"Edith Crossland

Who loved this place"

It's easily missed if you don't know where to look. Set off by the old red phone box at Green Moor, take a walk around the Delph and you'll soon find it along the winding path flanked by birch, broom, bramble, heather and willow; a seat in a tranquil place looking out over a lovely view. Then a bit further on – there it is – the "Fish Stone" upon which is attached a modest stone plaque inscribed with the words:

"In memory of Edith Crossland 1917 – 1979 who loved this place"

Who was this woman who lived so long ago? As I write this in January 2019 there are only a handful of people alive who remember her. But I remember her. She shines in my memory like a beacon of light. She was my dad's spinster sister, my Aunt Edith and she was amazing.

Although only 62 when she died, Aunt Edith always appeared to be old and bent, leaning over her stick. Her grey hair (which was very dark when I was little), angular face, bent nose and pointed chin made her look to my mind like a witch. A good witch of course, because her magic, her wonderful magic radiated around Green Moor and touched everyone who knew her.

From being a tiny tot to a troubled twenty something Aunt Edith's house was my refuge. Her warm, welcoming hearth would draw me along the wild and windy road from Hunshelf Hall like a magnet.

And I was not alone for half the Parish, who weren't in the Rock, seemed to hang out at Aunt Edith's. There they'd be: half a dozen squashed up bodies sinking into the cosy crocheted cushions on her old settee in front of the roaring coal fire where there'd be a dog spread out over a hand pegged rag rug that was made out of everybody's old worn out woollen coats.

Even people who wouldn't get on with one another found an uncanny truce in Aunt Edith's living room which was always called t' house.

Whatever the season, whatever the weather there was always something new to look forward to as I approached the bottom gate which led to the School House. In late summer an enormous hydrangea painted in a magical pastel mixture of pink, lemon and forget –me-not blue – the like of which I have never seen since – nodded its happy head inviting me through the creaking gate – into Fairyland.

And there she was waving here walking stick like a wand from the top of the garden.

"Look 'ere. Av got sommat to show ye!" I walked up through the pretty perennial flower beds interspersed with waving ferns, across the soft lawn grass and up to the top corner: a secret spot in front of the big bay window – where she'd just finished making - a pond!

"See 'ere!" waving her wand over the water revealing a bubbling fountain and a running waterfall she'd constructed from stones, moss and ferns.

A woodland glade: where the dumb woodland gnome and the motionless white rabbit peeped through the plants!

Then Aunt Edith would turn around stiffly which was the signal for the guided tour to begin.

"Let's see what's come out." I'd trail behind her along the little paths flanked by clumps of alpines and succulents, a big patch of London Pride. Past the little stone trough filled with water for the birds, past the rabbit, past the old gnome. Then she'd stop, suddenly, as something caught her eye.

Tenderly lifting up the delicate heads of some pretty red flower bells with the ferrule of her stick she'd exclaim: "eee-ah" as if the most rare and dazzling jewels lay at her feet. "Aren't they just GRAND"

But to Aunt Edith her flowers WERE jewels of Nature which she taught me to love too. This was her gift to me for which I've been forever grateful.

On another day I'd be going to Aunt Edith's and she'd be inside. To see her involved going around the back of the house which was another magical world.

Below Uncle Jim's perfect rows of vegetables, on a wall by the steps opposite the back door and the wash house which contained "the lav" and Uncle Jim's gardening tools, neatly put away, lay three big stone shallow troughs. These had been pig troughs, remnants of Aunt Edith's farming days. But now they contained miniature gardens filled with little clumps of alpines and succulants. One of these contained something very special. A crazy –paving pathway constructed of tiny stones wound its way up to a miniature wishing well which Aunt Edith had constructed out of a chopped off branch and a piece of wire. It really worked and whenever I went "round the back" I'd be winding the little bucket up and down into the jar of water embedded in the soil.

The wishing well fascinated me so much that I made a replica of my own when I was 10 and incorporated in into my very first Aunt Edith - inspired garden I even wrote an essay about it at school and the teacher read out to the class!

So, back to the visit. There she'd be, Aunt Edith, washing up by the kitchen window, her face bursting into an animated smile.

"Come in. A'v got summat to show ye! I'd push the front door open to the sound of tinkling Swiss cow bells half hidden behind the velvet curtain. Aunt Edith had chimes years before anyone else I knew had them and before they were fashionable.

All Aunt Edith's doors hid behind heavy velvet curtains which were intended to keep out the draught – her house was cold – but to me they were theatre curtains which concealed hidden delights waiting to be discovered. For even Aunt Edith's house was an extension of Fairyland.

