

The Memories of Sarah

Elizabeth

Dobson (nee
Latue)

1926 – 2017

Part 3

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I've read through all the wearisome pages of my recollections of family and my early life with some of them. Now all I want to do is add a few more bits and pieces then I'll put it away until one of you who are left want to glance through it.

I don't think that I ever got round to mentioning Mary Thompson who was one of Shincliffe's colourful characters - not notorious - because she was part of our family life in a small way. My strong memory of Mary is of her sitting on the chair nearest to the back door of our house and she always wore a pinny. She would be smoking, which many many people did then and, since we didn't offer her an ashtray and she was too far from the fire, she would tap the ash from her cigarette into her pinny pocket. Mary was married to Ned Thompson, a Shincliffe family - his father's nickname was Kakem - I don't know why and I certainly can't remember his proper name. The family was rough and ready - they lived below us - nearer the bottom of Avenue Street. There was Sally, daughter, who had an illegitimate son, George, who was known variously as George Roberts (from his known father who lodged further down the street) and George Thompson. There was Jack, the eldest son I think who was a bit of a Don Juan, better-looking than the rest and, possibly, a bit more ambitious. Anyway, he married a teacher and they lived in Pond Street at first and, many years later, they split and that's when Mary and Ned moved in - next to Fawcetts.

There was also Bob - I know nothing of him. There was Paddy, another son, who joined the army with my young Uncle John. I don't know what happened to him - hopefully, a better life somewhere than they expected - following father into the mines. Then there was Ned, who was one of the nicest men - invariably, whenever he came to our house - usually on New Year's Eve when he'd had a few - he was the most respectful quiet, unassuming man.

His mother was quite a character - wore a sacking apron, looked as though she had had and was still having a really hard life. She smoked a clay pipe and would frequently be heard berating her family, particularly Kakem him who drank quite a bit. I think that he was in the Navy 14 to 18 War, along with Lena's husband, Norman. He had what looked like a glass eye and this gave him a sinister look. My dad would say that there was many a bout of fisticuffs outside the pub when they were home on leave.



Fig 1 The Avenue where, according to Sarah's father, there were plenty of fisticuffs during leave from WW1.

Mary's family came from Witton Gilbert - her maiden name was Tulip. There were two sons of the marriage - George and John. George lives in Witton Gilbert, I think, and he did all right for himself - he worked in an office and was never rough as you might have expected. John - I don't know what happened to him.

Mary died at a comparatively young age. She'd had treatment for varicose veins and perhaps this caused the thrombosis. Ned survived her for many years. End of ODDMENT 1

(taken up again on a very miserable rainy day 7 July '09 and following some days of beautifully sunny weather - this climate of ours is a dead loss - I can't even get out shopping or into the garden to admire the colour.)

Somewhere, along the line, I seem to have concentrated on one particular period in this family's history (meaning my maternal side since I found out so little about the early Latues). For instance, you've read quite extensively about Aunt Gert and Aunt Ethel's family and obviously about my mam and dad, but much less about my aunts (those above were great aunts). Uncle John - because he was mostly away from our area - in the army for many years and then in Leeds with his wife Margaret and son, John. Therefore, I have few recollections of him - we saw him at funerals mainly. As for his wife and son, after Uncle John died, although I sent cards every Christmas, there was no return.

Aunt Mary, who married Harry Arnold who came from a family in Bowburn, is a similar case. I believe that when she was young, she was lively and modern-thinking, regarding her clothes. She seems to have had a friendship with Mona, Harry Hill's wife. - I gain this info. from looking at old photographs. Again, apart from the early period of her married life which she spent, partly in Durham on Claypath in a large flat overlooking what was then a greengrocer, and now is around the area of the Cuthbert Hospice. I remember that Harry was in the army - probably during the war and then they went to live in Leeds and he was a prison warder. Their two daughters, Dorothy and Cynthia, have never kept up a close contact, and of course, neither have we. I, personally, feel closer to the memory of Dorothy, who is now dead, since, as a little one she often stayed with us at Shincliffe. Don't even think about how we managed the sleeping arrangements. We were (Joan and I) probably evacuated to or Aunt Milly's. I do remember fairly clearly the time she had a severe dose of whooping cough - mam and Aunt Mary sat up with her. Keeping a kettle boiling on the fire to help her to breathe.

