

DOROTHY JOHNSTON OF APPLIEDORE: HER WARTIME EXPERIENCES AND GIFT OF A STRETCH OF THE ROYAL MILITARY CANAL TO THE NATIONAL TRUST

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Dorothy Johnston, photographer, traveller and philanthropist, was not born in Kent, but her family connections led to a life-long love of and interest in the county. She became a generous benefactor, donating a stretch of the Royal Military Canal and later her home, Hallhouse Farm in Appledore, to the National Trust along with her possessions and much of her estate. Living in Appledore during the Second World War, she kept a diary, recording in detail how village life was affected by the war. She built up a comprehensive library of books relating to all aspects of Kent life and history, which she intended for the use of future researchers, and lectured on local history. This article outlines the life and interests of an extraordinary woman.

Family background and early life

Dorothy Edith Johnston was born in London in 1880, the third daughter of William Archibald and Bertha Harriet Johnston. William was a clergyman who died relatively young in 1885, but he came from a wealthy background, and this provided the financial security that in time enabled Dorothy and her sisters to lead interesting and independent lives. The Johnston family papers, now housed in the London Metropolitan Archives, provide a fascinating insight into the family.

William Archibald Johnston, Dorothy's father, graduated from Emmanuel College, Cambridge with a B.A., and was ordained in 1867, becoming curate of Battle in East Sussex. He served here for two years, and in 1871 was installed as Rector of Acrise, a small village six miles north of Folkestone, although just before this, at the time of the 1871 census, he was living, or probably staying, at Wootton Court near Dover. His sister Sophia is also listed there, along with a friend, Lucy Prescott, and five servants. Dorothy's affection for Kent must relate to this period of her father's life. Perhaps William's health was never strong, because in all he served as a priest for a relatively short time. On 13 September 1872 he married Bertha Harriette Saward at St James' Church, Croydon. She was just nineteen. William remained at Acrise until 1879. By the 1881 census, the couple were living at 11 Eversfield Place, Hastings, Sussex, a large terraced seafront house. He is described as 'without care of souls'. The family was complete by this stage, with



Fig. 1 Dorothy Johnston as a young woman, dressed for fencing. (Courtesy KHLC.)

Bertha Caroline aged 8, Mary Sophia aged 5 and little Dorothy Edith, born the previous year. Nurses and two domestic servants are also listed on the census.

Sadly, William died on 19th November, 1885, leaving Bertha and her three children. The trustees of a family will (great-uncle Edmund's) allowed her £450 per annum out of the income which the children would eventually inherit and she moved to Brighton.¹ In the 1891 census Bertha is described as a widow living on her own means, with her three daughters, her sister-in-law Sophia and six servants. They were still there in 1893 when the eldest daughter, Bertha, was able to release her share of the trust funds, but they moved to Wimbledon in south-west London a few years later.

We know little of Dorothy's childhood, but we do know from bookplates and inscriptions in some of her books that she was educated partly at Levana, in Wimbledon, a well-known girls' school of the time, memorably described by Gwen Raverat in her autobiography.² Dorothy's school books date from 1897 and 1898

while Gwen was a pupil between 1902 and 1904, but the experience must have been very similar. During Gwen's time there were 42 pupils. There was a rule that, outside lessons, the girls should talk in either French or German and, interestingly, Dorothy's books from this period are either French or German texts, one with a prize label for French. After Prayers each day, the girls would be asked to raise their hands if they had spoken any English during the day, and bad marks given to those who had lapsed. Mademoiselle apparently pounced on anyone she heard speaking either English or ungrammatical French, but Gwen Raverat admitted 'she really did teach us to speak French without false shame, which is half the battle'.³

One by one, the three Johnston girls came into their inheritance, Bertha in 1893 and Mary in 1896. Mary, Dorothy's other sister, was perhaps the one with whom Dorothy had more in common. Mary was educated privately, and when her mother moved to Wimbledon around 1897 (presumably when Dorothy attended Levana) she was able to pursue a previous interest in geology more deeply.⁴

In 1901, at the age of twenty-one, Dorothy came into her inheritance from her great-uncle Edmund. She was entitled to around £450 of annuities, and a quarter of various investments in railway companies, her share amounting to around £5,500 of stock, £200 of console plus £109 in cash. This equates to almost £600,000 now and clearly gave her independence and the ability to pursue her interests. These interests are represented in the unusual bookplate that she had printed in 1906 and which can be found in a number of her books in National Trust properties today. The plate was a photographic still life which included a framed portrait, possibly of herself, a violin, tennis racquet, paintbox, riding crop and horseshoe, a pile of books and magazines (one is possibly a photograph album), a small teapot, possibly Indian, and some sort of fencing weapon. The bookplate is lettered 'Dorothy E. Johnston 1906'. In the same year Mary had a similar design made into a bookplate, in her case the items revealing her interest in palaeontology, geology, riding and photography. Like Dorothy, there is a pile of books and pamphlets in the corner. It is interesting that the two girls chose similar bookplates and perhaps indicates that they were particularly close.