I'd peer into the old fashioned 1940s painted green kitchen with its war-time Calorgas cooker, water boiler, pot sink and three ceramic ducks flying over the empty fireplace. No wasting time in there though. She'd usher me out to more interesting things and say in her sharp, bossy way:

"Come on into 't' room."

The cold sitting room where no-body ever sat apart from special days such as Christmas, was crammed with "stuff". Stuff which Aunt Edith was saving for her creations. Materials - fabric, wool, wire, straw. Thread, pipe-cleaners, string, branches, dried flowers, bits of wood, stones, glitter – you name it – covered the settee, the chairs, the dresser and most of the floor. There'd be piles of plant material in various stages of processing depending on the season. Teasels, honesty, stachys, holly and glycerine - all for decorating the chapel throughout the year. Out of the mess Aunt Edith pulled out half a dozen little dolls that she'd dressed up in National Costume.

Christmas decorations at the chapel

“This is Holland. This is Norway. ‘Av just got t’hats to do now …. Lets go into t’house where it’s warm.”

T’ house, the living room, was always so cosy, the draught being kept out by a particularly thick heavily lined velvet curtain on the side of the door which you had to push hard to open a little.

In the early days scary, scruffy, fluffy old Flash, later on quiet faithful Nell and lastly bouncy young Floss were fixtures sprawled out on the rag rug in front of the fire.

Uncle Jim, Aunt Edith’s older brother and a man of few words, would be sitting in his father’s old Windsor chair in the background finishing his dinner at the table by the bay window watching the cricket on the black and white T.V. Aunt Edith was one of the first people in Green Moor to get a television. My sister Angela, can remember watching the Queen’s Coronation with a house full of people – mostly Matthewman’s crowded around the small screen.

If you were fortunate enough to be there on the hour, the grandfather clock in the corner would chime just as the cuckoo was bursting out of the Swiss cuckoo-clock on the wall with a very loud “cuckoo”. It would make strangers jump.

Then Aunt Edith would rummage into the big cupboard where all her sewing stuff was kept. It was full of new delights which she’d pull out and show me one by one.

“See – ere..” Rummaging around she’d pull out a piece of delicate needle-point, a pretty tapestry, some cross stitch or a lovely pressed flower picture. Then the quilts – the wonderful patchwork quilts made from pieces of re-cycled fabric cut into hexagons and joined together by immaculate tiny handsewn stitches: hours and hours of work. I’d recognise my old dresses in there – as well as those of half the village.

Everywhere you looked at Aunt Edith's you could always find some sort of magical, miniature world. It could be a Nativity or Easter scene she'd make for the Chapel. Tiny pipe- cleaner dolls dressed to represent Biblical characters: Shepherds, angels, wise-men, the Good Samaritan bending over a prostrate figure. And is that Judas the betrayer hiding behind a rock?

Special present from Santa at the Christmas social in Green Moor School, 1958

Chapel decorations

But for me it was the miniature Japanese garden in the big bowl on her bay windowsill that was the most fascinating. A little ceramic pagoda and an oriental tower appeared to grow out of a variety of miniature succulents. A pebble pathway led to a bridge where an old oriental man held his cotton fishing rod over a lake made from an old mirror. A tranquil scene which I wanted to be part of. Then Aunt Edith would point out of the window at the bird table and exclaim, awestruck:

“See'a! That little robin yond. Isn't it GRAND!”

If it was a fine day she'd make the suggestion that I'd been hoping for.

“Let's go ‘n see what's ont' Delph” So off we would go with dog and stick for a walk upon the Delph.

Every few paces she 'd be stopping , poking her stick about in the grass, looking, listening and marvelling at the tiniest little things. Our walks were filled with “Oooohs!” “aaahs!” and “eeehs!” as she pointed her stick everwhere.

“Ooooh! See them little blue tits – aren't they bonny!”

“Eeeeh! Aren't they lovely together, them Lambs-tails, an' Pussy Willow,” picking sprigs of both to decorate the chapel.

And in Autumn: “Eeeeh! Look at t'colour of them Rowan berries. You can't beat that!”

A skylark rising up and disappearing into a pale blue summer sky: “Listen....eeeeh.... there's no better music na that!”

Then half-way around came the view of Wortley Church: “Eeeeh.... there's nowt better than that is

there?”

And so we went on, discovering new jewels and delights of the Natural World which were continually changing. It didn't stop there.

When I was 9 I acquired a dog of my own, collie dog Jip. Aunt Edith took me further afield, on walks down the Trunce, over to Romptickle and Huthwaite, over the Exin (oxen) Pasture to Holly Hall and down the straight path which Aunt Edith called the 'Roman Road' through Tin Mill wood.

