

# Mary Kelly

## 1950-2026



### Early Life

Mary was born at home in 276 Leicester Road, Loughborough on 6 June 1950, the fourth child and second daughter of Bill Kelly and Rachel Walley Rowe (or Carr). In 1951, the family moved to Hinckley where Bill was Superintendent of Police. Living in a family of eight larger than life children was never uneventful!

Mary's first school was St Albert's Convent Primary School, Priory Walks, Hinckley (now demolished). While there, Mary was chosen in 1960 to be the St Peter's Church May Queen. She and her attendants processed through the town walking on rose petals. The culmination of the procession was the crowning of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the playing fields of the then convent, near St Peter's Church. Mary climbed the steps positioned for the occasion, reached up to the Virgin's head, put the crown on back to front, then promptly tripped and fell down the steps!

Mary's first three years of secondary schooling were at St Martin's Roman Catholic High School in Stoke Golding which changed from being girls only to "co-ed" during Mary's time there. Her last three years of education, including "O" levels and "A" levels, were completed at Hinckley Grammar School.

Mary was one of the athletic members of the family. She played in the school hockey team and was school Swimming Champion in 1965, school Junior Sports Champion in 1965 and Victrix Ludorum in 1967 (ie School Sports Champion).

In her final school year, Mary was called on as the oldest child at home to help run the house during her Mother's absence in hospital.

### Nursing Career

In 1968 Mary trained and worked post registration at Guy's Hospital in London (qualifying as a State Registered Nurse in 1971 - now an RGN). While there, Mary made many life-long friends with whom she kept in contact. She also much enjoyed travelling to London for their periodic nursing year group reunions.

After staffing on a male medical ward, Mary decided to specialise in Midwifery. She trained in Brighton and London, qualified in 1973 and worked for some time as a Midwife in Hertfordshire.

Between 1974 and 1976, Mary fulfilled her dream of undertaking Voluntary Service Overseas nursing in Ghana. There she was Sister in Charge of, firstly, Bongo and then Widana Health Posts. These were both new projects in villages where there had previously been no western medicine. In Bongo Mary worked in close liaison with the Canadian White Fathers - suppliers of whisky, solace and humour. While there she managed to break two priest's toes on St Patrick's Night during enthusiastic Irish dancing!

On returning to the UK Mary lived in Monmouth, covering maternity leave in Nevill Hall Hospital, Abergavenny, and then Lewisham, London where she worked as a District Midwife.

### Marriage, Family and Career

Mary's love of travel led her to take a year out in the USA. While there, she met photographer Alfred Vandenberg. On her return to the UK, they married in Hereford on 2 July 1979. That was followed by the birth of their two children - Thomas William Kelly



Vandenberg on 18 May 1980 in Hereford, and Tess Rachel Kelly Vandenberg on 10 January 1983 in Knighton Powys.

After a few years, during which Mary experienced a profound and prolonged breakdown, she and Al first separated and then divorced. The initial separation and subsequent total estrangement of Thomas and Tess was a continued source of much hurt and sorrow to Mary.

While in Herefordshire, Mary worked as a Child Minder, then as a District Midwife in Hereford before becoming Staff Nurse at Kington Cottage Hospital. Always enterprising, Mary for a short time also ran her own Rug Repair business.

### Return to Hinckley

After the breakup of her marriage, Mary returned to Hinckley where, thanks to the loving support of her many friends, she slowly recovered her health and equilibrium. The work she undertook during these years was very varied and some of it voluntary. Much of it was in the caring sector which part of the time involved her in driving minibuses for Leicester County Council. Her seven-year time as a fully qualified bus driver for Arriva was not only challenging but a source of many entertaining stories!

During the 2010s, Mary studied at Warwick University and it was a very proud day in 2017 when she graduated with an Honours Degree.

### Interests

#### Church

Mary's Christian faith was a vital part of her life. For many years she was a very active member of St Peter's Roman Catholic Church in Hinckley, including chairing its Developing World Support Group. Her many friends in the Parish plus numerous other friends and neighbours gave Mary great support in difficult times, particularly during her periods of recovery from cancer and a serious motorbike accident.

In later years, Mary moved first to Earl Shilton Roman Catholic Church and then to Our Lady of the Angels Roman Catholic Church in Nuneaton. As with everywhere Mary went, she soon made many good and loyal friends, developing a particularly close and lasting bond with Laura Bell from their time together in Earl Shilton.

#### Côte d'Ivoire

Mary's close links with Côte d'Ivoire developed from the support given her by Fr Joseph Kakou Aka during her recovery from cancer and while he was undertaking an attachment with St Peter's, Hinckley. From her subsequent visits to Côte d'Ivoire, where Fr Joseph is now Bishop in the diocese of Yamoussoukro, and from her contact with Ivorians in London, Mary grew to love the country and its people. She maintained a very strong bond with the Ivorian Choir in London, whom she arranged to sing



in St Peter's on several occasions and last visited Côte d'Ivoire in 2023 with her friend Laura.

#### Nature, the Environment and Social Issues

Mary has always had a great love of nature. One of the major bonuses of undertaking part of her training in Brighton was the opportunity to go sailing and walking on the Downs. Walking and annual camping weekends (as well as social evenings!) have been major activities of the 'Gopsall Gang', the amazing group of neighbours from Mary's small street in Hinckley.

Throughout much of her life, Mary was an active campaigner for environmental and social justice issues, regularly joining in campaigns and peaceful protests. Her time as a tree warden and work in the voluntary sector in Hinckley "opened up the world" for her just as her year in the USA enabled her to fulfil her dream of seeing the trees of Oregon.

#### Gardening and Photography

Mary was a very enthusiastic and highly knowledgeable gardener. Her garden was a riot of plants giving colour and interest throughout the year. Mary shared with Al a passion for old-fashioned film and print photography. She took hundreds of pictures of flowers (many of which she sent out as cards) and of friends and gatherings. Unfortunately she labelled or dated only a few of her many images of people.

#### Music

Mary loved a wide variety of music, including the pop music of her teenage years and indigenous music of Africa. She also loved classical music and enthusiastically booked her ticket for the orchestral concerts of her nephew, Neil. Mary had a good singing voice and got much enjoyment and friendship from her time with the Hinckley Choral Society which she joined in 2022. A particular highlight for her was the experience of singing the Verdi Requiem in the Albert Hall with The Really Big Chorus in 2023.

### Final Days

Mary's last months were gruelling as she had to cope with a second bout of breast cancer and then a serious heart condition which led to infections and increasingly serious relapses. Through it all she fought with great determination 'to get better' but was overcome in the end. Having been fully aware for the last rites and online mass, she passed peacefully without pain or anxiety on 11 January 2026 in Leicester Royal Infirmary.

