

# *This is A Few Forgotten Women Story*



*This story was written, in November 2023, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who studied or taught at The Grange School of Housewifery in Street, Somerset.*

## **Dulcie Martha Rose Cottle**

On 17<sup>th</sup> June 1910 Dulcie Martha Rose Cottle appeared in the Minute Book of the School of Housewifery in Street Somerset because the committee of Managers had awarded her a studentship which entitled her to enter the school after the summer holidays of that year. The School of Housewifery had been in existence since 1897, two years after Dulcie's birth. It came into being at a difficult time for such an establishment, which was actually based on reinforcing ideals of womanhood which had been the basis of their position for centuries.

Established at a time of great change which partly accounted for its relatively short existence until 1915. The school was housed in The Grange, Somerset which belonged to the Quaker, Clarke family of shoemaking fame.

“It becomes clear quite quickly that the school is designed to either help young women become good housewives when they marry or to turn them into superior servants with the prospects of gaining a better position than those without training. This is borne out by the Minute Book in which it states that “...make the girls who pass through the school better fitted to be the wives of artisans or others of a similar class, or to be good domestic servants”.”. (Wendy Durston).

The curriculum had 7 subjects; *Income, how to spend it; Food, how to cook it; Clothing; House how to keep it; Hygiene and Home nursing.*

The fact that formal instruction was being given to girls was significant, but, the underlying ethos reinforced the accepted stereotype. This had been the basis of women’s instruction since Mrs Beeton’s book of Household Management in 1861.

Male writers and psychologists wrote books and articles ensuring that women were kept in their place.

Robert B Shoemaker quotes from a conduct book of 1859 that  
*“A husband should consider himself the divinely appointed priest in his own household”*  
(P.420 Philippa Gregory, *“Normal Women”*) and G. Stanley Hall, a psychologist, deplored that:

*“...women in parliament and in journalism, their representation in the local and general government in peace congress, in workingmen’s meetings, in science and literature – all this will produce small results until women realize that the transformation of society begins with the unborn child.”*

And N.R. Greg believed that:

*“The cerebral organization of the female is far more delicate than that of the man. The continuity and severity of applications needed to acquire real mastery in any profession, or over any science, are denied to women and can never with impunity be attempted by them.*

Even the esteemed Darwin thought that:

*“...not only were women inferior to men but they would evolve to become more inferior. While men evolved greater superiority in all their diverse talents, women would only become more fertile and successful as child-bearers”.*

The women’s literature of the time equated relationships between a man and a woman likened to that of a horse. An extract in Dulcie’s local paper, of the serialization of a romantic novel, *A Prince of Vagabonds*, by Jn. K. Prothero talked of,

*“ .... But her lack of spirit or what passed for it galled him. There was no sport in taming a woman or a horse whose meekness nothing could provoke”*

( Somerset Guardian Friday, Sept 13<sup>th</sup> 1912).

The Grange, whilst providing women with formal instruction, albeit in domestic management, either as wife or superior servant, was reinforcing those subjugating and suffocating

values. The reference to women's emotions was an attempt to silence the growing yet conflicting methodology of those who sought to advance women's suffrage and equal standing in the world. A conflicting methodology because there were those who believed that women's rights would only be advanced by militant means, whereas, another wing wished for a more peaceful transition, jeopardizing the latter's efforts when incidents such as took place near to Dulcie's home

**A lady present endeavoured to put a question to Mr. Hancock on the women's suffrage question, but the Chairman promptly ruled her out of order.**

Somerset Guardian 13<sup>th</sup> Sept 1913 (FMP)

This conflict within the movement marred the demands for women's suffrage and also divided those outside the organization. However, history was to take a hand and play a major part in reshaping the woman's world.

When Dulcie entered the Grange in 1910, aged 15, she was at an impressionable age. Did she read the frequent articles in the Somerset newspapers about women's suffrage? Was it discussed among the pupils? Dulcie came from a smallish industrial area which supported mining and railways which provided employment for the population. Radstock had been settled since the iron age and was situated on the northern slope of the Mendips. In 1911 the population was 3690. Aiding the mining industry was the geological composition of Radstock being on the

syncline of the 240 sq mile Somerset coalfield. The lower and middle seams were mined in the Radstock area and it is where members of both sides of Dulcie's family worked. The tightly compressed seams lead to explosions, obviously a worry for the family.

In the early years of industry the roads had hardly been suitable to transport the coal which was used outside the area, as there were not suitable markets locally for the coal. After turnpikes were introduced, transport was improved but canals came and then the railways. A Railway works was established in the town and was where Dulcie's father worked, as a waggon builder.

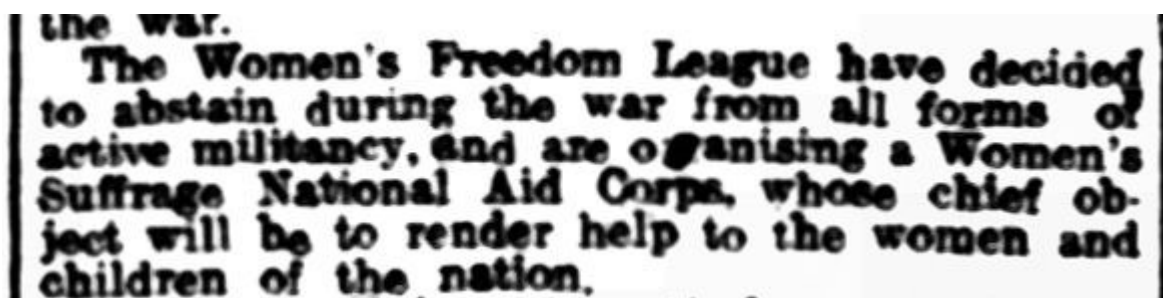
According to the 1939 Register, Dulcie had been born on 11<sup>th</sup> Oct 1895 and baptised according to the Bristol Non conformist register on 12<sup>th</sup> November of that year. Dulcie being Albert and Emma Cottle's 7<sup>th</sup> child. She had 4 sisters and 2 brothers.