On these walks she'd tell me tales from 'the olden days' – about my dad taking milk round the Delph on a horse-drawn cart to the poor people living in the Delph cottages, the ruins of which we passed. Her school friend, Ivy Rusby, (an ancestor of Kate's) who later on would sing and play the piano by ear in the Rock Inn when she was married to Joe Bacon, was born and brought up in these cottages.

A bit further on down the path she'd start explaining how the Delph cottagers had to go “down t' sixty steps” - sixty tiny steps cut deep into the sides of a quarry-, to fetch their water from the well. We could still see a few of the little steps near the top for at that time, around 1963, some of the old quarries hadn't been completely filled in. And I would imagine poor people from the olden days trailing up and down with heavy buckets time after time because they hadn’t a tap in their house.

Then there'd be stories about men who'd fallen from their 'monkey poles' to their deaths in the quarries. One unfortunate man who worked in New Biggin Quarry was killed one morning. His body was put in a horse-drawn cart and taken along Old Mill Lane towards his home. His wife was walking the other way and said “I’m just takin’ our George ‘is dinner.” “He wain’t be needin’ it today Mrs,” replied the driver.

There was also a man who was walking in the dark to or from his night shift at Fox's Steelworks over the hill when he fell down the Isle of Skye ('Oil in't sky) quarry and died. Some people said he was drunk.

Under the viaduct at Romptickle she'd put her stick high up to a stone bearing the name of a man who fell to his death during the railway's construction.

On our walks we would pass the old and then derelict cottages where wire-drawers and quarrymen had once lived. At that time, in the 1960's, everybody seemed to want to live in a nice new council house on the Stubbin Estate in Stocksbridge, with electricity, running water, a bathroom and flush toilet, and to be near a bus stop and the shops. Nobody wanted to live in a damp and draughty old cottage with an outside privy and well- water out in the sticks. Besides, all the stone quarries and most of the wire mills had closed and the good life was the steelworks in Stocksbridge.

There were derelict cottages everywhere we went – at Cherry Tree Row, Wortley Forge, Old Mill Lane, Huthwaite Lane and Romtickle. They were all fun to explore, particularly the gardens, or what was left of them.

“Look – a clump of rhubarb!”

“Ooooh – we'll take a bit o' that.”

“Look, Aunty, some snowdrops!”

“We’ll ‘ave some o’ them.”

A lost world waiting to be explored by us.

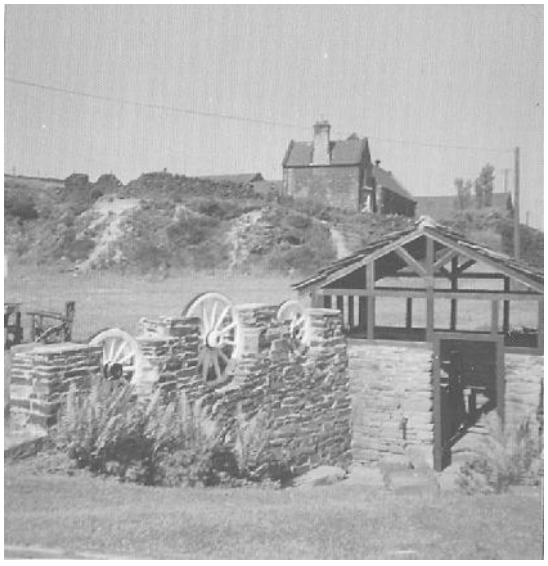
Once, as we were nosing around the ruins, an old tramp peered out from behind the door of the old railway house at Romptickle. We would never have guessed then how much sought after these 'done up' expensive properties would become in the future.

Once Aunt Edith organised a circular walk “fo’t’ Green Moorers”. The route went down Well Hill, past the Chemistry Cottages up to Wortley Church where we’d stop for a picnic. Then downhill and over the stepping stones across the river and back home through Tin Mill Wood.

She was great at organising things, Aunt Edith. If she had an idea people generally didn’t say “no” to it because her enthusiasm would carry them along. But whatever it was, she did it for the good of the community and everybody in it, so people rallied round.

Such was the case in 1968. Aunt Edith wanted to enter Green Moor for the “Best Kept Village in Yorkshire” competition. Or as she called it “t’ Tidy Village Competition”. It was a long shot, because at that time Green Moor was not a pretty village like Hooton Pagnell or Cawthorne which had both won previously.

But Aunt Edith energised everybody onto doing their bit. Brothers Neville and Rex Roebuck together with Jimmy Birch were particularly active. Willis Squires was responsible for creating a lovely playground for the children, a forerunner to the one that’s there now. Aunt Edith decorated the area around the old pump with a fence incorporating old cartwheels which she’d painted black and white. George Davies built the wall up around the cartwheels. Edith planted perennial flowers all along the verges and gateways – even as far as Hunshelf Hall. Some of them are still there. Eventually after months of T.L.C. much in evidence, Green Moor won the prize.



