

The Life Story of Mary Jarrett 1927-2025



By Mike McKeown

Thanks

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the many members of Mary's family and her dear friends who enriched her life and have played a part in preserving her story. Mary's journey was shaped by the love, wisdom, and companionship of those around her, and their memories and contributions have been invaluable in piecing together this account of her extraordinary life. A special thanks to Maggie Walker, whose dissertation on Mary's life not only captured her essence so beautifully but also provided an essential foundation for this story. To all who shared their memories, photographs, and stories, your generosity has helped ensure that Mary's legacy is remembered in the way she deserves—with warmth, love, and admiration.

Table of Contents

The Early Life of Mary Jarrett (1927–1944) 4

Wartime Evacuation and the Love of the Countryside (1939–1944)..... 7

Mary’s Early Career and Move to Cornwall (1945–1957) 10

***Progression at Redruth Library and Professional Recognition (1948–1957)
..... 12***

A Difficult Period: Love, Loss, and Becoming a Mother (1960–1965) 18

***A Time of Change: Family Life, Challenges, and Finding a Home (1965–
1976).....22***

A New Chapter: Stability, Advocacy, and Loss (1976–1981)26

The Piglet Years: Mary, Hospitality, and Lifelong Friendships (1982–1986) 30

Mary’s Life with Mike, Annie, and Her Grandchildren (1988–2025)32

***Life at The Barn: Community, Friendship, and Transformation (1990s–
2010s).....36***

***The Later Years at The Barn: Independence, Friendship, and Resilience
(2010s–2025).....40***

Mary’s Peaceful Passing and Final Chapter (February 2025).....44

Epitaph: A Life Well Lived48

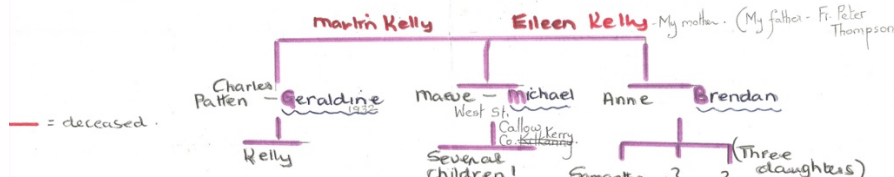
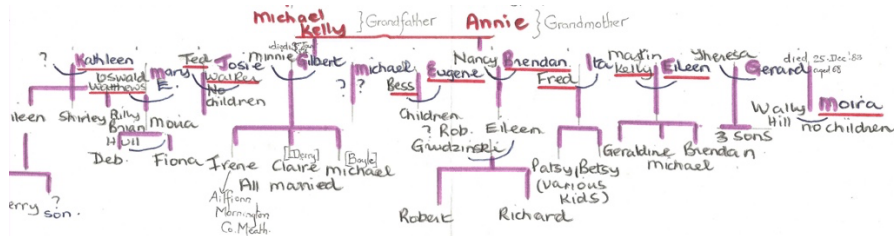
The Early Life of Mary Jarrett (1927–1944)

Birth and Adoption (1927–1928)



Mary Jarrett was born on March 29, 1927, in Chorlton-upon-Medlock, Manchester. Her origins were surrounded by secrecy and societal pressures of the time. Her birth mother, Eileen Kelly, was a young Irish woman who had trained as a teacher. One of eleven children, she came from a family with deep roots in education and public service in Ireland. Her father, Mary's grandfather, was the head teacher at the school, reinforcing the strong emphasis on education within the family. Years later, Mary's biological sister, Geraldine, reached out to her in a letter, explaining that she believed their mother, Eileen Kelly, had been in love with a young man, Peter Thompson, and that he was likely Mary's father. This relationship was considered a scandal at the time, leading to Eileen being sent to Manchester to give birth in secret. Peter later joined the priesthood, though Geraldine noted that he continued visiting Eileen frequently, suggesting that their bond remained, even though he never acknowledged Mary.

After Mary's birth, Eileen was unable to keep her and was pressured into giving her up for adoption. Mary spent the first few months of her life at St. Gerard's Home, a Catholic orphanage run by the Salford Catholic Protection and Rescue Society. In March 1928, at just under a year old, she was placed with a couple in Manchester, Gladys and Bert Jarrett, who became her adoptive parents.



- 1. Kathleen + ? Greenwood Canada
- 2. Mary E. (Known as Lily or Paddy) Oswald (my mother + father)
- 3. Josie + Ted Walker
- 4. Gilbert + Minnie
- 5. Michael ? - Canada - Montreal - near Kathleen
- 6. Eugene + Bess - Tallon Dublin - USA
- 7. Brendan + Nancy USA
- 8. Ita + Fred Gneisler
- 9. Eileen + Martin
- 10. Gerard + Theresa
- 11. Maura + Wally Hill

Auntie gave me a picture of you, I think you were about 18 you look very much like my Mother when she was young, & the pictures you sent, me Charlie & Kelly think that I look like you so there is a resemblance. I really do not know where to start this story but I will try, here goes.....

I am very sorry to hear my Mother put you out for adoption, No wonder we never got along too well I was a daily reminder to her, the boys Michael my older brother (now deceased) & Brendan my younger were always the favourites but I had my Grandmother who was wonderful. The people who adopted you you seemed to have made it O.K.

in your life.

My mother's father? * My Mother was a very small person, 4.10" blue eyes brown hair & weighed about 100 lbs, did you know she was a teacher, just like her Father & her sister Kathleen. Aunt Kath lived here in Montreal but she died about 10yrs ago, maybe more. Mother was supposed to have been in love with a young man, whom she could not marry, for some reason, it was probably she was pregnant & when it was found out she was shipped off out of the way & taken care of on condition she would not see him again, anyway he joined the Priest Hood & that took care of that, I know that because there was an old lady who lived in Elphin who told me, but she never said anything about you, later on I met Fr. Peter Thompson he was very nice gave me lots of expensive presents & would come and visit once a year but not to our house at the old lady's, only after my Grandmother died did he come. I used to write to him, but he was ill with arthritis, Uncle Peter stopped writing, I must have been about 14 then, never did know what happened, he must have passed away that's all I can tell you about him. My Mother had heart trouble, it seems all the Kelly's have died from the same ailment, getting back to Uncle Peter as I got to know what was going on I was kind of suspicious that maybe he was my Father, maybe it was because of the presents or because the boys looked so different from me.

Life with the Jarrett Family



Mary's early childhood was shaped by her complex relationship with her adoptive parents. Her father, Bert, had served in the First World War as a tank driver and was described as a kind and gentle man. Her mother, Gladys, was far more difficult, and over time, Mary came to refer to her privately as "OBJ" (Old Bag Jay), a reflection of their strained bond. Unlike Bert, who showed warmth, Gladys was a strict and often distant figure, setting the tone for a childhood that was not marked by much affection.

Despite this, Mary was not alone. She grew up alongside her adoptive sister, Pauline.

Wartime Evacuation and the Love of the Countryside (1939–1944)



The outbreak of World War II in 1939 led to a dramatic change in Mary's life. Like many children in cities, she was evacuated to escape the bombing raids. In 1941, Mary was sent to a farm near Pendle Hill in Lancashire, an experience that would become one of the most cherished memories of her early life. The farm provided her with a sense of freedom and belonging. She loved working with animals, waking up to the sounds of nature, and

even sleeping in the barns during warmer months. This was where her deep love for nature, animals, and the countryside was truly nurtured. It was a stark contrast to the cold, disciplined environment of her adoptive home.

She would often recall the warmth of farm life in later years, noting how she felt far more at home among animals than she ever had in Manchester. The resilience and independence she developed on the farm became defining traits in her character. It was here that she learned self-sufficiency, problem-solving, and the simple joy of a life close to nature—values that remained with her throughout her life.

Education, Music, and Early Ambition



Mary's academic talent was evident from an early age. She began her formal education at Heaton Mersey R.C. Primary School, a Catholic primary school in Greater Manchester, where she attended from approximately 1933 to 1938. This early education laid the groundwork for her love of learning and curiosity about the world.

