

Mary Gwendolyn Gluyas Thomas

9th July 1916 - 11th May 2020 - 103 Years

Celebration and Thanksgiving Service - Thursday, 4th June 2020

Eulogy - by Graham Thomas (Nephew)

"The Life of Mary Thomas - A Very Full Life Devoted to God, Family, Mums and Babies".



Mary Thomas - Amazing Lady

I really got to know Mary well during the latter years of her life, after she moved from Holybourne to the Borovere Residential Home in Alton, where she happily lived for some 14 years.

I used to visit Mary's sister Muriel, when she lived in Alton and together we would visit Mary. Then in 2012 Muriel also moved to Borovere, to be with her sister Mary and also well cared for her remaining years.

Whilst at Borovere, I took to visiting Mary and Muriel, pretty well most Sundays, taking Muriel to the Alton Methodist church and out for a 'spot of lunch' - by this time Mary spent most of her time in her room.

I have to say that her life at Borovere was a comfortable one with her own room overlooking the gardens. The love and care that both Mary and Muriel

received from the staff at Borovere was really quite amazing. When one was there you felt the staff cared for all the residents as if they were their own Mums and Dads.

Mary, at the grand age of 103 & 10 months, was the last of the "Thomas Elders" - my father's generation - most of whom lived well into their 90's.



Mary's 100th - Queens Congratulatory Telegram

In July 2016, we were delighted to celebrate Mary's 100th Birthday with her brother Jim and family, along with a delicious cake and the accolade of receiving a telegram (card) from The Queen.

But Let's start at Mary's beginning - some 104 years ago - to 1916, when Mary was born on the 9th of July to her parents James Arthur Thomas & Rachel Pascoe Thomas (nee' Wellington), both of whom came from Wendron - a mining village on the toe of England in Cornwall - on her mother Rachel's 31st birthday, when they lived at Pheasant Court Farm, North Chapel, near Petworth in West Sussex

She was christened as Mary Gwendolyn Gluyas and was the 5th child to be born in the family, being one of nine children, which was not uncommon in the early 1900s - especially on farms, butter, milk, fruit and vegetables - and the odd broody chickens - were readily 'available' to feed the family.

Like Mary, all her siblings were born at Pheasant Court Farm, between 1909 and 1921. Their arrivals were detailed on the inside cover of our Grandmother - Rachel's, Family Bible - which my cousin Michael still has.

Mary's Brothers and Sisters:

1. Arthur Wellington (1909);
2. Rachel Lilie (Ray) (1910);
3. William Perry 'Little' Gluyas (1911)
4. Cecil Rhodes (1913); my father.
5. Mary Gwendolyn Gluyas (1916).
6. Harold Gluyas (1917).
7. Edith Muriel (1918);
8. James Noel (1919).
9. John Quentrill (1921).



The Thomas Siblings with their Parents - "Happy Times"

Each child was born roughly a year apart over a period of 11 years - the last one John in 1921 when Grandma Rachel was 36 years old! On one Sunday, a few years ago, when I took Muriel out to lunch after church, she told me that - "after 9 children, her Mother, Rachel, had decide to move to sleep in a separate room from her husband James - to ensure she didn't have any more babies !" - We had some most interesting and frank conversations.

Mary attending the North Chapel village primary school, until, in 1926, all the family moved to Fitzleroy Farm, Fittleworth, again in West Sussex. When there, she went to the Chichester High School for Girls - at the tender age of 11 years old - travelling to school each day, first by bicycle, then by train and then on foot - a long journey of some 16 miles.

When the family moved, yet again, to Hoe Cross Farm, Hambledon in Hampshire she remained at home until 1932, when, at the age of 16, she was accepted for nursing training at Winchester Hospital, following the basic training course of classroom and ward experience and qualifying as a 'Registered Nurse' in January 1940. Remembering this was all before there was the National Health Service, which was established after WWII in 1948.

A year later, in 1941, when Mary was 25, she decided to become a midwife and took up the Midwifery Part 1 training at St Mary's Hospital in Portsmouth (where my three sons - Digby, Giles and Martin were born in the 1970's), then moving to Swindon Hospital to complete her Part 2 training.

She started working as a qualified midwife at the Gosport Memorial Hospital, but with the war (WWII) on and Portsmouth being a target for bombing by the Germans, the whole department was transferred to Shawford Park near Winchester, an idyllic



Shawford Park and Gardens [Today]

17th-century country house set between two branches of the River Itchen, which, Mary told me, was a delightful place to work and a much safer place for the mum's and babies. Mary recalled she loved to walk around the gardens and grounds when off duty and that it was probably those gardens that inspired her to love gardening.

