



MARY HEATON from North Yorkshire

Born Mary Sleightholme, she was christened at the village church in Great Barugh near Malton, the only daughter of Albert and Kate Sleightholme. Mary had two older brothers, Alf and Eric, and subsequently a younger brother, Joe. Her parents, affectionately known as Codge and Connie, both came from large families, with three brothers from Codge's side marrying three sisters from Connie's side. The resultant offspring from these three marriages created a unique grouping - calling themselves "The Double Cousins". When Mary was six, the family moved to Wold Newton to take over the village shop which had been run by her mother's parents. When she was thirteen, the family moved again to Scoredale Farm in Millington. So Mary had attended three schools, Kirby Misperton, Wold Newton and Millington. After leaving school, she stayed at home to help in the farmhouse, where there was always plenty of work looking after and

feeding three strong brothers and her father, with no mains electricity, hot water or telephone. That included the infamous 1947 winter when they were snowed in for ten weeks. For entertainment, she would join in with her sport-mad brothers - and not let them beat her without a fight. In winter, the dart board on the back of the kitchen door proved a popular challenge. She enjoyed a game of darts, playing regularly in the W.I. team. Anyone taking her on for a game of "round the board in doubles" would know she was no pushover. In summer, cricket was their game, and she developed the skills which would come into play after her children





had become big enough to run after the ball. She first played for Leake Ladies, and later Norton-le-Clay, and Sheriff Hutton Bridge Ladies cricket teams. Showing her ability to “lead from the front”, she became Captain of Leake Ladies, was an accomplished left-hand opening bat, and bowled fiendishly slow right-arm donkey droppers. In later years, she could be found watching cricket, whatever time of day or night, a keen critic of any bad shot, dropped catch or poor sportsmanship.

It was while at Scoredale that Mary met the new tenant of a neighbouring farm, Allan Heaton, when her brother Alf purchased a bull calf from him out of a pedigree Northern Dairy Shorthorn cow, helping him start his own pedigree herd. When he was courting Mary, Allan would ride over on horse-back, spend time with her, and then ask for a leg-up when he had to return home. During their courtship, Allan took Mary on a romantic day out - to her first sheepdog trial at Seamer - riding pillion on the back of his motorbike. It obviously did the trick and Mary married Allan on 13th May 1950 at Millington. They had also been engaged on the 13th so 13 was her “lucky number” that she would always choose. Perhaps it was fitting that her “innings” should end on 87 - the cricketer’s unlucky number - 13 short of a century.

They moved to Canvas Farm in Knayton, North Yorkshire, from 1950-1966. For five years, there was no electricity or running water. It was here that they brought up their children: Andrew, Janet and Mark. Sheepdog trials were the family outing - the break from the daily farming chores. Andrew was taken to his first



“International” at Edinburgh at the age of four months and wherever there was a trial in the north of England the whole family would be there - a great geography lesson.



In 1965, Mary plucked up courage to compete herself and won the Ladies Trophy at her first attempt. Being one of the first ladies to attempt trialling, she gave encouragement to others to follow her lead. Locally, she was a founder member of the Ryedale Sheepdog Society in 1968. Allan was the founding Chairman, they held the first nursery trial at their farm Peel Park in Brandsby, the first of many trials over the years. From a modest start, the Ryedale Society went from strength to strength, with Allan and Mary both serving as Presidents from 1997 - 2007, and retaining pride in all the members who have



made the English team over the years, and their achievements. Their son Mark won Longshaw sheepdog trials in 1979, he made the English team in 1984 with Jason 115366, and he competed on One Man and His Dog.

She enjoyed meeting some wonderful people from all over the British Isles and also further afield to New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, Kentucky, California, Sweden and Belgium where she travelled either as a competitor or judge. In 2000 she was honoured to become the first woman to judge the English National trials, and two years later judged the largest trial in Canada. Her proudest moment was in 2009, when both Allan and Mary were awarded the ISDS's most prestigious award, the Wilkinson Sword, in recognition of their unique contributions to the Society, to Sheep Dogs, and to Sheep Dog trialling. Always putting back into trialling as much as they took out in accomplishments and enjoyment, they did their fair share of judging. Their involvement extended worldwide, travelling to sheepdog

Courtesy of the ISDS Sheepdog Archive/HLF Project,
Written by Andrew Heaton and Kim Gibson in 2017
Photos courtesy of the Heaton Family
Copyright owned by the ISDS Sheepdog Archive.



trials abroad extensively, judging and competing. They also welcomed many sheepdog enthusiasts to Brandsby. In 1974, they spent seven weeks travelling and trialling in New Zealand, meeting up with son Mark who was working there at the time. In 1985, they also travelled and trialled in South Africa for three weeks. They were both mentors and advisors to many individuals over the years.

Mary's other lifelong passions were. In 1943, for her 14th birthday, Mary was given the gift of membership of the Women's Institute and she remained an active member for over 70 years - more than 50 years as a member of Brandsby W.I. where she served in all official capacities more than once. The family had moved to Peel Park, Brandsby, in 1966 and Mary soon became involved in village life. As well as the W.I., she joined the Parish Council and Village Hall committees, and offered the hand of friendship to all newcomers to the village. When Andrew and Ann married in 1978, Mary and Allan moved to Ulwith Farm, Catterick with Mark, returning in 1982 when their new bungalow was built at West Park on part of the Peel Park land. In 2007, they moved into Easingwold where she joined the Easingwold W.I., and the coffee morning circuit. Their final home was a bungalow called 'Inbetween'. Mary and Allan were married for 62 years and they were proud to receive a personal card from The Queen on the occasion of their Diamond Wedding Anniversary. There had been difficult times, particularly the tragic loss of son Mark when he was only thirty two.

