

Life Story

DOREEN CARWITHEN

The story of **Doreen Carwithen**, and her long family associations with Haddenham, is the story of a beautiful and successful young woman, whose grandfather had been Chairman of Haddenham Parish Council in **1902** and **1908** and whose mother, Dulcie, was on the verge of becoming a brilliant international concert pianist, only to give it all up to become the local piano teacher when she married in **1921**.

Dulcie's daughter, Doreen, was not only exceptionally talented, (her music was performed at the BBC Proms and in concert halls and cinemas all over the world), but also obsessive, (marked by her sixteen-year secret affair with her composition teacher at The Royal Academy of Music, **William Alwyn**). Alwyn, the celebrated film composer courted by Disney and Hollywood in the

**THIS STORY
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WITH DOREEN'S BIRTH
ON 15TH NOVEMBER 1922,
AT NO.8 HIGH STREET
IN HADDENHAM**

1950's, never envisaged a long, secretive affair with Doreen let alone for her to eventually give up her flourishing career to look after and live with him in Suffolk in **1961**. Intentionally shut off from London

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and the recording industry, and unable to marry William, Doreen changed her name permanently to Mary Alwyn. William did not divorce his wife (Olive Pull) until **1973**, a scandal diminished by being miles from anywhere on the Suffolk Coast in Blythburgh.

This story begins though, with Doreen's birth on 15th November **1922**, at No.8 High Street in Haddenham attached to No.6 the "Old Bakery", now Paul Wilkinson Photography. The entire three-story building, including the family home, grocer's shop (Clementine) and bakery, was built by Doreen's grandparents, Freeman Clarke, and his wife Mary (their joint grave is clearly marked in the Baptist Church burial grounds off Stockwell). Freeman was a successful baker and grocer originally trading in premises on Fort End (now The Cottage

Bakery). He outgrew this establishment and in **1902** looked to build, as Chairman of the Parish Council, the tallest building, beside Haddenham's churches, in the village.

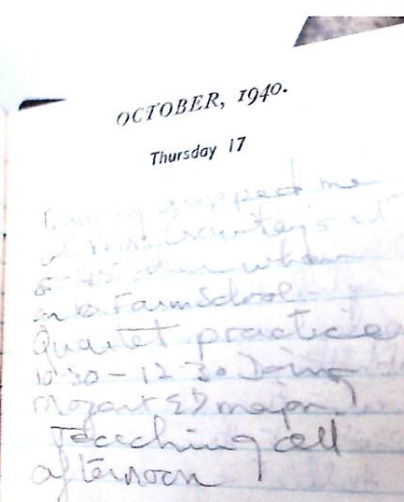
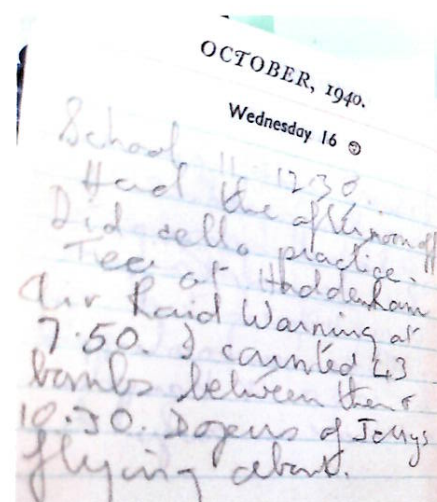
The local gossip maintains that the "High Street" was renamed from "The Street" upon completion of his large residence, shop and bakery. Freeman made sure that this extraordinary building with 11 further rooms (a mini mansion in all but name) received the address befitting of such a building project.

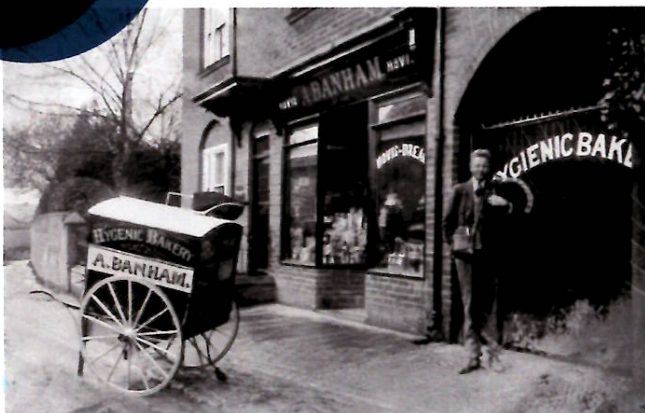
IN 1941, DOREEN WON THE AYLESBURY MUSIC SCHOLARSHIP

In **1921**, Freeman and Mary's youngest daughter, Dulcie, married Reginald Carwithen, a Londoner who had served in the trenches in the First World War and worked as an insurance clerk. Dulcie, had, with Freeman's financial backing, become

