

Mary Green – A Bottisham Girl

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The Story of Mary Green - born and lived in Bottisham since
1914

At the age of three Mary attended the National Church School in Bottisham. She remembers the headmaster, Mr Morgan who lived in the White House, Lode Road, as being free with the cane. There was a clear distinction in the village between those who attended the Church School and the pupils at 'Bleak House'. Bleak House was a private school, in a little pink cottage, run by two sisters, Miss Hollins whose sister, Mrs Hinton, cycled each day to teach at the school near the Toll Gate at Devils Dyke, Newmarket. The Bleak House building remains a private house in the High Street. There was no regular transport for the young to use: it was either walking or hope for the carrier's cart, from the Golden Ball, to take things to Cambridge. Like many others, Mary remembers George Osbourn's mother walking to Cambridge pushing a pram. At the age of 11, Mary transferred to Cambridge High School, going by train from Lode Station and then walking to the school in Mill Road, Cambridge. She left school at 16 years of age, (explained below). As a 'Brown Owl' under the eye of Commissioner Mrs Gilbert (the doctor's wife) Mary enjoyed joining some 20 other Brownies. More advanced fun came with the Imperial League Young Conservatives.

Some events stand out clearly in the memory. Once, when a small girl, she cut her leg on a spike in the cemetery and she was carried each day by her Dad to Doctor Wood's surgery in Tudor House. The doctor occasionally gave her a penny which was immediately spent at Woollard's sweet shop, a few yards

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down the High Street. The surgery at Tudor House seemed a terrible place - it smelt, and the ceilings were black from the smoke of the oil lamps. Alcoholic drinks appeared plentiful at the surgery! Each Trinity Sunday there was a feast on 'The Hill' opposite Holy Trinity church. An influx of visitors packed the church and village pride ensured that all the gardens were tidied for the occasion. After Sunday evening service the congregation waited on the slope in front of the church until eight o'clock, when the village policeman gave the starting signal, at which point all the horses, pulling the fairground equipment, charged down the High Street. It was a terrifying sight for all the small children. The fairground men claimed their positions on The Hill and partly erected the stalls during the Sunday evening and completed them the next morning. With rough roads it was not uncommon, at any time, to hear a runaway horse charging down the street; an experience frightening for children and adults alike. A runaway horse could be the consequence of fighting between the drivers!

There was great pleasure trailing across the flower covered fields, without any fear of what the environment might hold, and then through the woods and return by 'Whitelands'. The Swaffham stream carried much water, and sticklebacks and Tom Thumbs could be caught. When Mary passed the Golden Ball beer house in the High Street, she thought it a happy place. The light shone out of the open door and the singing sounded as if the customers were having a wonderful time. The first radio in the village was owned by a Mr Daniels who lodged in the Golden Ball. Mary enjoyed her dad's crystal set

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The Post Office

Mary recalls that the post office, then in Holly Cottage, High Street, was run by the two Miss Kings. Mary's mother heard about the sale of the post office and purchased the business. First, the telephone exchange was taken over in 1929 (and run until 1942); Mary having left school at the age of 16 to help her mother because her father was ill with rheumatoid arthritis. Mary can still recall the 'phone numbers, such as, number one was the post office, two the baker, three the doctors, four the Jenyns, and so on until 12 which was the number of Webb the landlord of the Swan. A year later the post office was taken over from the King sisters.

Mary and her Mother worked the exchange from 8am to 8pm and then the telephone was put through to Cambridge at night. The very hard time came with the start of World War II when they had to run the exchange 24 hours a day. At night Mary stayed in bed and her mother came downstairs to answer the 'phone (by turning a small handle). These calls included all the police calls and the red, green and yellow air-raid warnings. The siren was on the roof of the Court House, High Street. At six o'clock each morning the army rang up to test the lines. This work was conducted in the house in Bottisham High Street, now occupied by the Editor of the Cresset, Nick Martin. When mother (Mrs Joyce Martin) retired the exchange moved to the adjacent house. The pressure of work increased when the Americans arrived in Bottisham and the operators "nearly suffered a breakdown". Three women (Mavis Webb, Lucy and Mrs 'Feathers') operated the considerable increase in the number of lines. The post office continued in this house

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until about 1960 when the telephone exchange moved to the automatic exchange in Tunbridge Lane.

The post arrived at 5:30am and was dealt with by Mary's mother. Sunday post was collected by a Mr Taylor, from Wilbraham. Mary delivered post as far as Nine Mile Hill and took out the telegrams. She held the local agency for the Ministry of Labour when help was often needed for those men who could not write. A day to remember was when the Government ministers, Mr Ernest Brown and R.A. Butler called in to see what it was like in the office.

Social life

In the early 20th century, entertainment was what each person made it. A special treat was when Mr Coleman, the father of the baker or when the Reverend Uthwatt, who prepared the young for Confirmation, filled their large cars with young people and a great day would be spent in the Cromer area. Some belonged to the Imperial League Tennis Club and played on the grass court at the vicarage, or at Tunbridge farm where a pack of hunting hounds were kennelled. It was a stirring sight as the master of hounds, Mr Johnson, drove the pack through the village. A rare visit to Cambridge, with Grandma, to partake of a doughnut in one of the five small rooms of the Dorothy Cafe, was a treat indeed.

This particular story ends with the marriage of Mary in 1937 and her involvement with farming.