

Diary of Ethel Mercy Burchett – a Robertsbridge Girl

Ethel Mercy Burchett was born in Robertsbridge on 23rd October 1886, sixth child and fifth daughter of Jabez and Miriam Burchett. She was born at the saddlery on the High Street (now The Old Saddlery Bookshop) which was run by Jabez. Perce, who appears throughout the diary was Percy Butcher the son of Charles and Alice Butcher who ran the Post Office in the High Street. Ethel and Perce would marry in 1912.

Ethel lived in Robertsbridge all her life, moving with Perce to 2 Saxon Terrace. They had three children and her ancestors are now to be found throughout England, Scotland, and Australasia. There is no record of her ever having worked outside the home following her time at the shop in Beckley but no doubt running a home and bringing up three children, during WWI and in the twenties and thirties would be occupation enough.

She took an active part in village life and as can be seen from her diary the Congregational chapel on the High Street was a big part of her life. In later years she played the harmonium there.



Photo scanned from a copper print probably dating from around 1905/1906 possibly Hastings.

Left to right –
Alice Ellen Butcher
Ethel Mercy Burchett – the Diary writer
And a friend Ciss (? Cicely)

The Burchett family :

Jabez and Miriam Burchett (nee Mitten)

Jabez was the son of Henry Burchett and was the Robertsbridge Village Saddler.

He married Miriam Mitten the daughter of Joseph Mitten (Baker) in Brighton in 1871.

Her grandparents were a Dutch seaman and a Brighton Housekeeper/cook.

Burchett children:

| | | |
|------------------|--------|--------|
| Rosanna Mary Ann | b 1874 | d 1946 |
| Mabel Ellen | b 1878 | d 1941 |
| Joseph Henry | b 1880 | d 1964 |
| Agnes Miriam | b 1883 | d 1972 |
| Alice | b 1884 | d 1884 |
| Ethel Mercy | b 1886 | d 1976 |

Notes re family names used in the Diary:

Harry - Joseph Henry Burchett m. Mabel (May) Catt. Babs is their daughter.

May - Mabel Ellen Burchett m. John Lewis. She was the Parish Nurse.

Ness - Agnes Miriam Burchett m. John Fitzgerald (Jack)

Ma B - Percy's mother Alice Butcher. She ran the village Post Office with her husband Charles.

Diary Commencing August 20th 1906

I find myself at a very quiet little wayside station about one and a half miles walk to my destination Beckley a little village fourteen miles inland from Hastings and about six miles from Rye. -- When I did at last reach the house where I am to lodge, I find it full of fresh air and girls from London and a lively party they are. -- It is now about one o'clock and after my walk I am quite ready for my dinner and I went to Buss. -- Saw my Gov he showed me round told me what was expected of me etc. -- Everything goes on the same now until Sunday.

Sun 26th.

I got up about 9.30 – did nothing until dinner after that I went out and met Perce and we had a very enjoyable afternoon and evening together.

Mon 27th

Work at eight o'clock nothing happens today worthy of note or Tuesday.

Wed 29th

Close at two – I went to Mrs Phillipps to tea (with) my sister May's (who I must say is the Parish Nurse) Landlady (she is very starchy) -- all goes on the same until Sunday

Sun Sep 2nd September

Went home had a lovely time returned by the (?) train same evening.

Mon 3rd

Work again same old job nothing new.

Tues 4th

I have been here just fifteen days and I like it very much -- Mrs M is a dear lady and my sister being so near makes me all the happier -- everything goes on the same now until Sunday

Sun 9th

Went to chapel in the morn not much of a Preacher -- Perce came over in the afternoon.

A1 spanking. -- Everything goes on the same old pace until Wed week.

Wed 19th

Close at two went to Grace Hammonds wedding I was one of her bridesmaids she was married to very nice fellow Mr Ben Bailey -- I Hope she will be very happy -- we had a lovely Breakfast and a jolly time afterwards. -- Nothing more until Sunday.

Sun 23rd

Went to Church in the morning Canon Porles sermon was so tedious that I had to come out in the middle of it a very bad proceeding I must admit but I really could not help it.

