

THREE WOMEN AT SWALLOW'S NEST, MELLING

During the summer of 1917, three women, all related to the Barker family of Todmorden were staying at, or visiting, Swallow's Nest, Melling:

- **Mary Leech** (1881-1963) lived at Swallow's Nest from May to October 1917, awaiting the birth of her first daughter in November; her second husband, Dr Ernest Bosdin Leech (1875-1950), was on army medical service in France.
- **Emily Barker** (1867-1955) was a visitor from Tatham, where she lived with the family of her brother-in-law, the Rev. Arthur Senior Roberts (1867-1939) at the Rectory of St James the Less.
- **Grace Barker** (1892-1994) had also been living at Tatham Rectory, after a period of service as a nurse in France; for the summer of 1917, she stayed at Swallow's Nest, which she had found for Mary Leech to rent.

How were these three women related?

- **Emily** and **Grace** were aunt and niece: Emily was the sister of Robert Barker (1866-1912), the father of Grace Barker.
- **Mary** and **Grace** became stepmother and stepdaughter in 1904 when, after the death of Grace's mother, Robert Barker married Mary Walder, who had been Grace's governess.
- **Emily** and **Mary** were thus sisters-in-law.

Emily's father Robert Barker died in 1912; **Mary** Barker married Dr E. B. Leech in 1916, and **Grace** Barker married Herbert Brough Usher (1892-1969) in 1923.

In October 1939, at the church of St James the Less, Tatham, Emily, Mary and Grace were among the chief mourners at the funeral of the Rev. Arthur Senior Roberts:

- 'Miss Barker (sister-in-law)' is **Emily**.
- 'Mrs H. B. Usher' is **Grace**.
- 'Mrs E. B. Leech' is **Mary**.

The funeral service was conducted by the Rev. W. J. A. Burrow, Vicar of Melling.

The chief mourners were: Mrs. Roberts (widow); Messrs. Arthur Cecil Roberts and Philip Barker Roberts (sons); Miss Barker (sister-in-law); Miss E. M. Remington; Mrs. J. Barker (sister-in-law); Mrs. H. B. Usher, Mrs. J. S. Lord, Mrs. McKay, Miss Nellie Barker (nieces); Major R. H. Barker and Dr. T. Stephens (nephews); Dr. and Mrs. E. B. Leech, Mr. and Mrs. Stewart Dennett (Todmorden), Miss Edith Barker (Todmorden).

Lancaster Guardian 6 October 1939

GRACE BARKER OF TODMORDEN, BLACKPOOL, MARPLE, LONDON, GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND DEVON (1892-1994)

A photo of 1917 (taken probably between 28 May and 16 June) shows Emily Barker and her niece Grace Barker 'by the wall in the garden' of Swallow's Nest, Melling:



Grace Barker was born in Todmorden on 14 April 1892, and died at Otterton, Devon on 2 June 1994.

Grace's family (1892-1914)

Grace was the daughter of Robert Barker (1866-1912) and his first wife, Kate Fielden (1867-1901), who were married in Todmorden on 4 February 1891. In the 1891 census, Robert and Kate Barker (erroneously recorded as Baker!) are staying in the boarding house of John and Emma Croasdale, at 56 Lord Street, North Meols, in the centre of Southport, along with Kate's parents Samuel and Alice Fielden and her brother John.

Robert and Kate Barker set up home at Thornhill, Harley Wood, Todmorden. In July 1898, their daughter Grace was a bridesmaid at the wedding of her aunt Mary's wedding to the Rev. Arthur Senior Roberts.

In 1900, Robert, Kate and Grace moved to Blackpool, on account of Kate's poor health; Kate was suffering from Graves' disease, 'an autoimmune condition where your immune system mistakenly attacks your thyroid which causes it to become overactive. The cause of Graves' disease is unknown, but it mostly affects young or middle-aged women and

