

Mary Frances Moorhouse



18th February 1927 - 20th July 2020

It somehow seems fitting that Mary's last home, where her life ended, was a few hundred yards from the one she had grown up in, above her father's grocer's shop.



Mary with her brothers, Leslie and Philip, 1932 and 2007. They remained in touch to the end.

Indeed, Walcot Court was built in the grounds of the Methodist church where she had attended Sunday School and Girl Guides and, in October 1956, married Fred Moorhouse.

Mary was not the most famous daughter of a Methodist grocer to benefit from post 1945 opportunities to study science at university (in her case Geography, Chemistry and Geology at Reading). Although she shared this background with Margaret Roberts (later Thatcher).

Mary's life was marked by rather different values, service to others and using education as a tool to eradicate inequality, principles she inherited from her parents.



***Mary in the 1950s; Reading 1st XI 1948-9.
(Mary front right)***



Mary and Fred's Wedding October 1956.

Mary's father, Harry Warne's, business had always been hampered by his inability to refuse credit to customers from Walcot and Snow Hill (then slum areas of Bath) amidst mid-century depression and war, in the full knowledge that it could never be repaid.



Harry and Mary at her wedding; Mary, Leslie, Philip 1944

Harry's pacifist principles and Christian Socialism had led him to serve as an unarmed stretcher bearer in the WWI trenches, risking his own life to save others needlessly sacrificed. Sixty years later, Alderman Roberts' daughter may have branded Nelson Mandela a 'terrorist', but Harry's daughter was proud to have taught Mandela's own daughters.



Mary, Rachel and John, Bulawayo 1970; Fred, Rachel, John and Paul, Studland, Dorset 1967.

This principle, the importance of using her skills, labour and knowledge to serve other people, shaped Mary's career as a teacher and the life she shared with Fred, until his death twenty-five years later.

In vastly different places: home county girls' grammar schools, Inner London primary schools, comprehensive schools in Bristol, racially segregated African secondary schools in Zimbabwe before majority rule, and Southern Africa's pioneering multiracial school, Waterford Kamhlaba in Swaziland, she was remembered with the same affection by colleagues and former students (at least one of whom remained in touch with her for nearly 70 years).



John, Mary and Rachel, Bulawayo 1970; and (with Paul) outside the Rondavels, Waterford 1972.

Life after Fred's death at 52 was a challenge and she was never fully content - in her last months she returned frequently to thoughts of their life together.

Over a quarter of a century together their strong personalities and shared principles merged into a joint 'Mary and Fred' identity.

Which perhaps had its finest flowering in the two years they were joint 'house parents' to fifty odd 11 to 13-year-old students in eLangeni, Waterford's junior school and introduced an innovative, project-based, first-year curriculum.



Paul, Fred, Rachel and Mary, Puriton, Somerset 1960; and, with John and Philip and Mary Warne's family, Bath 1963.

Not long before Fred died, they moved to a cottage in Claverham, south of Bristol, where they began to build a garden together with thoughts of self-sufficiency. This property was too isolated and full of memories of what might have been and Mary soon moved back to Bath, living next door but one to her sister in law, Mary Warne. They shared weekly crafting mornings which 'the other Mary' remembers fondly.



During this time her first grandchild (of eight) was born - she couldn't be described as a doting grandmother but always took a keen interest in their lives and enjoyed having them to stay, as well as taking them on educational visits - they all developed a respect and love for her as a person.



Mary with Tom Woodhouse, Lewis Moorhouse and Jack Moorhouse



Grandchildren in 1998, 2007 and 2017

Aged 64 she again upped sticks, to serve as Warden to the Quaker Meeting in Settle, North Yorkshire. There, as in at least 15 other homes on two continents, she grew a beautiful and productive garden, and when she returned to Bath, she took up the craft of carpentry, producing and mending furniture, to complement the weaving, cooking and other skills with which she enriched her home.



Mary in 2003 and 2016

In 2004 she was diagnosed with bowel cancer. Radiotherapy and surgery eliminated the tumour, but side effects of her treatment compromised her health and she moved to Salisbury, living near Rachel's family for mutual support. Again, gardening and cooking kept her busy, and filled the stomachs of her teenage grandsons.

In September 2013 she made her final move back to Bath, and Walcot Court - she continued to live very independently for many years and this move proved to be so important in her last year. At Walcot Court she was a valued member of the community and regularly attended a reading group and Scrabble. She also remained an active member of Bath Quaker meeting.

In her last year there were many positives; she attended and read at her grandson's wedding and held her latest great-grandchild.



With John and his wife Jenni at Tom and Robyn Woodhouse's wedding, 2019; and Fred's brother, Les, and sister-in-law, Pam on Mary's 80th Birthday, 2007 .



December 2019 and June 2020.

However, it was also a painful year as her health deteriorated and she was unable to do the many things she loved. This was exacerbated by the isolation of lockdown and she sometimes referred to having experienced so much in her life but nothing quite like Covid - quite a statement from someone who had lived through the Bath Blitz and travelled across much of Africa.

However she remained capable of giving the 'teacher glance' when needed, and she was so pleased to be able to remain in her own home to the very end. It was a great comfort for her to be nursed by familiar and loved carers as well as her family.

Memories of Mary from cards received

Mary was the best, we will all miss her sense of humour and jokes... Walcot Court Carer.



I remember her fondly as a fair, stern but loving mother to all of us at eLangeni house back in 1975. T.M.

She was a great teacher, very demanding but also great fun and empathetic. Everything she did radiated dynamism, but with genuine care. J.S.

Mary and Philip with their mother, 1929

Mary was a caring and strong house parent to us all in eSiveni in the '70s. She seemed to understand just what each of us was about. K.D.

I admired Mary very much for the way she lived in the Walcot Court community, quietly but purposefully, her gentle smile constant in our book reading group every Tuesday... In my 14 years at Walcot Court Mary is the fifth resident able to die peacefully in their own home. As I go in and out of the back door, No 38 will remain a reminder to me of [her] dignified presence and calm spirit. J.R.

Mary and I exchanged Christmas cards every year since I left school at the age of 17... I am 63 now! She was so kind to me, and to my sister when she was struggling with being a boarder at Waterford. I remember her with such affection. K.M.

Mary was a wonderful Aunty and I am so grateful for the part she played in our family life growing up, as well as later as an adult. I particularly remember her humour, her gardening advice (I still follow it!) and the lovely presents she gave [including] her lovely woven pieces – she was so skilled. We were really pleased to be invited to her 90th birthday and seeing her there surrounded by family reminds me of how much she gave to all who knew her. She will be really missed! R.L.(niece)



Three of the gardens Mary made at Lower Claverham (L) and Prospect Place (C) and Elm Grove, Bath (R).

Mary was one of my three oldest friends. We first met in the early 1950s when she came to teach at my school. By the time I was doing my A levels there were only two of us in the geography class and it was easy to develop a rapport... Latterly I visited about once a year and have always found the conversation between us most stimulating. [Once] I had picked up in a junk shop a copy of a set of maps of Kent (1789) which set us off next to look her maps of Roman Bath... Last time Mary told me of her memories of living (and working) in the Walcot shop which was fascinating.

Longer ago she was most supportive when I was going through a difficult patch – having a sympathetic ear was so important to me. D.V

I don't think I ever saw her not smiling and happy to see people. She was a beautiful lady. A.W.(niece).



Mary with great-granddaughter Alice, March 2020