion
remedies of gin and ergot proposed by White. Ella brought a court action alleging breach of a promise to marry her, but White proposed an out of court settlement and the matter was hushed up. White's political career, however, was in ruins, and he began to spend more of his time in London.

From 1897, Geddes and his family had been spending more and more time away from Edinburgh. While working at Dundee, Geddes took up residence during his summer teaching terms in Newport-on-Tay, across the river and to the south of the city. When not teaching, he spent much of his time at Crauford, a country house at Lasswade just outside Edinburgh. From 1899 to 1900 he spent much time abroad, making two long visits to the United States and being heavily involved in plans for the Paris Exposition. Both of his parents died shortly before what turned out to be the last of the regular Edinburgh Summer Schools. This detachment from Edinburgh was to continue, and from 1900 to 1905 Geddes barely visited Edinburgh at all.

By the turn of the century, Geddes's butterfly enthusiasms, his willingness to take on projects without any consideration for their financial implications, and his persistent interventions in practical administrative matters for which he had no aptitude were leading many of his followers and supporters to lose patience with him and they realized that his aspirations would have to be carried on in his name despite him rather than through him. A further summer meeting was held in Edinburgh in 1903, but this was a mere one-off event. His most successful venture was the launch by Victor Branford of the Sociological Society in 1903. Their educational efforts, however, were soon overshadowed by the establishment of sociology teaching at the London School of Economics. Martin White had been persuaded by Branford to finance a chair in sociology at the School, seeing this as a way of launching Geddes onto the London scene and establishing his vision of sociology firmly in the academy. Geddes, however, made a mess of the interview and the trial lecture, and the appointment went instead to Leonard Hobhouse. Indeed, there is some suggestion that White may have come to see the need for a more philosophical approach to sociology than that pursued by Geddes and that he may not have been unduly disappointed at the outcome of the appointment process (Macdonald 2004a, 25).

Geddes was by this time heavily involved in practical issues of urban planning. In response to an invitation from the Dunfermline Carnegie Trust, both he and the landscape gardener Thomas Mawson submitted proposals to remodel Pittencriffe Park and its surroundings in Andrew Carnegie's hometown of Dunfermline. Geddes built on this experience with a series of planning exhibitions in Britain and abroad. Though the exhibitions were highly praised and many civic leaders expressed interest in hosting one, with the exception of a display shipped to India (see chapter 3), the exhibitions effectively ended with the outbreak of World War I in July 1914.
Geddes had been predicting a European war for many years, seeing it as an inevitable expression of the inherent “Wardom” of the modern age. His writings were increasingly concerned with warfare, but he also faced personal tragedies as a result of the war. He twice traveled to India with Anna and it was during the second visit, in 1917, that he received news that his son Alasdair, undoubtedly his favorite, had been killed in action (Branford 1918), just a few weeks before Anna died in an Indian hospital of enteric fever following dysentery. Geddes was distraught at the double loss and threw himself into a flurry of planning commissions for urban authorities in India. He returned to Scotland in 1919 but only to retire from his Dundee chair in order to take up the post of Professor of Civics and Sociology at the University of Bombay. Simultaneously, he accepted a commission from the Zionist Federation to design a new University of Jerusalem. Geddes remained at Bombay from 1919 to 1923, but in 1924 he shifted his attention back to university reform and started the Collège des Écossais, as a hall of residence for the university at Montpellier.

In 1928 he married for a second time, to Lilian Brown, a wealthy corn-flour heiress from Paisley who had attended his summer meetings during the 1890s and whose father had helped finance some of Geddes’s early business ventures. Lilian was some fifteen years younger than Patrick and had begun a correspondence with him in 1921. No doubt one reason for his attraction to her was her willingness to put her money at the disposal of his projects. The marriage was met with disapproval from his children and much consternation among his friends. Nevertheless, Lilian’s money proved useful to the causes and her house in Netherton Grove, Chelsea, became his London base. Although Geddes had turned down a knighthood in 1912 “for democratic reasons,” he did accept one in 1932. He died that same year on April 17, in Montpellier.