Fencing was a major interest for Dorothy. She was taught by Felix Bertrand, whose father Baptiste was a world-famous master of the sport who established the Salle Bertrand in Warwick Street in West London.⁵ A studio portrait of Dorothy exists in which she appears as a serious young woman, appropriately dressed and equipped for the sport (**Fig. 1**). One assumes that she must have been a good student, since M. Bertrand gave her a scrapbook, now at *Hallhouse Farm*, of late eighteenth-century engravings of fencers and reproductions of portraits of masters of the art. The binding has the date '1763' on the upper board, and it is inscribed: 'Offert à Mademoiselle Dorothy Johnston. Souvenir de sa Salle et son Père, Felix Bertrand le 8 Avril 1911'. He also presented her with a number of Napoleonic items which meant a great deal to her. They included a Böhne statuette of the dying Prince Imperial, an ink pot in the form of the head of Napoleon and a bullet taken from the pistol case of Napoleon after his death on St Helena. When Dorothy decided to give her house to the National Trust, she was adamant that these should remain in the house, and wrote a Memorandum to this effect.⁶

Although it has not proved possible to construct a complete record of how Dorothy

spent the next few years of her life, we can tell from a variety of sources that she spent much time travelling and recording her travels in photographs. For example, there is a set of five photograph albums from this period in the Billiard Room at Polesden Lacey, with the monogram DEJ on the covers, filled with photographs taken by Dorothy at home and abroad, alongside commercial photographs of places and art works. They depict views of Italy, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, France, Egypt and the Holy Land, as well as various parts of England, Wales and the Channel Islands.

The earliest record we have of Dorothy's travels is from May 1901 when her name appears on the passenger list of the *Sicilian*, one of the Allan Line ships, sailing from Glasgow to New York. Since her name cannot be found in the 1911 census, it is very likely that Dorothy was abroad at that time. In February 1913, Dorothy and her sister Mary became part of the first cohort of 163 women to be admitted as Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society. Until 1913 women could give papers but could not be formally admitted. Dorothy was recommended by A.E. Kitson, G.W. Lamplugh and John W. Evans. Kitson, who claimed personal knowledge of her, stated on her election for candidate certificate:

Miss Dorothy Johnston is a student of geography and is greatly interested in the subject. She has travelled in nine countries of Europe, in Syria, Egypt, South Africa including Rhodesia - as far north as Livingstone, and in parts of Canada and the United States. I strongly support her candidature.

The title 'student' is probably not meant in a formal sense. There is no record of Dorothy studying at university although it is possible that she attended lectures. Since women could not matriculate until the 1920s, university student records cannot necessarily be taken as accurate. In 1914, Dorothy donated twelve of her Egyptian photographs to the RGS library and these are noted in the September issue of *The Geographical Journal* as 'very good enlargements of photographs taken by Miss Johnston in January and February of this year. They measure 6 by 4½ inches'. She also presented twelve photographs of Turkey.

Dorothy was still living in Wimbledon in 1915, but at some stage she moved into her own accommodation. Presumably the Great War prevented further travel for a period. While it is certainly not possible to compile a comprehensive list of all her trips, her name appears on passenger lists throughout the 1920s: in October 1923 she visited Jamaica, and on 13 January 1924, probably a return journey, she set sail to Liverpool from Cristobal, Venezuela, on board *Oroya*, of the Pacific Steam Navigation Co. On 13 December 1929 she boarded the P&O liner, the *Maloja* to Bombay, returning at the end of May from Colombo, a trip she documented thoroughly. We also know from RGS records that she visited Russia in 1933, presenting a set of thirteen photographs to the Society.⁷

Dorothy Johnston was a great chronicler of certain periods of her life but the only record so far discovered is that of her 1930 Indian trip, when she went specifically to study the crafts and industries of that country. In 1960 Dorothy presented her Indian material, which included guide books, photographs and lantern slides, to the RGS. Some of her Indian photographs were used in a 1930s book⁸ and others illustrated Lady Hartog's *Living India* (1935) and Sir Firozkhan Noon's *India in the British Commonwealth in Pictures* series (1939).