Old pump house 1968 with School House in background

It was a proud day in the summer of 1968 when the award winning ceremony took place accompanied by Thurlstone brass band. The village was presented with a copper beech tree which was ceremonially planted by the Rock Inn next to the road. It was later surrounded by a circular

seat. The other prize was a beautifully handcrafted bench made by Thompson the famous Yorkshire "Mouse Man". You had to look carefully to see where he'd carved the mouse.

Aunt Edith would have been thrilled to know that after 50 years Green Moor would once again win first prize for the best village in Yorkshire competition – going on to win the National competition the following year. Her spirit lives on!

Another Aunt Edith idea was the Museum. By the 1960s the old horse-drawn rural way of life which she'd been brought up with had gone, but there was still enough of the redundant old equipment lying around in attics, old sheds and field corners to label and to put together for a display in the school's disused coke shed for the education of generations to come. It was Aunt Edith's thrift and foresight which saved these relics from the past being lost forever.

The museum

The old coke shed was the tiniest stone building you could imagine and only Aunt Edith could have crammed so much stuff into it in such a tasteful way. She loved showing interested people around and would unlock the door with a big old key as if it were the entrance to Aladdin's cave.

"This is t' dolly n't' posher we used to use in t' tub on wash days."

"These ar't piggin cans used for ladlin' out t' milk from t' churn to customers on t' doorstep."

Any sort of celebratory day usually ended up at Aunt Edith's, at Christmas in particular. The School House was the last of the houses where the Green Moor Chapel Carol Singers visited on their annual round on Christmas Eve. Late at night they'd all pile in with their violins, violas and a cello and their hand-written local carol scores to raise the roof before falling into a hot supper mince pies, cakes and tea. No alcohol. They were Methodists!

During the Christmas Holidays all the nephews and the nieces and children of friends would be invited round at different times for their teas. After tea we'd wait for the cue:

"Shall we see what t' Snowman's got fo'r ye?" And we'd trail into the sitting room where the Snowman was waiting for us in the corner.

Aunt Edith brought him out. Not a real snowman of course, but the same size as a real one and he looked real. Aunt Edith had made him from a big cylinder covered in cotton wool. He had the usual hat, smiling face, buttons and scarf.

The decapitation of the snowman was a ceremonial ritual which we all waited for with eager anticipation. Aunt Edith made a meal of it as she slowly and gently lifted him out of his corner and placed him in the centre of the room.

"Now then", she whispered in awe to the wide-eyed audience who moved in closer as she lifted off his head – to reveal his inside – filled with presents! For all of us: wrapped up and labelled with our names. We took it in turns, youngest first, to find our present.

The fun was in rummaging around inside the Snowman's tummy to look at all the other labels before finding our own – which was always something cute, useful and handmade: a peg doll, for instance, a bar of soap sewn into a piece of sponge to look like a turtle or a crinoline lady whose dress covered a toilet roll.

Sometimes, to celebrate Yorkshire Day Aunt Edith would hold a Yorkshire Evening where everyone turned up wearing Yorkshire roses. In her poem "A Yorkshire Neet" Freda Watts described one such evening when there was a power cut. A lot of fun was had by all.

A Yorkshire Neet

Edith's gin me a long pencil
That's a dangerous thing to do
She'll be mentioned in despatches
I doubt before I'm through.

This pencil's a long 'un as pencils go
Do you know, it's aboon a foot long.
An' she'll not want it standin' idle
So mi poor owd brain'll be throng.

She had a "Yorkshire Evenin'" one neet.
There wor all maps an' candles she'd put
Cos only t'thing we were sure on
We were in for a power cut.

It didn't spoil't evenin' one little bit
I don't know what t'other fowk thowt
But, to me, sat there in't candle leet
It mad't evening better, it owt.

T'first thing we did, we had a song
It wor Ilkley Moor Baht 'at
We had a bit o' trouble 'ere
An' we might a' been a bit flat.

There were some on 'em singin' in't room
An'us in't house having a blether
An' Neville wor singin' in't passage way
Tryin' to keep us together!

Trouble wor, them lot singing in't room
Wor adding some twiddly bits to it
An' us lot singin' in t'other oil didn't know
we were just rushing straight through it.

We seemed to 'ave gone back fifty years
Wi' a bit o' home made pleasure.
I don't know if folk enjoyed it,
It's a neet Edith'll always treasure.

Modern way of entertainment
Is not what it used to be
Some artists these days tak all the clarts off
That doesn't mean it for me.

There wor three on us, Jean an' Neville, an me
Sayin' poems that we'd all got to larn
An' there were only me took mi cardy off
An' that wor because I wor warm.