Wed 26th

Got up at half past six and went Bicing with May.

Thurs 27th

Same except that it was rather more exciting for as I was going down Cherry Garden Hill I ran full tilt into a poor old man and sent him flying in one direction while I landed in the hedge head first the sight was better imagined than described

Sun 30th

Went home had a lovely day Harry May Babs, Perce & I all went up in the field above Park Wood and sat down -- Mr Crew was preaching he is a fine man -- I stayed all night came back here Monday morn -- Nothing now until Sunday.

Sun Oct 14th

Perce comes over before I am up so I have to dress in haste -- I must not omit to say that he has brought my Bicycle which Ma and Pa are giving me for my birthday which is on the 23rd of this month.

Wed 17th

May and I went to Mrs Bailey's to tea -- enjoyed emensly -- she is a dear girl so I am going to call her Grace.

Sun 21st

Went home on my Bic got on splendidly.

Mon 22nd

Got up at half past five and rode back to Beckley

Tues 23rd

Today is my twentieth Birthday and I have got to work -- I think it is a shame -- I have received four PCs one Birthday Card and of course I must not forget to mention the most important present my Bicycles handles from May

Wed 24th

May came up and had tea with me -- I went with her on her round this is the first time I have cycled through the village.

Now over two months have passed and I have sorely neglected my poor diary I will try a (and) see if I can't start afresh with the new year. -- I had a very enjoyable Xmas the most important item was a Party at Mrs Butchers it was her silver wedding -- I enjoyed myself very much. -- That ended the old year. -- Now for a fresh start.

Jan 1st 1907

I must tell you before I write further that my sister has left her old diggings and come to live with me, we do enjoy ourselves and no mistake. -- I went to work and nothing extraordinary happened.

Wed 2nd

Same, except that we closed at four I washed a blouse and a pr of gloves

Thurs 3rd

Same. – Close at seven finished up the evening knitting. – I am making a pr of stockings.

Fri 4th

Nothing worthy of Note

Sat 5th

Half an hour late for work but nothing said tomorrow home D.V.

Sun 6th

Started home at 9.30 met Perce not far from Staplecross. – had a lovely ride home got there about eleven ten just too late for chapel –. Harry May and Babs came up in the afternoon first time she has worn leather shoes and she is quite proud of them and says Dad Dah quite plain - she is a love – went to chapel in the evening Mr Freeman (?) preached a nice sermon but he is so slow. – Had supper and bed.

Mon 7th

got up about 6.30 started back to Beckley at 7 not at all a bad ride but the roads were very heavy.

Tues 8th

Went to work nothing new -- in the evening did some of my everlasting old stocking.

Wed 9th

Woke up at 3.30 someone calling for May so poor old girl had to hop out of bed and go to poor Miss Luck who is dying – she is an awful sufferer but so patient – went to work at usual time closed at 4 – went for a ride through Northiam through new cut – home had tea did some more of my stocking played crib with Cackie (?) lost – supper and bed ten o'clock – May still out.

Thurs 10th

Work as usual – May did not come home all night she will be out again tonight – poor Elsie Butter is taken bad again May will have to take her to the asylum tomorrow.

Fri 11th

Work still measuring up for stocktaking which is not coming off until 21st June so if I am lucky as I think I shall be I shall just get out of it – poor old May is still busy Elsie is no better and still at home – Miss Luck is still alive poor girl so May will have another night up – Bed at 10.

Sat 12th

Work till 10 – supper bed sewing until about twelve – May still out.

Sun 13th

Up about nine pumped up my bik and started home – met Perce at Staplecross got home twenty to eleven. – Went to Chapel Mr Tapner preached a very good sermon – he came to dinner – Perce came up in the afternoon we stayed home together in the evening – Ness is in London.

Mon 14th

Came back here went to work as usual.

Tues 15th

May still out she has not been to bed now for seven nights.

Wed 16th

Work as usual until four o'clock then changed my togs and went for a ride – had quite a nice spin came back about five – May was resting called her and we went down to tea together – Mrs Brown was here to tea she is very nice lady – May is out again tonight I shall be glad when she comes home to sleep. -- Turned the heel of my stocking.

