

BETTY BUSBY

15th October 1916 - 12th February 2021

Betty Busby was born in Hall Green, Birmingham on the 15th October 1916. This was in the middle of the first world war. Her father, Herbert Wesley Pinfield, was a private in the British army, presumably serving in France, so Betty did not see much of him in the first two years of her life and by the same token, he was not around when she was a baby.

The names she was given were Maud Mary, but all her life she was known as Betty, much to her relief, except in official documents. She was the eldest child of Herbert Wesley Pinfield and Winifred Maud Pinfield. Her brother, Bert (Herbert), was born six years later in 1923.

Very often on Sundays the family would visit one or other of the grandparents. The Watkins, on her mother's side, lived a little closer to the centre of the city in Sparkhill, where her grandfather, Frederick and his two sons, Arnold (known as Pip) and Frederick (Bub) ran a company manufacturing blinds. This must have been an important business during the blackout in the war. Another of his sons, Lawrence (Laurie) was not involved in this, as far as I am aware.

The Pinfields lived further away, possibly in the village of Moreton Pinkney near Daventry, not far from the Cotswolds, and Betty and her parents had to catch a train to get there. As a young girl she was taken on long walks in the countryside by her grandfather Pinfield. "Do we have to keep going? My legs are so tired," she would say, but he insisted.

Her grandfather, the Revd Thomas Pinfield, was a Methodist minister and her father was a lay minister in the Methodist church. After she married, she attended Church of England services. Religion was always very important for her. She was not in the least pious, but had a strong Christian faith.

As a child she went to Yardley school in Birmingham which was about a half-mile walk away from home. She also sometimes helped out at her father's Gentlemen's Outfitter's shop as well as looking after her younger brother. She loved music and learned the piano, and spent a lot of her pocket-money on books of classical music to play, including most of Chopin's works. Oddly enough, I never recall hearing her play the piano.

On leaving school and until her son, John, was born, she worked as a secretary. For the rest of her life, she devoted herself to being a housewife and mother. When I was poorly, I was very glad that she was at home to look after me.

On the 3rd September 1938 at the age of 21, she married Arthur Busby, an accountant. He lived in Ivor Road, Sparkhill, a street away from Esme Road where her grandfather Watkins lived. Betty used to say that they got married a year before war broke out. Judging by the relationship between her and her husband, the 'war' never really came to an end.

On the 23rd June 1942 she gave birth to John in a heatwave and on the 29th January 1946 in a snow storm, his brother Paul was born. This might explain the difference between them!



Betty aged 19 in 1935

Arthur did not serve in the forces during the second World War, but became a fire-fighter. It may be just as well that he did not join the forces as he was extremely clumsy and could have caused many accidents if he was let loose with a weapon of any kind.

Birmingham was very heavily bombed in the war, with only London receiving more bombing raids. Arthur's brother, Gordon was in the Fleet Air Arm and lost his life when his plane, a Swordfish, could not locate its aircraft carrier and crashed into the sea in rough weather off the coast of Norway in 1940. The planes were not equipped with radar then and the pilots had to rely upon what they could see.

After the war, Betty and Arthur wanted to get away from Birmingham, understandably so, and in 1948 Arthur got a job with a firm of chartered accountants in Camborne in Cornwall (Peat, Marwick and Mitchell - now called KPMG). They found a house in Chariot Road, Illogan Highway a few miles from Camborne. Some time later, they moved to quite a large house in Gustavus Road, Camborne and stayed there until around 1962.



Sunnyside, Gustavus Road

After that they went to live in Falmouth for about a year and a half, before moving back to Pendarves Road, Camborne for several years, then to Green Lane, Portreath which is on the coast, and then to a bungalow in Alexandra Road, Illogan, a few miles inland from Portreath. When Arthur died in 1997, Betty moved a short distance away to a new house in The Meadows in Illogan. John had returned to Cornwall at this time and lived in a neighbouring house where he did a lot to help her out, as he always has done. From here she moved to a flat in Kilfillan Park in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire to be nearer one of John's daughters, Gill, and her family. John then moved to the same general area. When she needed more nursing care, she went to St Joseph's Care Home in the neighbouring town of Tring at the age of 102.

