

## *Memories of Old Dover*

# IN A MUDDLE

By

Edith May Keeler née Muddle

**I** WAS BORN IN JUNE 1914 – Mum always said to me “You were born on 29th June and the war broke out on 4th August”. The First World War, of course.

I was christened Edith May, but to family and friends I was Dinah – it seems that the midwife said, “Here’s your Dinah” when she gave me to Mum, so the name stuck. We lived in Manor Road – the Maxton area of Dover. I was the youngest of five – two brothers and two sisters. We were surrounded by hills so spent a lot of time on them. Although we didn’t have much money we were a happy family.

The tradespeople came around the streets with horse and carts, there were not many motors about then. I remember the milkman came from Hougham, a few miles away. He had a two wheel trap and horse. He had several milk churns on his cart and we took our jugs to buy what milk we needed – it was about 1½d a pint.

The old coinage then was 4 farthings or 2 half-pennies = 1 penny (1d), 12d = 1 shilling (1s), 20s = 1 pound (note), a florin = 2s, half-a-crown = 2s6d.

I also remember the coalman with lots of bags of coal on his cart – everybody had coal fires and it cost about 2s for 1cwt. Then, of course, bread and green-grocery was delivered, also groceries and meat. We had several little shops near us which sold nearly everything and we had a Post Office.

We had lots of stews, meat puddings and vegetables for dinner and home-made jam and brown sugar on our bread for tea, also home-baked buns.

I don’t remember much about the war – only when Dad came home from France when it ended. He was like a stranger to me, but he loved children and we were soon great pals. He had been in the Labour Battalion digging trenches, he wasn’t fit to go into the Infantry as he had a lame leg. His right ankle had been broken in two places when he was working on the breakwater, the bones would not knit together so had to be wired. Mum said he was in and out of hospital for nearly a year and they had to postpone their wedding for a year.

I started at Belgrave Infant School when I was five years old, I remember the big coal fire in the winter, with a guard around it and big brown curtains to separate the classrooms. There was a big bell outside the school and the boys took it in turn to pull the rope to call the children in to class.

I was seven years old when I started at St. Martin’s Primary School. Miss Prescott was my first teacher and I loved her – we had thick sheets of brown paper marked off in inches and pink counters to learn our first sums.

I was an average pupil but very shy – my best subjects were composition and drawing – in one of the older classes we had a subject – describing Spring as a young woman – my imagination really ran wild, writing about a beautiful young girl with flowing hair – her feet barely touching the ground and her finger-tips changing the bare branches to green. It must have been good for the headmistress read it aloud to the class.

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I was in the top class when I left school at fourteen years old. If you were a very bright pupil you could take a scholarship and if you passed go on to Grammar School.

Dad was working on the Railway, he was a Marine Dock Porter and his wage about £2 weekly – I remember going to the shop for him when it was pay day for 1/2oz Hearts of Oak tobacco and a packet of A.G. cigarette papers (it was cheaper to roll your own) and I could keep the change, one penny farthing – what an assortment of sweets you could buy for that amount.

While I was still at school I painted a picture in a competition, it was on the children's page in Mum's weekly paperback called *Christian Novels* – it was of two children sitting in front of the fire and was called 'Faces in the firelight', so I painted a rosy glow over their faces and clothes and to my delight I won 10 shillings, 1st prize. I remember Mum cutting the results piece out of the book the following week and keeping it until it dropped to pieces – 1st prize, 10s had been awarded to Edith Muddle of Dover.

I had hoped to do something interesting when I began to work, like trimming hats or dressmaking, but I started work as a nursemaid or mother's help to the local butcher's wife. They had two little girls – one eight years old and a baby of eight months. It was a busy life, I learned all the household duties and went out a lot with the baby. I also had the loan of an old hand sewing machine and I enjoyed making frocks for the girls and myself. I worked there for seven years, I took the girls to pantomime at the old Hippodrome in Snargate Street and went to the cinema every Wednesday when it was my half-day off.

The trams were very handy, they started from the tram sheds which were next to the Orange Tree public house and it only cost 1d to go the Worthington Street. Admission to the cinema was 4d and sweets 2d for 1/4lb, so I looked forward to my weekly treat. I was in my teens when the talking films came to the screen, I think 'Laugh CLOWN Laugh' was the first one I saw and I thought it was wonderful.

I remember as a teenager going with several of my friends to the Market Square to see the old year out, there was a crowd of people already there – very jolly and excited. Then when the church clock struck midnight, it was so quiet. Then the bells began ringing and we all grabbed hands and danced around singing Auld Lang Syne, everyone was so friendly and happy, them walking home in the moonlight shouting to each other "Happy New Year".

We had a regatta day in August when the sea front would be full of stalls and people – I think the rowing club had a competition to see who kept afloat the longest, they would pelt each other with flour and soot. My sister and I were walking along one particular Regatta and we met up with a fellow we knew and his pal Jim – they walked home with us and that began my friendship with Jim – we were married three years later.

We were married in June 1938 and the Second World War began the following year – 3rd September 1939. Jim worked in the tunnel being made in the cliff at East Cliff. He had already registered for war service and was waiting for his age group, when his call-up papers came. I think he was glad to get out in the fresh air, it must have been very hard for him as he was a born gardener. >

He went to Belfast, Ireland to join his ship (a minelayer) called the *Southern Prince* and he was in the navy for 4 years.

Dover was called Hell Fire Corner in the war and we had more than our share of bombs, etc. When the German troops got as far as the French coast they shelled us frequently and it was the sea that saved us again. Many schools and children were evacuated to Wales and at one time mothers with young children were advised to have a case packed with clothes and a blanket ready in case Dover had to be evacuated.

We all had an Anderson shelter in the garden, it was made of corrugated iron and bolted together to form a little room. A big hole was dug in the garden and the shelter erected, then covered with earth. They saved many people's lives. I packed up many times and took Michael (our

young son) to Bexleyheath where my sister lived, but when the flying bombs, or Doodle Bugs as we called them, started coming over on the way to London I came back to Dover again.

The war had lasted six years when it finally ended. We had two little sons and longed for a quiet life together. Jim came home on the 4th November 1945 and we had a bonfire and fireworks in the garden the next day, we were so happy.

Jim started work on the Railway as a Shunter and we tried to make up for lost time – taking the children out as much as possible. Every fine Sunday in the summer we would go over the hills to Shakespeare Beach. My brother and his wife and family lived next door to us and we made a happy crowd going up the hill with beach gear, picnic and a primus stove. ◇

## Deadline for CONTRIBUTORS

The Editor welcomes contributions and illustrations, particularly line drawings, or other appropriate visual materials.

The deadline for issue No. 18 for publication on 1st December is 31st October. The producer would much prefer "copy" to be typed but, in any case, asks that it be double-spaced. Single spacing, especially in manuscript is a frequent source of typesetting error, the more so when one is stressed by a heavy work load.

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## WORLD-WIDE DOVERS ————— BUDGE ADAMS

The leaflet reproduced on the following page whilst being self-explanatory does show how I am going about a project that might well be of interest to members. I have recently discovered that there is in America a League of Mayors, with headquarters or offices in Minneapolis/St. Paul and from that League I hope to obtain the names and addresses of the Mayors concerned. In the meantime I have written to all those whose addresses I know of.