

Diocese of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane with Diocese of Brechin

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MARY ELIZABETH SUMNER

31.12.1828 – 09.08.1921

A hundred and forty five years ago, a meeting took place in a Hampshire Rectory which brought together a group of like minded women who were interested in supporting family life. Those who came that day were unusual in that they were drawn from across the social classes. The ladies arrived in their carriages and the village women walked up the drive to the house and all were invited to sit in the Drawing room. Sadly the lady who invited them, took fright and they were asked to return the following week, which they did. When they heard her explain the objects of the new meeting and give out simple cards on which there were practical suggestions for the members' lives.

From that inauspicious start the vision that inspired Mary Sumner to found the Mothers' Union has had far reaching consequences. Today we can boast of over 4 million members working across the world. But what of Mary herself as we mark the centenary of her death on August 9th this year?

But what of Mary herself?

She grew up within a loving family in Herefordshire, her parents having moved from Liverpool. They were well connected and wealthy, so Mary, her brother and sister lacked for nothing. On a visit to Rome, she met George Sumner, a young man soon to be ordained and they fell in love, and were married in July 1848, Mary being just 19yrs old. Their married life began in Crawley, a village just outside Winchester, George was not only the curate, but Chaplain to his uncle, the Archbishop of Canterbury.



Not long after, George's mother died and they moved to Farnham Castle to be chaplain and support to his father, the Bishop. In 1851, George was appointed as

Rector of Old Alresford, and this became their home for the next 34 yrs.



It was in 1876, with the two daughters about to start their own family lives, that Mary, now 48yrs old, began to put into reality, all those thoughts and

experiences she had pondered about, and the invitation went out to her friends and the village folk and that first gathering of the group, the Mothers' Union took place. It soon became a regular parish meeting, and the idea spread throughout the dioceses. Mary was asked to address the women gathered at the Church Congress of 1875 and from that point, having received the blessing of the Bishop, it spread rapidly throughout the Anglican Communion...and the rest is history



A photo of Mary around the time that the first meeting took place in the Rectory at Old Alresford.

Perhaps the first photograph of a MU group. The original branch that Mary started in Old Alresford

Mary and George had one more move to make when George was appointed an Archdeacon and Canon Residentiary of the Cathedral and they left the Rectory at Old Alresford for No 1, The Close Winchester Three years later, he was appointed as the first suffragan Bishop of Guildford which was then still part of the Winchester Diocese.. It was to remain their home for the rest of their lives



No 1 The Close Winchester

Sadly George died in 1909, and Mary survived him for another eleven years, dying on 9th August 1921, aged almost 93. They were married long enough to have celebrated their Diamond wedding anniversary surrounded by their three adult children



Celebrating their diamond wedding with their son and two daughters

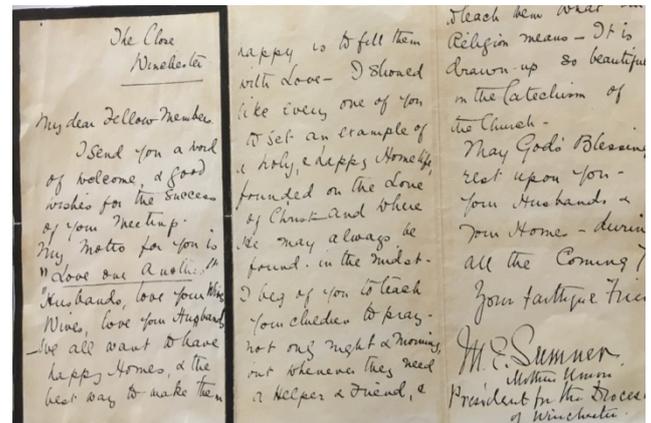
By the time of her death, Mary had seen the MU blossom from a simple Church meeting to a



worldwide institution with a head quarters in London being planned and built. The structure and Constitution had been established as Royal Charter in place. Each branch had its own place within the diocese, and each diocese had its own place within the Central framework, which is more or less the

George and Mary's grave under the East window of Winchester Cathedral, and besides No 1, The Close.

same as it is today. Mary would have been delighted to see how we have survived and grown and the profound influences we manage to exert on society for the benefit of family life in all its complex forms. But prayer was the glue that not only held it all together but the very bed rock on which the Mothers' Union was founded.