In Cornwall, they regularly attended Roskear church (not far from Illogan Highway). They had several friends in the church. Each Sunday after evensong they would go to one of their houses for a social get-together. Every Christmas, there was a big party in her house in Gustavus Road with her friends and their children. These parties remained etched in her memory as well as in the memories of all those who attended them, such as the time a vicar's daughter came to the party and was later joined by her father who came to pick her up...and stayed for hours, enjoying the cider and the company.

There was also the time when everyone played sardines. This is a game, played in the dark in which one person finds somewhere to hide and others try to find him or her. If they do find the missing person, they have to join them and the remaining people then have to hunt them down and hide with them until everyone is in the same hidey-hole. I'm not sure how it officially ends.

A male friend of the family persuaded a straight-laced woman friend to join him under a bed where he put her hand in a chamber-pot filled with water as a prank. Her response was picked up

by a hidden microphone and relayed to the drawing-room below where some of the non-participants, including Betty, were in stitches.

Together with church friends the family also participated in a 'tea-treat' at Marazion, in full view of St Michael's Mount. The tea-treat was a sort of picnic-cum-barbecue on the beach with sausages in rolls and saffron buns. Cornish saffron buns are about the size of a dinner plate and were much enjoyed. In fact, the engine-drivers of the train from Penzance to Paddington in London used to stop the train beside the beach so that they could be given a sausage roll and a saffron bun. Passengers would probably not have realised why their train had come to a stop there.



Paul, Olga, Bert and Betty

Betty loved animals and hated any cruelty towards them. She and Paul were nearly arrested on Boxing Day on Carn Brea one year for trying to sabotage a fox-hunt. Another time when she was in the car, they passed some riders on horse-back. She wound down the window, thinking it was a hunt and shouted loudly at them "I hope you all fall off your horses and break your necks!" It turned out to be a riding school.

There were always pets in the house. She always had to have a dog – a terrier whose name I forgot who dug up the kitchen floor, Whisky, Buffy, Shadow – a sheepdog who made friends with Buffy and came to live with us - Sam, Bruce and Gemma. There was also Nicky, a black cat who lived for 20 years. John also kept white mice which my mother was petrified of. She used to tell the story of when she took out the grill pan once and found it was full of dead baby mice (not John's pet ones). So much for having a cat! The responsibility for taking the dog a walk was shared between them. On one occasion, my father came back from the walk with just the lead in his hand. He had forgotten to attach it to the dog's collar and had not noticed the dog was missing.

She also took part in an anti-apartheid demonstration in Camborne one year and took Paul with her, aged 12 at the time. Camborne School of Mines attracted people from all over the world and it was not unusual to see people of other races in the streets. My mother was not political in

any way, so I am curious why she actually went on this demonstration. Going on demonstrations was not her thing. All I can say is that she was a bit of an enigma.

For many years she collected money for the Save the Children Fund and sponsored a few children in poor countries.

For a time, she was a volunteer at a hospital. She remembers that many of the male patients wanted to show her the site of their operations. To which she remarked afterwards: "When you've seen one, you've seen them all." It was clear that it was not the operations she was referring to.

She was very keen on interior design and loved to go to antique auctions with a friend. "What have you bought now?" Arthur would say, despairingly when she got home. It was often a bulky piece of furniture – an armchair, bookcase or chest-of-drawers. It was a good job the house was very large.

She took up painting when she was middle-aged and was very good at it, but had to give it up when her eyesight deteriorated. Some of her paintings were displayed in the corridors of Kilfillan Park when she lived there.

For a few years she did bed-and-breakfast – just the one family from Luton, (mother, father and 3 children) who came for many years running on a motor-cycle and sidecar - a very large sidecar! She also put up some Thai female nursing students at one time too who wanted rice with every meal. She found this rather odd, as to her, rice was only used to make rice pudding.



Betty and Arthur's Golden Wedding Anniversary, 1988

She was a fast worker. One day when Arthur left home to go to his office, she decided to emulsion the kitchen and by the time he arrived home for lunch, she had finished and had cooked him a meal. Her meals were never elaborate – she did not want to spend too much time on them. But they were certainly more than adequate. In fact, her Victoria sponge was wonderful.

In those days, lunch would consist of things like beans on toast or bread and dripping (fat). We survived on it, and so did she! In fact, her favourite foods were things like jam tarts and biscuits, and it was the sweet course (the pudding, she called it) which was what she looked forward to. Certainly, the sugary food did not harm her constitution, considering that she lived to the age of 104 years and 5 months.