THE EARLY YEARS OF VICTOR BRANFORD

The Branfords were descended from a long line of Norfolk farmers, though Victor’s grandfather had been a miller and brewer, and his father, William Catton Branford, was a veterinary surgeon. William trained in London and began his career in Oundle, Northamptonshire, where he set up household with his deceased wife’s sister Ann Kitchen, and had five surviving children: Mary (known as “Mollie”) was the oldest, followed by Victor (born in September 1863 and known as “Vic”), Lionel (known in childhood as “Willie”), John (known as “Jack”), and Benchara (known as “Ben”). All seem to have been unaware of their probable illegitimacy. William and his family moved to Edinburgh in 1869 when he took up an academic post in the veterinary college. Conflict with his students and the college authorities led
to his dismissal and for a time the family returned south, where his common
law wife died young. William Branford returned to Edinburgh in 1874, but
two years later he took a post as Colonial Veterinary Surgeon in the Cape
Colony (now part of South Africa), leaving his young family in Edinburgh
in the care of a stern, Norfolk-born housekeeper, Miss Sarah Armes. Mollie
may have been expected to help look after her younger brothers when they
were not away at school, but her dislike for housework meant that there was
little love lost between her and Miss Armes. William Branford returned to
Edinburgh after six years in South Africa, following his imprisonment for
fraud, and he spent the rest of his life racing, gambling, and evading the
numerous creditors created in his property and business deals.

Victor Branford's childhood and those of his siblings could not have
been easy. Their father was overbearing but distracted by dubious mon‑
ey‑making ventures, though he was undoubtedly a scientific inspiration and
was held in affection by his boys. Any sense of security must have come from
school. Victor began as a boarder at Oundle School in the years 1874–75,
where he won a Classics and English prize, but he spent most of his school
years (1875–1881) at Daniel Stewart's College in Edinburgh. All the boys
grew up with intellectual interests and did well at school. Both Ben and
Jack also studied at Daniel Stewart's College and Edinburgh University. At
the college, Ben was the 1882 Medalist in mathematics, the 1884 Dux and
Gold Medalist in mathematics, and winner of a £100 college bursary. Jack
won a scholarship for free education and board and became 1884 Medalist
in mathematics. He played as a forward in the school rugby team and in
later life was an active member of the Old Boy's Association. Ben studied
mathematics at university and won the First Class mathematics prize in the
advanced class of 1888. Jack graduated with a Distinction in 1890, after
which he immediately entered theological training and achieved a First
Class in the preliminary theological examinations. Lionel studied at the
Royal High School. He entered Edinburgh University to study mathemat‑
ics but transferred to theology, also attaining First Class in the preliminary
examinations. He became a deacon and curate in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and
Duns before completing a degree course at Durham in 1894. Mollie seems
to have attended pre‑university classes at St George's Hall, run by the Edin‑
burgh Ladies Education Association, but did not go on to university.

Victor Branford appears to have been a star student. He entered the
arts faculty of the university to study history in 1881, a year after his father's
imprisonment and return from South Africa, but he soon switched to natu‑
ral science. He was awarded the Certificate of Merit in the junior class for
1882 and gained a Distinction in the bursary examinations. He graduated
in 1886 with the distinction of an honors award (Anon. 1888). This was
the year in which his father's problems with his debtors became pressing
and Victor, as the oldest son, was closely drawn into his father's difficulties. He jointly signed with his father a promissory note to repay the principal debts, but his income was such that he was unable to meet the commitment. In 1889 he was named as a founding director of his father's South Africa nitrates company, but he was unable to meet the cost of the qualification shares. Fortunately, he lost no money in the collapse of the company, but he was committed to helping his father to repay the shareholders' losses. Victor's income at this time came from private tuition in science for students of the preliminary medical examinations, and he produced some primers for these students (Branford 1888, 1889). Mylne and Campbell WS, the lawyers for William's creditors, reported of Victor that "The poor fellow seems to have a great struggle. . . . He seems to be earning a livelihood from literary work of a very precarious kind." Referring to his primers, Victor informed Mylne and Campbell that "the business operations into which I have recently entered have turned out the reverse of remunerative." Early in 1890, he found some employment as a sub-editor on the Edinburgh Evening Dispatch, founded a few years earlier by the Scotsman, and under legal advice aimed at preventing his own bankruptcy he entered into an arrangement to covenant one-half of his salary each month to pay off the father's debts. Payments were made for the first month but the proprietors of the Dispatch disapproved of an employee being in debt and terminated his employment after a mere two months. Victor took great care to shield his brothers from any knowledge of the true extent of his father's financial problems and even in adult life Benchara was unaware of the difficulties his brother experienced in dealing with them and looked back fondly at his maligned and much-beloved "Pater." For Victor, however, it must almost have come as a relief when his father died in 1891.