Mrs Rogers sat at t'side o' me
Patiently holding a lamp
She looked like Florence Nightingale -
I hope she didn't get cramp.

T' supper wor lovely but that's neer in doubt
When Edith has that job in hand
She'd gone to some trouble to mak a success
I hope it turned out as she'd planned.

Iverrybody seemed to help an' did what they could
Mad sandwiches an' then cut some more
Kids were pinnin' white Yorkshire roses
On't fowk as they come I through't door.

This is what is wanted these days
All helpin' to do things together

Instead of pullin' in different ways
Which only maks heavy weather.

There must have been forty fowks there that neet
I don't know there might have been more
But all o' them people had help't just a bit
When they went off hoame through' t door.

Freda Watts, nee Battye, was one of Aunt Edith's longest and closest friends. She was brought up on a farm at Snowden Hill, a couple of miles away, had married Arnold, Aunt Edith's cousin and brought up their family at Well Hill Farm, Green Moor.

We are very lucky to have more of Freda's funny Yorkshire dialect poems which tell us so much about their lives, their friends and relationships, for Aunt Edith features in many of the poems. Here are short extracts from two of them:

Corn Dolls

You'd think Edith Crossland 'ud know enuff stuff be now
An' the'd be nowt else she wanted to know
But I'll bet if anybody's doin' owt
She'll say "Hey up, let's us 'ave a go."

She knows how to crochet and mad a straw stack
An' trim up a chapel by golly
But t' latest thing she wanted to know
Was how could she mak a corn dolly?

Down Falls

I've known Edith Crossland since we were young.
That's a long, long time ago
But we can still have a laugh at things at we did
An' we did some daft things you know

This horse riding craze is not summat new
We used to be riding out too
But we didn't have special ponies for t' job.
We'd mak t'owd cart horses do.

Aunt Edith with brother Jim and Freda Watts

They tell us that Edith, Freda and their friends didn't travel very far. Their lives were centred around the village, the chapel and each other's houses. They were never lonely. They had a lot of fun. They organised their own entertainment which was creative, imaginative, simple and inexpensive. They didn't expect anyone else to do it for them. They cared and looked after each other and they weren't materialistic.

They took pride in what they managed to do with so little and nobody that I remember appeared to be depressed.

I could see why they were so grateful for what they had; things which my generation think of as basic necessities which we all think we have a right to such as a warm house, hot and cold running water, a flush toilet; Edith and Freda and most of the villagers in little farms and cottages had none of these.

Aunt Edith's early life had been very tough indeed although I never heard her complain about it. She was born in 1917 at Hill Top Farm which hadn't really changed since Victorian times – or before! The soil was poor and stony and her father had to work part-time in the quarries splitting curb stones for pavements. It was a skilled job which required precision.

Charles Crossland ploughing at Hunshelf Hall 1946

The children had time off Green Moor School for stone picking and my dad who was second youngest to Edith, left at 14 to work on the farm full time. The farm had to support a depressed alcoholic uncle – a casualty of World War One as well as the parents and 6 children, two of them invalids.

Green Moor School 1920s. Edith on the back row, far right.
Ivy Rusby back row, second left. Dilly Gudrum second row, third left.

While Stocksbridge, over the hill was lit up by gas and electricity for most of the twentieth century, civilisation didn't reach the farms at Green Moor until the 1950s. At Hill Top Farm it was well water, oil lamps, candles and carthorses. Smoke pollution from scores of domestic houses and big factory chimneys blew over Hill Top must have been dreadful. Not surprisingly two of Edith's older sisters, Mary and Annie suffered from severe respiratory diseases and their mother, aged 46, succumbed to pneumonia after walking home over Hunshelf Bank in the rain after a chapel tea at Deepcar.

Edith, the youngest, was only 9 when her mother died in 1926.

"Look after our Edith." Their mother had said on her death bed.

As it turned out it was Edith who looked after all the others who were living at home – including her oldest sister, Mary, who was always weak and never married.

You might be very bright, but in the 1920s, if you were a girl, you usually had to be the Headmaster's or the School Governor's daughter to be selected for the Grammar School. But such a thing was never even thought of at Hill Top. There was too much work at home. So, after leaving Green Moor School with her friend, Dilly from Briery Busk, who was also a very bright girl, they would walk over the hill together to Stocksbridge Secondary School – until they were allowed to leave at 14.


Edith and Dilly at Hill Top Farm in the 1920s

My dad was five years older than Edith and Jim was two years older than my dad. Jim didn't want to be part of the farming business and spent his working life in the steelworks at Foxes. He walked there and back over the hills like every other villager did who worked down there, but he still lived at home and never married. My dad loved farming and took on all the heavy manual work as their father grew old and infirm.

