

Dorothy Whipple 1893-1966



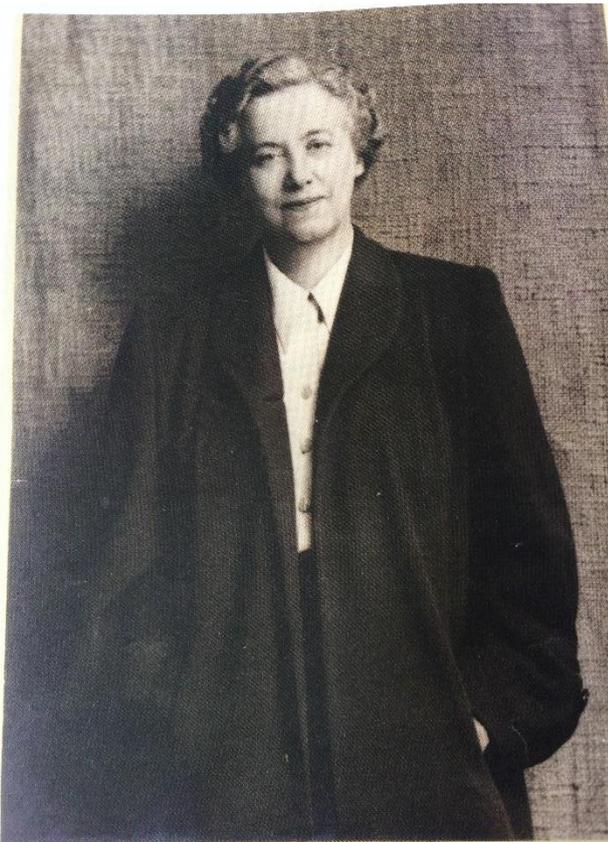
Born in 1893, **Dorothy Stirrup** had a happy childhood in Blackburn as part of the large family of a local architect. She was educated at Miss Barretts' private school, then the High School and finally the Convent of Notre Dame. Dorothy had a story published in the Blackburn Times as early as 1905. After school she went to work in the local Education Office. Sadly, her close friend George Owen was killed in the first week of World War 1. She worked for three years as secretary to Henry Whipple, an educational officer who was a widower twenty-four years her senior and they married in 1917. She moved with him to Nottingham in 1925 when he was appointed Director of Education and they lived at 35 Ebers Road in Carrington from 1925-1939 and Dorothy concentrated on her career as a writer and her early books were written there. She described those 13 years as the fullest of her life.

Her first novel was ***Young Anne*** (1927), followed by ***High Wages*** (1930) and ***Greenbanks*** (1932) which became a best seller, heading the Observer and Sunday Times lists. Many Nottingham locations are apparent in her novels, for example ***The***

Priory (1939) was inspired by Newstead Abbey where they rented South Lodge on the estate as a weekend retreat.

Dorothy and her husband moved to Kettering just before WW2 and she continued to write. Advanced sales for 'They Were Sisters' topped 32,000. Rank bought the film rights for 'They Knew Mr. Knight' and Gainsborough Pictures bought the rights for 'They Were Sisters.' She was asked to do the Lancashire volume for the County Book series, but declined, suggesting Jessica Lofthouse as someone more qualified. At the end of the war she was invited to the world premiere of 'They Were Sisters' at the Gaumont Theatre in Haymarket. She produced 2 volumes of short stories **The Closed Door and Other Stories** and **Every Good Deed and Other Stories** and in 1950 she also wrote her autobiography '**The Other Day.**'

Someone at a Distance (1953) was her final novel and it had no reviews and did not sell well, it concerns midlife crisis and infidelity, and is considered by many to be her best but British society had changed and she became unfashionable with newer writers who might loosely be described as the 'angry young men' becoming popular.



She was a very popular and prolific writer during the 1930's and 1940's in the inter-war years with her novels focusing on the lives of ordinary middle class people, particularly women in northern England in the middle of the twentieth century as they deal with changing social times. According to J.B. Priestley she was a kind of 'North-Country Jane Austen'. Whipple excelled in recording women's experiences with subtle and accurate observation and psychological understanding as can be seen in her devastating account of coercive and controlling domestic abuse in **They were Sisters** - surely one of the first in literature and very current. In 2005 in the Independent on Sunday Charlie Lee-Potter reviewed **They were Sisters** saying 'It exerts a menacing force from start to finish.' Salley Vickers in The Spectator

