



**Dorothy Whipple** nee Stirrup **1893-1966**

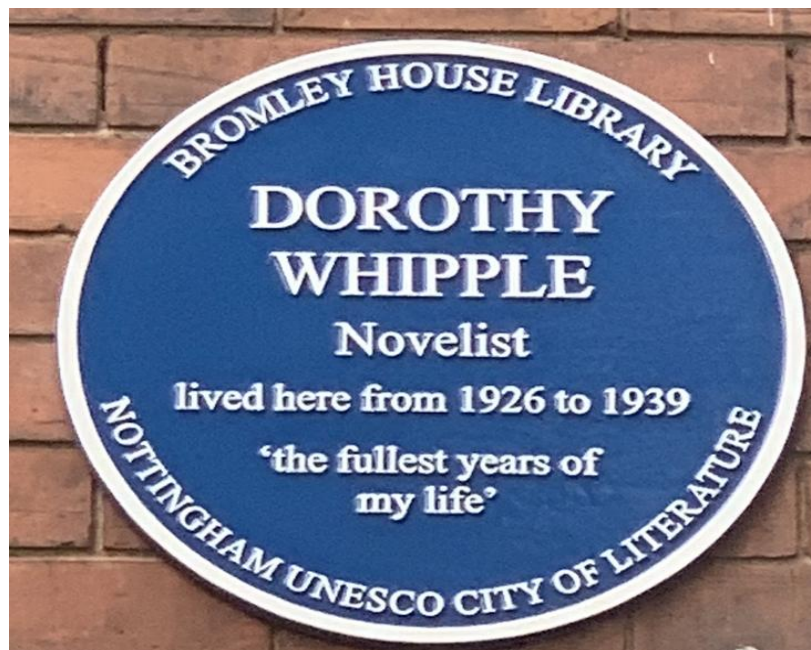
**Writer**

Dorothy was born at 9, Edgeware Road, Blackburn on 26th February 1893 where her father was a successful architect and land agent and her mother was Ada Cunliffe. The family moved to various properties each a little larger than the one before. Dorothy was educated at two small private schools and in 1903 she started at Blackburn High School for Girls and in 1905 went to The Convent of Notre Dame on Whalley New Road in Blackburn. In 1905 when Dorothy was 12, *The Blackburn Weekly Telegraph* started to publish her short stories. In 1910 she gained first place in the country and an examination distinction in English Language & Literature. In 1911/12 Dorothy spent a year in France at a Convent. It is thought that the man she loved George Owen was killed early in WW1. Dorothy worked as secretary to Henry Whipple, then Director of Education for Blackburn - a widower 24 years her senior and they married on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1917, at the Parish Church in Gisburn. She also worked with the Red Cross from 1914 – 1919 in Blackburn engaged in cooking duties. In 1924 Henry accepted a promotion as Chief Education Officer for Nottingham and the couple moved to Ebers Road where they lived from 1925 – 1939. Dorothy flourished as a writer during her time there writing her first 8 novels. She became a prolific and successful novelist of 1930's and 40's writing 16 novels as well as collections of short stories. Her first novel was *Young Anne* (1927) and drew on some of her early school and life experiences and a number of her other novels draw on her time in Blackburn. According to J.B. Priestley she was a kind of 'North-Country Jane Austen'. Two of her novels were based on Nottingham; *The Priory* was based on Newstead Abbey where she had a country cottage South Lodge on the estate; and *They knew Mr Knight* (1934) which draws on a real Nottingham villain Ernest Hooley, whose financial swindles landed him in prison 3 times and he is the basis of the corrupt millionaire at the centre of the novel. Two of

her books were made into films in America and her novels were widely distributed there. Her last novel was written in 1953 -*Someone at a Distance*. She also wrote her autobiography in 1950 '*The Other Day*.' Her work has recently enjoyed a revival with her books available from Persephone Books and 5 of her short stories were read as the afternoon reading on BBC 4 in 2007. After her husband's death in 1958 Dorothy returned to Blackburn where she died. Blackburn archives have various of her novels as drafted by her – she wrote in notebooks with revisions and crossings out before finally typing up the final copy. In 2024, Blackburn with Darwen Library & Information Service secured grant funding from the National Lottery Fund through Arts Council England to celebrate and promote her literary heritage in Blackburn, and to acknowledge how the impact of Dorothy's life in the North influenced her writing. Dr Cynthia Johnston worked with them on the project and essays, information and a film can be found at

<https://www.cottontown.org/Culture%20and%20Leisure/Literature/Pages/Dorothy-Whipple.aspx>

On Sept 26th 2020 a plaque was unveiled on her house in Ebers Road thanks largely to Helen Lewis and Bromley House Library crowdfunded with support from NWHG.



Nottingham archives were left her notebooks for the 2 Nottingham based novels – *They knew Mr Knight* and *The Priory* – these are many, many Woolworths notebooks with her handwritten drafts and revisions and give a great insight into her working methods. MSC also have some of her papers and Local Studies at the Central Library have 4 collections of clippings – I think Dorothy's own collections.

Dr Cynthia Johnstone of London University is researching her life and a biography is planned for 2028 – she gave a talk at BH in 2025, is sitting in on a book group discussion of *High Wages* at Five Leaves on Tuesday July 28<sup>th</sup> 2026, and will be giving a talk at NWHG in autumn 2026.