Edith with Joyce Kaye and Margaret Clancy:
all Young Farmers' Club friends

Aunt Edith, effectively, did all the work of a farmer's wife. She kept house and washed, cooked and cleaned for five adults after her two older sisters, Annie and Ada had married. She kept hens and would regularly kill, pluck and gut them as well as grading the eggs. She would feed the animals, hand-milk the cows, cater for extra staff during hay-time, harvest and threshing and generally turn her hand to anything when needed. Together with her elder sister, Mary, she managed and budgeted the farm so well that in the 1930's they secured the tenancy of Pond Farm near Snowden Hill, a bigger farm where there was more scope for expansion.

Through thriftiness and good management they got through the lean years of the Great Depression and like most farmers, thrived well producing food during the years of World War II. It was during this period when they started a milk round which eventually covered Green Moor, Thurgoland and Spring Vale.

Then their father died. He simply slipped away in his Windsor chair in front of the fire.

The farming business was doing so well that by 1946 the family were able to take on the tenancy of one of the biggest farms in the area: Hunshelf Hall. Their sister, Ada, who was married to Tom Matthewman moved into "Pond Farm" with their six children.

Milk round during winter of 1947: Edith with niece Margaret Walton, Charles Crossland and "Owd Tom" using upturned table as a sledge.

The living conditions at Hunshelf Hall were still primitive since it was a large, once grand, draughty old house on a cold hillside. Aunt Edith's cousin, Phyllis Watts now married to George Davies, occupied part of the house with their 6 children but were soon to move to one of the new council houses at Castle View. George worked at Foxes but being a farmer's son helped on the farm too. Everybody accepted roughing it; they always had done and the farm came first.

But you can't marry your sister and my Dad, now 34, needed a wife. He found one at an "Excuse Me" dance at Penistone Drill Hall.

Aunt Edith must have been devastated when she first met my mother. Seeing her nail varnish, high heels and lipstick it was obvious that this woman had no intention of plucking hens and scalding dead pigs. Besides she was a foreigner from Oxspring three and a half miles away and she was a school teacher!

My dad's dream of a happy compatible, communal family life evaporated very quickly. They didn't get on. Dad said years later it was like "having two bitches in one kennel." The last straw for mum came after their wedding night which was spent, unfortunately, at Hunshelf Hall. At 7 a.m. Aunt Edith was outside throwing pebbles up at their bedroom window.

"Get up lad! It's time to milk t' cows!"

They lasted about two years under one roof. Life became so intolerable that Aunt Edith along with invalid sister Mary and their Brother Jim moved into the School House at Green Moor.

Green Moor school photo 1977

Uncle Jim and Aunt Edith became the school caretakers. It worked well. Uncle Jim was responsible for stoking up the school boiler and for managing the coke deliveries. He still worked at Foxes. Aunt Edith cleaned the school and washed up after the school dinners. I remember sometimes popping in after school to have a chat with her while she was mopping the floor. I was unhappy at school and her presence, which was never very far away, was always a comfort.

Aunt Mary died of TB on Christmas Day 1954 at the School House the day after the carol singers had been. Aunt Edith had looked after her for years and it was soon after that that my memories of the School House began.

During the 1950s Aunt Edith would come into the farm yard every morning at Hunshelf Hall to wash up the dairy equipment for my dad. She would come in a little green van that was filled with crates, which were filled with freshly bottled milk, cream and orange juice from Stocksbridge Co-op dairy which she'd deliver around Springvale. As a pre-school tot I'd look out for her and would often toddle down into the farmyard to ask for orange juice which came in small quarter pint bottles. As a treat she'd sometimes take me on her round.

Once I asked for a quarter pint bottle of cream to drink

"You'll be sick," she warned, but gave it to me anyway. I was still supping the cream out of the bottle as the milk customers – all stay-at-home housewives in those days – were receiving their milk.

They were all saying : "Ooooh – watch her Edith; she'll be sick!" But I wasn't. I did grow into a chubby little girl though. How I loved Aunt Edith's cream!

As I grew into my mid-teens during the "swinging 60s" I longed to see more of the world as new possibilities opened up. I started hitch-hiking around Europe with my friend Dave and later with my sister Angela. Aunt Edith took a dim view of this. As I sheepishly tried explaining to her that I was going off again, she'd turn up her "Crossland chin" (as my mother put it!) in disapproval.

“Where’ you going off to now?” she’d snap.

I’d mumble apologetically: “Er – Germany or “Greece.” It sounded like a confession.

“There’s nowt wrong wi’ round ‘ere!” she’d state, defiantly, as if I were betraying the tribe. Many years later I realised that, in a sense, she was right.