In 1938, at the age of 11, Mary earned a scholarship to Hollies Catholic Convent, a prestigious school known for its rigorous academic standards. This achievement was a testament to her intelligence and determination, setting the foundation for her lifelong commitment to education.

At Hollies, she excelled in her studies, particularly in literature and classical music, subjects that remained central to her throughout her life.

During this time, she formed strong friendships with Genevieve Earley, a sixth-form student at Hollies whom Mary greatly admired. Genevieve became a role model and mentor, offering guidance and encouragement. Through church and school, she also became close with the Henderson family, a large Irish family that included Steven,

Alec, George, Mary, and Collette. Their friendship brought Mary a sense of connection and belonging, helping her through the challenges of her early years.

Not only did she love listening to classical music, but she was also a talented musician, mastering many instruments, including the piano, accordion, concertina, violin, recorder, and oboe. Her passion for music was a defining aspect of her character, and she took great joy in both playing and appreciating the beauty of classical compositions. Mary especially loved Richard Strauss' Four Last Songs and Schubert's Winterreise.

Mary's love for music also influenced her social life. Throughout her time in Manchester, she and her sister Pauline would regularly attend the ballet together, often visiting venues like the Manchester Opera House and the Palace Theatre. This shared love of the arts strengthened their bond and enriched Mary's cultural life.

Despite the disruptions caused by the war, Mary remained a determined student. In 1943, she earned a scholarship from Manchester City Council to study under the Northern University Joint Matriculation Board—an opportunity granted to only a select few. This scholarship marked the beginning of her career in the library service, as she joined the Manchester Corporation after passing the Junior Entrants Exam.

Working while studying, Mary began her career in the Manchester City Council's Library Services. She enrolled at the Manchester College of Technology in 1944 to gain formal qualifications, focusing on library science while working part-time at the library. She was soon assigned to the Music Library, combining her professional role with her passion for music.

Her choice to enter the library field was a natural one—she was a voracious reader with a keen intellect. Books provided a form of escape and knowledge that shaped her ambitions. At the Music Library, she developed strong friendships with colleagues, particularly Freda, a fellow librarian who was about two years older than her. Freda not only became a mentor but also provided extra tuition to help Mary prepare for her Library Association Examinations. Their close friendship mirrored the admiration Mary had previously felt for Genevieve, and Freda played a crucial role in Mary's professional and academic growth.



A Formative Period

By the time Mary entered her late teenage years, she had already experienced more upheaval than most—adoption, wartime evacuation, and a complex home life—but these challenges only strengthened her resolve. She had developed a deep love for animals and the countryside, a lifelong passion for learning, literature, and music, and an independent spirit that would define her adult years. Her early life was not easy, but it forged the

characteristics that made her the remarkable woman she became—resilient, determined, intelligent, and deeply self-sufficient. The lessons she learned from farm life, the discipline she cultivated in her studies, and her love for books and music all combined to shape her unwavering drive to build a future on her own terms.

Mary's Early Career and Move to Cornwall (1945–1957)

– From Manchester to Cornwall County Council

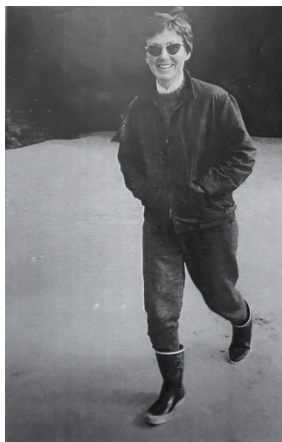
Starting a Career in Libraries (1945–1947)



In 1945, at the age of 18, Mary took her first steps into what would become a lifelong career in libraries and education. She joined the Library Association in the same year, achieving professional recognition and marking the formal start of her career. Her work involved cataloguing music scores, assisting researchers, and supporting the public's engagement with musical resources. She took great pride in making the library accessible and welcoming, reflecting her belief in the transformative power of knowledge and culture.

She thrived in the academic environment, taking every opportunity to enhance her knowledge. She particularly enjoyed assisting students, helping them navigate the library's vast collection, and fostering their curiosity. This early exposure to education reinforced her belief that knowledge should be shared, a philosophy that would guide her throughout her career.

Forced Relocation to Cornwall (1948)



In 1947, Gladys moved to Cornwall to be closer to family who had relocated earlier. Mary stayed behind in Manchester for another year, determined to continue building her career and maintaining the friendships she had established. However, in 1948, Mary felt she had no choice but to follow, as Gladys decided to sell their home and fully settle in Cornwall. This move was not one Mary made willingly—she was deeply frustrated, as she had been thriving in Manchester, forming lasting connections and pursuing her ambitions.

Despite her frustration, Mary quickly sought employment and secured a position at Redruth Library as a librarian. Though it was initially a difficult adjustment from the more expansive library system she had known in Manchester, she applied herself with dedication and professionalism, ensuring she made the best of her circumstances.

Family and Lifelong Bonds



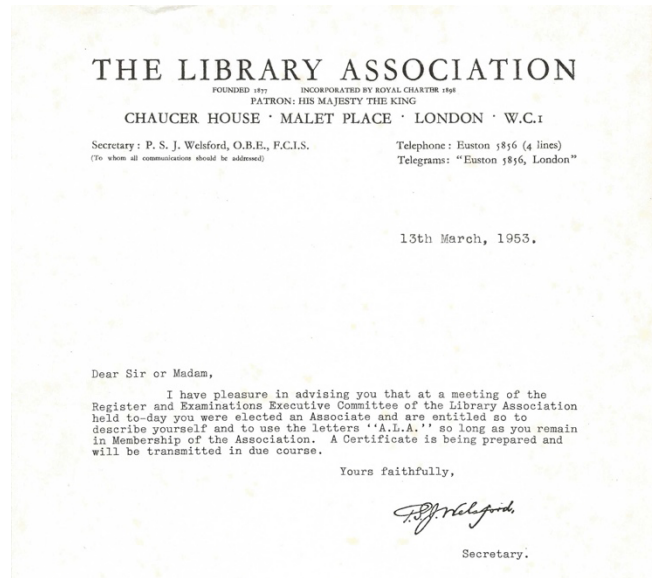
During Mary's twenties, her adoptive mother, Gladys, expanded the family by fostering Val and Pam, who joined Pauline as Mary's sisters. While Mary had already embarked on her own path, these new additions further shaped the dynamic of the Jarrett household, reinforcing the sense of family that would remain with her throughout her life.

Despite the complexities of her early years, Mary maintained a close connection with her adoptive family throughout her life. A cherished tradition developed in which her adoptive relatives, along with their expanding families, would visit Sidmouth every year before Christmas and come and visit Mary at The Barn. Among those dearests to Mary were Helen and Mark, Pauline's children, and Emma, Val's draught, whom she considered her own grandchildren. As the years passed, their families grew, and Mary welcomed their partners and children into her life with open arms, embracing them as an integral part of her extended family.



Progression at Redruth Library and Professional Recognition (1948–1957)

By the early 1950s, Mary had become a respected member of the library profession. She pursued additional qualifications while working full-time, determined to advance her career. Studying remotely at the Manchester University Faculty of



Technology from 1950. On March 13, 1953, she successfully passed her Library Association examinations and was officially awarded the title Associate of the Library Association (A.L.A.), granting her degree level professional recognition within the field. She later took a further qualification from the N.W. Polytechnic in 1962-63.

Initially, the move was challenging. Compared to the well-established library system in Manchester, Redruth Library had fewer resources and

limited career progression opportunities. However, Mary approached the role with her characteristic determination and efficiency, determined to make a difference despite the obstacles. Her dedication and skill did not go unnoticed. She was recognised for her ability to manage and modernise library systems, making books more accessible and streamlining processes for both staff and visitors. Her methodical approach and forward-thinking mindset made her a valued member of the profession. Though initially starting at an entry-level role, she was promoted multiple times due to her expertise and leadership, ultimately becoming Head Librarian before transitioning to a role at Cornwall County Council in 1957.

She quickly gained a reputation as someone who could bring order to any system, engage communities with reading, and foster a culture of learning. She found satisfaction in working closely with the local population, encouraging children to read and ensuring that even small-town libraries could be vibrant places of knowledge and discovery.