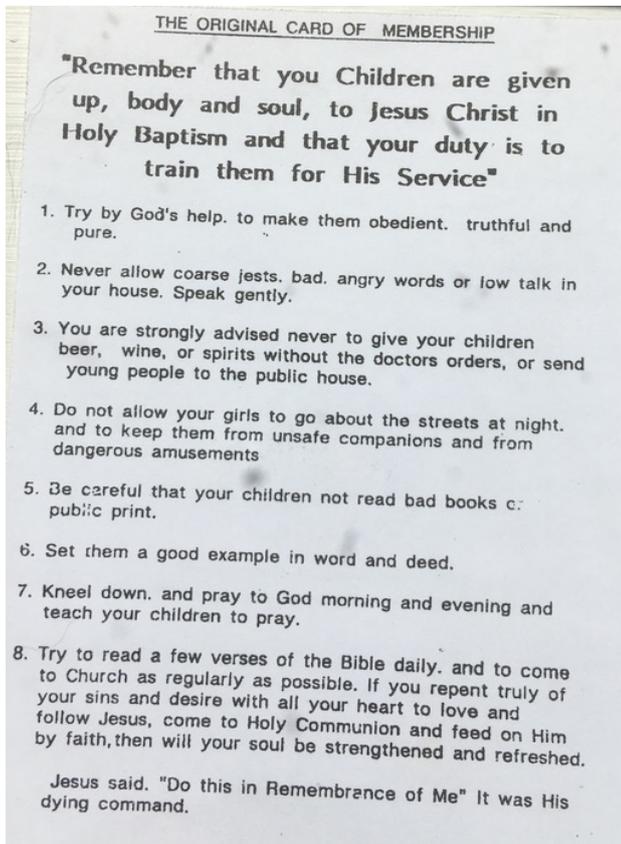


A letter from Mary Sumner to the branch at West End, Winchester Dio. dated December 1910

The first membership badge designed by Heyward Sumner, the artist and their son

And the original card of membership





A Reflection on the Mary Sumner Prayer

All this day, O Lord,
let me touch as many lives as possible for thee,
and every life I touch, do thou by thy spirit quicken
whether through the word I speak,
the prayer I breathe
or the life I live.
Amen.

During the last eighteen months, our freedom to touch has been curtailed severely. I wonder how this is affecting you?

I have discovered that I instinctively use my sense of touch a great deal when shopping. I like to handle fruit and vegetables, to run my fingers along a shelf to find a product, to feel the texture of a garment even before looking closely at its colour or design.

I have also found that when I'm with someone in distress, my first response is to reach out with my hands before finding words to comfort them. And I realise that I have felt very keenly the loss of not to be able to hug my children and my friends or to share the peace at church.

Experts say that physical contact with other people can reduce the effect of stress on our bodies. Young babies often become calm and sleep better when they are held close.

Our skin is full of sensors which allow us to experience pressure, vibration and pain as well as temperature and physical pleasure. It's thought that in the womb, a foetus experiences touch before it can hear, smell or taste.

Neuroscientists have shown that in addition to fast nerve fibres which respond when our skin is pricked or poked, there are slow fibres which send information to another part of the brain. This slow system is thought to have been developed to promote social bonding through gentle stroking of the skin.

In the Gospels we read of Jesus using touch to comfort, heal and bless those in need. He broke social norms and religious laws by reaching out to lepers and others who were branded unclean.

Have you ever tried to imagine what Jesus' hands looked and felt like? I suppose his years of working as a carpenter must have strengthened and scarred them.

