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MEMORIES OF TURVEY

1900 -

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School holidays and off to Turvey! I'm seven years old, it's a Saturday afternoon and my father, Walter Stewart, takes me to Sloane Square in Chelsea and on to a horse bus - on top, of course, so that I can see the two horses - and cloppity clop all the way to St. Pancras railway station. My father talks to the guard of the four o'clock to Bedford and I am put into the compartment next to the guard's van, into a seat by the window; then goodbye to father and off we go.

It's Luton first stop and then to Bedford where I am let out. It's five o'clock and there is Mrs. Horn waiting for me; then into the train on the next platform and off to Turvey. There outside the station is one of my cousins, Will or Harry Osborn, (I forget which) with the pony and trap, and off we go again ~~under~~ the railway bridge ~~and away~~ *to the right as we turn left for the village.*

That bridge was built by my grandfather, Charles Warren (mason) of Bridge Street, and there it is, as I remember it on the skew, slantwise across the road. Then we pass Green Lane on the left and Priory Farm on the right, then the Abbey; on through the village and up Carlton Road, turn right into May Road and along to No.4, Mrs. Horn's house - and here I am in Turvey for my four weeks' school holiday.

The first excitement is a glass of cold water from the well at the back of those four houses. Is it still there I wonder?

In the first of those four houses lived my Aunt Leah, Uncle Tom Sanders and three of my cousins, Charlie, Georgina and Nance. Next door were Mrs. Sargeant and her two sons, then Mrs. Garlick at No.3 and next again Mr. and Mrs. Horn and their son Robert. Across the road there were Mr. and Mrs. Bamford, further on the Wrights and at the top of the alley one of the Higgins' families.

Then comes Sunday morning with the bells pealing, and off with Mrs. Horn to church where in come the boys from the Reformatory - how well I remember the sound of their boots as they march through the porch and down the right aisle. After church a number of the villagers walk up the High Street to Mr. Barcock the baker to collect their Sunday joints taken earlier to be cooked in the bakehouse oven.

There are so many relations and friends to be visited - Uncle Sam and Auntie Skevington, Cousin Marshall at Tod's Brook in Jacques Lane, Auntie Emmie Osborn in the High Street with Cousins Harry, Will and Emmie - and is there a Victoria plum tree still at the back of the house? Then after calling on Mrs. Dent in Bridge Street, I go to my grandmother Warren next door which was my mother's home, now possibly rebuilt, and on to the Mill to see Uncle George Osborn.

I have very vivid memories of visiting the butcher's shop to see Uncle Sam Skevington and my cousins. I can still see Marshall getting the pony harnessed up to the trap and our taking the order to Home Farm - up Nell's Lane and past the field where the earth was level with the top of the wall. In the Easter holidays there were many, many, wild violets just over the top of that wall. Has anybody looked lately?

During days spent in and about the village there were, I recall, Pecky Payne's shop on the corner of Carlton Road, the Post Office, Mr. Nidd's shop; and how well I remember those bars of chocolate cream which seemed so different from what I had in London. Across the road was the school with my grandpa Warren's lettering "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom", and nearby, on the gables of Holmwood House, another inscription "Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it."

In the school front playground there was that tremendous walnut tree. There were three or four more near the road in the Law's field opposite the Law's house and one at the back of my mother's home in Bridge Street, which as a child she used to climb. Years passed and when the 1914 war came the village was stripped of those walnut trees, to make propeller blades it was said, though I believe the school tree was spared.

There were frequent visits to Mrs. Harley at the Lodge in Carlton Road to join my friends, her daughters, Bella, Alice and Grace for rambles and picnics; and we would make plans to meet in the evenings to play "Hunt the Fox", chasing from Dead Woman to Great Oaks woods and back. I recall that I was not too keen to be the fox. Do the children of Turvey do anything like that today?

I remember so happily those picnics in Uncle George's meadows behind the Mill, and those jutting out stones grandpa put in the bridge wall to help youngsters climb down into "Sam's garden", or was it "Sam's island"?

^ with its huge wooden water wheel and the big grinding stones;

Under that first arch the fish used to spawn in the gravel in the shallow water and it was jam jars for dipping out the minnows, but over into the deeper part of the river for the larger fish. I wonder whether the successors to Uncle's eel traps can still be found under the foot boards across the stream behind the Mill, and is Nell's Well still at the corner of her lane by the stile? But as to the Mill Pool my thoughts go back sadly to boys who from time to time when diving in were caught in the reeds and drowned.

But the favourite of all the children was, of course, Jonah watching from the whale's mouth as we paddled round and about him. Then: "dare you to climb on to his shoulders" calls out one of the boys and climb we did, and successfully. I believe it was Colonel Henry Higgins of Turvey House who saw Jonah in a monumental mason's yard and had him erected between the Mill Pool and the bridge. What a good thought that was and how much enjoyment and interest he has given to the young people of the village. As to the Mill, I remember that it had a tall chimney but later there was a bad fire and the chimney collapsed. Was that around 1910 - 1912?

Who remembers dear Mr. Mumby the Rector? He used to take me through the Hall Park and would lift me up to the trees to collect specimen leaves and so taught me all my trees. As I grew older he sometimes took me into the Rectory for tea and into the garden. I wonder if there is a shrub there now like the one with the beautiful white blossoms like snowballs that was along there to the left by the Carlton Road wall.

In those earlier, happier days of security and contentment many of the ladies of the village made pillow lace sitting at their cottage doors in the sunshine. At the Lodge in Carlton Road there was Mrs. Harley; in May Road my Aunt Leah Sanders, Mrs. Sargeant, Mrs. Garlick, Mrs. Horn and Mrs. Wright, and down the alley into the village my Auntie Skevington, Mrs. Perkins and Mrs. Dent.

I still have a snapshot of my mother, Annie Warren, taken when I was fourteen, in 1908, sitting by the well behind Mrs. Horn's house making lace. Now, I understand, no-one makes pillow lace in Turvey. What has happened to such well-established hobbies? And what has happened to all the pillows, bobbins and lace prickings? Is there anyone up at the Alms Houses who remembers? And why, oh why, did they build those Alms Houses up by the station isolating those older people from their friends, their church and the life of the village where in those old days anyone passing another in the dark on their ways home called out "goodnight"?

When I was twelve years old my father died and we brought him to Turvey. It was in September 1906. He lies in the cemetery, but alas now with no stone. My mother Annie Maria Sanders Warren who was born in 1855 in Bridge Street, married in Turvey church (by the Dean of Chichester?) in 1877, died in 1925, and was buried in Kensal Rise Cemetery, London.

How interesting it would be to know more about the Warren descendants. There is, I know, my cousin Marshall Skevington and his son Donald, and in my mother's branch of the family there remain, besides myself, my scientist nephew Dr. Sydney H. Bell, O.B.E., my osteopath son Stewart B. Humphry, D.O., M.R.O.; and his civil servant brother Graham S. Humphry whose children continue the line.

*Dorothy Stewart Humphry.*

*9.5.1980.*