Apart from her friends that have been mentioned already, she gravitated towards vicars, vets and doctors. Arthur was a member of the Rotary club and so, in those days, the wives automatically became members of the Inner Wheel. But she was not keen on being surrounded by just women. (Or unjust women, come to think of it.)

Arthur was also a good chess player and he and the family often visited Mr (Baron) Ivan Milliken-Napier and his wife Mary, and sister-in-law, Betty Bolitho, who lived in a small stately home in Lelant, near Hayle, where the men played chess together. My mother found it easy to get along with all kinds of people. She was a very sociable person and people would tell their whole life-history to her on first meeting, even complete strangers. She showed a lot of interest in them and was good at listening and had a good sense of humour.

Occasionally she and Arthur would visit a vet and his wife to play bridge. She also liked to play cards (patience i.e., solitaire), and canasta with the family, with a bottle of Corona (a soft drink) on hand. When playing cards, she always played badly so that one or other of her sons would win. Long after her sons had left home, on visits to see their parents, Betty would ask if they would like a glass of Corona. Apart from the odd drink on special occasions, she was pretty well a tea-total.

Betty also liked gardening and was very knowledgeable about different plants. While visiting the garden of a country house in East Sussex with Paul and Berta she surreptitiously broke off a twig from a lavender plant which she then stuffed into her handbag. This plant took to its new home in Paul and Berta's garden and soon became a big bush.

One of the first times she came to their house there were some Leylandii trees in the back and front garden. She and Olga (her brother's wife) immediately set to work and rocked them until they came out of the ground.

On another occasion when she and Arthur came up to see Paul and Berta, Arthur fell off the train, but fortunately was not hurt. In their house, the toilet is immediately above the dining room. While the family were sitting at the dining room table one day, my father had to go to the toilet. He aimed directly into the water and the sound was heard from downstairs. "Arthur, you sound like a horse!" said Betty, "Do it on the walls!" She meant the sides of the toilet basin, and I'm glad to say that he did not follow her instructions literally. She sometimes did use the wrong word but we always knew what she meant.

Going back a bit in time - not long after the family moved to Cornwall, Betty's parents and her brother, Bert moved down to the Plymouth area. Herbert and Winifred took over a cafe in Falmouth but lived in Camborne. I have fond recollections of visiting their home where my mother would light a fire before they got home from work. They kept a stock of confectionary at home for

the café and my mother would always give me a bar of Cadbury's chocolate on these occasions. I'm not sure if she ever told her parents about that!

When her mother became ill, they came to stay in the house in Gustavus Road. Her mother died there in 1958. But her father moved to Falmouth with them and then back to Camborne, where Betty looked after him when he became bed-bound during a long illness. He died in 1966.

Bert, her brother, got married to Olga and got a job in a garage as a mechanic in Truro. They had a bungalow in Portreath and stayed there for many years before moving to Probus and then to Grampound Road. He died in 1993 and his ashes were sprinkled on the ground in the graveyard of the church in St Just in Roseland. Betty was very attached to Bert.

His daughter, Christina and her three children moved to Leeds and Olga went with them, although she visited Betty on several occasions. Christina has commented that Betty and Olga were like sisters, rather than sisters-in-law. Olga died in 2005.

The family did not go on holiday abroad until the boys had grown up. For some years, they would go to Birmingham to visit relatives. Holidays were mainly day trips out, but living in Cornwall there are so many different places to go, the favourite places for swimming were Gwithian and Godrevy, which in those days were very quiet out-of-the-way places.

However, they did have a holiday in Scotland in 1959. The driving was divided up between Arthur and John. Periodically when it had grown dark, my mother would say to John when he was driving: "Are you awake, John?" When everyone wanted to go to the loo one dark evening, my father stopped the car near some bushes, only to discover afterwards that they were in somebody's garden.



Arthur, Betty and Paul in Scotland in 1959

After the children had left home, they went to Austria and Germany with two of their friends. At one restaurant in Germany, they asked the waitress what it was that they were presented with. The waitress did not speak English but used sign language instead. It turned out to be, as Betty called it, "titty-pie". Another year they went to Iceland. She also visited the Holy Land, appropriately enough with a vicar friend.

