

# Annie Elizabeth Turner

nee Bennett, 1910-2014

Annie Elizabeth Turner was born to Caleb and Laura Bennett (nee Bevan) on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1910 at Two Gates, Cradley and on living to the age of 103 years she became the oldest recorded member of Two Gates Ragged School.



## Early Life

She had four siblings, older sisters Beatrice and Mabel and younger twins, sister Triffina and brother Tom. She began life growing up in a small cottage on land adjoining Two Gates Ragged School to the east that is now part of a remembrance garden and Prayer Zone. The cottage consisted of four tiny rooms, 2 up and 2 down, each measuring 11 feet square.

The family of six later moved to one of the cottages along Gingerbread Row on Oldnall Road and later they moved to a house in Foxcote Lane, behind Ada's shop at the junction of Oldnall Road.

Annie's childhood was happy and loving but her parents were also strict.

From the age of 4½ years Annie attended Sunday school at Two Gates Ragged School. At that time the chapel had been established for 50 years and from the stories Annie told she was dedicated to attending the chapel each week and spoke fondly about the teachers that guided her through her formative years.

By the time she was old enough to attend the state school at Colley Lane, Annie already had a good grounding in the stories of the Bible and could sing from memory most of the songs at morning assembly.



When Annie left school, aged 13, she went to work in a factory named Searchlight that made prams in Halesowen.

During her teenage years she met a young man named John Turner, who was known as Jack. Jack was 3 years older, came from Lye and played for Two Gates Sunday School Football Club. In those days it was customary for the members of the football team to attend the Sunday evening services. After the service a group of

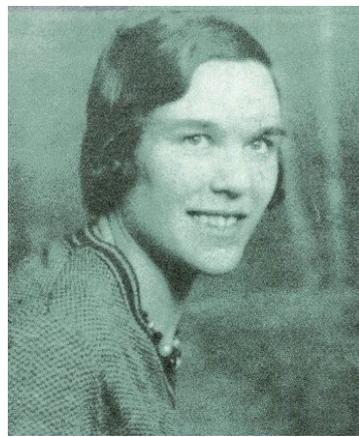


Annie (front left) aged approx 16 years

young people would spend time together and take walks along the country lanes. When Annie and Jack were teenagers, the lanes were merely cart tracks with a few cottages and farm dwellings.

### Annie & Jack

After several years of courtship, Annie and Jack were married on



Annie aged 21 years

Christmas Day in 1932, at Two Gates Ragged School by Mr Auden, the Superintendent. Annie was aged 22 and Jack was 25. They had their first child, a boy who they named John Dennis, in the following year but he only lived for 12 days and is buried in Cradley Cemetery. The death deeply affected Annie who never spoke of John Dennis afterwards.

For a time Annie and Jack lived at Careless Green in Lye and their son Thomas Geoffrey, known to all as Geoffrey, was born there in 1936. A few months later Annie, Jack and Geoffrey moved back to Cradley and into 7 Foxcote Lane. The previous occupants of the house had been Clifford and Martha Willetts, and their daughter Hazel, who had moved a short distance away to live at 4 Why Not Street.

In 1944, Annie gave birth to twins John and Jean who were born at Foxcote Lane. By coincidence the family followed the Willetts family



Why Not Street houses

again when Cliff and Martha Willetts moved to Clent View Road and the Turner's moved into 4 Why Not Street. It was there that their daughter Jennifer was born in 1950. The house in Why Not Street was one of a terrace of four where the only water supply was a cold tap in the brew house across the yard.

This particular brew house had once been a chain shop where Mrs Caroline Willetts (Clifford Willetts's mother) had worked long hours making small chain to supplement her family's income in the 1840s and 50s. The brew house contained a boiler which was used to brew beer, wash clothes and provide the hot water for all four families to have a weekly bath.

Times were hard and most people were living on the breadline. However, Jack always found work, mostly in local steel factories. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war he worked for a company making parts for aircraft, this job was a Reserved Occupation and deemed far more important than allowing him to fight for his country.

Later in life, even after his official retirement, Jack worked at Lye Spencer Steel – he was a hard working man.

In 1953 the family made a major move to a modern home at 26 Hedgefield Grove on the newly built Fatherless Barn Estate. There they had the luxury of both gas and electricity, and an inside toilet.

### **Annie the Grandmother**

As the years went by Annie and Jack's family grew with all four of their children marrying. In 1962 they had their first grandchild, Julie, whom they doted on. They often took her away with them on holidays to Blackpool alongside many of their own siblings and cousins' families. Over the years Annie and Jack had 10 grandchildren in all and loved them all equally, spending as much time with them as possible. Annie taught them her favourite pastimes of knitting and baking; Jack taught them about the world, history, how to pick mushrooms and how to grow flowers and vegetables.