an exceptionally fine pianist. She trained in London with Tobias Matthay whose students were nearly all destined to become international stars of the concert platform, Myra Hess being the most prominent. This was remarkable given that Dulcie practiced at home next to the Bakery. The employees must have been used to being serenaded for many hours a day headed by a proud father, Freeman. In the **1911** census, Dulcie at the tender age of 15 is listed as a student of music and not at school.

Dulcie and Reginald's marriage took place at St Mary's Church, Haddenham, but the Clarke family regularly attended the Methodist Church, then a Wesleyan Chapel, further down the High Street in the village. Freeman often hosted the annual Wesleyan garden fete in his large grounds, now the popular Turn End Gardens. In **1921**, Dulcie gave up her aspirations to be an international concert soloist and, whether helped by Freeman is unclear, she and Reginald bought an enormous house on Peters Lane in Monks Risborough. They called it "Underhill".





Dulcie visited Haddenham regularly as the village piano teacher, the sounds of lessons with local adults and children becoming common place next to the Bakery. In November **1922** she briefly moved back in with her parents in the latter stages of her first pregnancy. Freeman and Mary's first grandchild, Doreen Mary Carwithen, was duly born at No.8 High Street, Haddenham, on the **15th November 1922**.

Doreen's diaries from the **1930's** regularly see both her and Dulcie cycling over to Haddenham from Monks Risborough to visit the family. By this time both Doreen and her sister Barbara (born in **1926**) were incredibly talented musicians driven, no doubt, by Dulcie teaching them both piano, violin and cello and wishing her children to have the potential career she gave up in **1921**.

Doreen was a fine pianist and cellist and showed great promise as a composer. In **1941**, Doreen won the Aylesbury Music Scholarship which enabled her to study at the Royal Academy of Music, situated on the Marylebone Road between Euston and Marylebone

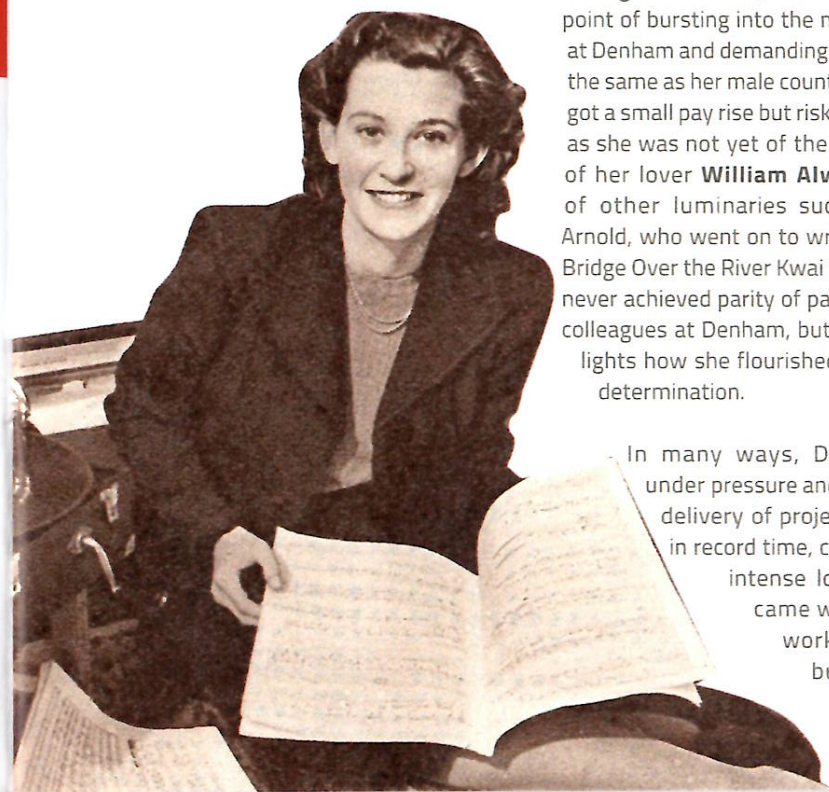
train stations. Two years later, her sister Barbara also went to the Royal Academy. On a weekly basis, both braved the train line to commute from Monks Risborough into central London for music lessons, facing a ruined city from the recent Blitz.

