

## PAULINE DEE

### Gigi the Rottweiler

I said *I'm not going into hospital*  
but the temperature went over 39  
and they rang the ambulance.  
I'm still breathless, it annoys me.  
My friend Sue takes Gigi for walks for me.  
She's a little tart is my Gigi – the product  
of a cheeky Chihuahua dad and a willing  
Shih Tzu mum. Gigi thinks she's a Rottweiler  
and guards me from the decorator.

I'm in the middle of Wem in a three storey house  
listed and Georgian but I have a lift.  
Gigi watches me going up and races  
up the stairs to meet me.  
The house has false windows to give balance  
to the façade, painted so well they fool you  
and a big cellar with seven safes in it –  
once it was a solicitors. We keep copies  
of the National Geographic in one.  
And Christmas decs in another.

I love Wem. I say it's God's own town.  
I've been forty years an Independent  
councillor and an independent woman.  
Now I'm an Alderman of Shropshire  
and I've got a little brass badge to prove it.  
I was a very shy little girl from Ballymena,  
daughter of a shy mother. And when  
I came to Wem the world opened up for me.  
Girls lift your eyes! Girls can do anything!

# ANN AINSWORTH

## I haven't won the lottery yet

I used to walk and work but last year  
was terrible. I got no exercise.  
But I do my knitting. Just now, a blanket  
for the homeless, all different colours  
and lovely and warm.  
Now I walk every day to school with  
my granddaughter and my daughter.  
It makes my legs ache but  
it'll get better.

I love cats and dogs and especially horses.  
There'd be about three or four of us up  
on the back of a white carthorse gelding.  
He was very gentle, but his name's gone long ago.  
His back was warm. I always wanted to buy  
a horse but I haven't won the lottery yet.

I have cats that come in from next door.  
One black and white, and one grey.  
Pretty and Arthur. Arthur miaows till I open  
the door and up he goes on the spare bed.  
He has me wrapped round his paw.  
There's pots in the garden and I think my dahlias  
are early this year. And cabbage and carrots and caulis.  
Either they'll grow or they won't.  
The tomatoes haven't come to anything yet,  
but I like to see spring come.

## ROB BALLANTYNE

### Bowler hats and lettuce seeds

I'm in my sitting room where I can see my front garden,  
a glimpse of conservatory and a gleam of sun.  
The sun swings round the house from the back to the front.

I enjoy my garden though I'm not as up-to-date with it as I'd hope,  
because my wife was the plants lady. She considered me  
the food grower. The remembering of plant names is quite a job.

I was born in the USA, but my father brought us back to Cheshire.  
My grandfather came to visit in his bowler hat. And when father  
was superintendent at his firm, he wore a bowler hat too.

Later when he was away travelling for his work, he sent us air mail  
in tiny envelopes. He wrote that he hoped I was looking after my mother and my  
sister. He told my sister to look after my mother and me.

We were taught in a red sandstone village school, in a large room  
divided by wooden screens on rumbling wheels. We were beside  
St Barnabas Church, but there were no bells in wartime.

I was naughty and used to sideways-look at my sister, because  
she'd point to help me know what to do. And I was slow  
to tie my shoelaces, and she'd shuffle over and do mine as well.

In the war they dug up the playground, red sandstone slabs and cobbles, and  
they built long Anderson Shelters. We had to hurry in twos inside the shelters.  
Later we planted lettuce and beetroot seeds beside the shelters.

And on a summer's day our teacher took us through the graveyard  
to the trees and named the leaves of oaks and beeches, the nuts and seeds.  
If you know what it's called, you know how to value it.

## IRMA ARMISHAW

### Not two years in Wem yet

I'm in my lounge, fiddling, trying to understand  
a crochet pattern. I've had the laptop thing on to help.  
It won't beat me, I'm going to win through.  
A lovely waffle stitch – and a load of waffle!

There's not enough hours in the day.  
I'm never bored. I knit blankets for the elderly  
and baby blankets. My daughter said I do  
too much so now I do Christmas decs as well!

I'm not two years in Wem yet. It's so lovely!  
So quiet and friendly, people are so helpful.  
I'm very blessed. I thank the Lord every day  
I'm so contented. I have all I need.

I have a kitchen window that looks over the garden.  
I looked at a wall for so many years!  
And I have a camellia bush in the garden.  
How can you grumble? The sun is shining.

# HILARY MORRIS

## Bunch of flowers

Wem is wonderful! I'm in my recliner chair with a glass of sherry before my Meals on Wheels arrives.

On the wall I can see a picture of five children playing poo sticks on a bridge, the walls are creamy and there's light from the garden at the back through the veranda.

Gardening has gone by the board recently but our garden has evolved for 34 years. There are tulips, grape hyacinths clematis and lily of the valley. I used to be with Wem Walkers we'd go in the woods and the fields. You have to know your own limits – too far and you'll be a miseryguts afterwards! After the walk we'd have lunch. Some just came for the lunch.

The telephone's been a lifeline this year. But on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, which should have been in Wem Town Hall, instead I had four friends in the morning, four friends after lunch, and five round at night, all in my garden, and with bubbly! And then my son came up from London, a surprise, all the way from London with a big bunch of flowers!

# GLADYS DICKENS

## A Dedication

I could stand on the stone and call the cows in  
and we had a pony who stole cakes off the windowsill.  
I looked after the calves, looked after the animals,  
it's been my life. But since I've started falling  
I'm just ordinary, not got a lot on.  
When you slow down, you slow down.  
It's hard when you've had a life outside.

I do bookwork now, and deal with emergencies.  
When my son's at work my granddaughter calls me  
*Nana, Nana!* and I come out and give advice. And  
I have my building cats that go to bed in the shed  
every night with their tea. But they come in the house –  
they're all my favourites. When you're with animals  
day and night it's a life. Farming is like a dedication.

# GLADYS DICKENS

## How Wem Was

When I biked to work Wem was very busy.  
Start by the Fox and there was shops  
and little businesses all the way down.  
Mrs Peake's across the road sold bras  
and corsets for the older lady.  
Very pricey and they did a roaring trade.  
You can't buy knickers in Wem any more!  
There was a lovely fish shop at Mrs Bedford's  
put five shillings on the counter  
for the biggest bag of fish you ever had.  
And Morgan's the chemist at the Maypole  
and Maples grocery, and no end of pubs  
and enough butchers to sink a battleship!

# BETTY

## The Bright Side

I'm a Brummie from the war years, brought up  
in the grocery business, born in a back-to-back.  
I made deliveries to Dad's customers, I was chatty.  
Shop at the front, aunty on one side, aunty at the back.

When we moved out to Smethwick it was  
the first time I'd seen trees. I got in trouble,  
came home filthy from crunching in the leaves.  
It was lovely, I still love to do that.

This year was hard at first. It took a lot of getting  
used to. We don't know when the day centres  
will start up again. It's the company I miss but  
I look on the bright side.

If I walk into Wem I have to sit for an hour, but  
in Wem Town Hall they know how to make my drink.  
If I sit down on my own, I'll soon have a table of eight!  
I love Wem. It's a tribe of friends.