BRANFORD'S EARLY CAREER AND FIRST MARRIAGE

By the time his father died, Victor Branford had come to know and admire Patrick Geddes, whose lectures in zoology and botany Branford had attended as an undergraduate. He became a member of the group of acolytes around Geddes and he taught on the Edinburgh Summer Schools from 1892 to 1895, initially covering history and then science. He had also, by this time, acquired some journalistic work for the Dundee Advertiser, most probably acquired with the help of Geddes and Martin White, the latter being an associate of Sir John Leng, the paper's owner. Branford's circumstances improved to the point at which he was able to spend some time traveling in France, Switzerland, and Italy.

It was in Dundee that Branford met Bess Stewart. Born Matilda Elizabeth Smith in Aston in 1853, she was the daughter of Isaac Smith
(1822–1868), the manager of Mason’s steel pen works and nephew of Josiah Mason himself. Her husband, James Farquharson Stewart, had been a journalist and editor of the Dundee Advertiser until his death in 1891. Branford seems to have taken on some of Stewart’s editorial work, working from Stewart’s office, and, it was through this work that he came to know Bess and her daughter Elsie. Branford was attracted to the young Elsie, whom he taught to ride a horse, but felt that his poor health—he appears to have suffered from asthma or TB—precluded a relationship. However, Bess, ten years older than he, developed an affection for him and, having chosen security over love and sex, he proposed marriage to Bess. They were married in 1897 at the London West End register office, with two unknown clerks acting as witnesses. Neither of Bess’s two sons from her marriage to Stewart—Martyn and Arthur—were present at the wedding.16 Her daughter Elsie was also absent, having married in Argentina to Adam Goodfellow, later a business associate of Branford’s in Argentina, in the same year that Elizabeth married Branford.17

By 1896, Branford had already decided on a change of career from journalism to business. Despite his unfortunate early experience as a director of his father’s company, Branford seems to have had an aptitude for business, and the security provided by Bess’s money allowed him to join with his student friend John Ross, a qualified accountant, to form a partnership trading as Ross, Branford & Co in Edinburgh and Westminster. Branford specialized in corporate finance, insolvency, and restructuring (see chapter 7).

In London, the Branfords lived for a time in an apartment at 29 King Street, Portman Square. The address on his marriage certificate, 28 Victoria Street, was his business address, and Branford is known to have slept overnight in his offices when working. Geddes was a frequent visitor to the Branford home, generally arriving uninvited and often staying overnight. Bess tired of this intrusion into her life, and Branford bought Rowan Cottage, in White Lion Road on Amersham Common, an isolated part of Buckinghamshire. The Branfords lived alone in the cottage, but Victor spent much of his time commuting between Edinburgh and London and traveling on business. His interests soon took him to Latin America and he spent much time on business in the United States. What time he had free in Britain, and much of his free time during his travels, was devoted to sociology, and it was in the early years of the century that he formed the Sociological Society and the Sociological Papers (see chapter 3).

Victor Branford’s travels abroad put considerable strain on his marriage. Bess was often at home on her own and feeling lonely. She was, as her brother-in-law Ben described her, “a once beautiful woman with gentle, sympathetic manners and a loving generous heart” but was “worn and weary”
from nursing her first husband before his death and looking after her drunken mother. Rural isolation was, perhaps, the final trigger for her own resort to whiskey. Domestic life for Branford became ever more fraught because of Bess’s drinking bouts. His brother Lionel settled Bess in a cottage, The Nook, in Stoke, Hampshire, close to his own home in Lye Binley, hoping that he could care for her and resolve her problems. Seeking a divorce, Branford took advantage of his business interests in the United States to establish a purely nominal residence in the small but bustling gold rush town of Goldfield, Nevada. This nominal residence and an application for American naturalization in November 1907, followed by a declaration of intention to immigrate in April 1910, allowed Branford to file for divorce under Nevada law. The grounds for the divorce given in the petition were that Bess was constantly drunk and unable to control her behavior in public, with the aim of appealing to the judge who heard the case and who took a notoriously unsympathetic view of drunkenness. The divorce was, however, “amicable,” and Branford remained on close terms with both Elsie and Bess’s brother Martyn Josiah Smith. Branford negotiated a financial settlement for Bess, but he prudently ensured that the Cuban Telephone shares on which it was based reverted to him on Bess’s death. By the time of the divorce, the Amersham home had been sold and Victor had moved into an apartment in Chelsea, close to the intellectual center of the Sociological Society. Bess died in Hampshire in 1915.