Thurs 17th

It seems no good putting it down for I do the same thing day after day – May is out again tonight I am getting quite used to sleeping alone again.

Fri 18th

Usual until eight o'clock then I changed my togs and went to a concert with May enjoyed it emensly – there were some Tableaux they were very pretty indeed two or three songs from Shotter were very laughable –May is out again tonight.

Sat 19th

Work not as usual – in the afternoon the boss went out as I thought home but instead of which he only went to Northiam – I went into the warehouse to call one of the Boys he had a paper that I wanted of course he would not let me have it so

I went for him and we wrestled – just as the fun was at its height who should creep in the door but the Gov who at first we did not see being so engrossed in our game until he spoke – how I wished I was anywhere but where I was all he said was 'I don't expect you to play with the boys during my absence'

Sun 20th

Went home met Perce at Cripps Corner – went to chapel in the morn – Mr Plumfs (?) preached a very good sermon indeed 'Ah Yes' – May Harry and Babs came up Babs is a darling – Perce and I walked as far as the church with them in the afternoon.

Mon 21st

Up early had some Breakfast started back to Beckley – roads were Rotten. In the evening wrote three letters – supper and Bed.

Tues 22nd

as usual

Wed 23rd

work until four – came in and sat by the fire until bedtime had a good warm the weather is enough to freeze a Brass Monkey. – Nothing worthy of note until Sat May's birthday.

Sun 27th

Got up about eight cycled home met Perce at Staplecross – had a lovely day – Mr Topkins preached at chapel had a splendid sermon he came home to dinner and tea. – Enjoyed myself very much all day – had more of Perce's company.

Mon 28th

got up half past six started back to Beckley at five to seven had a lovely ride got there at eight – I don't think that was bad – the weather has changed instead of freezing now it is blowing gales and raining like fits.

Tues 29th

nothing worthy of note

Wed 30th

went to work until four then came in and cleaned up my bicycle a bit but not much – went to Bed early.

Fri 1st Feb

Ma's birthday

Sun 3rd

Went home on my cycle in the morn – went to chapel Mr Darham preached the best sermon I have ever heard him preach – came back Monday morn by train left my bik at home.

Wed 6th

work til four – dressed caught the half.....

(Feb 14th)

.....(stock)taking the Gov took down the showroom this afternoon he was so sweet -- Today is Valentine's day – Tom Butter was mine -- As I went to work I saw fat little Tom come waddling up the road like an old duck.

Fri 15th

still Stock taking – Gov took down some more this afternoon -- he is still very sweet I don't know how long it will last though.

Sat 16th

same as usual

Sun 17th

Went home –met Perce at New House Farm – he was working and very down and informed me that he would have to go over to Cranbrook in the afternoon to see Butch – he has got Scarlet Fever poor fellow he is unfortunate but in the afternoon the weather looked very unsettled and so he did not go – Will Edmunds came to tea – Mr Ashton Preached at the Con –Noah Taylor is still at the mission but I did not go and hear him – Ness has made me a blue blouse.

Mon 18th

came back – Ness came as far as Johns Cross with me she rides uphill better than I do now – she gets on fine – I had a nice ride back here got here at eight o'clock enjoyed the ride very much –

I have been cutting out a Blouse thought and think it will be very pretty.

Tues 19th

still stocktaking

Wed 20th

work until four – did most of my Blouse but could not quite finish it as I had not enough lace.

Thurs 21st

Finished My Blouse Sleeves are an awful size.

Friday 22nd

stocktaking – Gov calls out I write the list (????) the spelling he calls out. – He calls out the most unheard-of words and so I put what I think – so glad it's done

Sat 23rd

Nothing Special

Sun 24th

Had a P.C. To tell me Perce had a cold so I had to ride all on my own – When I got home I found Ness's dear old Jack there I was so glad to see him that I nearly kissed him and myself I don't think there would have been any harm done if I had quite – Went to chapel Mr Tomkins he preached a splendid sermon – May Harry & Babs are home as well as Jack so we had quite a Big Family Mass and I had a bit of a 'Wet Up' in the afternoon – Poor old girl she was upset but I won't put the trouble down here in detail – In the afternoon Perce and I went as far as the chapel with Harry and May

Mon 25th

Ness and I got up early and started back to Beckley –Ness came with me I never dreamed when we started that she was coming all the way, but she did – May hurt her head last night she has been very bad and has been in bed all day today and is much better tonight.