The maternity unit returned to the Gosport Memorial Hospital after the war in 1946 and Mary continued to work there for nine years as a valuable member of the staff assisting in bringing many babies into the world, this being the era of the 'baby boomers' just after the Second World War.

In 1939 the family moved to St. Bury Hill Farm at Lower Froyle - just outside of Alton. This, in the 1950's and 1960's, is where I, my three siblings and 10 cousins got to know our 'Thomas Clan' when all our Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles and Cousins would meet up two or three times a year for 'family gatherings' with food a plenty and 'cakes' - the Thomas favourites.

As youngsters we would listen to all the older folk reminiscing about their childhood exploits on the various farms where they had lived. Including the time when Jim and John the two youngest brothers 'accidently' set fire to a hay rick on the farm and after calling the fire brigade their father quickly lit the fire under the copper in the wash-house, so they could say that the sparks from the wash-house fire must have started the hay rick fire.



Saint Bury Hill Farm - The Thomas Family Home since 1939

We used to delight in these gatherings where Aunt Mary would always have a smile and encouraging word - often with a hand-full of "sweeties" and always calling us 'Deary', as I think she couldn't remember all our names.

In 1953 her father, James Arthur, died aged 86, and Mary's eldest brother Arthur Wellington, took over the running of St. Bury Hill Farm, whilst his Mother Rachel kept house for him. However, in 1955, when their Mother's strength began to wane, Mary returned from Gosport to the family home, to help out and then started to continue her mid-wifely duties at the Maternity Unit of the Alton General Hospital, where she worked until she retired on her 60th birthday in 1976, after 22 years assisting in the delivery of numerous Alton babies during that period.

My sister Anne told me that when our family was staying on the farm on one of our summer holidays, she suffered appendicitis and had to go to the Alton General Hospital and whilst there Sister Mary had visited her at the end of one of her working shifts and Anne was take-a-back by the respect and adoration the nurses and doctors had for Mary when she came into the ward - obviously a well liked lady.

One of my fondest memories of Mary was that of her love for animals - especially cats. On the farm at St bury Hill, there were a good number of cats - some feral, but they were always keen to come to Mary - and mill round her ankles - brushing up to them - when it was time to fed them. I do remember when I we were quite young (7/8), my brother Ivan 'smuggled' a lovely snow white kitten - which he found in a combine harvester on the farm - hidden under his coat - when we returned from one of the lovely holidays we had on the farm as children. It turned out to be deaf and mute, but it was delightful little thing and would open it's mouth to mew - but make no sound.



Mary - aged 29 - 1945 - with Mum and Dad Rhodes, Muriel and John at St Bury Hill Farm

In the 1960's I was at boarding school with Ivan and our Aunts Mary and Muriel used to send us 'Red Cross' parcels full of goodies and now and again letters of encouragement which contained 1/6d Post Office Savings Stamps - which we used to cash down in the village Post Office if we got short of cash. I actually came across one of these in a clutch of old letters I found in my loft.



*Midwife Mary - with Mum and New Baby
[Possibly Sue Treloar 1964?]*

What, to me is a lovely accolade to Mary's devotion to the community and help to Mums, is that some folk that I met in Alton at the Methodist Church and at the Borovere Home, have mentioned to me that Mary had delivered some of their children - most of whom, will now be grown up, with their own families.

We tried to estimate how many babies Mary may have delivered in her career as a Midwife - and even with a conservative estimate of one and a half babies a day - bearing in mind the baby-boomer years of the 1940's - 1950's and 1960's - we believe that Mary could have delivered as many as 10,000 babies over her working career as a midwife - by comparison the total population of Alton in 2011 was just over 17,000.

In 1957 her sister Muriel returned to the UK from her Methodist Missionary work in Nigeria and lived again at St. Bury Hill Farm to help look after their mother, whilst Mary

continued to carry out her midwifery duties at the Alton General Hospital.

After their brother Arthur got married to Lucy (nee Rogers), - who was a close school friend of Muriel's, in 1959, Mary, Muriel and their Mother moved to a delightful home 'Bethany' in Holybourne, where they were members of the Holybourne Methodist Chapel where Muriel often preached.