SYBELLA GURNEY AND COOPERATION

Branford remarried shortly after the divorce. There is some suggestion that he may have been on close friendly terms with Penelope Eyre, a wealthy member of the arts and crafts circle in Chelsea, but the object of his affections, and the immediate stimulus for securing the divorce in 1910, was Sybella Gurney, whom he had met through his involvement in the Sociological Society. Sybella Catherine Nino Gurney came from a Cornish family, very loosely connected to the great Quaker cousinhood (Anderson 1980). For at least three or four generations, members of the family had been Rectors of Tregony, near Truro. Sybella’s grandfather, however, had read for the bar and lived the life of a country gentleman in Tregony, Brighton, and London until debts arising from election expenses led him to flee to the continent. The family traveled incognito around the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Switzerland. Sybella’s father, Archer Thompson Gurney, who had been born in Tregony in 1820 traveled with his father and became involved in some of his speculative ventures but returned to Britain in 1841 to read for the bar. He was, however, drawn to theological and literary interests: he
was actively involved in the Oxford Movement and for a while he planned to stand for Parliament as a Protectionist. He was ordained in 1849 and held church posts in Exeter, Soho, and Buckingham and eventually secured appointment as the first chaplain to the British Embassy in Paris, where he held services on official occasions and for the English-speaking residents of the city.

It was in Paris that he met his wife, Elise Hammett, and where Sybella and her four older brothers were born. The brothers were Gerald, Vivian, Archer Hugh (who died as an infant), and Archer Evelyn. Her birth was in July 1870, the month in which the Franco-Prussian war broke out, and the situation in Paris required that the family flee for Britain. Family tradition holds that they crossed the channel in an open boat on the same September day that Napoleon III was captured at the Battle of Sedan. In fact, a more likely departure date is January 1871, during the siege of Paris. Arriving in Britain, the family lived for a short time in Worthing with Archer’s mother-in-law, Sybella Hammett, herself a long-term resident of France. At the time of the 1871 census their household at 24 Marine Parade included four French servants and it is likely that the whole group had fled France at around the same time. Archer Gurney soon took livings in Brighton, Hastings, London, and mid-Wales, and eventually settled in Oxford, where he stayed until his death in 1887.

Sybella Gurney was brought up with academic interests. She moved to London and entered Royal Holloway College in 1887 to study for the Oxford examinations. Although women were, by this date, permitted to study for the Oxford examinations, it was not until 1920 that they were entitled to take a degree. Sybella transferred to Oxford to complete her studies and worked under Leonard Hobhouse—she was his first female student—and became friendly with his wife Nora. While at Oxford she developed an interest in philosophy and social reform, and in 1894 she met the pioneers of the cooperative movement at the home of Charlotte Toynbee, widow of the economic historian Arnold Toynbee (Hubback 1927). Gurney soon became an activist of the Labour Co-Partnership Association, being editor of its journal from 1897. Her commitment to cooperative housing schemes became all-embracing and she was in demand as a speaker at rallies and was an active promoter of schemes in Oldham, Letchworth, Kettering, and many other places. In 1905 she formed the Co-Partnership Tenants Housing Council, under the auspices of the LCA, and in 1911 the Rural Co-Partnership Housing Association. She had been living at South Weirs, Brockenhurst, in the New Forest since around 1901 and was also involved there in housing schemes for rural workers. These rural interests led to her involvement in the work of both the Garden Cities movement and the Arts and Crafts movement.
Sybella Gurney sailed from Liverpool to New York in the month following Victor Branford’s divorce and she married him there at the end of the year.\textsuperscript{26} The wedding was held in the Philadelphia home of businessman Samuel Fels, whose brother Joseph was a land tax reformer and was closely associated with the work of Branford, Geddes, and Gurney in London. Though Sybella was an Anglican and the Fels brothers were Jewish, the ceremony was conducted by Father John Krohmalney, a Russian Orthodox priest recently arrived from Poland, who officiated in a private capacity prior to taking up a parish appointment.\textsuperscript{27} As a divorcee, Victor would have been ineligible for a regular Anglican church wedding but a ceremony performed by an Orthodox Church priest in the relatively more liberal American context would have satisfied Sybella’s religious convictions and would have ensured that any doubts about the validity of an American divorce were in no danger of being tested in the British courts.