Tues 26th

Let off work at seven o'clock – went home wrote a letter got my bik and started out to post it – all went swimming until I got almost to the Bottom of the Hill just in front of Vincetts Butchers then a big black dog came straight for my front wheel and before I knew where I was the Rectory coachman was picking up my machine and brushing me down asking questions as to my injuries which were no more than a scraized hand thank goodness – My front brake is a bit 'wobbly' but I don't think my bik has come to much harm.

Wed 27th

I have had my bik seen to Fred Luck says there was not much harm done – I left off work at four then May and I got on our biks and rode to Wittersham on the road we stayed at Kitchenhour (?) to ask Mrs Bull if she had any more kittens yet because we wanted two but she had not got any-- Then we continued our journey to Wittersham the water down on the level looks something lovely just like a small sea and the view of it from Blackwall is just alright – when we got to our stopping place we thought we should like to see over the church but it was locked so we found out where the sexton lived and got the key from him – they have been doing the church up and have fairly spoiled it all the carved pews are taken away and just ordinary seats put – we could not stay long there as we were anxious to get home before lighting up time – home at six then I started off again alone this time went to Northiam Chapel to a Service – they are having a mission there the preacher is a fine man but I should think he was a thorough Christian he gave a splendid address on the Parable of the Prodigal Son I enjoyed it very much – on coming out I met Emily Goldsmith came up the road with her then lit my lamp came home and had my supper and bed

Thurs 28th

work until seven – Ma came walking in the shop about dinnertime I was so surprised – she had dinner with us and went on to Northiam in the afternoon – I went there again tonight went up to Mill Corner and found Ma had gone to chapel so I jumped on my bik after Mother – A long talk to Edi B and went to find her -- the Missioner was I think Better tonight than last night his text was 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not Perish but have Eternal Life' the address was splendid

Friday March 1st

Nothing to speak of

Sat 2nd

Nothing Special -- had a bit of a row with Smith Bishop -- left early to go home to Wadhurst – Will left early to Play Billiards so Smith and I were left alone to close shop ourselves.

Sun 3rd

home –Went to chapel Mr Woodley preached in the afternoon – I went to Sunday School in the evening to the Mission Room to hear the curate he is a good preacher -- I enjoyed the sermon very much indeed but did not care for the form of

service

Mon 4th

came back to Beckley -- Ness came all the way with me -- I never like work Mondays

Tues 5th

nothing to speak of

Wed 6th

closed at four and came and dressed -- went over to tea with the Ballards saw Aunty Hessie she still keeps about the same then went to chapel -- the Missioner over there is going to stay a fortnight longer than he expected to so that will make it a month.

Thurs 7th

closed at seven -- went up to Mr Pearsons boys club to see their room but almost as soon as I got there the boys started coming in, so I came out.

Sun 10th

Oh, dear Its blowing hard and looks like rain I do hope it will keep off for me to get home and so it did -- I went home went to chapel heard Mr Stacy Reabe he is a splendid preacher -- Sunday school in the afternoon and I must not forget to mention just as we were going to Sunday School Ness and I had got as far as the shop door -- Ma was coming down the steps when she fell I just turned and said 'Come on Ma or well be late (Dead loss to the firm) and before I got the words out of my mouth poor Ma was on the floor Of course instead of thinking seriously about it I was obliged to see the ridiculous side of it and started laughing so that I could hardly leave off -- Stayed home in the evening rained in the morning so I came back by train was very late to Buss.

Mon 11th

Very late had a bad headache did not go to work in the afternoon went to bed instead.

Wed 13th

Cut out a blouse and made it all but fastenings did them next day -- May went for her holiday yesterday -- Lydia Luck is dead

Thurs 14th

Another of Mays patients died today a poor old lady nearly ninety.