Her meeting with her new composition teacher, **William Alwyn**, in October **1941**, proved a life changing day. The young 19-year-old women fell for the shy, but increasingly famous 35-year-old film composer. Alwyn had married Olive Pull in **1929**, a previous composition pupil of his at the Royal Academy and they had two young children. The ensuing 16-year affair, between Doreen and Alwyn, caused much hurt and stress to Olive over the years. It was not until **1973** that Alwyn eventually divorced her.

In **1946**, now turning heads everywhere she went, Doreen became the first recipient of the J. Arthur Rank Film Composer Award and became part of the furniture at the film

scoring studios in Denham. Her ability to work fast under pressure gave her a string of successes including the scores to British Classics such as *Men of Sherwood Forest*,

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The *Three Cases of Murder* and, in **1953**, the soundtrack for the film documenting the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Doreen was asked to do this scoring project not because she was a woman, but because she was incredibly fast and accurate at her job. The whole film, including score, was released 3 days after the Coronation. Doreen hardly slept for those three days.

In **1946**, the year her career took off in the film industry, Doreen lost her grandfather, Freeman. Her grandmother, Mary, had died the year before and the loss of both grandparents coincided with Doreen throwing herself into hours of film scoring projects. Determined, stubborn and not bowed by the overbearing males at Denham studios (it is well documented that several were not subtle about their feelings for Doreen), she flourished to the point of bursting into the manager's office at Denham and demanding that she be paid the same as her male counterparts. Doreen got a small pay rise but risked being sacked as she was not yet of the musical status of her lover **William Alwyn**, or indeed of other luminaries such as Malcolm Arnold, who went on to write the score to *Bridge Over the River Kwai* in **1957**. Doreen never achieved parity of pay with her male colleagues at Denham, but this story highlights how she flourished with guts and determination.

In many ways, Doreen's focus under pressure and her successful delivery of project after project in record time, coupled with the intense long hours that came with this way of working, led to her burn out. It has

often been debated amongst musicologists whether Doreen stopped work through her devotion to Alwyn or through exhaustion and lack of recognition (she struggled to find a publisher for her mainstream compositions).

When asked in her final years why she had chosen to give up her successful film career to look after Alwyn she replied "Well, someone had to!"

The early **1960's** saw the decline of the Carwithen's connections with Haddenham. In **1960**, Dulcie and Reginald moved out of the family home on Peters Lane, Monks Risborough, further up the lane to a modern bungalow built to their specification. Dulcie continued to teach piano, but not at 6/8 High Street in Haddenham which had been rented out since Freeman's death (the shop and bakery had been rented since **1922** as Freeman looked to wind down his business).

In **1961**, Doreen's devotion to Alwyn caused a schism in both their lives and they moved to Blythburgh on the Suffolk coast, the affair no longer a secret. Alwyn was an alcoholic and was having a nervous breakdown, his

marriage to Olive in tatters. Doreen had become anorexic through the stress of keeping the affair secret and working long hours.

Finally, in **1963**, the Freeman Clarke estate was sold off in lots, Dulcie being a signatory on the deeds transfer. I can imagine her visiting her parents' grave in the Baptist Church cemetery throughout this time. Following Reginald's death from cancer in **1970**, Dulcie sold the bungalow in Monks Risborough and moved to Cheltenham to live with her youngest daughter Barbara who, like her mother, had married and given up her professional music career. One would assume, that the discovery of Doreen's affair in **1961** had weighed heavily on Dulcie, brought up as a devout Wesleyan by her father in Haddenham.

After Alwyn's death in **1985**, Doreen devoted the final 18 years of her life setting up the **William Alwyn** Foundation, championing his music and neglecting her own. Since **2022**, Doreen's centenary, interest in her music has increased substantially and it is hoped that this momentum will continue over the next few years.