Uncle Jim died in 1975 aged 62 after suffering many years from weak “Crossland lungs”. He’d always been a quiet, reliable, benign presence. Once a good tennis player and cricketer he helped found the Green Moor Cricket Club and became the umpire later on.

The creation of the cricket pitch was all done by the communal effort of the villagers. During the 1920s, 30s and the war years there was little money around and the Green Moorers knew that if they wanted entertainment they had to make it themselves. The three tennis courts which were created at Hill Top Farm, Pond Farm and Hunshelf Hall were testimony to this “can do” attitude. My dad helped to prepare the ground but it was meticulous Uncle Jim who maintained the courts.

The tennis courts provided years of home-grown entertainment and community togetherness for that generation who would reminisce about it as they grew older. They would comment how it had all been lost by my generation, the “Baby Boomers”, the “Sixties kids” who didn’t know what it was like to go without, who had everything, but wanted more, who only cared about themselves and didn’t know what a hard day’s work was. As for morality, what was the world coming to!

The School House felt sad and lonely without Uncle Jim. Aunt Edith really missed him but she had her dog, Nell, who was a great comfort. Nell was a sweet-tempered black part Labrador who followed Aunt Edith like a shadow. But, she was becoming stiff, stout and old. For a long time Aunt Edith was in denial that Nell had cancer. She really suffered.

Aunt Edith couldn’t bear to lose her dog. When Nell did eventually die Aunt Edith dug a big hole in the garden that very morning and buried her herself through floods of tears. She’d had Nell a long time. The previous dog, Flash, who I could just remember had long black wiry hair. She was not very friendly and a bit snappy, but Nell was lovely. It wasn’t long before the Matthewman’s gave Aunt Edith a young collie she named Floss. But, oh dear! She was very much a puppy, bouncing all over the place and biting the furniture. Aunt Edith was really too old and lame by this time to be coping with a young dog. But in August 1978, Aunt Edith died suddenly.

The previous year had been tremendously creative and productive. Edith had taught herself how to make corn dollies and was brilliant at it. She was so good at it that she was teaching other people how to do it at night classes at Stocksbridge College. She’d just think of something and make it in straw.

That year had been the Queen’s Silver Jubilee. Aunt Edith had decorated the Chapel with all her corn dolly creations which celebrated the event. They included a coach, a ceremonial mace and chain and a cake.

Edith with some of her corn dolly creations

But this wasn't all. There were on-going activities such as putting bog plants in big jars and bottles and candle-making. My sister, Angela, who had accompanied her to a candle-making class in Penistone, said later that Aunt Edith's candles were far better than anyone else's.

And of course there were the lamps. Whenever she could, Aunt Edith rescued old oil lamps from oblivion. Lamps which had once been precious pieces of household equipment, essential for lighting up the house, were no longer needed and were being chucked out in their thousands. Aunt Edith would take in as many as she could, scrubbing, cleaning and polishing them, like poor neglected orphans. Then she'd work out a way of threading a flex through the middle to which she'd attach a plug and a light bulb. Some of these lamps particularly those which had fancy glass domes were very beautiful. She gave this treatment to two rusty old Victorian carriage lamps we found in the attic at Hunshelf Hall. They were brass and she made them look lovely. It was a joke that she was like the character in the Aladdin story giving "New lamps for old".

Edith presenting one of her creations to Winnie Stanley who gave a spinning demonstration at School House in 1976

So by the beginning of August 1979, Aunt Edith was still in great form, busying about as usual, bubbling over with ideas and plans for the future.

Then her older sister Annie, now a widow and who'd always been an invalid with chronic asthma fell ill and needed looking after since her only daughter, Margaret lived in Australia. Annie only lived at "Ingle Mount" the first house in the village, so Aunt Edith was only too happy to go and look after her. It was only a few yards down the road from the School House and Aunt Edith could keep popping in. Besides, she was good at looking after people. A decade earlier she'd helped her cousin, George Bingley, look after their spinster Aunt Fanny who lived alone in a Victorian bubble in one of the "New Houses" and died there in 1965 in her eighties.

Edith at home shortly before she died

We've now reached the autumn of 1978. With one marriage already behind me I had met my second husband (to be) on a ship returning from Australia. I wanted to introduce him to Aunt Edith before we went down to live in Devon where Chris was going to be a shepherd on a big estate.

We just caught Edith for a moment in the school yard. Whatever I did, however weird or whacky it was, Aunt Edith was never judgemental with me. We waved goodbye.

"I'll be seein' ye agen," she said cheerily. That was the last time I ever saw her.

One afternoon in August the following year my dad's car drew up outside our cottage in Devon. Mum and dad had finally managed to get away from the farm and had driven all the way down the length of the country to stay with us for a little holiday. They'd hardly stepped out of the car; we were standing there exchanging greetings when the farm manager drew up by us in his landrover.