Dorothy Johnston and Appledore

By 1936 Dorothy had already moved to Appledore, giving her address as *Westwood Cottage*. Electoral rolls place her at Westwood for 1936 and 1937, and at 'Hillhall Farm' in 1938 and 1939. 'Hillhall' is almost certainly a mis-transcription of 'Hallhouse'. There were no elections during the war, so it is not until 1945 that Dorothy gave *Hallhouse* as her address. She remained resident in the village for all but the last two years of her life. One can only guess at the reason for this move into the country: her father had been a rector at Acrise (near Folkestone) and as a girl she had lived in both Kent and Sussex. Her aunt Sophia had lived in the nearby village of Swingfield between 1873 and 1896. Now in her fifties, Dorothy undoubtedly wished to settle down in a house of her own and, for whatever reason, she chose Appledore. There is no documentary evidence to show that she had a connection with this village before 1936, and yet her response to the sale of the Royal Military Canal, explored below, would seem to hint at prior familiarity with the area. Sir John Winnifrith describes Dorothy as having 'lived for many years in Appledore' by 1935, but there is nothing to substantiate this claim.⁹ Intriguingly, Dorothy was living very close to Porchester Square, where at one time Dr Frederick William Cock, a well-known medical practitioner and antiquarian whose family lived in Appledore, had practised medicine. Dr Cock published in both medical and local history topics, and Dorothy was eventually given his archive by his family, but it is not possible to tell whether they were acquainted in 1936. Perhaps she simply got to know the village through her involvement in the Royal Military Canal.

Hallhouse Farm where Dorothy eventually settled lies towards the end of The Street, the principal road in Appledore. This leads down to the Royal Military Canal, built between 1804 and 1807 to provide a defence against invasion by Napoleon. *Hallhouse* is a late fifteenth-century timber-framed house, now grade II listed, and was extended in the nineteenth century (**Fig. 2**). Downstairs were a study and two living rooms, kitchen and bathroom while upstairs were four bedrooms, a box room and bathroom. There was a large garage and land, which Dorothy leased to a local farmer for grazing.

Appledore is an ancient village, first mentioned at the end of the 9th century, lying just off a small road running between Tenterden and Rye. Before the Norman invasion the archbishop and monks of Canterbury owned the manor, and it was once a prosperous place, being a port on the River Rother, but in the great storm of 1286 the river changed its course and Appledore lost its river trade. Disaster struck the village in 1380 when many of the wattle and daub houses were destroyed by fire and the church damaged during one of the French raids on the south coast. The population declined over the centuries, being affected by plague and other epidemics such as marsh fever, a type of malaria. Hasted, quoted by Winnifrith, writes that the village 'is situated very low, close to the marshes ... the houses are but meanly built ... The vast quantity of marshes which contiguous and come close to it, make it very unhealthy, and this is rendered much more so by a large tract of swamp called the Dowles ... the large quantity of stagnating water continually on these engenders such noxious and pestilential vapours as spread sickness and frequent death on the inhabitants ...'.¹⁰ It took the construction of the Royal Military Canal and wider drainage schemes to bring about a change to a healthier environment.



Fig. 2 *Hallhouse* today. (Copyright Joanna Duran.)

Although, being largely a farming community, there continued often to be poverty in Appledore, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century it was a lively place with twenty tradesmen in the village, four pubs and two mills which fell into disuse after the railway arrived in 1851, and it was not until the advent of the motor car that village trades began to disappear in any number. Even so, Sir John Winnifrith noted that as late as 1983 ‘the village is lucky still to have not only its four pubs but also its baker, two grocers and a champion blacksmith – and of course a large garage operated by the Bates family who once ran the barge service on the canal’.¹¹

The Royal Military Canal

Dorothy Johnston seems first to have become associated with the village when in 1935 the stretch of the Royal Military Canal west of Rye was sold by the War Office, who took the view that they no longer had any need for it. They changed their minds a few years later when they were obliged to requisition the canal as a line of defence against Nazi invasion. The stretch from Iden Lock to West Hythe had already been leased to the Lords of the Romney Marsh for 999 years at an annual rent of one shilling, while the town of Hythe had purchased the remaining stretch. Dorothy Johnston was very concerned about the new sale, fearing that the War Office had made no stipulations to prevent building on the land. The first 8.5 mile stretch between Giggers Green and Appledore was sold on September 17th (the sale catalogue with Dorothy Johnston’s name written on it can be found at KHLC) to Mr Richard Price of Hythe for £1,675. Asked by a reporter from the *Kentish Express* if he had any plans for development, Price said he had nothing definite in mind.