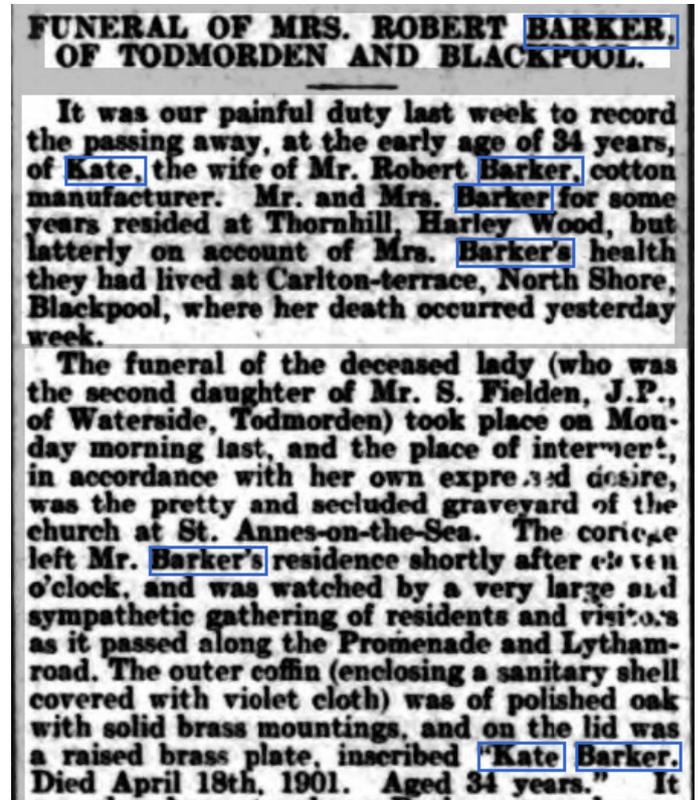
often runs in families' (NHS website). The 1901 census shows the family living at 9 Carlton Terrace, North Shore, Blackpool: Robert, Kate, Grace, Alice M Fielden aged 28 (a sister of Kate), Mary Walder aged 19 (born in Jamaica and governess to Grace), and three female servants.

On 18 April 1901, Grace's mother Kate Barker died.

In June 1902, under the will of her grandfather Samuel Fielden JP (1839-1902), the father of Grace's mother Kate, Grace inherited a 1/3 share in trust of the residue of his property.

In 1904, at the church of St James the Less in Tatham, Grace's father Robert Barker and her former governess Mary Walder were married by the Rev. Arthur Senior Roberts, Grace's uncle by marriage, who had recently moved from Todmorden to Tatham. Emily Barker (Robert's sister and Grace's aunt) was a bridesmaid.

In 1909, Robert, Mary and Grace moved from Blackpool to Beechwood, a substantial residence in Marple, where Grace became a Cheshire member of the British Red Cross Society. The 1911 census records Robert Barker, Cotton Spinner, Mary Barker aged 29, Grace Barker aged 18, and three household servants. (The 1911 census is the first to record the number of rooms in each property – for Beechwood, there were 16 'including kitchen but not scullery, lobby, closet, bathroom nor washhouse or office/shop.')



From the *Todmorden Advertiser*, 26 April 1901



Robert and Grace Barker
(photo: Marple History Society)



Robert & Grace Barker at Beechwood, circa 1910
(photo: Marple History Society)

For more about the Barkers at Beechwood, see: www.marplelocalhistorysociety.org.uk/stories-from-the-archive/places/336-if-walls-could-talk.html

But in 1912, death struck the Barker family once more: Robert Barker died at Beechwood on 9 October; there is a memorial window in St James the Less church, Tatham, paid for by Mary and Grace.

Grace during the Great War

After her father's death, Grace remained in Marple, first at Beechwood, and then at Brabyns' Auxiliary Military Hospital, where she was a live-in voluntary nurse.