"I've just had a phone call for Charles," he said. "Your sister Edith has died."

Dad looked shocked of course, but we all agreed that he'd got it wrong. It would be Annie who had died. She'd been a creaking gate for years. But, we were soon to learn that he had been right.

The following day I travelled back up to Yorkshire with Mum and Dad for the funeral. We couldn't believe it. Aunt Edith had been so full of life.

When we got back we learned what had happened. Aunt Edith had been looking after Auntie Annie. She'd been sleeping in the spare room and when she didn't appear to be getting up Auntie Annie

staggered out of bed to peep into her room. There she lay – dead - from a massive heart attack which had taken her while she slept.

Mum and dad sat in Aunt Annie's front room, stunned.

"Have a biscuit," wheezed poor Aunt Annie, offering us the tin filled with shortbreads that Aunt Edith had made a couple of days before. I couldn't eat them.

I went back to the School House on my own as if I might find her there. The door of the wash house was slightly ajar. I looked at the whiteboard on the wall which she always used to let people know where she was. The last message read: "Spending night at Annies. Back tomorrow morning."

There was much speculation as to why she died. There hadn't been any signs of impending illness. Like many of her generation she consumed a lot of saturated fat which we know now is bad in excess. I remember the tasty dinners at her place being covered in butter. She was always urging me to eat more.

"Eeeh –ye'll be clammed to death!" she'd say. The shortbread tin was always full.

She would never have thought to have had her blood pressure and cholesterol checked by a doctor. If she had, she could have been put on statins and could have lived much longer; long enough to see my children who would have loved her and learned from her.

Her death could also have been triggered by stress for she was growing very worried about her future. The School House went with the job which Aunt Edith was about to retire from. There had been talk for some time that Barnsley Council would be building some OAP bungalows in the field above the School House. That would have been perfect for Aunt Edith who'd been pinning her hopes on this for years. Then, at the last minute, the Council backed out and the bungalows that were built were big expensive private homes we now know as "Delph Edge". The fear of the possibility of having to leave Green Moor could have been enough to kill her. We shall never know.

Once when Aunt Edith was going on about how wonderful Green Moor was someone said: "But Edith. You ARE Green Moor." There was truth in that because after she died it felt as though Green Moor had died with her. It was never the same.

So what would Aunt Edith make of us if she were to come back today? She would never have heard of all the newly coined eco-words we all use now such as "conservation", "sustainability". "environmentally friendly", "global warming" and "carbon footprint". Yet she herself had the smallest carbon footprint of anyone I've ever known.

She wouldn't have been at all surprised at the deteriorating state of our present environment, because she saw it coming, back in the 60s, when the Baby Boom generation - who never experienced real hardship – started to want more than they needed, becoming self-centred, materialistic and less in tune with Nature. This was in no small measure fuelled by the Government and big business which encouraged spending rather than saving. She was well aware of it, I know, and it was largely through her that I became environmentally sensitive from a very early age.

If she were to be asked to comment on today's environmental mess she'd snap sharply: "Eeeeh – what do you expect! Ye can't keep taking wi'aht putting summat back! They should 'ad known that long since! It's common sense!"

But Aunt Edith would have been thrilled to have seen Green Moor winning the 2018 Village in Bloom award, 50 years after winning the Best Kept Village Competition. The resurgence of a new generation of Green Moorers who love and care for the village as she did are working together again for the common good. She would also have been pleased to know about her memorial on the Delph; a lovely idea which came from Doris Stubbs who commissioned and paid for it along with Neville Roebuck and Pat Pearson.

Today Aunt Edith shines and speaks to me as she always did. Some people believe that good people like her never really die. Their spirits are so strong that they continue to live on through those who are known and loved, to be passed on to the next generation – and the next. Recently my son, who was gardening in Japan, posted me a photo of a beautiful Japanese garden with the comment: "It must be like Aunt Edith's" even though he'd never actually seen her gardens!

Aunt Edith is still as alive to me now as she ever was. I still see her and she still speaks to me as I walk around Green Moor. I stop at the School House gate and she waves to me from the top of the garden with her stick.

"Come in. See what 'ave been doing!" I see her pottering about by the grass verge planting perennials. I see her trudging up from the Trunce holding catkins and pussy willow for the Chapel at Easter. I see her sitting on her seat on the Delph saying, "Eee – in't it grand, there's nowhere better n' that is ther'."

So – after reading all this I urge you to take a walk around the Delph. Take a look at Aunt Edith's stone and sit quietly on her seat. You might just find - that she's still there with you.

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Edith's Stone. Angela Fox, Wendy Crossland and Julia Tomson: Edith's nieces 2020.