Transition to Cornwall County Council (1957)

In 1957, Mary's career took an exciting turn when she was offered the opportunity to establish the Children's School Library Service in Cornwall. Recognising the need for a more structured and accessible service for young readers, she designed and

implemented a program that brought books and learning opportunities to children across the region.

This was groundbreaking work—she created engaging reading programs, curated book collections specifically tailored for young minds, and encouraged schools to integrate library visits into their curriculum. Her belief in the importance of early literacy and education drove her to make the library not just a place for books but a hub of learning and imagination.

Her efforts were widely recognised, and she became a respected figure in Cornwall's education and library services. The Children's Library Service flourished under her leadership, setting a precedent for other regions to follow.

An Emerging Passion for Education and Children

As Mary's work increasingly brought her into contact with schools and young learners, her passion for education, teaching and children became evident. These early experiences, particularly in the children's school library service, sparked a deep and lasting appreciation for the curiosity and potential of young minds. More than just a professional interest, this connection with children became a defining part of who she was, shaping her relationships and commitments throughout her life.

Mary believed that libraries were more than just repositories of books—they were spaces of discovery and inspiration. She saw them as places where children could explore the world beyond their immediate surroundings, and she took great joy in fostering that excitement for learning. This philosophy guided her transition into teaching and later roles in adult education, reinforcing her lifelong belief in the power of knowledge to change lives.

Her move to Cornwall proved to be a turning point, solidifying her role in the community and deepening her engagement with the families around her. What had begun as a career in library services evolved into a lifelong dedication to nurturing and supporting others. This ability to connect, to guide, and to care for those around her would become an intrinsic part of her legacy, extending far beyond the walls of any school or library.

Mary's Work in the Cornwall County Council School Library Service and Lifelong Friendships

In this position, Mary travelled extensively, visiting schools, advising teachers on how to best integrate library resources into their curricula, and encouraging children to explore the joy of reading. Her work wasn't just administrative—she was an advocate

for early literacy, structured learning through books, and fostering curiosity in young minds. Her natural warmth and intelligence made her a beloved figure among students and teachers alike.

Sneaking Off to Bed



Mary's younger sisters, Pam and Val, have fond memories of her during her time working at the Cornwall County Council library service. At that time, they were still children, and Mary had taken on a bit of a motherly role in their lives. Mary would cycle from home to the railway station to catch the train to Truro each day. In the evenings, when she returned, sometimes Pam and Val would still be up when they were supposed to be in bed. Hearing Mary's bike coming up to the house was the signal to dash upstairs, dive into bed with their clothes still on, and pretend to be fast asleep. They were always convinced that Mary knew exactly what they were up to, but she never said a word—just letting them get away with it. It's a memory that always brings a smile, reflecting both Mary's gentle nature and the special bond she had with her younger sisters.



A Transformative Friendship: Meeting Deborah



It was during these early years in the School Library Service that Mary met Deborah, a young and enthusiastic woman who had recently joined as one of Cornwall's first mobile school library drivers. The two quickly developed a deep and meaningful friendship, one that would shape both of their lives in profound ways.

Mary was captivated by Deborah's energy and intelligence and their bond extended beyond professional interests. As part of the mobile school library service, Mary and Deborah travelled together across Cornwall, delivering books to schools and ensuring children in remote areas had access to

reading materials and running library programs. This shared experience strengthened their friendship, as they spent countless hours on the road discussing literature, education, and their personal aspirations.

Deborah, however, struggled with lifelong mental health challenges, and Mary quickly became a steadfast source of support and stability in her life. She provided emotional guidance, encouragement, and unwavering friendship, helping Deborah navigate both personal and professional challenges.

Mary's kindness extended beyond just Deborah—she also played a crucial role in helping Deborah's mother, Vera, secure a home in St Agnes, the same village where Mary and Deborah were living.

Key Friendships That Shaped Mary's Journey

Alongside her growing friendship with Deborah, Mary formed close bonds with several remarkable women who played pivotal roles in both her professional and personal life.

Joan Butler – A Colleague, A Confidante, and a Lasting Gift



Joan Butler was a key figure in UK's school library services and became one of Mary's most cherished friends. Their shared dedication to improving school libraries and providing children with access to literature created a strong professional connection that soon evolved into a profound friendship.

Joan's support and wisdom were invaluable to Mary throughout the years. Even after Joan retired, their friendship remained strong. Joan's impact on Mary's life extended beyond shared memories—she later left Mary £800 in her will, a sum that allowed Mary to complete the conversion of her beloved home, The Barn. This final gift was a testament to the depth of their friendship and the lasting influence they had on each other's lives.

Judith Tregenza – A Life Changed Through Mary's Guidance

Another significant friendship that blossomed in Mary's life was with Judith Tregenza, a teacher who first met Mary through Deborah. Their relationship grew from an initial connection through shared living arrangements into a close personal friendship.

Judith's connection with Mary began when Mike and Deborah lived together in Judith's cottage. Recalling their time together, Judith said, "I'm not sure how long you were there... eight months? You'd been staying in a caravan near Mousehole, and my Mum met Deborah. She suggested to her—and to me—that you move into my cottage with me, which was very nice." It was during this time that Mary would visit on weekends to see Mike, and it was in those moments that she and Judith truly connected.

Over time, Mary recognised Judith's intellectual depth and keen interest in understanding human behaviour. Seeing her potential, Mary encouraged Judith to explore new opportunities beyond teaching. It was through conversations at Judith's cottage that Mary first mentioned Eileen's course in Exeter, which led Judith to apply. With Mary's guidance, encouragement, and support, Judith eventually transitioned from teaching to becoming a psychotherapist, a career change that she later credited Mary with helping her achieve. Judith expressed that Mary played a crucial role in shaping the course of her life, steering her towards a path that was far more fulfilling.

Marjorie Wilson – A Connection to History and Politics

Through her work, Mary also developed a strong friendship with Marjorie Wilson, a head teacher in Cornwall. Marjorie was a woman of great influence in educational circles, known for her sharp intellect and leadership. However, what made their friendship particularly intriguing was Marjorie's family connection—she was the sister of Harold Wilson, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Though Marjorie was not directly involved in politics, she and Mary often had spirited discussions about current affairs, governance, and the role of education in shaping society. Their conversations enriched Mary's understanding of the broader political landscape and further cemented her belief in the importance of education as a vehicle for societal change. A lifelong Labour supporter, Mary was deeply interested in political discourse and strongly believed in social equity and public investment in education. Marjorie's connection to political life added an extra dimension to their friendship, but at its heart, their bond was built on mutual respect, shared values, and a dedication to education.

A Defining Period in Mary's Life

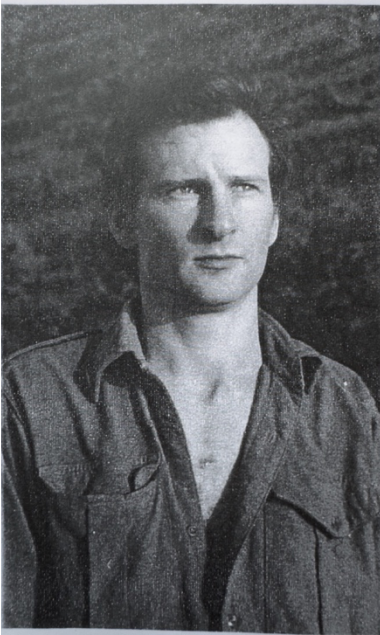
Mary's time in Cornwall County Council's School Library Service was transformative—not just for her career but for the relationships she built. Her work in expanding library services, fostering a love for reading, and mentoring colleagues became defining aspects of her professional identity.

Her friendships with Deborah, Joan, Judith, and Marjorie enriched her life in immeasurable ways. Each of these women played a different role in shaping Mary's journey, just as she left an indelible mark on theirs.

This period set the foundation for the profound personal changes that were soon to come. Mary's love for children, her commitment to education, and her capacity for deep, lifelong friendships would continue to shape her story in ways she never could have predicted.

A Difficult Period: Love, Loss, and Becoming a Mother (1960–1965)

Deborah Meets Michael McKeown



In the early 1960s, Deborah met Michael Papworth McKeown while both were undergoing treatment for mental health issues. Michael had struggled with mental illness for several years, and during this time, he and Deborah quickly formed an intense bond.

