

Kitty Moss

Artist, Advertising representative, Post Office worker, wife and mother



Kitty Moss, December 2018



Self-portrait of Kitty during her time at Felixstowe Post Office

On the Move

I am fully aware all good things come to an end but even when invited to a 'Farewell Sunday Soirée for Neighbours' in Kitty and Steve Moss's Conservatory, I was still not convinced they were moving. But it was and is, all too true. Half an hour ago, I waved a sad farewell as my next-door-neighbours departed for other climes. Not perhaps too different as Felixstowe is their destination but depart they have. Kitty and Steve Moss have enjoyed just about forty years of Trimley life in a variety of occupations but now the time has come for them to wake up to another vista. No more hazy views across the fields to the river, no more sleepy dusk time languor as the sun sets. Instead they now wake up to the invigorating smell of ozone in their noses with brisk sea breezes stirring up the crisp early morning air as the sun rises directly in front of them.

Your memories of Kitty and Steve may well begin in the Post Office when they landed in Trimley in 1979; mine are more recent. I cannot pretend to be indifferent to this departure. Kitty in particular, has been a lively source of support and kind friendship during stretching times as well as in the easy sunny days. There have been Block Printing days, Origami afternoons, early morning walks, chatty cups of coffee, camp fire evenings and house-sitting weeks. But all this stopped at 12.00 o'clock on

Thursday 6th December 2018. As it is Kitty who has been my larking companion, it therefore falls quite naturally that my focus should be upon her. What follows is a brief sketch of her life and times before she flitted to Felixstowe. I wanted to attempt to have a tiny glimpse of Trimley Post Office in the early nineteen eighties as she remembers it. And perhaps as you read this, you may see of glimpse of Kitty as *you* remember her. And maybe you may learn somethings you didn't know about this buoyant and energetic woman.

I imagine Kitty has always been a wandering spirit. Her first home was Grove Park, near Bromley in south London where she went to school until she was 15. Her mother agreed she could follow her creative inclinations on the condition she acquired secretarial skills; these were to prove invaluable as it later turned out. Eventually, she did go to the Artistic Ball and attended Art School at what is now known as Ravensbourne School of Design. This was in the 1960s and she intended to use her not inconsiderable inventive gifts in the fashion industry. But you may recall there was something of a fashion revolution in the Sixties; Mary Quant and André Courrèges introduced the mini skirt and everything changed. The delicious ballerina gowns which Kitty loved became completely passé and there was no call for the ultra-feminine style and shape they personified. Her art studies were just gathering momentum but this major shift in women's wear meant it was time for her to look for an alternative career as her heart did not respond to the block outlines of the clothes of the time. In 1966, she made the daring and dynamic move into Fleet Street where she became one of just two women working as Advertising Representatives. Kitty hadn't been there very long when she and others suddenly realised, she could talk for England, Great Britain and probably the rest of the World; a major talent when rustling up advertising business. Her role a Research Assistant depended on her involvement in the intoxicating world of fashion and beauty and yes, she was networking and chatting all of the time, day and night. It was her role to bring in the advertisements and thereby generate revenue for the newspaper, which was, I believe, The Daily Sketch. Everyone helped each other and the work rolled on from the long working days into the companionable evenings where the odd whisky was shared. The assignments began to change as research became more informed by demographic studies and at this point various criteria began to creep in. Her work required a more scientific approach and there was a shift of emphasis in the fact-finding into the background of the Readership. During this period, Kitty shared a flat in Earls Court with some other girls who came from New Zealand living a modern life of freedom and independence. It was the Swinging Sixties and Kitty was in the thick of it, living it up and generally having a ball. During this period Kitty met her future husband Steve, and shortly thereafter moved to Heston near Heathrow where,

"... We were able to study plane spotting."

but as Steve's work was part of the mushrooming computer industry, they soon needed to move again to a completely different part of the country.

