

Source:-

Hand-written original owned by Anne BANKART nee ROCHE of Harrogate daughter of 'Babs'.

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Story by Rachel Emily WRATHALL (maiden name) about her grandparents John ELSWORTH and Mary COCKSHOTT.

She wrote the story for her niece Evelyn May Louise DELVES known as 'Babs'.

To E.M.L Roche  
Nee Evelyn May Louise (Babs) Delves

### "Some Incidents in the lives of John & Mary Elsworth"

\*Your great-grandparents

Aunt Rachel Emily

London.

New Year's eve. 1945

The first I know of grandmother – then Mary Cockshott, was when she was living with her brother, a bachelor. He was much older than she, and was a tall gaunt, and not very pleasant person. A real old fashioned hard shell Baptist.

He made a good deal of money. Farming in those days was paying well – Like all the rest of the farmers in Craven, his great desire was to buy land. Mary was quite different. She was very small and dainty, gay and sweet tempered. These two were looked after by a housekeeper, a sour old spinster, called Ellen.

They were living then at a nice old farm called Deepdale head, of course belonging to brother Thomas.

Mary must have been very pretty. She had deep-set, dark grey eyes with long lashes, auburn hair and a lovely skin. She had also tiny feet and hands. She was very proud of her small feet and would always wear black silk stockings. This was an almost unheard of extravagance in those times. The farmer's wives told her that only Queens and Duchesses wore silk stockings. Mary piped up "Yes I know, Queens, Duchesses and Mary Cockshott". She insisted upon wearing black, silk stockings all her life, and they must be of good quality silk with clocks.

My first mental picture is of a journey she often told of – when she was old.

When she was quite a girl, they had a very hard winter – and winters were winters in those times, they had a terrible snowstorm lasting for days without ceasing. Thomas began to worry about his sheep on Foxup Farm, away up in the dales. He told Mary he must ride up and see about them, so plucky little Mary said, "I will come too."

"Nowt ut soart." "Impossible, just look out at it". "But I will come" said Mary.

So she put her saddle on her Galloway pony, and jumped up. She wore a flowing, green habit, and a green hat with a red feather. (Your mother, Janie and I have all ridden miles on that saddle, it was most comfortable. It had a washleather, non slip seat, with fancy stitching, only one crutch and a little slipper, so much better than the latter day stirrup – We always knew it as Grandma's saddle.)

The two of them started off from Deepdale Head in the early morning, and rode through Long Preston round by the Church and up the moor road, through the thick snow. Further they went up the moors and thicker the snow became but on and up they rode.

When they got past Settle, the snow drifts were so high they covered the 6ft stone walls, but up there, the snow was frozen so hard, they gaily rode right over the tops of the walls and hedges.

As far as they could see, there was only snow, snow and more snow, but for here and there a few tops of tall fir trees; and once or twice a lonely shepherd, trying to dig out his sheep. The only sound a curlew's plaintive call as it circled over their heads. How charming little Mary must have looked in her green habit, and green hat with the red feather, her red curls flying and face all pink with the frosty air; the only spot of colour in all that white expanse.

Ingleborough is in front, and Pennyghent alongside them. When they get to the top of the dale they see Foxup. Mary turns in her saddle and looks back on beautiful Langstrothdale covered in pure white snow. The sun is setting, looking like a great round ball of fire. Turner never painted a sunset to equal this glory of crimson and gold against the snow. Mary rides on feeling awed by the sheer beauty of the world as God made it for us.

The door of Foxup farm is open, and the glow from the big peat fire can be seen. The farmer and his wife are "fair-capped" at the sight of the riders on such a day. They go in and Mary is put on the red, black oak long settle by the inglenook. Mrs Knowles insists up on taking off the little shoes and when she sees the silk stockings words fail her, but she says "my poor lamb, you mun be fair frozzin". "To bed at once with a hot bottle and then joy – I'll bring up a nice, hot posset [posset – hot milk curdled as by wine or ale- Nick] with a drop 'o rum in it".

Time marches on. In a year or two half the young men of Craven are courting Mary Cockshott, for besides being lovely, is by way of becoming an heiress for those days, her brother shows no sign of marrying, he has no time for such foolishness. On workdays he is hoarding up his gold. His great ambition is to get enough to buy Bend Yate, a nice little farm near bye. He already has Deepdale Head, Foxup and Old Ing.

His Sundays are spent preaching at a makeshift Baptist Chapel at Hellifield. He holds forth for hours on the carnal lusts of the flesh, to punishment by hell fire etc.

Among Mary's suitors is one young John Elsworth of Stainton Cotes. In Mary's eyes he is the handsomest youth in all Craven, he is the finest horseman, the best dancer, he is gay, carefree and very charming. He is very tall, has a fine face and wonderful violet blue eyes; they are both deeply in love with each other.

When brother Thomas hears of this he is simply furious "this must be stopped at once," he says. "John Elsworth is nowt but a wastrel, he has no brass and never will have."

Poor Mary is practically shut up in her bedroom, and old Ellen is set to watch her. But as we all know "love laughs at locksmiths".

On one moonlight night, Mary slips off her little sandals, carries them in her hand, creeps down the stairs and out of the front door. She runs round by the garden wall, at the end of the garden, where the gooseberry bushes still grow, she sees the grandest young man in all Craven waiting for her on his blood mare "Blossom". He picks her up in his strong, young arms (she is only a featherweight), he holds her very firmly in front of him and vows that nobody shall ever take her away from him again, as long as his life lasts.

Mary feels a bit frightened "Will he catch us think you John?" "Catch us?" says John "not the d'eil hisself can catch us when we're on Blossom. She is the swiftest mare in all Yorkshire". Blossom pricks up her ears and with a neigh and a bound flies like the wind.