Michael's family, including his mother Sue and sister Jill, were supportive of the relationship, hopeful that marriage would bring Michael the love and stability he needed. Deborah's mother, Vera, also welcomed their union, recognising how much happiness they brought each other. Within three months, the couple married, beginning a new chapter together filled with optimism despite the challenges they both faced.

Life in Polruan and Tragedy on Bodmin Moor

After their marriage, Deborah and Michael moved to Polruan, Cornwall, where they lived in the garden room at Sue's house, September Cottage. Mary remained in St Agnes, but she stayed closely involved in their lives, always looking out for Deborah's well-being.

Their time in Polruan was short-lived and deeply troubled. Michael struggled to find suitable employment and was increasingly overwhelmed by his mental health battles. Their idyllic summer together was filled with poetry and fleeting happiness, but as time went on, Michael's inner turmoil deepened.

One fateful night in July 1964, Michael disappeared after a row. After an exhaustive search, he was found a month later, curled in the fatal position near Bodmin Moor, having taken his own life. He had returned to his favourite childhood haunt to end his suffering, leaving Deborah behind in shock and devastation. Michael never knew that Deborah was pregnant.

Deborah's Mental Health Decline and Suicide Attempt

Following Michael's death, Deborah returned to St Agnes to live with Mary, who provided constant support and care. However, the grief and mental strain became

unbearable. As her pregnancy progressed, Deborah attempted suicide, drinking a mix of milk and sleeping pills.

For three agonising days, Mary led search parties, desperately scouring the surrounding countryside and coastal cliffs, fearing the worst. Eventually, Mary found Deborah on a secluded cliffside, barely conscious. The milk had absorbed some of the sleeping pills, preventing a fatal overdose. Both Deborah and the unborn baby survived.

This period must have been one of the darkest in Mary's life. The sheer emotional and physical toll of caring for Deborah, searching for her, and witnessing her despair must have been devastating. Yet, through it all, Mary never abandoned her. She remained steadfast, ensuring both Deborah and the baby had a future.

A New Life: The Birth of Michael Sean McKeown



On April 2, 1965, Michael Sean McKeown (Mike) was born in Redruth Hospital. Mary was by Deborah's side throughout the birth, providing unwavering support. From that moment on, she remained a constant presence in Mike's life—first as a co-mother alongside Deborah and later as his mother in every meaningful way.

Mary always called him Micheal, but to his family and friends he was Mike.

Moving to Cherrystones: A Fresh Start



After Mike's birth, Mary and Deborah, along with the baby, moved into Cherrystones in St Agnes, seeking a fresh start as a family. It was here that they began to build a more stable home life, despite the emotional weight of the past few years. Mary took on the role of a caregiver, protector, and guide, ensuring that both Deborah and Mike had the love and stability they needed.

This period of Mary's life—marked by profound loss, deep struggles, and unconditional love—would shape the course of her future.

Sue and Jill McKeown



Despite the hardships, Mary remained close to Sue and Jill, maintaining a strong relationship with them over the years. Like Mary, both Sue and Jill were strong, independent women who navigated life with determination and resilience. Their shared values and outlook on life created a deep and lasting connection between them.

Sue, Michael McKeown's mother, was a steadfast and resourceful woman, facing life's challenges with quiet strength. Although deeply affected by the loss of her son, she carried on with dignity and remained a stabilising presence in the lives of those around her. Mary admired Sue's fortitude, and over time, their bond grew beyond shared tragedy into a friendship built on mutual respect and understanding.

Jill, Michael's sister, had pursued a career in medicine, becoming a doctor, a profession that reflected her own intelligence, independence, and commitment to helping others. She raised two sons, Jamie and Robin, and later became a grandmother. Mary considered Jill and her family as an extension of her own, finding joy in watching Jamie and Robin grow into adulthood. She remained connected to Jill throughout her life, valuing their shared history and the unspoken understanding that came from having faced similar trials.

Mary and Sue remained in touch for many years, sharing letters, phone calls, and the occasional visit, keeping their connection alive despite the distance. With Jill, the relationship endured for Mary's entire life, a testament to the strength of their bond. Whether exchanging news of their families, reminiscing about the past, or offering each other support through life's inevitable ups and downs, Mary's connection with Jill remained a steady and meaningful presence.

For Mary, Sue and Jill were not just extended family by circumstance—they were kindred spirits, women of strength and independence who faced life with resilience. Their friendships were a testament to the importance of enduring bonds, and they remained a significant part of Mary's life story.

Emerging Motherhood

While the wounds of this time probably never fully healed, it was also the beginning of something new: a lifelong commitment to raising and nurturing Mike, and a testament to Mary's unwavering strength, resilience, and boundless love.

A Time of Change: Family Life, Challenges, and Finding a Home (1965–1976)

Early Family Life at Cherrystones (1965–1969)

After Mike's birth in 1965, Mary, Deborah, and the baby settled into Cherrystones in St Agnes, creating a family life that, for a time, was filled with happiness and stability. These were some of the best years of Mary's life—a period of love, security, and joy, where she could nurture Mike in a safe and caring home. In 1967, Mary legally became Mike's guardian, formalising the role she had already played since his birth.

Mary's role in Mike's life was deeply significant. While Deborah was his mother, it was Mary who provided the structure, security, and stability that defined his early years. She created a loving and warm environment, ensuring he felt safe and cherished. Mike has fond memories of these early years, remembering Mary's unwavering love and how she was a constant presence, shaping his sense of security and belonging.



During this time, Mary continued to thrive in her career at the School Library Service, which was going well. She remained dedicated to education and literacy, helping schools develop stronger library programs and advocating for children's access to books. Her work was fulfilling, and she was respected among her colleagues for her commitment and expertise.

The family also had dogs, which Mary adored. At the time of Mike's birth, they had a dachshund named Pretzel, who was much loved and became a part of the household's warmth and companionship.

Vera's Passing and the Loss of Cherrystones (1969–1970)

In 1969, Deborah's mother, Vera, passed away, an event that led to unexpected complications. Before her death, Mary had purchased Vera's house for her, intending it to be a secure home. However, following Vera's death, the property had to be rented out, and a sitting tenant refused to leave. This legal and financial complication forced Mary to sell the house at a loss, which in turn led to the difficult decision to leave Cherrystones.

Deborah's Departure to Scotland and the Disruption (1970–1971)

As Deborah's mental health struggles continued, she began to feel restless, believing life might be better elsewhere. In 1970, without warning, she took Mike and left for Scotland in a VW camper van, which Mary had purchased for family trips. They lived



in Scotland for several months before the local education authorities intervened, requiring Deborah to return so Mike could attend school.

Upon their return to Cornwall, they were temporarily without a stable home, and for a short time, they lived in the camper van on a campsite in St Agnes while Mary found more permanent accommodation. During this period, Mary rented a flat nearby,

ensuring that she was still close and able to support them.

Finding a New Home in Penzance (1971–1973)

Determined to restore stability, Mary arranged for Deborah and Mike to stay in a cottage in Newlyn, near Penzance, which was owned by Judith Tregenza. They remained there for several months while Mary looked for a permanent home. Eventually, she was able to purchase a house in Penzance, where Mike was enrolled in school, giving him much-needed consistency and structure in his education.

During this period, Mary also took a course to qualify as a Further Education teacher, furthering her commitment to education. She completed the course and earned her certification in 1972, a significant professional achievement. It was during this time that she met Eileen Chandler, a lecturer at Exeter University, who became a close friend. Their shared interest in education and intellectual pursuits formed the foundation of a strong and lasting bond.