Dorothy married and lived in Leeds with her one daughter. Susan, who, again, is probably closer and more in touch with Auntie Athy who, not surprisingly kept in touch with Auntie Mary. Cynthia married well, to quote an old fashioned expression, and she eventually settled with her two sons and husband in Berkhamstead. I saw them once when Sue took me over there. David came from a fairly affluent background and was one of the top "brass" in a firm of brewers. (I think). Anyway he was an extremely nice chap - good-looking too, well mannered and well-educated - no airs. Unfortunately, he died a few years ago - fairly young - there are grandchildren and Cynthia has stayed down there.

Aunt Ena, who is Mary Hazelgreaves mother (known more as Mary Whittle) is a shadowy figure in my memory, whereas the others come through much stronger. I don't know why - she lived in Brandon after she married and we visited on Sundays - for tea probably - this was the usual treat for mining families as far as I can recall. You would get into your best clothes and wait for two buses to get over there. They lived in a street, one of many, which were probably built to house miners (gone now) and I can see clearly (in my mind's eye) the door we went into and the bus terminus and the layout of the downstairs. Funny what you can remember. Aunt Ena was small;

like gran really but not as attractive. Her features were blunter. Gran had fine features. I can only recall one time when I saw her while she was having a “fit” - it was in Grandad Robinson's house at the top of Avenue Street - I felt afraid. It's a shame that her life was cut so short - nowadays she'd be on medication. Little Aunt Ethel was small in stature also - she had a brood of children and a mistake for a husband – 3 boys and 3 girls - all quite attractive. As a family we were closest to Auntie Marjorie, my cousin, since she was the eldest and had lived in Shincliffe - probably until grandad died and there was some trouble about who owned what. I don't think that Gran and Grandad Robinson paid the mortgage. I think that Gt. Grandad Thompson did. Anyway, my mam was very fond of Marjorie and she invariably visited us when she was older and married. She had a brain haemorrhage and spent many months in Newcastle and Dryburn Hospitals. She recovered her mental faculties, but she was left with a degree of immobility. I don't think that she even got onto her feet again, but Frank, her husband was a ‘star’ - he looked after her splendidly. She died many years ago but, even then, she was still young, compared to today's expectations. They lived in Shincliffe before she became ill - she always wanted to come back to her roots and she was happy there. Unfortunately they needed a bungalow and they bought one in the Ferryhill area. She became a teacher and worked in Cornforth at one time. I well recall the day when she popped in to Barbara's house - next to The Avenue Inn - and she had got her ref's ticket so that she could ref the school football matches. It was after one such flying visit that she had her haemorrhage. Her brothers were Ben, Roddy and Tony. Her sisters Liz and (*not completed – Ed*). Ben died while very young - also a brain haem.

The day that my dad had his accident to the colliery was the same as the day that mum went into labour with Barbara. I recall so clearly watching the ambulance pull up on the road and Uncle Freddie being in it with dad and when I went over, there he was, in all his grime, lying on a stretcher. He was in the old Durham Hospital, the one near the viaduct; the main building was all there was then and it was and it will, hopefully, be what is left when you read this. It must be a listed building.



Fig 2 The old Durham Hospital, near the viaduct, which is now part of Hild and Bede College.

Anyway he had been involved in a fall of stone which had crushed part of his chest, one of his ribs piercing his lung. After a short stay, he was sent out, but he contracted pneumonia and had to be taken in again. Not exactly NHS procedure.

My dad, like many miners who spent half of their lives in the dark, enjoyed being in his garden. Whether it be cleaning out his racing pigeons, spending endless hours waiting for them to fly home, or digging, planting and reaping the rewards. Before the pigeon-mania and somewhat ramshackle “crees” (sheds to some of you) there were equally home-made green houses, with a full heating system. I think this was mainly when we lived in High Street, because once ensconced in Avenue Street, the allotment was further away - running from the old Oddfellows Hall, long since demolished. This stood quite close to Overman Street - the pub end, and, originally was the dance hall. How I wish that it could be transported back to see the comings and goings there. As long as I can remember, it was used as an undertaker's workshop - Mr. Wilson was the man-in-charge related to Mr Willis from the Post Office - by marriage.

Anyway this is where the allotment started and they stretched almost up to Simpson's garden where w (text ends here. We wonder what Sarah's next sentence would have been? – Ed).



Fig 3: Sarah as a young woman



Fig 4: Sarah in later life, just a year before she died.