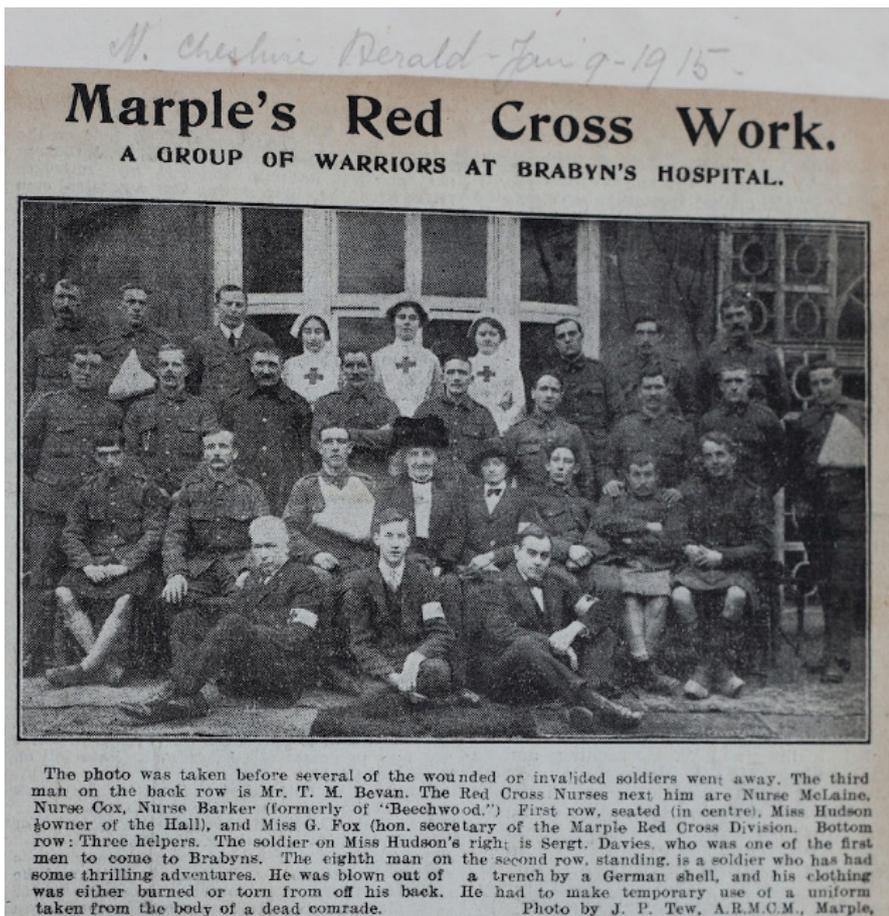
Grace's service record card (see next page) shows that from November 1914 to May 1918, she was a member of VAD Cheshire 114 at Brabyns' Auxiliary Military Hospital, Marple, and later VAD Lancashire 110 at Wray Auxiliary Military Hospital, Wray House, Hornby Road, Wray. Her duties involved nursing, secretarial and housework.

MR. ROBERT BARKER'S WILL. — Mr. Robert Barker, partner in Luke Barker and Sons Ltd., cotton spinners and manufacturers, of Todmorden, a well-known figure on the Manchester Exchange, who died at his residence, Beechwood, Marple, Cheshire, on the 9th October last, left £24,306 gross, £13,075 net. Probate has been granted to Mrs. Mary Barker, widow, Miss Grace Barker, daughter, both of Beechwood, Mr. John Barker, brother, 13, Seafield-terrace, Lytham, and brother-in-law, the Rev. Arthur Senior Roberts, of Tatham Rectory, Wennington, executors. The will leaves the daughter Grace all investments inherited from the late wife, or given to her or testator by the late Samuel Fielden. His household effects he leaves to his wife during widowhood, with remainder to the residuary estate. Of the residue one-half to the wife during widowhood, or a life annuity of £200 on re-marriage, and subject thereto, all the residue of the estate to children equally, his daughter's share upon trust.

From the *Todmorden & District News*, 30 May 1913

Surname *Barker* MAY 1918
 Christian Names *Grace* (Mr., Mrs. or Miss)
 Permanent Address: *Wemington, near South of the
Leicester at present.*
 Date of Engagement *Nov: 1914* Rank *Member of VAD* Pay *Voluntary*
 Date of Termination *May 1918* Rank *Member of VAD* Pay *Voluntary*
 Particulars of Duties *Nursing, secretarial & housework*
 Whether whole or part time, and if latter No. of hours served *4708 hrs*
 Previous engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where *Member of
B.R.C.S. 1910.*
 Honours awarded

PERIOD OF SERVICE, Etc. *Marple*
 From *Nov 1914* To *May 1918* (Commission or Department or County) *Cheshire Branch
111 & 110*
Brabyns A.M.H Marple Cheshire & Wray A.M.H W. Lancaster



North Cheshire Herald, 9 January 1915; Grace Barker is on the right in the back row.

Source: www.marple.website/local-history/flora-buck-scrapbooks.html

In 1916, Grace was a nurse with the British Expeditionary Force in France. Her service is recorded on the Great War Roll of Honour in the church of St James the Less, Tatham. The inscription reads: 'With the Y.M.C.A. (British Expeditionary Force in France,) and awarded the General Service Medal. Grace Barker. Red Cross. Lucy Henrietta Shawcross. John Leslie Thomas Shawcross.'