When Paul became engaged to Berta and was working in the Bahamas, Betty and Arthur and the same two friends visited him there, in Freeport. Paul arranged with a friend whose father was captain of a passenger ferry for them to go on an outing to Nassau (on another island). The captain invited them on to the bridge of the ship when they entered the port. They also flew to Florida while they were in the Bahamas to visit Berta and her parents.

In Freeport, there were also social gatherings amongst Paul's fellow musicians and friends and so he took advantage of the occasion and asked his mother and her friend from church to make some Cornish pasties for everyone. They were well-received in spite of the very hot weather. Cooking over a hot stove in the heat must have been overbearing.

Betty was very kind and generous and helped out other members of the family when times were hard. We all have a tremendous debt of gratitude for her.

It was always lovely visiting my mother and father in Cornwall, when we were living in Bristol, Cardiff and Ringmer, although the trip from East Sussex took a whole day to get there and we only managed to do it a couple of times a year on average. After my father died, we would take my mother round and about. She enjoyed going to the clothes factory shops near Portreath, and to the pottery shop near Carn Brea. We would also take her to other places - St Agnes, Truro, Falmouth, Helford Passage, St Ives, Penzance, Porthcurno, St Austell (the Eden Project), etc. In the last year or two before she left Cornwall, she became very fond of Porthleven near the Lizard.



South West Cornwall

When she moved up to Berkhamsted my brother, John, was able to visit her frequently and to do things like take her shopping and going out to have lunch at the Golden Eagle pub in Ashley Green where she really liked the desserts. She was now in a wheel-chair as she had arthritis in her knee. The lady who ran the pub and her assistants made a huge fuss of her and my mother very much appreciated their kindness.

When Paul and Berta visited her in Berkhamsted, we would take her to the Golden Eagle pub until the time that she had ready-made meals delivered to her flat instead. She very much liked to go to feed the ducks on the canal that runs not far from the main road, or have a ride round in the country. She loved all the trees in that area - many more than in Cornwall.

She enjoyed having the staff in her room when they came to do the cleaning and she could have a good chinwag with them over a drink. But when she started falling down, especially at night-time, the family thought she ought to move to somewhere with round-the-clock care staff and she became a resident of St Joseph's Care Home in Tring.

By this time her eyesight and hearing were deteriorating badly and she was developing dementia. In her room, she longed for company and spent a lot of time dozing and imagining things. We had to treat some of the things she said at this time with a pinch of salt, although there were times when she was more lucid. How much was due to dementia and how much was deafness was difficult to judge. When she only took in a few words, she made up the rest and got a distorted message. On one occasion, a woman member of staff parked the food and drinks trolley outside her room behind the open door.

"What would you like to go with your drink, Betty?" she asked. "Can you see - there are plenty of things on the bottom shelf of the trolley."

Betty turned to Paul who was visiting her that day.

"Did she say - Can you see my bottom?" said Betty and laughed. She never lost her sense of humour.

The last year and a half of her time in St Josephs was a distressing time for her. Owing to Covid restrictions, she was mainly confined to her room. She did not understand about the virus and why visitors were only allowed to see her outside at a safe distance and wearing masks. It was clear that she did not know who the visitors were at times.

Visiting her became impossible as new rules were applied. The last time Paul saw her, she was inside her room and he (and John) had to be outside the window. It was very difficult for her to hear and a staff member had to help her. But she could not grasp why John and Paul could not go inside.

In January 2021, she had a fall and cut the back of her head badly and was taken to hospital to have the wound cleaned and patched up. Fortunately, Gill, my brother John's daughter, is a nurse and was able to take her to and from hospital.

Not long after this incident she proved positive for covid and after a few days the symptoms came on - not eating, not sleeping, not talking, etc. She was taken to hospital and hung on to life for several days in an unconscious state before dying on the 12th February.

The medical staff were amazed at her strong constitution. In her entire life, she had never been to hospital before having her fall a few weeks prior to this. (Her children were born at home.)

Betty's funeral service was held on March 22nd in Tring Church. Most of her family were present - something that she would have liked as she was intensely proud of all of them. This was probably the only occasion since her golden wedding anniversary in 1988 this had happened, and this time it was augmented by Gill's husband and her three children.

Mom - we all miss you so much.

A shortened version of this was written for the care staff at St Joseph's so they would not see just another old frail lady but a real person whom they could relate to and admire for her warmth, generosity and abundant kindness.