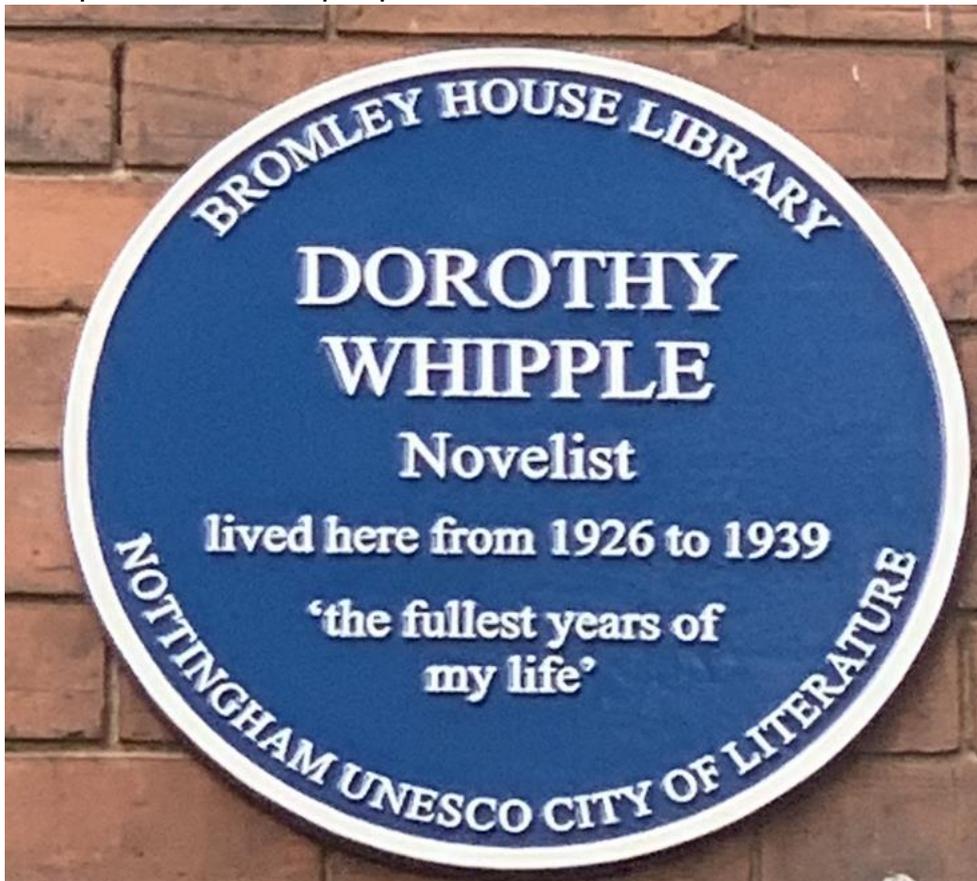
wrote about 'the sparkling achievements of this accomplished novelist, not the least of which is the ability – rarer today than it should be – simply to entertain.' Her writing does not give us the extremes of wealth and poverty seen in

some literature nor are they action packed rather her writing is subtle and understated, but page-turning stories nonetheless, with subtly feminist themes of women striving for independence albeit often unsuccessfully.

Persephone Books a specialist publisher of forgotten, out of print women writers have made several of her books available and she has enjoyed something of a revival. Indeed, she has 10 books in the Persephone List of approximately 130 books, more than any other writer; and five of her short stories were read as the afternoon reading on BBC 4 in 2007. In the later years of her life she wrote some books for children.

After her husband's death in 1958 Dorothy returned to Blackburn living in Whinfield Place, where she died in 1966. Her archive is held at the Blackburn archives.

In September a blue plaque was installed at her home



- *Young Anne* ([1927](#)), republished 2018
- *High Wages* ([1930](#)), republished 2009
- *Greenbanks* ([1932](#)), republished 2011
- *They Knew Mr. Knight* ([1934](#)), republished 2000
- *On Approval*, ([1935](#))

- *The Priory* ([1939](#)), republished 2003
- *After Tea, and Other Stories* ([1942](#))
- *They Were Sisters* ([1943](#)), republished 2005
- *Every Good Deed* ([1946](#))
- *Because Of The Lockwoods* ([1949](#)), republished 2014
- *The Other Day: An Autobiography* ([1950](#))
- *Someone at a Distance* ([1953](#)), republished 1999
- *Wednesday and Other Stories* ([1961](#))
- *Tale of Very Little Tortoise* ([1962](#))
- *The Smallest Tortoise of All* ([1964](#))
- *Little Hedgehog* ([1965](#))
- *Random Commentary: Books And Journals Kept from 1925 Onwards* ([1966](#))
- *Mrs. Puss and That Kitten* ([1967](#))
- *The Closed Door and other stories* ([2007](#))