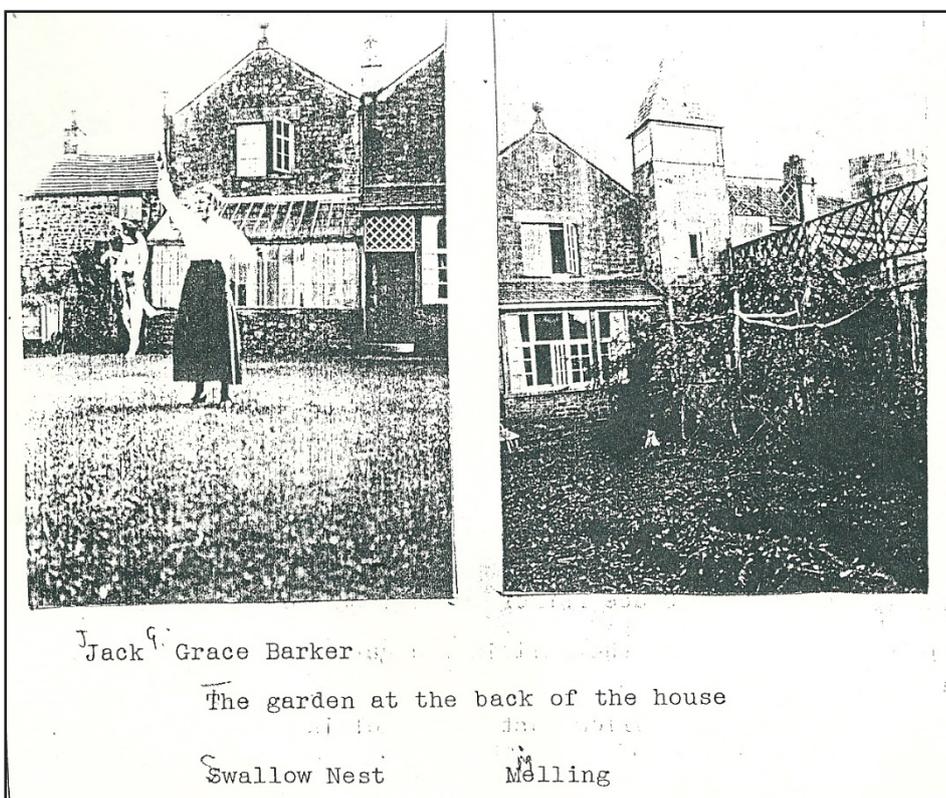
Grace maintained a connection with Marple and in a letter refers to her work at Brabyns Military Hospital, Marple earlier in the Great War.

By December 1916, Grace was back from France, and working as a volunteer nurse at the Auxiliary Military Hospital at Wray House, Hornby Road, Wray. She was staying at Tatham Rectory, with the Roberts family and her aunt Emily Barker.

In the Spring of 1917, Mary Leech, who was expecting her first child, asked Grace to find a house where she could stay for the summer, while her husband Dr Ernest Bosdin Leech was away on war service. The house Grace found was Swallow's Nest, Melling, where stepmother and stepdaughter lived from April to October, while Emily remained at Tatham, visiting her niece Grace at Swallow's Nest (see photo at the beginning of this article).

Here is Grace, with a canine companion, in the back garden at Swallow's Nest:

Later in 1917, Grace returned to France, first as a nurse in the Vosges (Martin Ferguson Smith: *Madeleine Symons*, p20 and Mary Hamilton: *Remembering good friends*), and then from May to October 1918 in a canteen with US forces in France. Grace's service record (see above) shows that her VAD service ended



in May 1918; it gives her address as Tatham Rectory, Wennington, Lancaster, where she probably stayed for a short time on her return from France.

According to Martin Ferguson Smith: *Madeleine Symons*, p20, 'Grace Barker worked during the war with Mary Macarthur and Madeleine [Symons, 1895-1957] on industrial arbitration tribunals'. This work may have continued for some time after the end of the War.

In January 1920, Grace (as well as her stepmother Mary Leech) was among those presenting a wreath at the funeral at Cheltenham parish church of Mrs Jane Walder, the

wife of Mary's brother, the Rev. E. Walder (sometime master at Cheltenham College), who had taken services at the church.

By 1921, Grace was living at 44 Princess Gardens, South Kensington; in August, she was a godmother at the christening of the child of her cousin Major Robert Hewitt Barker MP of Ewood Hall Todmorden and his wife Violet Kathleen Gartside (*Todmorden Advertiser*, 19 August 1921).

On 26 February 1923, at All Saints Church, Ennismore Gardens, London, Grace married Capt Herbert Brough Usher, who was educated at Haileybury and Trinity Hall Cambridge. Madeleine Symons was a witness (*Todmorden & District News*, 2 March 1923). (After joining up in October 1914, Capt Usher served in France and Mesopotamia, was twice wounded, and invalided out; after the War, he worked at the Ministry of Information, and then at the *Westminster Gazette*; he lived in a flat at 44 Princess Gardens.)

Grace and Herbert had three daughters, all born in London: Rachel in late 1923, Susan on 18 September 1925 (died in Devon in 2003), and Mary in 1928.