When their Mother Rachel died in 1970 at the grand age of 95, Muriel returned to Africa to carry on her Methodist missionary work there. On retiring from nursing in 1976 Mary invited her lifelong friend, Margaret, with whom she had worked as a midwife in Gosport, to join her at Bethany for mutual company where they enjoyed retired life to the full.

In retirement Mary spent a lot of time in her beautiful "English-Country-Garden" and delighted in her cat(s) and a corgi dog she had called Ronda - which we as children were in admiration of, as it was the same breed as those that Her Majesty The Queen kept. We were always amazed how fast Ronda could run with such short legs!

In 1972, Mary's sister Muriel was sent to Sierra Leone as a Methodist Missionary, on the West Coast of Africa and was involved in Pastoral Work and Lay Training, working there through to her retirement, at 62, in 1980.

It was during this time that Mary was invited to join her sister in Sierra Leone and I recall Muriel telling me that during this visit they both bravely trekked off "up country" - keenly looking out for venomous snakes - with a young guide, to a village to meet the Chieftain.

There, Mary was introduced to the Chieftain as Muriel's elder sister and the Chieftain told Mary that he would like to 'take Muriel as his wife' - and to 'clinch the deal' he would offer Mary 20 cows for her ! They were both somewhat taken aback and Muriel - who was quite a forthright lady - told him, in no uncertain terms, that she had no interest in marrying him - especially as he already had four wives. To this he said he would divorce them all !

Seeing the Chieftain was quite determined to marry Muriel, Mary - who was quite demure and solid - squared up to the Chieftain and told him that her brother Arthur was a farmer in England and he had a herd of over 200 cows - so the Chief's offer of a mere 20 cows for Muriel - "would not be entertained" - so that was the end that!.

When Mary's sister Muriel eventually retired from her missionary work in 1980, they moved from Bethany to Gasrell Court, a sheltered housing complex in Holybourne, where they were regular attendees of the Alton Methodist Church, having been devout Methodist Christians all of their lived.



Muriel and Mary - Devoted Sisters Together at Borevere

In 2006, Mary moved to the Borevere Residential Home in Alton, to remain in the area and amongst friends, where her sister Muriel could visit her regularly and chat and play scrabble with others at the home. Mary became quite proficient in winning the scrabble games as she was quite well read and had a sharp mind picking out obscure words to fit the game word shapes. Muriel told me that she used to keep the 13th edition of the Oxford English Dictionary to hand to check on some of the more obscure words, which Mary proffered as 'real words' and, amazingly she was normally right - and always seemed to know their meaning. Obviously an intelligent lady.

Muriel joined Mary at Borevere in 2012 where they delighted in each other's company and the regular visits from loving members of the Alton Methodist Church - and the Alton Anne Chaplaincy, especially Debbie Thrower and Revds. Helen Jessy and Rachel Sturt.

Although Mary had an extended family of Brothers and Sister and all their offspring - who delighted in her fun and energy and who loved her dearly, she didn't have any children of her own, although in retirement all the brothers, sister and their spouses would regularly get together for birthdays and have parties with lots of tea and cakes.

I recall joining one of the Thomas Elders camping holidays near Hastings with my three boys and it was a delight to see them all laughing and chatting together - reminiscing about the good old days "on the farms" where they grew up as a big happy family.



'Family Gathering' - Siblings Jim, Rhodes Muriel, Gluyas and Mary

When Muriel passed away back in January 2015, I gently broke the news to Mary. When I told her that "sadly Muriel has passed away" - she told me that it was "not sad at all" - as Muriel was now with her Maker - as she had wished to be.

Mary also had the same outlook on life and said to me on several occasions whilst at Borovere, that she too "wanted to meet her Maker".

For Mary, her "family" was her sister Muriel, her Mother and the Methodist Church - and of course, all her "Mums and Babies". Mary was a wonderful lady, full of gentleness, Christian faith, determination and kindness - an amazing lady.

However, I know she is now with her Maker and her beloved sister Muriel, her parents and her brothers.

She will be blessed in Heaven, where, in the later years of her life, she so longed to be.

Mary was a real treasure and her life of dedication to her family, "Mums and their Babies" has left the world a better place.

Thank you Mary - you will remain a 'cherished lady' in our hearts and memories for ever.

God Bless You.

Graham Thomas (Nephew)

Service: Basingstoke Crematorium - 1.15 p.m. Thursday - 04 June 2020.

Service held by: Rev. Philip Simpkins - Minister at the Alton Methodist Church

Funeral Directors: Kemp and Stevens - Alton