In October 1935, from her London flat, Dorothy sent a guinea for associate membership of the Council for the Protection of Rural England and wrote to ask for their opinion on the matter.¹² D.C.L. Murray, the Assistant Secretary, replied that the CPRE would bring the matter to the attention of the War Office when they were considering future sales. Very soon she must have decided to take events into her own hands, because by July 1936 she had moved to Appledore, bought the three-mile stretch between Appledore and Warehorne, and presented it to the National Trust, a wonderfully philanthropic gesture of conservation. Her mother, Bertha, had died two years previously, leaving Dorothy a share of her £22,837 estate, and this undoubtedly was a factor in her purchase. A.E.W. Salt of the Committee for the Preservation of Rural Kent wrote 'I consider it one of the most effective gestures that has ever taken place in Kent with a view to the preservation of its amenities ... Kent owes you a great debt of gratitude'. The gift was reported in *The Times* of 22 July and in various local papers.

After the sale, Dorothy was involved with the running of the Canal as part of the local National Trust committee. During the war, it was she who was approached by the military when they wanted to cut the lower branches off the elms along the Canal. 'I asked if it would save England. He couldn't say it would'. She kept a close eye on the military to ensure that the trees were not cut, regularly visiting the banks and listing war damage.

She joined the KAS in 1936 and remained a member for the rest of her life.

The war years in Appledore

By 1938, Dorothy was firmly settled in Appledore, now living at *Hallhouse Farm*. We know a great deal about her life during the next few years, thanks to a diary which she kept regularly throughout the war years. The war diary begins in an old Levana school exercise book, originally intended for her Harmony class. Only one such book seems to have survived, but towards the end of her life she had two copies of the diary typed up, and one of these is in the National Trust archives, beginning on 23 September 1938 until 16 August 1945, when a bonfire was lit on the cricket field to celebrate V.J. day. She had it typed because she considered this record one of her most important possessions, as indeed it is.¹³ Every bit as significant as Mass Observation records, it describes the life of a small Kent village and the profound effect that the war had on everyday life. Kent was very much on the front line during the war, with the Battle of Britain being fought overhead, and the ports of Ramsgate, Dover and Folkestone under constant attack. The diary comprises 145 pages¹⁴ and it has proved difficult to make a selection for this article, since the whole document deserves a wider audience, as she clearly intended. What follows is simply a selection to indicate the immediate impact of the war on the lives of all the villagers, many of whom are mentioned by name in her pages.

During the brief 'phoney' war period which started in September 1938, the villagers were immediately fitted with gas masks, and asked to prepare for the billeting of 267 children. As a result of the Munich conference this was not necessary at that point, but preparations for war continued, with lectures on gas poisoning, the organisation of a First Aid post, Air Raid Patrol meetings, sandbagging and thick curtains brought in for blackouts. Eventually, 75 children and their mothers arrived

on 3rd September, the day when Chamberlain announced that Britain was at war with Germany. Dorothy took in a Mrs Cutting with her three young boys, all under school age, and a Mrs Spicer and her baby girl of 5 months. Mrs Spicer stayed only for a fortnight until a more suitable arrangement in the form of a bungalow was found for her at Wittersham, five miles away. Mrs Spicer returned to Catford at the end of October, and Dorothy was alone once more. Her diary mentions problems with her eyes, possibly cataracts: her oculist, a Mr Heath in Rochester, 'was not pleased with the operated eye, and thought the right eye very advanced'. She was not to be overworked, but there is little indication that she followed this advice, or indeed that she was able to. Each day brought new challenges: January was cold with snowdrifts up to 5 feet high. Travelling in the blackout was problematic. On February 2nd she 'went to town. Coming back, owing to the blackout, got out at Ham Street instead of Appledore: had to go back to Ashford and start again'. A Mr Temple from the Ministry of Education arrives late in the village to give a talk, having lost his way there due to the lack of signposts. She saw three sunk ships in Folkestone harbour, showing only their funnels and masts. During May there was the constant sound of explosions and bombing 'but this house shakes very little'. Fierce fighting in northern France which led later to the evacuation at Dunkirk led to 'all sorts of rumours, one being that Appledore was to be evacuated to allow the B.E.F. from France to be brought over here. In the evening [of May 22nd] it looked as though the sheep were being evacuated from the Marsh ... Went on putting [paper] crosses on the windows'.

