

Introduction

Both my mother and her father, my grandfather, kept diaries, short notes of what they had done and what had happened to them. They did not write at length, sometimes only a sentence or two. Often, the things covered were pretty mundane. For example, in grandad's first diary, in 1914, he noted fastidiously the time he went to bed! Throughout his diaries, he noted what he bought (and often the price!). Nevertheless, both sets of diaries are full of fascinating detail about family and friends against a backdrop of life first in Nottinghamshire and subsequently in Norfolk.



The diaries

The diaries are not about news and world events although sometimes these intrude. The style of the diaries varies. Grandad's entries are matter of fact. He almost never describes his feelings. Mum's diaries differ in that they do sometimes explain her feelings. The level of detail varies. Some days there are full descriptions, some days only a line or two and some days are blank.

What is perhaps remarkable is the length of time these diaries cover. Grandad started his diary in 1914 when he was 17. Mum continued her diary until 2016 when she was in her eighties. So, together the diaries cover more than a century. There are some missing years – 1916 for grandad, 1968 to 1974 and 1994 for mum. There is a considerable period of overlap when both were keeping diaries. Mum's diaries start in 1946 when she was 11 and grandad's continue until he died in 1975.

Although I have kept diaries at various points in my life, I had thought they were all lost. However, quite some time into this project, I went through our loft, looking for my old University yearbooks. I did find them but also found my diaries for the period March 1976 to November 1977 and from 1982 to 1984. I also found a large number of letters between me and my wife Jo for the period 1982 to 1984.

I have been reading mum's and grandad's diaries for my own interest and have made these notes largely for the same purpose. But, they may also be of interest to other family members. They are written in my voice, i.e. "I" is me, Roger. I have supplemented the material from the diaries with information from other sources where this has



My diaries and a selection of letters between me and Jo from 1982 to 1984

been available and has been of interest to me. In particular, I have drawn on a large number of photographs, newspaper cuttings and similar that mum accumulated over the years. Because of the way I distributed documents when mum died, the papers I retained, and to which I had access, relate to me more centrally than to my other siblings.

I have also found the Internet to be a huge resource. While I have tried not to rely overly on [Google](#), [Wikipedia](#) and [YouTube](#), all three have proved invaluable. I found the website [FreeBMD](#) invaluable for checking details of births, marriages and deaths. While my primary purpose has not been to construct family trees I found I needed to do so simply to be able to process and understand the information about different family members available to me. For this purpose, I used [TreeView](#). I found [FindMyPast](#) useful, initially for researching military records but later for a wide range of information including from the 1901 and 1911 censuses, from the 1939 register and from various electoral registers. At the start of 2022, records from the 1921 census became available through FindMyPast. I have also found [Ancestry](#) useful, not least because of access to old phone directories and public member trees.

As with family trees, it was not my intention to collect vintage items but I have found myself buying various things to supplement items that mum had collected. Many of these could be classed as ephemera and I have found [EBay](#) a useful source for such items, although I have also bought from other sites.

I found local Facebook groups to be very helpful. Two have been of particular assistance, [Kirkby Living Memory \(Heritage Centre\)](#) and [Norwich Remembers](#). I have created a [list/index of Facebook groups](#) I am a member of. Other sites I have accessed, I have referenced as footnotes and I have created a [list/index of all websites](#) I have referred to.¹

In addition, I have found a number of books to be useful. I have compiled a [list/index of all books](#) I have referred to. Many of the books I have referred to a lot relate to life in Kirkby before I was born. These include a number of books consisting mainly of photographs including “*Kirkby-in-Ashfield: A Pictorial View 1889-1989*” by Nottinghamshire County Council and “*Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Annesley on Old Picture Postcards*” by David Ottewell. Two books of photographs I have particularly referred to are by Frank Ashley, Sylvia Sinfield and Gerald Lee