The area around Radstock being small, family relationships were often complex and Dulcie's ancestry was no less so. Albert's father, (Dulcie's Grandfather), William Cottle, (b.1843) had married Emma Button (b.1842). Emma had already been married to William Pointing but it appears that he was 70 and died quite quickly. Emma then married William Cottle but she died in 1879. Already having a complex family William married Martha Wise, whose maiden name was Denning as she had also been married previously to William Wise, having several children she was made

a widow in 1866 when William Wise died. William Cottle and Martha Wise married in 1880.

Dulcie's father, Albert Edward had married Martha Wise's daughter, Emma, in 1886. In their early years Dulcie's sisters became servants, perhaps her parents had heard good reports of the school and thought that Dulcie would obtain a higher position having attended. Her sister Clarissa did actually have a good position with a retired army major according to the 1911 census. Gladys was also a servant in Bristol to a theatrical manager another quite prestigious position but later Gladys married George Jenkins and remained in Bristol as Albert was living with her when he died on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1945.

The 1<sup>st</sup> World War changed the position of women as the men went away to war women were needed to fill the void.



the war.  
**The Women's Freedom League have decided to abstain during the war from all forms of active militancy, and are organising a Women's Suffrage National Aid Corps, whose chief object will be to render help to the women and children of the nation.**

The women of Somerset were pulling together. What Dulcie did after her training at the Grange is not recorded in public documents. I could find everyone in her family in 1921 except Dulcie; Edna Emily was a nurse attendant, employed privately. Evelyn was at home with no occupation and Richard was at home

but working in the mines. Eustace had married and moved to Nelson in Lancashire as a boot repairer.

After the war the girls took up different avenues of nursing, Edna became a mental nurse while Dulcie, who had received basic instruction in home nursing at the Grange, is registered nurse no. 44021 registered on 19<sup>th</sup> Nov 1926 by examination. Stated in her record as examinations had only been introduced in 1924 by the General Nursing Council which had been formed in 1920 to regulate the people entering the profession. She was living at 144, Muswell Hill Road, N10. She trained between 1923 and 1926 at The Royal Free Hospital. Nursing, originally regarded as undertaken by the lowest classes, was by the 1<sup>st</sup> decades of the twentieth century being treated with greater respect and midwifery being an important arm of the profession. There were quite strict rules; minimum age for entry was 21 with 3 years prior good conduct.

### ***Stay Away from Men***

*In many cases, nurses were forbidden to get married. The hospital would do everything it could to retain the nurses they had on staff, so there was a lot of incentive to limit a nurse's personal life as much as possible. It meant having nurses live at the facility and enforcing strict curfew rules. If nurses had the time and the freedom to pursue courtship, some of them would surely give up their profession to raise a family and take care of their husband. Of course, times have changed a*

*great deal since the early 1900s. Today, nurses are free to do as they please when they get out of work.*

[\(https://nursegrid.com/blog/list-nurse-rules-early-1900s/\)](https://nursegrid.com/blog/list-nurse-rules-early-1900s/)

|       |                            |  |                       |  |
|-------|----------------------------|--|-----------------------|--|
| 44021 | Cottle, Dulcie Martha Rose | 25, Frome Hill, Radstock, Bath, Somerset | Nov. 19, 1926, London | Royal Free Hosp., London, 1923-1926. By Examination. |
|-------|----------------------------|--|-----------------------|--|

Dulcie passed her examination and was entered in the register.  
(Registers found on Ancestry.co.uk)

At the time when Dulcie was training to be a nurse her parents were having difficulties with a tenant in their property in Radstock. 25, Frome Hill, the address Dulcie gave as her address for her nursing register was being rented by her parents to a Mr George Briston. He, in turn, had a property, which he was letting out. Mrs Cottle, Emma's mother was not now in good health and needed the larger premises so that her sister, a nurse, could move in to look after her but Mr Briston was refusing to move out. After son Richard had given evidence the judgement was awarded to Mrs Cottle.

From being a general nurse Dulcie progressed to being a midwife and was in the register

|        |   |              |                     |
|--------|---|--------------|---------------------|
| 71460. | Cottle, Dulcie Martha Rose, [25, Frome Hill, Radstock, Bath, Somerset.] | 1927 Aug. 13 | C.M.B. Examination. |
|--------|---|--------------|---------------------|

(Registers found on Ancestry.co.uk)

After Dulcie's mother had passed away several members of the family moved to London, where Dulcie had trained. Dulcie was in Enfield as a private nurse, whilst Albert, Edna and Evelyn were in Hornsey. Sadly, both Albert and Evelyn were blind. Albert had



retired and Evelyn had also retired from her job as a mental nurse. They appeared in the electoral registers in London throughout the 1930s and also in the 1939 Register. However, Albert had returned to Bristol as he died at his daughter's home 67, High Street, Hanham in the city on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1945. Probate was granted to Eustace and Albert left £190.14.5

Dulcie never married and she passed away on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1956 in the Whittington Hospital, her home being 21, Fortismere Ave, Muswell Hill. Probate of her will again went to Eustace and she left £610.17.11

As the industries declined the area of Radstock has returned to a more rural landscape, with a population in 2011 of 9419. The railway which had provided work for Albert, its routes becoming a cycle way which ran from Dundas Aqueduct to Frome. And the mining spoil tips landscaped.

*Ann Simcock 2024*