Mary Sumner's hands would have been very different. She had a comfortable life as the daughter of a banker and the wife of a clergyman with servants to do the household chores.

In Victorian England there would have been strict rules governing physical interaction with people of different social classes. Her vision of young mothers meeting together in order to support and encourage one other irrespective of social status was radical in its day. I wonder if these women used touch as they greeted each other and prayed together at those first Mothers' Union meetings?

Mary Sumner's personal prayer reminds us of our calling to touch the lives of others with love. We are to be Christ's hands here on earth, using our words, our prayers and our day-to-day living to bless those we cannot physically reach.

Loving God, we thank you for the life of Mary Sumner.
Help us to make her prayer our own. Amen.

Our Chaplain Nerys Brown

Mary Sumner Month Events from MSH on line

Sunday 1st August - Compline - 9pm on Facebook

Monday 9th August - Virtual Tour of Mary Sumner's Church and the Grounds of Old Alresford Place - 10am on YouTube

From MSH Monday 9th August - Mary Sumner Day Service - 3pm on Facebook and YouTube

A special service to mark 100 years since the passing of our founder, Mary Sumner.

Featuring the Mary Sumner Prayer to a musical setting, along with praise and reflection from around the world.

Available to view live from 3pm on 9th August on our [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#). Available afterwards to be viewed on these channels at your leisure.

Throughout August - 31 Days Of Inspiration - YouTube and Social Channels

Throughout August - Count Your Blessings Digital Content - Social Channels

AND SOME DIOCESAN CELEBRATIONS

A REASON TO CELEBRATE

As I write this, we still don't know what the so called "freedom" day of 9th August 2021 will bring for us in Scotland.

But we can meet in reasonable sized groups outside, so the ABC MU group is having a tea party in my garden on Mary Sumner Day (9th August) to celebrate 100yrs since Mary Sumner died. Celebrating the death of someone might seem strange to some, but her legacy is so great and worldwide that it is surely worth a party to remember all she has achieved and what the Mothers' Union stands for and does locally, nationally and globally.

We may not have champagne but a cup of tea together is still a celebration these days with of course a piece of lemon drizzle cake!

It will be good to start to meet together again safely outside and I hope that we will all be able to begin to consider meeting again from September maybe in smaller groups to start with, to allow members to feel safe, but nevertheless we have to start sometime.

So, let's pray for sunshine; and maybe other groups could get together even if only in twos or threes to watch the service online with a cup of tea and say the prayers we have all been sent.

Don't forget the Count your Blessings calendar too for August. Any donations to be sent to Liz Crichton or transferred to our bank account for sending all together to MSH at the end of the month.

With my prayers Sarah

Mary Kenyon from Forth Valley writes

Please see below a special service to mark Mary Sumner Day on Monday 9th August. I sure that this will be something very special.

As part of The Summer of Hope appeal Helen and I are organising a Cream Tea on Sunday 8th August from 3pm – 5pm here at Easter Culmore. Helen is organising a couple of raffle prizes. Please let me know if you would like to come so that I can work out the numbers. Otherwise we are keeping it very simple for obvious reasons. Weather permitting it will be lovely to meet up and have a chat. Husbands/bubble very welcome.

You may be using the Count Your Blessings Calendar circulated in "Connected"

8th August – Take a moment to gift some items to a charity shop or your local food bank to spread hope within your community

9th August – Today think of five people in your life who have helped you through various challenges. You can add to your Blessings Jar as you think of them

I shall have a Blessings Jar ready for anyone who would like to put in a donation!!!!

I should advise that my young grandchildren will be here.

If it is raining we shall postpone!

Rosemary Stirling, Broughty Ferry writes

Sadly because of the age of our members and reduced numbers, we are hoping that we can arrange a tea in a member's home using for our focus the Prayer leaflet and combine it with saying Farewell to Helen Bridger, a member and along with her husband, our priest, who are retiring and moving back to Derbyshire.

M.U - Christian Concern for Families Worldwide