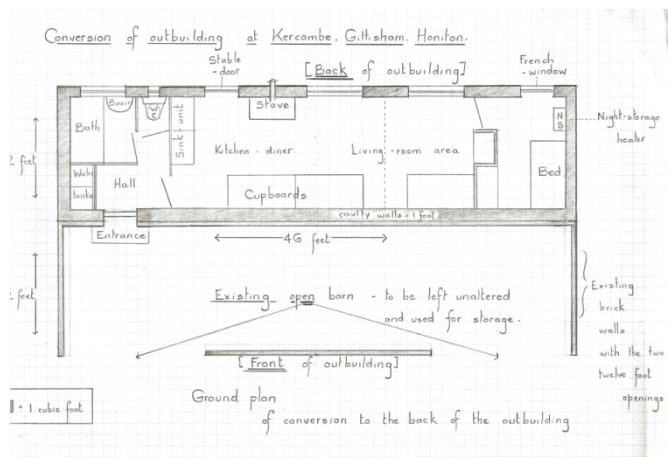
Illness, Early Retirement, and the Move to Devon (1973–1975)



The ongoing stress of Deborah's worsening mental health and the challenges of balancing work and caregiving took a toll on Mary's health. By 1973, she became too unwell to continue working and was forced to take early retirement from the School Library Service.

Around this time, Eileen Chandler offered Mary a place to stay at her home in Kercombe, near Gittisham, Honiton. Initially, Mary lived inside Eileen's house, but she soon purchased a "Devon Lady" wooden chalet, which she had installed in Eileen's Garden to give herself a greater sense of independence.

Designing and Building Kercombe Barn



In 1975, Mary secured planning permission to purchase a barn next to

Eileen's home—a brick cow barn, which she intended to convert into a permanent residence. Due to planning restrictions, the property had to be purchased as an annex to Eileen's home, though Mary was later able to separate the properties legally in 1992. Mary lived in a caravan next to the barn, ensuring she was close to the work as it progressed.

A Difficult Decision: Mike Moves to Polruan (1975)

During this time, Deborah's mental health deteriorated further, making it impossible for her to care for Mike, and with Mary's own health struggles, she was also unable to provide the full care he needed.

As a result, in 1975 the house in Penzance was sold, and Mike went to live with his grandmother, Sue, in Polruan, for his final year of primary school. It allowed Mike to have stability and security while Mary focused on recovering her health and completing her home.

Moving into Kercombe Barn (1976)



After a long process of planning, renovation, and determination, Mary finally moved into Kercombe Barn in 1976. This would be the home where she would live for the next 49 years, a place where she could regain her independence and create a sanctuary for herself.

Fun fact—after Mary moved into Kercombe Barn, Eileen repurposed the Devon Lady chalet that Mary had originally lived in, incorporating it as an extension to her kitchen, where it remains to this day.

This period of Mary's life was one of transition, resilience, and perseverance. Despite the upheavals of Deborah's struggles, her own health challenges, and the emotional toll of being separated from Mike, Mary never wavered in her love, support, and determination to ensure both her own stability and that of those she cared about. The move to Kercombe Barn marked a new chapter, one in which she would rebuild her life, surrounded by the peace and independence she had always sought.



A New Chapter: Stability, Advocacy, and Loss (1976–1981)

Moving to Ottery St Mary and Visiting The Barn (1976–1978)

In 1976, Deborah bought a house in Ottery St Mary, and with that change, Mike moved there to start secondary school at Sidmouth Community College. This marked a transition from the previous years in Penzance and Polruan, and for the first 18 months, Mike would visit Mary at The Barn most weekends, cycling from Ottery St Mary to Kercombe Barn.

Though living in Ottery, Mike's bond with Mary remained as strong as ever. These weekend visits were filled with warmth and stability, providing a sense of continuity that would prove invaluable as the years unfolded.

Moving to The Barn Permanently (1978–1981)



By 1978, Mike made the decision to move permanently to The Barn. While part of this decision was his own preference to live with Mary, it was also driven by the increasing struggles Deborah faced with her mental health. She was undergoing treatment once again, and it became clear that she was unable to provide the support and stability that Mike needed.

Life at The Barn was happy and fulfilling. Mary provided love, encouragement, and stability, ensuring that Mike thrived. Her approach to parenting was both firm and nurturing, instilling values of independence and curiosity, while also ensuring he had all the guidance he needed.

Mary's Fierce Advocacy and a Life-Changing Intervention



One of the most defining moments of Mary's impact on Mike's future occurred when he faced serious educational challenges. Mike was dyslexic, though at the time, dyslexia was not widely understood. As a result, his English and Math's suffered, and the school planned to move him into a remedial class.

This decision could have significantly altered the course of his life, but Mary was having none of it. With her

characteristic strong-mindedness, she fought the school relentlessly, refusing to allow Mike to be sidelined. Thanks to her persistence, the school reversed its decision, ensuring that Mike remained on a path that would eventually lead him to higher education and career success.

Mike credits much of his success in life to Mary's unwavering support and intervention, including the encouragement and expectation that university was simply the natural next step. Mary had a way of making academic achievement feel normal and attainable, and her belief in education played a pivotal role in shaping Mike's aspirations and achievements.

Mary's Work and Lasting Contributions to Honiton

During this period, Mary also took on part-time work at Honiton Town Council, a role that allowed her to stay engaged in community affairs while balancing her responsibilities at home. One of her unique contributions to the town was naming several streets in the Heathpark estate. Given her love of nature, she ensured that the streets were named after trees, a small but enduring mark of her influence on the town.

The Tragic Loss of Deborah (1981)



In 1981, tragedy struck when Deborah took her own life, a devastating event that deeply impacted Mary. She had lost one of the most important people in her life, someone she had loved deeply for decades. Despite their struggles, their connection had remained profound, and her loss was a heavy burden to bear.

Yet, in the face of grief, Mary remained unwavering in her role as Mike's mother. She provided him with the stability, love, and support that he needed, ensuring that he was not alone in this painful time. From this point onward, she became not just a co-mother, but Mike's one and only mother for the rest of her life.

A Turning Point and a Foundation for the Future

This period of Mary's life was one of both heartbreak and resilience. She faced profound loss, yet she also provided unwavering love and security to the person who needed her most. The move to The Barn, her advocacy for Mike's education, and her steadfast support created the foundation for the future, a legacy of strength, love, and determination that would define the years to come.

A Funny Memory: The Great Crispy Cake Disaster

One of the many things that made life with Mary special was her quick thinking and unwavering support, even in the face of absolute culinary catastrophe.

One day, while attending a cookery class at school, I was meant to bring in the ingredients to make chocolate rice crispy cakes. The problem? I had forgotten to tell Mary to buy the ingredients.

But Mary was never one to let a small setback get in the way. With her characteristic resourcefulness and optimism, she improvised with what we had in the house:

- No rice crispies? No problem—we had some rather stale cornflakes!
- No chocolate? Well, hot chocolate powder would do the trick!
- No golden syrup? That's fine, black syrup should work just as well... right?

She packed up my questionable substitute ingredients, and off I went to school, ready to cook.

The result? Utter disaster. The cakes were sticky, rock-hard, and tasted absolutely foul. When I brought them home, Mary—ever the supportive one—assured me that she was sure they were delicious. Then, in a moment I'll never forget, she bravely took a bite, pulled one of her signature funny faces, and tried to chew through the inedible mess.

After a brief moment of mutual horror, the cakes were quickly consigned to the garden for the birds. We joked for years afterwards that we may have accidentally broken the beaks of some of her beloved wildies!

It was just another example of Mary's humour, encouragement, and ability to turn even a disaster into a cherished memory.

The Piglet Years: Mary, Hospitality, and Lifelong Friendships (1982–1986)

A New Chapter: Mike’s College and University Years

Between 1982 and 1986, Mike’s journey in education took him from Tiverton College, where he studied for his A-levels, to Swansea University, where he pursued his degree in Computer Science.

Mary, ‘Piglet,’ and the Biscuit Tin Tradition

During this time, many of Mike’s friends from college and university, and Swansea visited The Barn, and each of them came to know and love Mary. Her warmth, humour, and ability to connect with people of all generations made a lasting impression. Among the regular visitors were Andrew, Di, Simon, Chris, Phil, Andrew’s V, Andrew B, and Richard—all of whom quickly became part of the extended Barn family.

It was during these years that Mary acquired the affectionate nickname “Piglet”, a reference to her funny snorting laugh, which had a way of making everyone around her burst into laughter too.

“I was 16 when we met on the Tivvy college bus, getting to know Mary had a great influence on myself that I will be for ever grateful for. All of your friends benefited from knowing Mary”.