On 24th May it was 'announced on the wireless that the Germans had taken Boulogne'. The First Aid post was moved from the village hall to Dorothy's sitting-room when the hall was needed to feed a hundred soldiers billeted in the village, and in the confusion, ten were allocated to *Hallhouse* without warning. 'I put 3 in loft over garage, 5 in the large bedroom and 1 in the little one, the N.C.O. in my proper bedroom'. Soldiers continued to be billeted with her on and off throughout the war, for which she was paid 2d. a day per man. The diary is full of references to her attempts to ensure that they do not damage her house or behave inappropriately and to the constant cleaning up after them, with the help of her cleaner Mrs Balcombe. At one point she tells the quartermaster: 'If I had not been here the place would have been reduced to a slum'. The outhouses were occasionally used to practice manoeuvres. In 1943 she took in two WAAFs, Joan Wilkinson and Myra Preston.

Dorothy does not dwell on the catastrophic position of the Allies, but succinct remarks such as 'May 26th - Sunday. Special day of prayer' and 'May 28th ... The surrender of the King of the Belgians has had a sobering effect' point to the gravity of the situation. On 17th June, a neighbour Mrs Ainger tells her that 'the French Command had ordered the cease fire: we were fairly flummoxed'. For the next few months there are many references to the air battles overhead. One typical day in August, she is 'spudding on the bank' when the sirens sounded. She could hear explosions as the planes moved towards Hastings, sheltered for a few minutes, but soon carried on with her work. Returning that evening, the siren sounded again 'and immediately 'planes could be heard coming from the sea. Some soldiers playing football could see them overhead and said there were about 50. Miss C. who was up on the hill said she could see some of them were ours and were diving

amongst the Germans. I came in and changed; had got down to the kitchen again when I saw the soldiers pointing over the Parish Hall. They shouted 'There's one for Appledore!' There was the scream of bombs twice, and two lots of thuds sounded like great hits on the floor upstairs, but not the crashes of Monday's raid [which she had described as 'the worst raid we've had here']. I was told the nearest bomb was 800 yds from Jenner's cottage on the station road'. The following day 'There seemed heaps of 'planes going over. There was constant whirring while I was getting lunch. The soldiers are now made to put on their tin hats whether on duty or not'. Dorothy recounts stories of German pilots. 'One came down in [the nearby village of] Ruckinge, a boy of 14 ran out to reach him before anyone else came up. The pilot was 19. He said to the boy 'Are there any soldiers here?' The boys answered 'Yes, hundreds and hundreds!' 'Will they shoot me?' 'No', said the boy, 'more likely to give you a cup of tea'. Bombs fall on nearby farms, killing livestock, ceilings collapse in *Horne's Place*,¹⁵ the station house is destroyed. The raids and noise must have been relentless, exhausting and terrifying, and yet she suppressed any sense of fear in the diary. Instead, she continued her daily routines: gardening, visiting neighbours and helping in every way with the war effort. In October the planes were still flying over every day and night, with bombs dropped in Rye, Folkestone (killing members of Mr Balcombe's family) and Maidstone. By April 1941 there was still a good deal of fighting in the air 'but they are so much higher than last year, one does not notice them so much'.

By June 1940, Dorothy had become involved with the work of the Women's Voluntary Service in the Tenterden Rural District Area, becoming Appledore representative. The WVS had been set up in 1938 to assist civilians during and after air raids, to help with evacuation and billeting arrangements and to collect salvage and knit clothes for the troops. She made frequent references to her work in the diary: in July she was organising the collection of aluminium, in August learning to make 'pullthroughs' for cleaning rifles.

The 1941 and 1942 entries continue in the same vein, with troop exercises in the village, references most days to aircraft overhead and the sound of heavy artillery from the other side of the Channel. Plans were drawn up to protect the cornfields from fire in the event of bombs being dropped. 'It is said one million men are on manoeuvres in Kent'. Everyday life went on with Dorothy taking over the role of Treasurer for the Girl Guides Committee, delivering pies for the agricultural workers, organising the mending of underwear for the troops, and choosing her books from the mobile library. After a visit to Canterbury in August 1942 she wrote of smashed windows in the Cathedral, the lead hanging down, the Library wrecked and many of the houses around the close bombed. When she took the bus to Folkestone, she missed a bombing raid at Hythe by just one hour. Although Dorothy had her own car, petrol rationing (just six units, representing one gallon per unit to last three months) prevented all but the most necessary driving.