In May 1923, Grace, 'an old pupil', sent a floral tribute for the funeral of William Alfred Wrigley, organist and choirmaster at Todmorden parish church from September 1884; he directed productions of Gilbert & Sullivan operas.

Glimpses of the Usher household are provided in letters written by contemporaries; Rose Macaulay writes, in a letter to Jean Smith (10 July 1927): 'Poor Ushers – they *are* so respectable. And so kind with it.' (Martin Ferguson Smith: *Madeleine Symons*, p33). In another letter to Jean Smith, referring to the birth of Madeleine's daughter with Jimmy Mallon, Rose Macaulay writes: 'Grace is a little peevish about it all [Grace and Herbert] are a little compromised in the eyes of the world' [...] 'Grace, of course, tho' the kindest hearted and best of friends, in action, *would* take this line about it' (31 July 1927; Martin Ferguson Smith: *Madeleine Symons*, p33; original source: M. F. Smith, *Dearest Jean*, p152). More pertinently, M. F. Smith had already noted (p20) that the Ushers 'were to give great support to Madeleine at a time when she most needed it', and also notes that Grace 'remained friendly with Rose Macaulay until RM's death in 1958' (p20).

Among Grace's cross-Channel travels, passenger lists show her leaving Southampton for Genoa on 5 November 1928 (her address is given as 2 Alfred Place London SW7), and making the same journey on 8 July 1931, this time with Herbert, 'Private Secretary to the PM'.

In 1936, Madeleine Symons drove Mary Hamilton and Grace from Salzburg to England: 'our direction was determined' by Mary and Grace (M Hamilton, *Remembering good friends*, p207, in Martin Ferguson Smith: *Madeleine Symons* p42). More precisely, Smith notes that 'Both Mary and Grace wanted to visit particular places in [the] Vosges' where Grace had been a nurse in 1917-18.

In the September 1939 Registration, Grace ('Private means') is living or staying at Pinders (a Listed Building since 1983), Broad Campden, North Cotswolds, in the household of Madeleine J. Symons, along with Irene M. Corbett (Symons) aged 12, at school. Grace's second daughter Susan E. Usher is at school at Yatterden Court, Bradfield, Berks. When Madeleine Symons married Harold Roper Robinson (1889-1955) in 1940, Grace placed a small ad in the *Tewkesbury Gazette* dated 23 November 1940, seeking a small house in the Campden district.

Grace Usher (née Barker) died in Exeter on 2 June 1994; she had been living at the Old Vicarage, Ropers Lane, Otterton, Devon, a residential care home since 1987; after probate, she left estate worth £8041.

Grace's husband **Herbert Brough Usher** was the son of a solicitor, and was born at Market Weighton, Pocklington, Yorks on 5 October 1892; his mother Henrietta died 11 days later. He was not yet 5 years old when his father (also called Herbert) died suddenly in August 1897; he was buried with military honours. The 1901 census shows the 8-year-old Herbert Brough Usher living at 54 Worley Road Blackpool with his aunt Rachel G. Usher aged 50.

After graduating from Cambridge, Herbert joined the Royal Engineers on 8 October 1914 as a temporary 2nd Lieutenant. In 1915, he was with the Middlesex regiment, Duke of Cambridge's own; from 15-26 November 1915 he was in the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital, Millbank for treatment for an injury to his left eye. On 14 July 1917, now a Temporary Captain in the Territorial Force Infantry, he was once again admitted to the Queen Alexandra hospital for an injury to his left thigh. On 3 August he moved to 53 Cadogan Square.

In the 1924 and 1929 general elections, Herbert stood as the Labour candidate in Leicester South, and in the 1930 election as Labour candidate for East Fulham, each time without success.

His address in May 1929 was 2 Alfred Place, London. In the 1939 Registration he was living at 88 Coleherne Court, Old Brompton Road Kensington; he is listed as a 'Civil Servant, Principal, Treasury'.

In 1948 he was Deputy Secretary at the War Damage Commission & Central Land Board, and in that year he was awarded the Order of St Martin & St George. He died in London in 1969.

In 2017, a Red Box from 1928-35, stamped with the initials H.B.U., was offered for auction in Exeter.

Mary Hamilton was born in Withington, Manchester on 8 July 1882. From 1929-31 she was Labour MP for Blackburn, and PPS to Attlee in 1929. She died on 10 February 1966.

Rose Macaulay was born in Rugby on 1 August 1881; she died in London on 30 October 1958.

David Nott

*With acknowledgements to **Mike Winstanley**,
Secretary of the Tatham History Society*