“She will leave a big hole in all the lives and all the cakes we dodged”

One of Mary’s defining characteristics was her absolute determination to ensure everyone was well-fed. Her hospitality knew no bounds, and she took great pleasure in making sure visitors were comfortable and had plenty to eat.



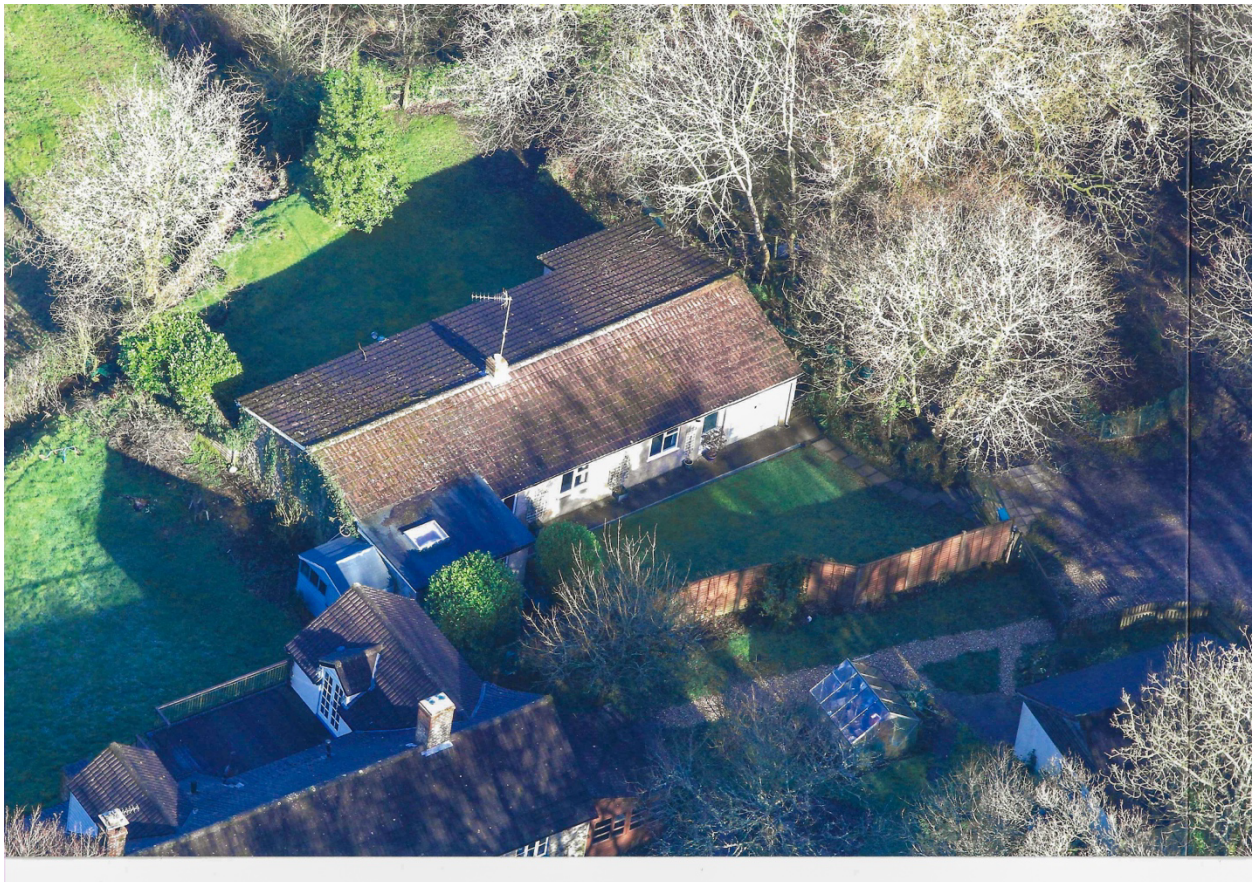
A now legendary tradition among Mike’s friends was “being chased by the biscuit tin”—Mary’s unwavering insistence that everyone has just one more biscuit or slice of cake or some nuts. She would repeatedly offer treats, ensuring that no guest ever left feeling hungry. Even those who politely declined found themselves gently pursued with biscuits in hand, much to everyone’s amusement.

Her ability to bridge generational gaps and make young people feel at home was remarkable. Whether sharing stories, engaging in debates, or simply making sure everyone had a full plate, Mary was at the heart of every gathering, effortlessly becoming a much-loved figure among Mike's friends.

The Barn: A Home for All

Through these years, The Barn was more than just a house—it was a home filled with warmth, laughter, and an open-door policy for all who visited. Mary's kindness, humour, and generosity made it a place where friendships flourished, and memories were made.

Looking back, those who visited The Barn during this time remember Mary not just as Mike's mother, but as a wonderful presence in their own lives—a woman who embodied warmth, care, and an ever-present biscuit tin.



Mary's Life with Mike, Annie, and Her Grandchildren (1988–2025)

A Wedding in Blue (1988)

In 1988, Mike married Annie, and, of course, Mary was there to celebrate the occasion in Lympstone. It was one of the rare occasions she was seen wearing a skirt, though



true to her lifelong love of sky blue, she made sure to wear her favourite colour. At the wedding, she was able to catch up with Jill and Sue, reconnecting with old friends and family in what was a joyous occasion.

Welcoming Grandchildren into the World



Mary became a grandmother to three boys—Jake (1994), Miles (1997), and Max (2000). Each time, Mary drove up to meet them as soon as they were born, excited to welcome them into the world. At the time, she drove a Mini Clubman Estate, and had a dog named Darcy—yet another of Mary's literary references. A running joke emerged that, since Darcy would sit in the passenger seat and Mary was so short, at a glance, it often looked like Darcy was the one driving!

The Club Room and Family Fun



Mary loved Jake, Miles, and Max, and they adored her. She set up the garage as their “Club Room”, a special place for play and mischief. She kept a “Club Box” fully stocked with chocolates, cakes, and biscuits, ensuring she could continue the famous “chasing the biscuit tin” tradition with a new generation.

Mary was not only loving but also game for fun. The boys made videos with her, and she fully embraced her roles:

- **“Cooking Mad Max”** – where Mary played Max’s reluctant cooking assistant, demonstrating great comedic timing.
- **“Rambo Junior”** – in which she gleefully took on the part of “the torturer.”

Her sense of humour and willingness to join in the fun made her not just a grandmother, but a true part of the adventure.

Generosity and a Love for Literature



Mary was incredibly generous, not only with her time and love but also with Christmas and birthday gifts, ensuring that Mike, Annie, Jake, Miles, and Max were always treated to something special. True to her passion for literature, her gifts often included books.

When the family moved to Thames House, by the River Thames in the Cotswolds, Mary’s enthusiasm for books came through yet again—they received nearly every book ever written about the Thames from her!

Sunday Visits and Politics

As Mary became frailer, Mike visited her more frequently, eventually every Sunday. These visits were deeply cherished, filled with conversation, laughter, and political debates. They shared a strong dislike of Brexit, which was a frequent topic of discussion.

However, one of Mary's favourite conspiracy theories was her firm belief that King Charles would abdicate and disestablish the Church of England—a claim that Mike never quite believed but always humoured with a laugh.

A Tactical Voter to the End



Mary remained sharp-minded and politically engaged right to the end. In the last general election, she switched allegiance from Labour to the Liberal Democrats—partly because Mike was a Lib Dem councillor, but also because she strategically voted tactically to get the candidate she wanted.

A Bond with Chloe



Mary also became very fond of Chloe, Max's partner. She saw in Chloe another strong woman, and they bonded over their mutual love of cats. Chloe's drawing of Ellykins, gifted to Mary as a present, was hung proudly next to Mary's seat, a reminder of their connection.

A Friendship with Robert



Mary was also very close to Robert, Annie's dad, who was the same age as her. The two would reminisce about the past, swapping stories about their wartime experiences, including what air raid shelters they had used.

Whenever possible, they were brought together to meet, and one of the last times was a visit to see Robert in his care home just before Christmas 2024, a moment Mary greatly enjoyed.

