



## **HELEN MARY BLUNDELL MBE 1915 - 1999**

Born 15<sup>th</sup> February 1915  
at 112b Chestnut Road, Plumstead, South London.

Helen's parents were Walter John Blundell (an Arsenal Overlooker) and Mary Elizabeth Blundell (née Dew.)

Helen won a Scholarship to Kingswarren County School, Plumstead (which was known as the Brown School because of the uniform). At school she used to get extra marks for neatness.

Helen was an only child whose loving but strict upbringing prepared her to accept the rigours of a nursing career, which she entered in 1933, training at the Woolwich and District Memorial Hospital in London, becoming a registered Nurse on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1936.

A medical colleague, Dr Moore, recalled that after many years in a difficult and poor area of Brighton and then, during the war years in London, Helen took up the post as one of the last District Nurse/Midwives in Lingfield in January 1946.

She lived with May and Cecil Love (brother and sister) at Ilford Dairy (now Rome Farm), Godstone Rd, near Ray Corner, where her nickname was Blun. They later moved to Pages Mead, Clinton Hill, Dormansland. During her later life Helen lived at 24 Vicarage Road, Lingfield.

Dr Moore says that in the first week of his joining the practice in 1970, and possibly his first duty night 'I was called to a lady who was in a very unexpected and late labour. Even though Helen had just retired as our district midwife, I did not hesitate to call her out, and we got the mother safely to hospital, where her son was born'.

During Helen's twenty plus years working in Lingfield in the post of midwife, many local mothers experienced and benefited first-hand from her enormous knowledge, love and expertise. During this time she delivered some 700 babies, including one in a gypsy caravan by candlelight.

After retiring as District Midwife, Helen then became a practice nurse at the surgery.

Helen was rewarded for her dedicated service to the community in February 1970 by the gift of a second hand car and a substantial cheque. Subscriptions had come from nearly 1,600 grateful folk from Lingfield and Dormansland and as far afield as Sussex, Scotland, Jersey and Belgium. Knowing that Helen had already agreed to purchase a Ford Anglia car, Anne Lindley and Lingfield Garage entered into a conspiracy that kept putting Helen off with excuses until the keys could be presented to her by her first baby, a Mr Colin Pettifer, at a party for over 300 people held in her honour at the Victoria Memorial Institute.

Helen was included in the New Years Honours List of 1971 for services to midwifery and nursing, and received her MBE from Her Majesty The Queen at Buckingham Palace later that year. Marjorie Piper recalls that there was a story that the hat she wore to the palace, was for many years kept on a shelf, and one day Helen found that a cat had had kittens in it.

Her background was not religious, but it was when she entered hospital to train as a nurse that she came in touch with the Christian faith that resonated with her inner spirit. Her love of music was very broad, she will be remembered for being a member of the church choir at St Peter and St. Paul, Lingfield, having a beautiful alto voice, rather like Kathleen Ferrier, and in the 1940's and 1950's often sang solos.

Helen was a very talented artist and produced beautiful and varied work. Once she won 3<sup>rd</sup> prize in a competition to design a stained glass window for Guildford Cathedral.

Her involvement with various groups included:

Christian Aid

Leprosy Mission

Church of England Children's Society

Guild of St. Raphael

Mothers Union

Womens Institute

Lingfield and Dormansland Development Group.

Pete Piper who used to do her garden, says her favourite flowers were polyanthus, but she also loved to receive a bunch of snowdrops when they came into bloom.

Helen was for some time editor of the church magazine, *The Star*, where she was a stickler for having the various reports in on time, If not, you received a phone call demanding to know where it was. She began writing 'Helen's Jottings' for the children, which were so popular that it was extended to include the adults.

At the end of her life, she had a very difficult and long terminal illness. Dr Moore says 'that my last connections were visiting her, just before she died on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1999 in Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, but there was never a word of complaint. She had a very firm Christian belief and was in the choir to the end'.

I (Win Penny) did not meet Helen Blundell until the 1980s when I joined Lingfield Afternoon WI. I would never have called her Helen to her face, as she was always called Nurse or Miss Blundell, by nearly everyone in the village. Helen joined the WI in March 1945, and came on to WI committee in November 1946. On 7<sup>th</sup> May 1947 it was found that the fringe and the gold cord on the WI banner had become tarnished and needed repairing, Miss Blundell and Miss Love took on that task and it is still there to this day.

We also have several copies of Helen's artwork in our WI archives, and an embroidered Lingfield badge, to be worn by anyone representing our WI.

The Church was overflowing for the service of Thanksgiving for her life, on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 1999. Tributes were given by The Rev'd Canon Alan Ramsay and Dr Dundas Moore.

Dr Moore says

**'there will never be another Helen Blundell.'**

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