Annie & Jack at their 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary

The couple played host to all their family every Christmas and also for many family parties, and in 1982 the couple celebrated their 50th (Golden) Wedding Anniversary with a party at home.

They still continued to enjoy their holidays and often spent them with members of the family.



Photo at Weston-Super-Mare

In 1986, due to Jack's ill health they downsized their home by moving to a bungalow in Dencil Close, Cradley. Annie and Jack still spent all their time together and very often went for a bus ride to Birmingham to buy groceries. They loved each other's company and enjoyed the love of their family and continued to spend family holidays in Weston Super Mare.

In 1992 the family held a surprise party in honour of the couple's 60<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary at Cradley Town Football Club. It was a big extended family affair held on the evening of Christmas Day. By that time Annie had lost her brother Tom and sisters Mabel and Beattie but her sister Triffina attended the party.



Annie & Jack at their 60<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary party with sons, Geoff & John and daughters Jean & Jennifer along with their partners and Annie's sister Triff

## **Annus Horribilis**

1997 was a traumatic year for Annie. First, her daughter-in-law Valerie passed away in late January after a long battle with cancer. Valerie's husband Geoffrey, Annie and Jack's eldest son, died very suddenly in June. Then after celebrating his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in September, Annie lost her husband Jack in November.

Annie was left devastated and the family thought that she might give up, however, with the help of her family and the home care given by her daughter Jean, Annie rallied round and got on with life.

Although living alone, Annie was convinced that Jack's presence was always with her. She would often reminisce to her daughter Jean and other members of the family about the long life that they had shared together.



Annie & Triff at The Black Country Living Museum



Triff & Anne on holiday

For many years afterward Annie led a self-sufficient life, cooking, cleaning and going out with Jean, her sister 'Triffy' and her niece Marlene. Triffy was just a few years younger than Annie and they had always got on really well with each other.

The four of them would go on holidays together twice a year and had weekly trips to Merry Hill to look around the shops, always visiting a cafe or a pub for lunch.

### **Later Life**

In later years Annie was able to stay in her bungalow in Dencil Close with the help of her family and still went on outings with the aid of a wheelchair. In 2010 Annie celebrated her Centenary. She received a

telegram from the Queen which she revelled in and had her photograph taken for the local newspaper – which she did not like one bit!

There was a huge surprise family party organised for Annie at the Wilson Hall, Colley Gate, Cradley.



Annie at her 100<sup>th</sup> party

Many relatives, whom she had only been in touch with at Christmas and who she had not seen for years, attended the party alongside her niece Rita and great niece Caroline who made the trip from Australia. By this time Annie had accumulated 13 great grand-children and 4 great-great children. It was a wonderful celebration and Annie loved it. She didn't even mind being wheeled around the hall in her wheelchair.

Sadly, Annie had lost her sister Triffina who passed away on Christmas Day 2009 but Annie soldiered on until eventually she became too frail to look after herself, at which time carers were called in to provide help twice a day. Reluctantly, in 2012, the family found a retirement home where Annie could be safely cared. It was a tough decision for the family to take and at first Annie did not want leave her bungalow, but following a few falls and experiencing periods of respite care, Annie realised she

needed 24 hour care and she settled into Rosemary Care Home at Wollaston. She was happy there and all of the staff loved her.

In 2013 Annie developed a chest infection and on February 18<sup>th</sup> she sadly passed away peacefully with many of her family around her. The family were distraught by her passing.



### **Two Gates Ragged School**

Annie had attended the Sunday evening service at Two Gates Ragged School right up until she was 101 years old. She had been a member of the congregation for nearly 100 years, an exceptional achievement.



Following her funeral service, donations were put toward the purchase of a memorial bench to be placed in the grounds of Two Gates Ragged

School and the site of the former house where Annie was born in 1910. That place has become a Prayer Zone for anyone who wants to visit and to rest or remember.



Remarkably, when members of the family were digging the patch of ground to site the bench on, the brick foundations of Annie's former house were discovered.

Annie had returned home.

### **A Spooky Story**

Two years later at Annie's grandson's wedding photographs were being taken outside at Two Gates Ragged School. One of her great-great grandsons, Elliot, then aged 15 months, was calling for his nanny. Thinking he wanted to go to his nan Jayne he was put down on the chapel pathway but he climbed the wall to the Prayer Zone and run over the garden to Annie's memorial bench. He clambered onto the bench, sat down and said "Nanny".

Affectionately known to most of her grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren as “Nanny T” we believe Annie was there that day at Two Gates Ragged School, at the heart of the family she loved so much - at the place she loved.

**Annie Elizabeth Turner, 1910-2014, “She Loved This Place”**