A Life Interwoven with Love

Mary's later years were not just about her own independence and friendships—they were deeply interwoven with the lives of her family. Her love, generosity, and humour



shaped the experiences of her grandchildren, and she remained a pillar of support for Mike and Annie.

Through books, biscuit tins, Sunday visits, and unwavering love, Mary created a legacy of warmth, laughter, and connection—one that will live on in the memories of all who knew her.

Life at The Barn: Community, Friendship, and Transformation (1990s–2010s)

Transforming The Barn into a Complete Home

In the 1992, Mary was able to make significant changes to The Barn, thanks to the generosity of her dear friend Joan Butler, who left Mary money in her will. This allowed Mary to convert the other half of The Barn and add the garage and store,



shaping the home into what it is today. These improvements not only made the space more comfortable but also cemented The Barn as the heart of Mary's world, a place where friends and family could always find warmth, tea, and lively conversation.

In 1996, Mary added a porch to The Barn, transforming it into her office. Always practical and organized, she took great pleasure in having a dedicated space for paperwork, letters, and keeping everything in order. It became a little hub of her daily routines, reflecting her love of staying on top of things.

A Lifelong Friendship with Jan Steele-Perkins

When Mary purchased The Barn, her solicitor was David Steele-Perkins. Through this, she met David's wife, Jan, a friend of Eileen Chandler. Over time, Mary and Jan developed a close and lasting friendship.

Jan became a regular visitor, bringing companionship, support, and laughter into Mary's life. Their friendship endured for decades, with Jan's children also getting to know Mary. In later years, Jan's children brought their own children to visit, ensuring that the bonds between their families remained strong.



New Neighbours and Lifelong Friends: Clare and Nick at Kercombe

In 1996, Eileen sold Kercombe, marking the end of an era. While their relationship had its complexities, this change led to something wonderful—Nick and Clare Chapman purchased Kercombe, becoming Mary's new neighbours and lifelong friends.



Mary was thrilled to see young children grow up next door. When Clare and Nick moved in, they had two small children, Tom and Rosie, and later welcomed a third, Leo. True to her nature, Mary developed a close bond with the children, often having them over for tea (Mary was famous for drinking very milky tea). In fact, Tom was introduced to tea by Mary, she let him have it with seven sugars!



Even as adults, Rosie continued to visit Mary regularly, and when she had her own daughter, Maya, she brought her over to meet Mary, ensuring that another generation had the joy of knowing her.

Mary also supported Clare in pursuing an English Literature degree, encouraging and inspiring her in the same way she had with so many others.

Maggie Walker: A Life Changed Through Mary's Encouragement



Another close friend from this period was Maggie Walker, a friend of Eileen Chandler who lived in nearby Gittisham. Mary's influence played a key role in Maggie's decision to pursue an English Literature degree, just as she had encouraged Clare.

Maggie later wrote her dissertation on Mary's life story, receiving a first-class degree. She credits Mary with changing her life, as the experience led her to become a teacher.

Maggie's children, Molly, Oliver and Barnaby, also visited Mary often as children, and later, as adults, they continued to bring their own children to visit, strengthening the intergenerational friendships that

Mary fostered throughout her life.

Friendships Formed Through Dog Walks and Community Connections

Mary loved to take her dogs on walks through The Beech Walk, the beautiful wood above The Barn. Through these daily walks, she made lasting friendships, particularly with Enid Harts, with whom she shared a love for animals and the outdoors.

A Love for Books and Community Engagement

Mary's passion for literature extended beyond personal encouragement—she hosted a book club at The Barn, bringing together a wide group of friends to discuss their favourite reads. These gatherings were filled with intellectual debate, storytelling, and laughter, reinforcing the deep sense of community that Mary fostered around her.

A Unique Friendship with Richard Saunders



Despite not being religious, Mary formed a strong and unique friendship with Richard Saunders, the local vicar. Their debates and discussions on faith, philosophy, and life were both entertaining and thought-provoking. Richard deeply respected Mary's intelligence and wit, and they shared a mutual appreciation for spirited, good-humoured conversations.

The Barn: A Home Filled with Love, Laughter, and Generations of Friendships

Throughout the 1990s and 2010s, The Barn became a hub of friendship, encouragement, and warmth. Mary's ability to connect with people of all generations made her a beloved presence in so many lives. Whether she was encouraging academic pursuits, welcoming families for tea, debating philosophy, or simply enjoying a dog walk with a friend, she created a community of love, support, and kindness that will never be forgotten.

This period laid the foundation for the final chapter of Mary's life, one where her friendships deepened, and her home remained a beacon of warmth and connection.

The Later Years at The Barn: Independence, Friendship, and Resilience (2010s–2025)

A Transition from Dogs to Cats



As Mary grew older and less able to care for a dog, she transitioned to having cats as companions. First came Bella, then Moley, and later, Ellykins, who became her beloved feline companion in her final years. It was through Gina, a close friend who visited regularly, that Mary found Ellykins, adding warmth and companionship to her daily life.

The Book Club Fades, Friendships Deepen

While Mary's book club gradually phased out, she was never without company and conversation. Close friends continued to visit regularly, ensuring that The Barn remained filled with warmth and laughter.

Tracy and Kathy

Kathy was Mary's community transport driver, often taking her to appointments, and over time, they became good friends. Through Kathy, Mary got to know her daughter, Tracy, who initially started working for Mary as a cleaner and carer. However, it was their conversations that truly deepened their relationship. Mary greatly enjoyed talking with Tracy—whether about everyday life, local news, or sharing stories from her past. Their chats became a highlight of Mary's day, evolving their relationship from a working arrangement into a close and lasting friendship. Even after Tracy moved on to another job, she continued to visit Mary regularly, ensuring she always had company and lively conversation. Tracy's visits were filled with laughter, warmth, and companionship, making her a treasured part of Mary's later years.

Gina King

Gina was another cherished friend who became a regular presence in Mary's later years. Their friendship formed through a shared love of animals, and it was Gina who helped Mary find her beloved cat, Ellykins, who became her faithful companion in her final years. Gina visited Mary regularly, offering warmth, companionship, and a listening ear. Whether they were chatting over tea or simply enjoying the peaceful surroundings of The Barn, Gina's visits were a source of joy and comfort. Her kindness and support ensured that Mary was never without company, and their friendship was a testament to the deep connections Mary built with those around her.

Sarah & Lenny Abbott

Sarah was another dear friend who became a regular visitor to The Barn in Mary's later years. She and her husband, Lenny, formed a strong bond with Mary, offering friendship, support, and practical help when needed. Lenny, a skilled handyman, made several improvements to The Barn, including adding fencing to the patio and securing the outside steps, allowing Mary to continue safely enjoying her garden and feeding her beloved wild birds. Sarah's visits were always filled with warmth and conversation, ensuring Mary remained socially connected and surrounded by friends who cared deeply for her. Their friendship was one of many that exemplified the kindness and community spirit that Mary fostered throughout her life.

The Joy of the Wildies



Mary's love of nature and wildlife remained unwavering. She adored her "wildies", the birds and other animals that would gather as she fed them up close from her patio. It brought her immense joy to see them return each day, and Lenny's work in securing the patio allowed her to continue this tradition safely well into her later years. She also loved watching cows and sheep in the field in front of The Barn, and occasionally, she would spot deer passing through the landscape.

For a few years, Mary was delighted by the presence of a deer and its fawns that regularly visited her garden. She named the deer Demelza, after the character in Poldark, one of her literary

favourites. Observing these animals up close brought her endless joy, further strengthening her connection to the natural world around her.

Friendships with Liz and Ann

Mary maintained strong friendships with Liz and Ann, who were frequent visitors at The Barn.

Embracing Technology and Staying Connected



Despite her increasing frailty, Mary remained remarkably tech-savvy. Her intelligence and determination ensured that she kept up with modern technology. She owned an iPad, which she used daily to communicate via Facebook Messenger with friends and family. Even when she was hospitalised, she was the only “oldie” on the ward with an iPad!

Mary’s home was surprisingly high-tech for someone of her generation. To help her stay independent and safe, Mike installed Google Nest Cameras around The Barn, and Mary wore an ActiCheck fall detector and emergency call wristband. She was fiercely independent, but these measures provided extra security, ensuring that she could remain in her beloved home.