Sun 17th

Got up early went home first train got home before May and Ness were up lazy bounders --

Ma was up though Dad had some breakfast of course -- went to chapel in the morn -- Sunday school in the afternoon -- to Ma Bs for tea enjoyed myself very much

Mon 18th

Can't possibly bik home pouring with rain came back by train

Wed 20th

Closed shop at four -- came in changed my togs and sloped off to Northiam to a Band of Hope entertainment it was very good but too long we did not get out until ten o'clock, so it was half past before I reached home --when I did get there Mrs M had a tongue banging ready for me but I nipped it in the bud so to speak -- I did not give her time to give me much of it for when she started I was missing

Sun 24th

Went home -- Mr Tompkins Preached -- he and his wife stayed with us all day -- Harry May and Babs came up -- big May is still at home so we had a big party -- I enjoyed myself very much

Mon 25th

came back to Beckley in the morn -- the steam roller chaps are still here they have been lodging here for a fortnight now

Wed 27th

left shop at two o'clock made to Hastings on my bik with Ness --I met her at Swailes Green we rode as far as the Arrow then we put up our bikes there and walked down part of the way and trammed the rest to Memorial -- When we were walking down just before we got into the tram we saw a poor fellow have such a bad side slip he did come off a whack and hurt his leg --after we got out at the memorial we walked along Robertson street went into Bookers and bought a Dictoney (?) for Ma she is going to give it to May for her birthday -- then we went along to Coops and I bought a hat so did Ness both were very pretty -- we had tea at Atkins -- the young lady that served us seemed familiar to me I was sure I had seen her before -- when she had gone out I said to Ness I was sure I had seen her somewhere and when she brought our tea in she spoke to me and even then I did not recognise her until she asked me how the Beckley people

were – then I remembered she was a Beckley girl – then when we had finished our tea we went to Plummers to get some stools for the Lillies but they hadn't any so we went to Tapners -- they sent away for some for us then we walked to Silver Hill thinking we should catch the tram to the Arrow but when we got there we found the last tram to the Arrow had gone so there was nothing left to do but to walk – we arrived there rather late got our bikes and rode home arriving there about 9.30

Thurs 28th

Got up at 6.30 and rode back to Beckley – came back again to Rbridge in the evening for Good Friday.

Fri 29th

Good Friday – got up about 8.30 had my breakfast sparred about with Jack a bit -- poor old Ness is very bad got a bilious attack kept being sick all night – then all three of us went into the garden to Dad he is plotting in 'Taters' and got some greens for dinner -- when we came back Ness and Jack went into the garden -- Perce came up he and I went to Bodiam to see Babs on my way I called in at Butchers and saw Ma and Nell.-- We got back from Bodiam in time for dinner in the afternoon -- Perce went to shooting competition at the Gravel Pit -- Ness Jack and I went to look on Perce won first prize after that we went for a walk and back home in time for tea

Sat 30th

up early and back to work

Sun 31st

home again and to Chapel -- Mr Tapner preached a very good sermon but it was not at all a suitable one being Easter day

Mon April 1st - Easter Monday and also All Fools Day

Ness caught me before we got up so she was a bit fly wasn't she -- O'h I forgot to tell you Sunday night I had a bad cough so I had some gruel and went to bed early – I tried so hard to eat it all but it was impossible so Ness had some to help me out a bit -- In making the gruel Ma burned the saucepan so this morning I am washing it up -- I scraped a nice lot of burnt gruel off the bottom just as Ness came along so I got a handful of it and chased her up the field -- when I caught her I smeared it all around her mouth then she chased me and gave me some -- of course Jack was looking on he laughed fit to Bust himself -- Perce came up to dinner – we did nothing but sit about all day but I enjoyed myself immensely

Tue 2nd

work again

Now it is August and I have neglected this diary ever since Easter but now I must make up for my neglect -- a lot has happened since I wrote last in this book – I am now at home permanently Ness was married on Monday August 5th 1907. -- We had a ripping day -- Ness went to London by the 4.15 train

Tues 6th

Lil is still staying with us she is the only one left of the wedding party -- we are very busy today cutting up the cake to send away.

