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# The Maid of Buttermere

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Mary Robinson, who was to become known as the “Maid of Buttermere” was the landlord’s daughter at the village inn, now the Fish Hotel, where travellers and locals would enjoy a glass of ale and a meal in the family kitchen. She had little knowledge of the world beyond the valley, meeting only those that grew up in the village and happened to pass through the inn doors.

## A girl becomes a tourist attraction

In 1792 Joseph Budworth “discovered” fifteen-year-old Mary at the inn during one of his frequent walks across the Lake District, researching material for articles and guidebooks he was writing. He was so amazed by her beauty that he included her as a tourist attraction for the valley in his article to a London newspaper. He expanded on this in his guidebook ‘A Fortnight’s Ramble to the Lakes’. Budworth described her in rapturous terms “her face was a fine oval face, with full eyes and lips as sweet as vermilion”, and compared her to an angel.

Mary’s became famous overnight. Many people came to Buttermere just to see her. William Wordsworth, wrote about her in *The Prelude*. Budworth himself returned after six years and lectured her on not letting the fame go to her head, but the fame she had never sought was to bring bad things with it.

In the Autumn of 1802 Mary was swept off her feet by one Alexander Augustus Hope, who claimed to be the brother of Lord Hopetoun, and was travelling through the Lake District and decided to come and see her acclaimed beauty for himself. After a whirlwind romance, the two were married in the church at Lorton on 2nd October.

## The disappearing husband

But there was no happy ever after for Mary. Just a few days after the wedding, her husband was summoned to Keswick for non-payment of bills. Once in the town he was accused of stealing Alexander Hope’s identity, forging cheques and being a thief and a liar! Hope persuasively talked himself out of trouble and left the town on the Buttermere road ostensibly to return to his new wife. At the end of the valley, however, instead of turning right over Honister Pass back to the Buttermere Valley, he turned left, up the Langstrath Valley and disappeared.

Constables were dispatched to find him and he was in December he was arrested in North Wales under his real identity of James Hatfield. He was brought back to the Lake District and imprisoned, then hanged at Carlisle jail for his crimes of forgery. Mary was devastated to hear that her beloved husband was a liar and already had a wife and child.

## Mary’s grave

Mary had a child by Hatfield, which died of pneumonia after just three weeks. She was later to marry again and moved to Caldbeck, in the north of Cumbria, where she lived out the rest of her days married to a local farmer. Her gravestone is in the churchyard there.