By 1943 the news overseas was improving and a service of thanksgiving for victory in Tunisia was held. The Wings for Victory sub-committee¹⁶ held a meeting in *Hallhouse Farm* in order to organise a fete. Altogether, with auctions and raffles, fortune telling and produce stalls, there was over £50 clear profit. By September Italy had surrendered. But the war continued: on 14th January 1944 Dorothy counted 70 planes overhead 'and there were many more'.

By March 1944, Dorothy's eye was causing a problem once more. She had been warned by the ophthalmic hospital in Maidstone in February the previous year not to do prolonged periods of darning. Now she needed to go into a nursing home for an operation. For several weeks she was unable to read or write. At least one friend, Miss Massey, came to *Hallhouse* to read for her. When she returned to activity, the village was busy raising funds for Salute the Soldier week, which fell at the end of a momentous week. June 6th was D-Day, the date of the Normandy landings, and Dorothy listened to the News 'nearly every two hours'. The fund-raising fete at the weekend must have taken place amidst renewed hope: it raised £75.3.0.

It was on 13th June that Dorothy first mentioned V-1 bombers, or doodlebugs, referring to them in a perplexed manner first as gliders, then as pilotless planes, which the Home Guard attempted to shoot down. 'The guns were going off seemingly almost under one's windows, and were almost more disturbing than the things themselves'. By June 21st she is calling them doodle-bugs, soon abbreviated to D.B.s. These were terrifying weapons, flying overhead before the engines cut out when there was an ominous silence before the bombs detonated. They began to do serious damage to the village. On 23rd June, around 4 o'clock in the afternoon:

'... a D.B. crossed the Street, several fighters after it; then a burst of fire from them and just beyond Westwood Cottage it dived steeply in flames, and fell, in the field, just behind the Agricultural Hostel. I was in the garden and felt little blast, but the large panes in Poplar Hall, Maclachlan's shop windows and in Scotland's garage were broken. Miss Clement came over and asked me to go with her to see the Hostel. It is mostly smashed flat, especially the kitchen and women's side. The matron and cook were badly hurt (the latter lost an eye), and the Matron's son slightly. He, probably, was outside mowing the grass, as I picked up a scythe lying in it. There was an enormous crater with the remains of the D.B. in it. At least two cows in the field were lying dead. ... Park House, opposite the Hostel, where the Mardens still are, had windows blown in, conservatory smashed, trees knocked over, staircase destroyed and, I believe, only the kitchen had a ceiling left. ... Some of the Shop windows were broken, and many at the School. Fortunately, the children have a fortnight's holiday, otherwise they would have been just coming out ...'.

Dorothy began to sleep in extra clothing in case she needed to leave the house in a hurry, putting her tin hat over her face when she heard the doodlebugs coming. Once again Appledore began to make plans to receive children from London, although as Dorothy continued to report that doodlebugs were still falling all round the village, one wonders whether this really was a sensible idea. On the evening of 22 July, the noise of doodlebugs, fighters and guns was so loud that Dorothy could no longer hear the News and turned it off. Almost immediately, at 9.15, a burst of firing sounded overhead following by an explosion. *Hallhouse* had suffered damage: windows blown out with broken glass all over the floor and a large hole in the bedroom wall. Large holes had blown through the weather tiling on the road side and many of the old fish-tail tiles were broken.¹⁷ Dorothy rushed out into the road when 'Mr. Rivers came past on a bicycle shouting that there was another bomb on fire, passing behind my house. Everything and everyone seemed to stand still, then a great ball of fire broke over the road just this side of New Town - the bomb had exploded in mid-air'. However, although bombs continued to fall, with further damage to people and property in the village, the tide had turned, with

shorter attacks and the occasional quiet night. On September 4th, Brussels was liberated but the fighting continued. When Kew was hit by the new V-2 rockets, ten people were killed, and Dorothy offered to take in her sister, but Mary turned down the offer feeling that the neighbourhood would not be targeted again. By March 1945, there was a general feeling that the long years of war were coming to an end. Dorothy took down her black-out curtains, and the concrete road blocks were removed. The diary entries are now shorter, and the one for the 7th May is almost peremptory: 'About 7.30, heard the official announcement that tomorrow would be Victory in Europe Day, that Mr Churchill would be making his announcement at 2.00 p.m. and the King's speech would be at 9.00 p.m.'. The following day the church bells began to ring from 7.00 in the morning for the first time since the war had begun, and Dorothy found a number of flags to fly. The diary ends wearily and with understatement. There is a sense of exhaustion, almost of anti-climax.