From 1911 to 1913, the Branfords spent much of their time in the United States, though Victor had returned to the UK to spend a short while in a sanatorium on the Isle of Wight.\textsuperscript{28} In the United States, the Branfords lived in an apartment in Manhattan, Victor using the National Arts Club as his business and professional base. Victor’s naturalization was finally granted in 1913, though this seems actually to have been the date from which he began to concentrate his business activities in Britain and the successful divorce and remarriage made the naturalization less important.\textsuperscript{29} In his deposition to the U.S. Embassy supporting Sybella’s application for a passport, Victor explained that he had lived outside the United States from 1914 because the pressing demands of his business work had caused him to spend much of the winter of 1914–15 in a warmer climate and he had had to spend the midsummer of 1916 in a sanatorium.\textsuperscript{30} They had, however, rented a summer home in Midlewater (sic), Connecticut, where Sybella would stay while Victor was in New York.

Their first permanent home in Britain was the newly built Boundary House in Wylde’s Close, Hampstead, where Sybella had been involved in the establishment of the new Garden Suburb. The house has been described as “a particularly fine house . . . by Parker and Unwin: brown brick, tall chimneys, steep roof, and very little ornament”\textsuperscript{31} It had six bedrooms, three reception rooms, and five bathrooms. They adopted two infant sons born illegitimately to the son of one of Sybella’s distant cousins (see Appendix C). Benchara Branford suggested that the adoption had been encouraged by Victor as an attempt to prevent Sybella from traveling with him on his business trips. These boys were apparently christened in Hampstead in 1913 as Archer Robert Francis Branford (Archie) and Hugh Sydney Branford.
In 1916, the family moved to the main part of Hampstead Garden Suburb, living at Goodways on Heathgate, but in 1920, partly for the sake of Victor’s health, they moved to a small cottage at 3 Chisholm Street on Richmond Hill and rented Broadley Farm in New Milton, Hampshire, as a summer home.

Living conditions in the Hampshire farmhouse were deliberately Spartan, perhaps in order to maintain its picturesque and “rustic” character. When Lewis Mumford visited in 1920, he was met at New Milton station by the governess and the two children in a dog cart and was taken to the farm. Showing him around the house, Branford unapologetically referred to the primitive sanitary arrangements and remarked: “Perhaps you will do as I do. . . . We have no neighbours for half a mile, and the gorse is thick and beautiful” (Mumford 1982, 260).

Having established a close business association with Bernhard Binder, Branford joined the Binder Hamlyn accountancy partnership on its formation in 1918, remaining with the firm until his death. Through the 1920s, Branford divided his time between business and the Sociological Society in London and leisure and academic writing in the country. In 1921, shortly after Branford had arranged for the purchase of Le Play House for the Sociological Society, he and Sybella gave up their homes in Richmond and New Milton in favor of a red brick cottage called The Pinders in Clive Vale, Hastings. The two boys were sent to a small preparatory school, Garth Place, in neighboring Bexhill. Archie later went on to the progressive boarding school at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight for a while, but both boys completed their education at a private school in Bletsoe, Bedfordshire.

Both Victor and Sybella Branford were suffering from serious illnesses by the time they entered their late fifties. Victor, always of a delicate constitution, and weakened by the strain of his business work in the early years of the war, underwent a prostate operation in 1921 and suffered from postoperative complications for some time, never fully recovering. Sybella developed a serious cancer of the rectum and underwent treatment in the health resort of Territet, Montreux, where they had both taken to spending large parts of the winter. Sybella died in 1926 and Victor continued to spend recuperative time in Switzerland in the years after Sybella’s death. His life cycled through bouts of bad health followed by periods of remission. Arthritis was his constant problem and he resorted to a salt bath treatment at Droitwich. Retaining the house in Hastings, Branford also took a small apartment at 55 Cheyne Court, close to the center of Geddes’s London concerns. In his last year, his health improved to the point at which, at the age of sixty-six, he won a prize for figure skating. He became very friendly with a young skater, Elspeth Beadle, and her two brothers, and after his own
marriage to a younger woman, Geddes joked that Branford should remarry
to Elspeth. However, he was soon hit again by his arthritis and developed
serious kidney problems. His health deteriorated rapidly in early 1930 and
he was taken into a nursing home. His last weeks were worsened by serious
worries over his will and the finances of the Sociological Society. He drifted
into unconsciousness, waking only sporadically. His final words were “more
executors” and then “damn!” before he sunk again into unconsciousness. He
died on June 22, 1930, his brother Lionel reading him the Twenty-Third
Psalm during his last moments.\footnote{\textsuperscript{34}}