



Mollie Paul with her dog, Emma

The Lady from the Home Office who fell in love with and in Old Alresford

By Lesley Drew

“When I was given a nun’s outfit to wear at the village fayre, I wasn’t yet truly living in Old Alresford, just coming down at weekends. Still, I stiffened the wimple and joined in.



Mollie in fancy dress when she first came to Alresford

It was fun. Some people even thought I was a nun because the Diocesan House, Old Alresford Place, was at that time being run by the Sisters of Bethany.”

The year was 1986 and Mollie Samuels’ true home was a flat in London not far from the Home Office where she was based as Assistant Chief Probation Inspector and from where she travelled the country and abroad. She had never heard of Old Alresford, until when considering future retirement in the south, a good friend living in Hampshire highly recommended the county. Estate agents subsequently pointed her in the direction of the village where the Old Forge was being converted into a home. She purchased the Old Forge in 1983, planning to live in it permanently when she retired a year or two later.

Cavorting at the village fayre was a far cry from Mollie’s working life which brought her into contact with Government ministers and top ranking officials, but Mollie is a hugely adaptable lady who rarely misses opportunities that come her way and is always ready for a new experience.

Mollie’s parents were Mancunians, very much a part of the northern scene. Spare time involved Amateur Dramatics and singing and her mother once sang with the operatic star Isabel Bailey. However father took a post as a civil servant in London and their daughter was born in Teddington.

Mollie’s aspiration was to get to university but at the age of 15 she contracted tuberculosis and was sent to a sanatorium in Benenden, Kent. She had just had an operation when in 1944 a doodlebug hit the sanatorium and everyone was evacuated.

Having been quite good at biology at school, when the time came to leave hospital, Mollie went to work in the Public Health Laboratory Service. Subsequently her father



Mollie appeared recently in the village's own panto

suggested furthering her education so she attended Evening Classes at Kingston Technical College. By then she had met someone who worked in the Probation Service and felt this could be her future. She applied to the Home Office, was accepted and sponsored by them to attend London University's Bedford College for Women to study Social Science. A Home Office Course followed, after which she became a Probation Officer at Epsom. Her father died shortly afterwards. It was cousin Jack Starr, a journalist with the Daily Mail and later the BBC, who replaced him as an influence in her life.

It was Jack who whilst inviting her out and about on the jazz scene, suggested she should consider travel before she settled to any particular way of life. Mollie reacted by taking herself off to the USA travelling on the mighty liner the United States. She toured the States and Canada and saw something of the American Corrections scene.

Following this she spent a year on the Advanced Casework Course at the Tavistock Clinic in London and then joined the Inner London Probation Service, being assigned to the Clapham Juvenile Court. In order to keep in touch with the adult side of the work she would spend alternate Saturdays on Court duties in Bow Street and Marlborough Street. This involved interviewing shoplifters and prostitutes in the cells. Ever keen to gain wider experience she later took a four-month release from the job to spend time working in a Girls Hostel on the Lower East Side in New York.

Mollie remained a Probation Officer until 1963 when she was appointed to the Home Office as an Inspector. At that time the aim was to expand training for Probation Officers and Mollie became involved fulltime in teaching on the Home Office Courses and liaising with students and academics in the universities around the country where sponsored students were studying. In 1975 she was promoted to Assistant Chief Probation Inspector and returned to "outside work" with a staff of five men, based in Manchester.

Their region covered the whole of Wales, Cheshire to Humberside and up to the Scottish borders.

When Mollie was asked to additionally cover the national issues of matrimonial cases and parole, based in London, she requested a change of region and was given the area covering from Hampshire to Cornwall and South Wales. This work involved attending conferences and ministerial meetings. She also spent four months in Singapore teaching probation methods, social work and methods of dealing with offenders.

It was in 1985 that Paul Cave, a Southampton Magistrate and publisher of the *Hampshire Magazine*, approached the Home Office. He was seeking financial support for a Sports Counselling Project he proposed for the benefit of Young Offenders. A hall in Southampton was already being used and the services of a sportsman, Keith Waldman had been acquired. Being very interested in "alternative projects" for young offenders, Mollie approved the scheme and financial support was granted. The project still exists and has expanded into other artistic and craft activities.

It was on one of her weekends in Old Alresford, that Mollie was invited to a drinks party and was introduced to Air Commodore G J C Paul. A much decorated pilot and wartime hero, Christopher Paul had lived in the village for very many years and was greatly involved in almost all aspects of its life. A widower with two adult sons and an adult daughter, he promptly invited Mollie to his home but she declined, already having a houseguest for the weekend. The Air Commodore was not however daunted. In the summer of 1987 he married Mollie at the parish church and his 13 year old grandson was Best Man. The couple enjoyed 15 happy years, during which they travelled a lot. Christopher Paul died in January last year at the age of 95.

Though Mollie retired from the Home Office in 1987, she promptly became a member of the Mental Health Review Tribunal, a duty she carried out diligently for 12 years. Locally she became a member of the newly formed TOADS (The Old Alresford Dramatic Society) which came about after the closure of the village school, of which Christopher Paul was Chairman of Governors. It was seen as a means of filling the gap and giving villagers a reason for coming together. Since then Mollie has gamely trod the boards in many productions, never baulking from being laughed at for roles such as being a singing mermaid, perched on a rock with fishy tail or dressed in a gymslip. She was a part of the village pantomime this past Christmas.

Mollie Paul is a doughty lady, never more proven than last year, not long after her husband's death and whilst she was busy with arrangements for his Thanks Giving Service in April, which included notable guests and a Moth Club flypast as the congregation departed the church.

Mollie was driving home from Southampton and was coming off the motorway on the nearside lane when a young driver cut across her. By using her brakes she avoided an accident but nonetheless decided to follow the offending driver into Winchester where he stopped and got out at a garage. She approached him, pointing out that if he persisted in driving in such a manner he was in danger of killing someone. His response was to tell her she was "A silly old bat who needed to learn how to drive". After she reprimanded him for rudeness he lunged at her and she was lying on the concrete with a cracked hip and fractured wrist. She subsequently spent a week in hospital, being discharged in time for the Thanks Giving Service. Although in her words she was not looking quite as planned the timing of the Fly Past was perfect!

(Chrissie Pollard will be back in our next issue)