Wed 7th

went for a walk with Lil in the afternoon as far as the church – went to the station to meet Rose and Harold they came up by Rother train -- Lil and I met them we all four waited on the station to meet two boys, friends of Rose and Harold's they were coming down for a fortnights holiday with us -- Len and Wal Smith were their names they are very nice boys but Wal is very conceited -- they are both at school Len is at he Bluecoat Boys at Horsham Wal is at St Olavs London

Thurs 8th

Had a splendid day – Mr Simpson came up from Hastings and we all walked to Bodiam – first we got a boat and went on the river we took lunch and ate it on the boat there were nine of us so you see we were a nice party – then we got off the boat and went into the castle enjoyed ourselves there -- we had the punt and got round the moat somehow –the men of our party refused to row because we kept splashing them for fun so us girls had a try and a nice hash we made of it too

Fri 9th

Lil and the boys and Harold had bikes in the morning they are learning -- Rose and I walked down Redlands Lane to watch then it was most amusing to see them.

Sat 10th

work same as day before -- the others had Bikes Rose and Harold went home.

Sun 11th

went to chapel in the morning Sunday School in the afternoon chapel in the evening.

Mon 12th

Washing-- Lil and the Boys went out cycling in the morn Lil had my bik..

Tue 13th

Wal Lil and I went to Brightling on biks -- coming back Lil cannoned to Bank coming down Ayleys Hill she did not hurt herself much -- of course it shook her up a bit rather unfortunate for her as she is going home tonight -- in the evening I went to the station to see her off -- May came home.

Wed 14th

nothing special

Thurs 15th

went to Rye on our biks saw Rye church and went to the top of the tower then to Camber -- walk along by the sea it is not a very interesting place just a long stretch of sand with the sea beyond and not at all pretty -- we came back as far as Rye had tea there then we started for Home

Fri 16th

nothing special went to Etchingham church.

Sat 17th

work in the morning -- in the afternoon we all went for a ride with Perce round Hawkhurst then round to Bodiam Home

Sun 18th

went to chapel in the morning Mr Noakes preached -- Sunday school in the afternoon -- chapel again in the evening -- Mr Beaney Preached

Mon 19th

planned to go to Hastings but it was too wet so we waited until after dinner then the rain cleared up so we went through Hurst Green to Flimwell for a ride then round to Hawkhurst where we had to shelter from the rain -- from here back to Hurst Green Home

Tues 20th

went to Battle Abbey -- Enjoyed ourselves very much.

Wed 21st

May went to London to see Ness.

Thurs 22nd

Harry Wal Len and I rode to Tenterden -- on our way stayed at Rolvenden to see the church then we went to Tenterden looked over the church there, St Mildreds --coming home just after we had passed Sandhurst between Sandhurst and Bodiam Len had a spill but very luckily escaped with nothing worse than a cut arm -- when we go to Harry's we found May had tea ready for us -- after tea we came home and found Mrs Tutt from Battle here with two of her children

Sat 24th

Work

Sun 25th

went to chapel -- Mr Reeve preached -- came here to dinner and tea -- Sunday school in the afternoon.

Mon 26th

Walked to Northiam

Sat December 28th

Jack Woodhall Married (Ethel's underline!)

Wed 1st Jan 1908

Sis Cheeseman and George Peacock were married so as we are starting a new year I think I will try to get on with this, this is the second time I have neglected it since I started -- today Mrs Hall and Gladys came to tea -- last night we went out Carol singing and collecting for Dr Barnardos Homes we have already got 25 shillings and are going out again tomorrow -- night last night we started about nine and got home at half past one this morning had a ripping time but it was rather cold

Thurs 2nd

Very cold weather been freezing hard all day it's the New Year's party at the Lodge** tonight I don't want to go but I suppose I shall have to

And here she ends. Maybe there is another diary long lost, we will never know! – Brian Thompson

** *The Lodge was probably that in Hurst Green (then part of Salehurst Parish) and the home of Wm. Orme Carter J.P. The building still stands, red brick standing opposite the junction to the road to Etchingham. Ed.*