Post-war years

Although Dorothy had lived in *Hallhouse* for only eight years, by December 1946 she was already considering the future. She had already decided to bequeath her house to the National Trust, however she was now minded to give the house while she was still alive, maintaining a life interest in it. The reason for this was that, following the war, there was clearly a need for new housing and she was afraid that Tenterden Rural District Council would requisition the land attached to *Hallhouse*, and maybe even the land adjoining the RMC as well. Although she was assured in January the following year that there were no specific plans as yet, and in fact none ever materialised, her solicitor advised her to make contingency arrangements in case such plans were to come to fruition. The suggestion initially was that *Hallhouse Farm* and the adjoining fields would be conveyed to the Trust as a gift, and the Trust would grant a lease to Dorothy for life at a peppercorn rent, on the understanding that she would continue to pay all outgoings and to keep the house in good structural order. The Trust was usually reluctant to accept properties that were under threat from Government proposals for construction, but if the Trust already owned the land, then they would vigorously oppose any such developments. The arrangement was later altered so that the transfer was made by settlement rather than direct gift, as section 31 of the Finance Act of 1937 permitted exemption from death duty where there was a life interest in property that went to the Trust, and there would be financial advantages for the Trust to proceed in this way.

Despite the many problems foreseen by the National Trust in such a gift, it was accepted at the meeting of the Executive Committee in May 1947. There was never any question of opening the house to the public: it was always intended to be let to tenants, and the fact that Dorothy donated not only her house but also her furniture and books, created problems in such a situation. An analysis of Dorothy's books and their subsequent treatment by the National Trust are the subjects of another article.¹⁸ Around 750 books and pamphlets still remain, the majority still at *Hallhouse* and a further 90 at Polesden Lacey near Dorking, where they were moved by the National Trust in the early 1970s. Many of the *Hallhouse* books relate to Dorothy's profound interest in Kent: its history, geography, topography

and inhabitants. From bookplates and inscriptions we can tell that her family had been collecting on this topic long before the move to Appledore. She had amassed a substantial collection of books on the subject, in the main not rare in the established sense, but extremely comprehensive in scope. The intention was always that the collection would remain in the house for use by researchers (she categorically did not wish the books to be placed in a public library, although her will stipulated that material relating to Acrise and Swingfield could be offered to Folkestone Public Library), although this stipulation has proved difficult for the Trust to administer. Dorothy provided an endowment to help maintain the condition of the books and to reduce the rent the tenants would pay, since they might consider themselves inconvenienced by the presence of the library. However, the archive material, some of which had been given to her by Dr Cock's family following his death in 1943, was in danger of deteriorating after Dorothy's death and in the 1970s this was moved to the Kent Records Office.

Dorothy Johnston's last years

Dorothy's last years in Appledore continued to be fulfilling. She went on summer field trips with the Royal Archaeological Society for several years from 1948 until 1958, and on a South Cotswold Tour with the Historical Association in 1953. She was active in village affairs and lectured on local history. Notes for one such lecture are in the KHLC. But in 1959, it had become clear that her health had deteriorated further and it was now proving very difficult for her to continue living at *Hallhouse*. She approached the National Trust once again, this time with a view to relinquishing her life interest. The Trust was sympathetic to her situation and arranged for the house to be let to tenants at £150 per annum exclusive of rates, with Dorothy having a say in who the tenant should be. The advertisement specified that 'The tenant must be prepared to house and care for an interesting collection of documents appertaining to local history collated by the donor of the property, Miss Johnston, who has been living in the house. He will be expected to continue to chronicle local events of interest; in consequence the market rate of this attractive property is reduced to the figure quoted below'.

In 1960, Dorothy bought a three-bedroomed flat in Folkestone for £3,100 and this, with the help of a daily cleaner, proved more manageable for her than *Hallhouse*. She continued to visit the village and her former home regularly.