John has barely a crown in his pouch and Mary – no dower chest for Mary, only her little reticule, which she clutches tightly to her. It contains one pair of black silk stockings (of good quality silk and with clocks) and six silver teaspoons marked 'C'. But they have what all the gold in the world cannot buy-youth, health, good looks, love and each other, also superb courage.

God help them.

In the meantime, at Deepdale Head Thomas Cockshott is aroused by the neigh of a horse; he jumps out of bed and rushes onto the landing his nightcap dithering.

He calls out "Ellen do you hear owt? Is Mary alright?" Ellen goes to Mary's room and comes out shaking with fright, and calls out "Shoo's not here, shoo's gone wi' young John Elsworth I'll be bound."

"What" shouts Thomas – "that wastrel, hark to what I say woman, her shadow shall never darken my door again, nor her name spoke." (This vow he keeps all his life.)

The house in the days to come is very quiet. The master counts up his gold and thinks it wont be long now, before he buys Bengate. The old walls miss the gay, young laughter and the patter of little feet on the stone floors.

Time marches on, the scene is changed, we enter a small house in a poor part of Manchester.

John Elsworth is still gay and careless. Mary is still sweet, but looks a little careworn.

There are two little daughters, the elder Margaret is a fine girl of about 7, strong and long limbed, with her father's large violet eyes. She is full of life and joy and with a heart of gold, every inch an Elsworth.

The younger girl Catherine is about 5. She is quiet and shy. She does not look strong, her cheeks are pale and wan; she has her mother's grey eyes and auburn hair. Mary looks at her wistfully and thinks if only Katie could have some pure Craven air, good new milk and eggs straight from the nest, she would soon be strong and well.

"I wonder," she thinks "dare I? ought I? Yes I must, I will." When John is out, she takes up her pen and writes to her brother (she has not anything from him all these years.)

"To brother Thomas

Honoured Sir

I am sending my younger daughter into your safe keeping, she is somewhat delicate, this Manchester air does not suit her health. I know you are a hard man and unforgiving, but you are also a just man, honourable and a God fearing man. I know you will bring up Catherine to be a good Christian and a virtuous maid.

Your humble and obedient

Sister Mary Elsworth"

I beg you to be kind to my baby for the sake of our childhood days. I doubt me she will be oft sad and lonely.

Mary.

Catherine is sent to Deepdale Head.

There are lots of lonely evenings for Mary, when John is out and Margaret in bed, she sits by the fire and gazes into the flames, seeing faces and pictures. She fancies she sees again beautiful Langstrothdale in her mantle of pure white snow and the marvel of a sunset, the sun going down like a ball of fire in all the glory of crimson and gold. Sometimes she sees little Katie and longs for her.

The fire dies down and the pictures fade away. She is back in this murky, sordid, hateful Manchester. Does gallant little Mary regret? I wonder, I wonder.

Again time marches on and again the scene is changed. They are now spending their old age in the Church Nook, a cottage belonging to the Elsworth family, close to the gates of the Parish Church at Long Preston.

I know nothing of "the years between". John – in the eyes of his wife is still the finest man in Craven, though now quite old he is still quite happy-go-lucky.

He spends his evenings at The Maypole with his old friends. Mary listens for his footsteps coming home round the old lane, she often hears his gay laugh, and snatches of song, though his walk is not always too steady; but she never fails to greet him with a smile, never a reproach.

On a lovely spring morning John and Mary Elsworth may be seen standing on their doorstep looking up to the "Everlasting Hills", as the sunrises. They are a delightful old "Derby and Joan" he is still a fine man and his little wife is still, as ever, dainty and sweet, hardly reaching up to his elbow.

Though Stephen McKenna says, "the greatest curse God put on humanity is not death but old age." In this case he is wrong, these two have indeed "grown old gracefully". I think it must be because they have always had perfect love and trust in each other. All through the sunshine and shadows of a long life together, and often hard times.

How grand Rye Loaf looks, just as though it were keeping guard over the old church and villages. Think of the centuries it has looked down on all the different vicars coming and going, of all the christenings, weddings and funerals of the people from one generation to another

"Yes and one day Rye Loaf will look down on us for the last time." Says Mary

"Well joy." John says. "When we come to our journeys end, we shall still be together."

There comes one Sunday when John Elsworth lies dying, the long limbs quiet at last. Mary sits by the bed holding his hand.

There is a knock on the door, an old friend comes in, he calls out "I have news for you".

"Hush, hush", whispers Mary. "My master lies a dying, but what is your news?"

"It is that Thomas Cockshott of Ben Gate died this morn."

This news penetrates to the ears of the dying man and gives him fictitious strength. He sits up and calls out "What did you say? Oud Tommie dead deenah." He jumps out of bed, claps his hands and dances a jig saying "I'm 't better ti ut two yet." Then he falls back on his bed unconscious. Those were the last words he ever spoke.

He was "game to the last".

Six tall farmers carry the huge coffin shoulder high across the road to where "the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

They bury him among his own the Elsworths of Stainton Cotes. His little wife turns away from the grave and whispers, " Goodnight my love I won't be long."

Not very long after she died at Bend Yate where she had been living with her daughter Catherine. Her little coffin is placed beside "her man"; they lie side by side in their last long sleep together.

God rest their souls

Years later, when I was about 12, I opened a drawer in the old Elsworth corner cupboard and found "laid by in lavender," a pair of black silk stockings, with such tiny feet. Also a row of auburn curls, which my mother told me Grandma always wore round her sweet face, within her Victorian poke bonnet. In another drawer were 6 silver teaspoons marked C. I have these spoons before me as I write. If they could only speak and give us their history.

As a tale that is told.