A selection of useful books

¹ I found [Our Mansfield & Area](#) useful for information about Mansfield and Nottinghamshire. The site [My Primitive Methodists](#) was helpful for many aspects of Primitive Methodism. [Cinema Treasures](#) was extremely useful for information about different local cinemas and the [British Film Institute](#) and [IMDB](#) sites provided information about old films. The [BBC](#) site was useful on a wide range of issues. What was the [BBC's Genome project](#) was a really useful source of information about old TV programmes. It is now the BBC's Programme Index. I have also quoted The [Guardian](#) website quite often particularly on news items. I have been able to access a number of old newspaper articles through the archive on FindMyPast. I also subscribed to the [Local Recall](#) site which provided access to archived editions of the Eastern Daily Press. However, this is no longer accessible so I am gradually removing these references. I also referred frequently to the [National Archives](#) website. I found the [Geograph](#) website an incredible resource for photographs of places and these are available to reuse under a Creative Commons licence. I also found [Flickr](#) useful for finding photographs that are available under Creative Commons licences. I also paid for some licences for photographs from [Alamy](#), [Shutterstock](#), [Picture Nottingham](#) and [Inspire](#). I used the [Moneysorter](#) website to estimate equivalent monetary values today.

entitled “*Kirkby and District from Old Photographs*” and “*Kirkby and District a Second Selection*” respectively. There is also a book by Gerald Lee called “*Kirkby-in-Ashfield: Yesterday Remembered*”. There are a number of more narrative recollections of Kirkby including “*Kirkby-in-Ashfield: An Interesting Township*” by Bill Clay-Dove, “*The Mystery of Ernie Taylor’s Abdomen*” by Jonathan Evans and a series of books by Mark Ashfield including “*Horses, Herbs and a Cockatoo*”, “*A Carnival Crown and a Roasted Ox*”, “*Ferrets, a Tin Whistle and Haircuts at Home*” and “*Christmas Pigs and a Summer Donkey*” Among mum’s papers there was a Kirkby-in-Ashfield directory from 1969. I found this useful, not only for the map it contained but also for the adverts of local companies in existence at that time. Mum also had a 1953 Carnival programme which was useful for the same purpose.² I was also given a book entitled “*Kirkby in Ashfield: Official Guide*” which contains a useful mixture of articles, photos and adverts. It also includes a map. It dates from 1950.³

I also came across a book(let) by a member of Bourne Primitive Methodist Church, Edith Searson, entitled “*I Remember*” which contained extremely useful anecdotes about life in Kirkby, in general, and in that chapel, in particular.⁴ Three books by Barrie Smith give more information about the history of Methodism in Kirkby. They are entitled “*Light on the Hill: One Hundred Years of The Hill Methodist Church Kirkby in Ashfield*”, “*The Methodist Church: A Brief History of the Ashfield Circuit (22/13) 1959-2010*”⁵ and “*“Noah’s Ark” – A Century Before and After: The Methodist People of Kirkby-in-Ashfield – A Brief Account of their History*”.⁶ I have come across Kelly’s Directories relatively recently. These have been valuable for checking names and details mentioned in the diaries. I have versions which cover Nottinghamshire in 1899, 1928 and 1941, Norwich in 1960, 1967, 1970-71 and Tradefinders for 1970-71 and 1971-72.

A large number of individuals helped me by providing information and responding to my questions.

What started as simply reading through the diaries morphed into a bit of a “*lockdown*” project at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, as mum died a couple of months after I started, this exercise has helped me come to terms with her death and my relationship with her, which was not always easy as the later diaries show! While these notes clearly reflect my grandfather and mother, and their views, as they are based on their diaries, they are undoubtedly shaped by my own perspectives and recollections.

Roger Drew, September 2023

² Theatre and football programmes were also useful for the same reason.

³ I am very grateful to Helen Jay for giving me this book.

⁴ I am extremely grateful to Edith’s daughter, Christine Nuttall nee Searson, for giving me a copy of this book. I also managed to buy another copy which has a picture on the front, a picture of Ben Searson inside and is signed by the author.

⁵ I am extremely grateful to Barrie Smith for giving me a copy of this book of his.

⁶ I am extremely grateful to Helen Jay for giving me a copy of this book. I am also grateful to Helen for sharing a large number of photographs.