Dorothy Johnston died on 6th March 1962, and a memorial service was held in the village on 28th March. Her estate was £50,988 net, a substantial figure at that time. Personal legacies to family and friends totalled £7,600, and she left £1,000 to each of the following: CPRE, Kent Archaeological Society, Friends of Kent Churches, and the Rural deanery of Elham in Kent for the upkeep of St. Peter's Swingfield, where her aunt had worshipped, and her father's church of St Martin's, Acrise. Legacies of £500 each were given to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Kent County Playing Fields Association, and Kent County Association for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. £2,000 had been earmarked specifically for upkeep of the Royal Military Canal, but the National Trust received the remainder of the estate, which, allowing for the high death duties at that time, amounted to

around £20,000. The legal adviser to the National Trust noted in a letter to Ivan Hills on 29th March that ‘while I have little doubt that she would have wished Kent to figure prominently as a beneficiary from her residue I cannot say I feel at all optimistic as to the result of any attempt to divert even part of the residue from the all-devouring Cow!’.

Dorothy Johnston’s life and contribution to Kent have been largely forgotten, and yet virtually everything she did from the mid-1930s onwards seems to have been done with a purpose: to preserve Kent’s rich history for future generations. This was true of the books she acquired as well as her home and land which she bought and gave to the National Trust. At the time of her first great gift of the three-mile stretch of the Royal Military Canal, her foresight and practical help as an early conservationist was widely recognised in the national press and elsewhere. Her interest in local history must have impressed the family of Dr Cock who felt that she was the appropriate recipient of his papers. She played an active role in village life during the war and after, and recorded the effects of the military campaigns on everyday life in her diary, a document she considered to be among her most significant possessions. She made the best provision she was able to do to continue her work after her death, but it is not clear that her legacy is as well-known or has been appreciated as much as it deserves. There is a great deal more to be discovered about the life of this generous woman.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Edmund was Dorothy’s great-uncle who died in 1864. His will left almost his entire estate in trust to his nieces and nephew, the capital to pass in turn to their children after their death, and should they die without issue, the third shares were to pass to the remaining siblings and then to the following generation. Edmund’s estate is therefore of great significance to Dorothy and her sisters who eventually inherited this wealth and were able to live interesting and fulfilling lives without financial worries.

² Raverat, Gwen, 1952, *Period Piece*, Faber.

³ *Ibid.* p. 74.

⁴ She joined the Geologists’ Association and took classes in geology at University College, London. Geology became her passion and she served the Association as Illustrations Secretary (1910-1925), Librarian (1932-1936) and member of Council (1918-1924). She published on the subject with her great friend, Margaret Crosfield, and on field trips often acted as the official photographer. Mary was a member of other learned societies: a Fellow of both the Geological Society and the Royal Geographical Society, and a member of the Palaeontological Society. She travelled widely attending international conferences, and amassed a large collection of geological material, maps, books and photographs which she willingly lent to other geologists to support their work. She corresponded with the Natural History Museum about her specimens, later donating fossil specimens to them and geological material to a range of national and regional museum and universities. Mary died in 1955.

⁵ Morton, E.D., 1992, *Martini A-Z of fencing*, Queen Anne Press.

⁶ National Trust archives A2/T/16/9.

⁷ *Supplement to the Geographic Journal: recent geographical literature, maps and photographs added to the Society's collections*. Vol. 5, no. 44 (November 1933), pp. 137-153.

⁸ *Wonderful India and three of her beautiful neighbours, Ceylon, Burma, Nepal*, Bombay: Statesman and Times of India Book Dept. Dorothy Johnston notes in manuscript on the copy at Polesden Lacey that she provided photographs for this.

⁹ Winnifrith, Sir John, 1983, *A history of Appledore*, 2nd edn, Phillimore & Co., p. 56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹² This section is drawn from material in the KHLC, file U3213/Z33.

¹³ Letter from DEJ to Ivan Hills, Feb. 4 1961: 'I have probably told you I thought it might in years to come prove to be the most interesting document in the collection...'

¹⁴ In fact 144, since 143 ff were misnumbered.

¹⁵ *Horne's Place* is a late fourteenth-century house with a private chapel attached.

¹⁶ Wings for Victory committees were formed all over the country to raise funds for the manufacture of aircraft.

¹⁷ When the damage was repaired in October, Dorothy noted that the new fish tail tiles were longer than the old, and did not fit as well. The bedroom was not replastered until December, and since the oiled paper that had been used as a makeshift repair made the room very cold, Dorothy started to sleep downstairs.

¹⁸ Stimpson, F., 'Dorothy Johnston of Appledore and her books: the National Trust's acquisition of a private library', in *Library and Information History*, 2018, vol. 34, no. 2, 89-103.