"We went to Rossendale Valley in Lancashire and stayed there for four years. The Northerners were amazingly friendly. I had to have a job and found myself as a Court Stenographer sitting very close to the Court Clerk, using shorthand and the stenotype machine. The Secretarial skills my mother made me learn came into their own! After Rossendale, we moved to Manchester and then to Iwer in Buckinghamshire. Eventually, the possibility of a move to Detroit came up as Steve was a skilled Systems Analyst but I didn't want to move to America as by then we had two children. One day, I was looking in 'Exchange and Mart' for a Pottery Wheel and I saw a Post Office advertised for Sale and immediately became very excited. I'd always wanted a Post Office! We spent a year looking for another Post Office in the right location and finally one came up. It was in Trimley St. Martin. The Post Office wanted a choice of three candidates; if you had a criminal record, you couldn't be employed by them. Luckily, we didn't!"

And of course, as many of you may recall, the next thing that happened was that in August 1979, they moved into Trimley Post Office.

"The first night we arrived, we decided to go to The Mariners over the road. We didn't check to see if we had our keys and when we went back we couldn't get in. The good thing was I had recently lost two stone and I managed to get in through the back toilet window. We made it more secure after that."

A small team of people, already working in the Post Office, awaited Kitty on her first day. They were: Peggy Kellard, Pat Reynolds and Molly Good.

"I was scared! I was going to be in charge of all these people and I'd never managed anyone before."

Kitty went on to describe life in The Post Office.

"Steve was based in the Post Office cubicle and was effectively separate from the rest of the shop. Every day was different; Child Benefit Day was Monday, Pensions on another. There was a different character to each day and of course, there was no computerisation. In the evenings we did 'The Books.' Wednesday night was always Balance Night. Fortunately, we never had any break ins or robberies but we always held minimal cash on the premises."

One of the tasks which came with the work was called Cleaning the Phone Box on Old Kirton Road for which the Post Master was then responsible. I would do it on a Saturday afternoon before defrosting the freezers. And...

(Why did it need cleaning, I naively interjected? Kitty just looked at me in a knowing manner; after an evening in the pub it was a convenient stopping off point for those on their way home.)

... we always closed every Saturday afternoon, all day Sunday and Wednesday afternoon. Otherwise we were open from 9.00 a.m. til 5.30 p.m. We closed at lunchtime as well, when we would listen to the News. I recently found the large Scales for weighing potatoes when we started packing up for the Move. They waited patiently outside the shop, with the potatoes slouching next to them. Inside we were always advertising offers and huge signs used to hang from the ceiling. I was always organising good offers for sale.

Once work on the new bypass was in full swing, I used to provide food for the Workers. I would bake 60 white rolls very early in the morning. They were set to prove overnight. I also used to boil three hams a week and used the bacon slicer to cut the meat which became the fillings for the rolls. (I worked out Kitty must have boiled in excess of 900 hams during her time at the Post Office as well as baking over 93,000 rolls.) The Bypass workers would come and buy both for their lunch and put it together themselves!. Food Standards would check regularly to make sure we conformed to hygiene standards. Sometime I would come across boxes of chocolates where grubby hands had opened them up to help themselves. I had to work really hard all day long and of course, the children were quite young at the time. I found if I moved stock, people would find other things when they went to look for what they wanted. There was never any spare time. Even if I finished working with the stock then there were always greetings cards to mark up. In fact, there was always work to do. The Greengrocer called every second day. If things were going out of date or needed using up, we ate them. We consumed a sizeable quantity of cauliflower cheese and out of date yoghurts! When the freezers stopped working, we ate pie and chips for a week.

The shop and house were and are, really old, probably 16th or 17th century with ceilings sloping downwards. The frailties of the old building were so obvious. The Staircase was curved and they were the one thing I didn't miss that when we eventually moved out! There were three floors with the Attic at the top. At the back of the building, we could see open fields all the way to the Rectory and beyond. The first Christmas we were there I looked out of my son's bedroom window onto the High Road and could see Father Christmas in his Rotarian Sleigh and reindeer. I thought it was just magical and a truly Village experience. I really felt I was part of the community.