A Determined Spirit in the Face of Frailty

In her late 90s, Mary’s strong mind and determination were key to her continued independence. Even as physical frailty increased, she refused to give in. She had a stroke, which she thankfully recovered from, but it left her weaker and more vulnerable to falls. After one such fall, she injured her arm, further limiting her mobility. Despite this, she remained active and engaged, driven by her will to stay in her home at The Barn.

Support in Later Years

To help her maintain her independence, Mary received daily support from Bluebird carers arranged by social services. They would visit at the end of each day, ensuring she was comfortable and helping her prepare for bed. In addition, Laura, her regular cleaner, became an essential support in maintaining her home and daily routine.

An Inspiring Legacy of Independence

Mary's later years at The Barn were a testament to her resilience, intelligence, and sheer determination. Even as her body became frailer, her mind remained sharp, her sense of humour intact, and her connections with friends and family as strong as ever.

Her ability to adapt, embrace technology, and stay socially engaged meant that even in her final years, she continued to live life on her own terms, maintaining the independence and dignity she valued so deeply.

For those who knew her, Mary's later years were not defined by frailty, but by strength, humour, and an unshakable will to keep going—all within the cherished walls of The Barn, the home she had built and loved for nearly five decades.

Mary's Peaceful Passing and Final Chapter (February 2025)

A Beautiful Final Memory



On February 6, 2025, I visited Mary to take her to a hearing aid appointment. Before we left, we stood together, admiring the newly arrived sheep in the field outside The Barn. The sunset cast a warm glow over the valley, creating a breathtaking view that perfectly captured the beauty of The Barn's surroundings. I took a photo, and later, Mary remarked on how much she loved it—a reminder of what a wonderful place The Barn was to

live.

A Day Like Any Other (February 7, 2025)

Mary's final day was as full and active as ever, a testament to her determination and independence. She was up early, classical music playing loudly, as always. She bustled around the house, staying busy in her usual way, and even went outside to feed the "wildies", a moment she always cherished. She loved being surrounded by them as she scattered the seed, watching them flutter around her.



Later in the afternoon, at around 4:30 PM, she settled into her chair and picked up her iPad, likely planning to read the news and send a message—a simple, familiar moment. The camera recording shows her sitting peacefully, iPad in hand, reflecting her quiet but engaged routine.

The Stroke and Her Peaceful Transition

At 5 PM, Mary's carer arrived and found her asleep in her chair, still holding her iPad, but was unable to wake her. Clare and Nick were called, and after checking on her, they rang me. We agreed something was wrong and called 111, who confirmed that Mary needed urgent care. Paramedics were dispatched, and I immediately started the drive down to The Barn.

By the time I arrived, the paramedics had confirmed what we had feared—Mary had suffered another stroke. Fortunately, as before, it was at the back of her brain, meaning it had simply put her to sleep, without pain or distress.

Mary had always been adamant that she wanted to stay at home, not be taken to a hospital. In line with her wishes, we agreed to keep her comfortable in bed, ensuring her final hours would be spent in her beloved home. The doctor estimated she had less than 48 hours, so we focused on making sure she was at peace, pain-free, and surrounded by love.

A Chance to Say Goodbye

The news spread quickly among Mary's family and friends, and over the next two days, people came to visit and say their goodbyes. At one point, there was even a queue in the lounge—a testament to how loved and cherished Mary was.

The doctor had told us that while Mary couldn't respond, she could likely hear us and feel our presence. So, I stayed with her constantly, holding her hand, talking to her, and playing classical music—a familiar comfort. At one moment, she briefly regained some consciousness. Though she couldn't speak, she took my hand, a final acknowledgment that she knew I was there.

Annie and Ellykins were by her side as well. Ellykins, ever loyal, spent most of those two days curled up beside her, providing a quiet presence of comfort and familiarity.

At just after 5 PM on Sunday, Mary peacefully slipped away. I told her it was time to go into the light, that Deborah would be waiting for her, and that one day, I would see her again.

Mary's Final Wishes: Returning to The Barn

Mary's passing was exactly as she would have wanted—in her own home, surrounded by those who loved her, without fuss or distress.

She had always made it clear that she wanted minimal ceremony, and rather than a large formal funeral, I brought her ashes back to The Barn.

Most of them are scattered in the garden, along with bird seed, so that she can rest among the “wildies” she loved so much. A pinch of her ashes is placed in the roots in of tree, planted along the hedge at The Barn, where she can look out over the valley she cherished for almost 50 years. This way, she will forever be part of the evolving story of The Barn.

We scatted most of her ashes as part of three small celebrations of Mary’s life at The Barn:

- One for her adoptive family
- One with my family
- One with her close friends

I know Mary would approve of these intimate gatherings, as they reflect the small, personal connections she valued most.

A Lasting Presence in Many Places

While The Barn will always be Mary’s true resting place, I am also ensuring that she remains close to me and to Gittisham, a place she valued.

- A second tree, planted at my home, holds a pinch of Mary’s ashes, so that a part of her is always with me.
- A small portion went to Gittisham churchyard, where Mary had donated monthly to the church, believing in its role in the community, even though she was not religious. It provides a place where Mary’s family and friends can visit her, close to the memorial bench for her friend Richard Saunders—a fitting spot for her to be near someone she held in such high regard.
- Finally, we had a gathering at The Pig in Gittisham, a place she enjoyed visiting, where friends, family, and locals came together to say a final goodbye.

Mary’s Legacy of Kindness: Supporting Ferne Animal Sanctuary

In In honour of Mary’s lifelong love for animals and the natural world, her family set up a [fundraiser for Ferne Animal Sanctuary](#). Mary was a remarkable woman—kind, independent, and full of life. What truly brought her joy were the birds and wildlife that visited her home, The Barn, every day. She affectionately called them her “wildies” and took great pleasure in feeding them—robins, bluetits, pheasants, crows, deer, and even the cheeky squirrels.

There was also a personal connection—Ferne Animal Sanctuary was especially meaningful as the partner of Laura, Mary’s friend and cleaner, worked there. The fundraiser, which aimed to continue Mary’s legacy of caring for animals, was a beautiful tribute to her spirit and raised over £500. It was a fitting way to honour Mary’s memory, celebrating the love and kindness she showed to all creatures.

Mary’s Perfect Ending

Mary’s final chapter was, in many ways, a reflection of who she was—strong-minded, independent, and filled with love for those around her.

She decided how it would be, ensured there was time to say goodbye, and most importantly, she stayed at The Barn, her beloved home, to the very end.

And so, her story continues—not just in memories, photos, or places, but in the trees that will grow with her, in the “wildies” that will always visit her garden, and in the hearts of those she touched so deeply.

Epitaph: A Life Well Lived

My favourite poem is “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” by Dylan Thomas. While Mary did not rage in the traditional sense of the word, the essence of the poem—strength, determination, and refusing to simply fade away—feels deeply reflective of who she was.

Mary was a strong, independent, and fiercely determined woman. She lived life on her own terms, with intelligence, humour, and an unshakable spirit. Even as she aged, she remained sharp, engaged, and active, refusing to let frailty define her. She did not simply go gentle—she embraced life with resilience and continued to shape the world around her until the very end.

She was deeply loved by those who knew her, and she loved them in return. She leaves behind a legacy of warmth, wisdom, and unwavering strength—a testament to a life well lived.

For Mary

***Do not go silent into the night's embrace,
Stand, stand against the fading of the day.
With wit and wisdom, light upon your face,
You walked your path, determined in your way.***

***Soft hands that fed the birds, that held my own,
A voice that carried laughter, sharp and bright.
A home you made, a love you fiercely sown,
You did not yield, you held on to the light.***

***Though time did call, your spirit did not wane,
Your mind, a fire that would not dim or sway.
A heart that gave, through joy, through love, through pain,
You stood until the light slipped soft away.***

***So rest now, where the wildies sing and play,
And know your love will never fade away.***

Mary did not rage(much!)—but she stood strong, loved fiercely, and lived fully, right until the light faded. And for that, she will always be remembered.

