

News from Carlton & Chellington Historical Society



Carlton & Chellington Historical Society has recently published *Knighton Grange*, an account of the joys and hardships of growing up in late Victorian rural England by Mary Wade (1877-1976) of Souldrop and Odell.

Knighton Grange, with the sub-title 'memories of my childhood on a lone farm', was completed in 1964 when Mary tried, without success, to publish her story. The manuscript, illustrated by her friend Constance Northern of Harrold, then lay forgotten until it came to light again over forty years later.

The background to Mary Wade's book is set out in the editor's introduction which identifies 'Knighton Grange' as Grange Farm, Odell, on the Dungee Road, north of Harrold. Readers will also find some family history and photographs, along with a brief guide to places and people of Mary's acquaintance, many of whose names are glossed over in the main narrative.

The opening lines of *Knighton Grange* take the reader back to Queen Victoria's golden jubilee, the year that Mary's parents Charles and Sarah Knight moved with their three children from Souldrop to become tenants at Grange Farm. Mary relates how her three younger siblings were born within a few years of her parents'

arrival. "With a domestic help, who often lived in, we were therefore a family of nine. How so large a family fitted into so small a house still remains a puzzle to me."

While Grange Farm has changed greatly from Constance Northern's depiction on the front cover, the setting is immediately recognizable from the description given by Mary:

"The farm house and buildings were a field's distance back from the hard road, which led to the nearest village, about two and a half miles away... Apart from two workmen's cottages by the road, across the front field, our nearest neighbours were farmers quite a long distance away. It was therefore truly a lone farm."

The six Knight children walked to and from Harrold every school day and up to three times on Sundays to attend Sunday School and chapel where their father Charles was a deacon. Charles is ever present in a story that ranges beyond the farm to provide a detailed and loving recollection of life in and around Odell parish at the end of the nineteenth century. However, it is Mary's mother Sarah, a semi-invalid, who is remembered with particular affection and, crucially, for her ability to inspire in her children a life-long love of the countryside.

An editor's postscript describes how Mary and her husband William Wade retired to Olney in 1952. Over the next twenty-five years Mary – or 'May' as she was better known to family and friends – became a highly regarded member of the local community, serving as president of the Olney Women's Institute and, in later years, becoming a founder member of the Bedford Unitarian Fellowship.

KNIGHTON GRANGE

Memories of my childhood on a lone farm

by MARY WADE

Published by Carlton & Chellington
Historical Society, Carlton, Bedford

Paperback: 120 pages

Price: £5.00 (add £1.20 postage)

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