

## High Wych History – 49 Grace Dunn.

If you have read one of my articles before you will have come across the name of Grace Dunn. Some of my older readers will remember her for themselves. Grace was the first to write specifically about the history of High Wych. A lot of what follows below was taken from her “memoirs”.

Grace was born on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1893 in one of the Half Moon Cottages on the Green in the centre of our village. William, her father, was working as a gardener at Rivers Nurseries at the time. Her grandfather, another William, had come to High Wych upon his retirement from the police force. Her great grandfather, Robert, had been in the police as well. According to Grace he came from Stroud in Kent and was promoted to Herts. Deputy Chief Constable upon the arrest of a murderer in Bengoe. Although Grace was prone to exaggerations, this was most probably true. The 1851 census describes Robert as a “superintendent of police”.

Grace had four older brothers, George, Ernest, Percy and Cyril. Their mother, Emily died in 1895 when Grace was only 18 months old. Her aunt Mary then came over to look after the children. In 1901 they moved to Clovelly Cottage High Wych Lane where Grace then lived for the rest of her life. Father William started work at the Manor of Groves when Edmund Barnard lived there. When Barnard left and was replaced by the de Silva family William lost his job.



From Grace Dunn's archive: a Programme of a scholars entertainment from 1898

In 1908, 15 years old, Grace left school and started training as a dressmaker thus following in her mother's footsteps. Captain Buxton and his family (of the brewing dynasty) had meanwhile replaced the de Silvas and through Mrs. Buxton she built up a loyal local following, even winning clients in London. Prices charged were 5 shillings for a dress, 10 shillings for a suit.

The first world war came and went. Grace reported sightings of Zeppelins and the fact that the Lancashire Regiment was billeted here. (This might in fact have been the 5<sup>th</sup> Leicestershire; there is no record of the Lancs being about locally).

After, the war, in 1916, Captain Buxton asked Grace to live in at the house as his wife was in poor mental health. Gradually she added secretarial work to her duties, travelled with them to their estate in Scotland and ending up working for the family for some 30 years.



**Grace in the 70s with an embroidered list of names used for Memorial Hall fundraising.**

Retired from her job with the Buxtons Grace got even more involved in voluntary work in the village. She collected money for the British Legion and other charities, was on the parish council, on the parochial church council, on the village hall committee and last but not least in the Womens Institute. As such her name came up regularly in newspaper reports on WI activities. "Miss Dunn judged the competition for the best egg dish", "Miss Dunn read out her treasurers report", "Miss Dunn did a talk on make and make do", Miss Dunn reported on the welcome home fund for the soldiers", ..... These are just a few of the snippets I found!

Two of Grace's brothers emigrated to Canada. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in High Wych only agricultural work was available to them or work at Rivers Nursery, not much choice. A generation before two of Grace's uncles had already done the same. They did well over there in accountancy and other professions. There were also some musicians of note amongst the Canadian Dunns. Grace herself travelled to Canada on two occasions, the last one being in 1977. John Dunn one of her nephews wrote about her visit in a book he authored. Grace must have impressed him greatly. John correctly recalls her pride in High Wych, her pride of having served the Buxton family and her voluntary work for the church.

Grace was obviously also very proud of her writings, so much so that she handed out copies of her two basic articles: A History of High Wych and Personal recollections. I scanned in both articles in their original (very neat) handwriting. Thanks go to Chris Finch for providing these. They can now be found on my website. Go to : <http://vandebilt.co.uk/history/> where they can be downloaded.

Sadly I never met Grace personally which is a pity as she was of course my predecessor as local chronicler. She passed away in 1988.

Sources this time were: Grace Dunn's own writings, Chris Finch, Ancestry.co.uk and as always county archives aka HALS. The High Wych History Project still needs your personal contributions, memories, stories and photographs as well as your criticism, positive or negative. Contact me at: [theo@vandebilt.co.uk](mailto:theo@vandebilt.co.uk) or phone me at 01279 725468.