I loved the Post Office and I loved the customers and the whole Post Office experience.

But when the new Sainsbury's opened at Warren Heath, trade began to be affected and we eventually decided to finish in 1986. In retrospect it has proved to be the most exhilarating time of my life. I absolutely loved it."

And thereby, a chapter of Kitty's life finished. It was time to move on and find a different *modus operandi*. The Moss's didn't move from Trimley but 'temporarily' occupied one of the Gatehouses next to the Grimston Lane Pedestrian Crossing. They had fourteen days to leave the Post Office once they handed their notice in and before the next Post Mistress took up residence. Kitty had always wanted to live next to a Railway line and for her, number 3A Gatehouse, was another exciting opportunity

whilst looking for a permanent home. But the temporary house became permanent 32 years ago and only now has the occupation of the 'stop gap' home come to an end.

"When we finally committed to the house we decided to start having work done to it. We had most of our possessions on the lawn under a tarpaulin. Anyone could have stolen anything but they didn't."

And then, as Kitty became bored with the work she was doing she took on another role as a Post Office Counter worker in the now defunct Felixstowe Post Office.

"I loved this work as well! I wasn't really involved with Post Office work in Trimley but knew enough to work as a Postal Worker. We were always chatting and laughing in the Felixstowe Office. We used to have our 'regulars' who would endure the long queues just to be served by their favourite employee behind the counter. People would come in to off-load about their circumstances and I always gave them a listening ear when they talked of impending domestic events such as 'My mother-in-law is coming to stay!' We had to work hard to keep on top of everything but it was great fun. We had a grey and yellow uniform; it's a shame because yellow isn't really my colour. Eventually we were allowed to wear Black trousers instead of skirts. We would sometimes dress up for Children in Need or other Charity events. But things began to change when the Post Office started selling 'products' to people and strict rules and regulations came into force. All the fun was being sucked out of our working lives. Conversations included offers like this:

'A book of 12 first class stamps, please.'

'Yes, of course. That will be £3.12. And can I interest you in this Life Insurance product today?'

'No.'

Throughout this time, in fact from the mid-1980s onwards, Kitty continued with her art work, attending lessons delivered by the renowned Ken Cuthbert. Kitty's skilful work is full of movement, life and humour and over the years she has been a regular exhibitor. During the recent packing operations prior to the house removal, Kitty found a picture she painted of life in Felixstowe Post Office.



Felixstowe Post Office in the 1990s.

We can see a queue of people stretching out of the door, clerks working at full pelt serving diverse member of the public and rubber stamps standing to attention. Kitty herself is in the picture, second from the left. Her sensitive use of watercolours with their beautiful translucent qualities, presents a light hearted image of the Post Office at the end of the twentieth century, completely capturing the last days before computerisation. In case you are wondering, the man with the stop watch in the lower right hand corner stands in observational authority to the effectiveness of the employees and the importance of keeping the queue moving. As for the rubber stamps, perhaps you too have noticed the silent demise of these silent and dominant witnesses to bureaucratic affairs. Their muted thump on so many letters, cards, parcels and documents is a sound which is gradually fading away as they become replaced with computer generated labels.

Eventually, it became time to stop work altogether and other opportunities arose. Kitty had always loved travelling and together with Steve, they began to eat up the miles around Europe and beyond. Motor homing became a way of life and together they regularly completed over 5,000 miles a year. France, Spain, Germany, Denmark; there were no barriers to their travelling ambitions. At home, Kitty carried on painting in her studio with its expansive views across the fields.

And now, the views have changed for Kitty and Steve. Always quick to chat and engage with her neighbours as well as offer support in times of need, many of Kitty's friends in Grimston Lane will

regret her absence, miss her friendship and wait to hear her effervescent laugh again. And those who know her very well, will note I haven't even mentioned Kitty the Party Animal. Something for another day perhaps.

Come back soon, Kitty. The door is always open.



Kitty's 'Farewell to Trimley, We're on the Move' 2018 Christmas Card.