

Mary Geering

25th December 1931 – 11th February 2012

Mary was born in Chelmsford on Christmas Day 1931 to Sylvia and Reginald Cook, the first of three siblings, together with Joan and John. The family moved to Hertford when she was very young.

Two significant features of her early years shaped her later life. Firstly, the Second World War. Mary had a clear recollection of:

- the declaration of the outbreak of War and the effect this had on her parents;
- of life in Hertford during the War
- and of post-war austerity.

The impact of War on her early years lent gravity to Mary throughout the rest of her life. In more recent years she has met with local students to talk about her war-time experiences. Mary greatly valued these events believing that by sharing her experiences of war she could promote the cause of peace. And the students have said that they greatly valued meeting Mary.

Secondly, being the eldest child also affected Mary's life.

- It brings with it challenges as parents learn their parenting skills.
- Mary's father was anxious for her to leave school and to work locally. Mary had regrets that though she had passed her school certificate she was not allowed to stay on in education.

Nonetheless, Mary spoke of happy times as a child, including:

- Sledging on the slopes at Foxholes;
- Swimming in the local rivers;
- Being a Sea Ranger, and rowing her mother along the local rivers;
- Taking a flight in a Tiger Moth; and
- Riding an Elephant at London Zoo.

After leaving school, Mary worked at the John Innes Institute at Bayfordbury.

Mary's time at the Institute must have been a particularly happy time for her:

- She spoke fondly of the people she met and of the work that was done

there including the breeding of new varieties of flowers.

- It suited her life-long passion for nature, of birds, and trees, and especially of flowers.
- At school she had won prizes for her presentation of wild flowers which she knew by name – their Latin names, their English names, and their nicknames, such as the aconites that are out now, which she knew as 'pats of butter on little green plates'
- Her acute sense of smell was used in testing the scent of new flowers;
- And she recalled games of cricket played in summer on the lawns at Bayfordbury.

And it was also at this time that she and Les first courted. Both lived locally and had gone to Abel Smith School. They both worshipped at All Saints, and it was through being members of the Church Youth Club that they became close.

Mary and Les were married in All Saints in 1955 and from that time on, two things mattered most to Mary: her family and her faith. Their marriage was a strong one. A very private couple, they found in each other love, mutual support, and a shared out-look on life.

Mary and Les had four children together: Helen, Ruth, Philip, and Paul. After living in Welwyn and Hatfield, they moved back to Hertford in 1965 establishing a family home with a large garden where the children could play. Mary was a very dutiful wife and mother, getting the family up in the mornings, seeing them off after a good breakfast, and caring for them when they returned at the end of each day. For many years she kept honey bees in the garden. She organised the family holidays, including the first family trip abroad to Holland where she visited her friend Hannie. She supported the children in joining Scouting and Guiding. Mary kept the family home running when Les' work took him to the United States for an extended period.

Later on, Mary returned to work as a stenographer at the local court; she enjoyed attending court and hearing the variety of cases.

The Church was very significant in their family life, with the whole family worshipping here and active in different aspects of the church. Mary, with her organisational skills, supported many of the Committees of the church: the Sunday School, the choir, the Church Wardens, and fund-raising including both regular fund-raising events, but also major events such as for the organ restoration fund. In 1973 Hertford Celebrated the anniversary of the First Church Synod of 973, and Mary played a prominent part organising the many events and pageantry that took place across the town.

In 1978 Les was invited to work with Airbus Industries in Toulouse, southern France. This was a huge opportunity for Les, but also presented challenges for them, not least as Philip and Paul were still at school. After much anxious thought, and a family discussion, Les took up the post, and moved to France while Mary remained here in Hertford to care for the boys. Being apart for extended periods was difficult, and after two years Mary too moved to France.

They gained many friends living in France. With other English women, Mary formed a club to welcome and support English wives who arrived in Toulouse. Mary wrote the first edition of what became known as "The Useful List" – things for people to know when moving from the UK to Toulouse – typical of Mary to produce something of practical help to other people. Mary joined the English-French Association and taught English at a local school. Les sang in a local Dominican church choir and later in an English choir where they went to church attended to by an English Chaplin.

Mary and Les had a strong wish to build links with the French Community and they successfully integrated into French life. They lived in the countryside around Toulouse where they learnt to speak French and enjoy a French life-style.

Living in France was a significant boost to their life together. They enjoyed life in and around Toulouse, a city they grew to love very much. They also had many adventures, travelling around France, and also to Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, North Africa, and to Scandinavia. Mary was always diligent in sending post-cards and letters to their children.

Les retired in 1992. Mary and Les chose to return from France to live back in Hertford. Mary and Les were immensely proud of each one of their children and by moving back to Hertford they hoped to see more of their family. Sadly, Les' retirement was cut short when he died in 1994.

His death was a dreadful shock to Mary and the family. Mary drew on her deep faith to support her children through bereavement.

In the subsequent years she travelled extensively both in the UK and abroad. Here in Hertford Mary kept-up her French language skills through the local French Group and she joined the U3A. She had close links with the town's museum and contributed to the work of the Oral History Society. She recorded readings of newspapers for the blind. Here at church she was a sidesman, she read lessons during the services – the clarity of her voice being much appreciated, she repaired hymn books and hassocks, and with Les' cousin Pauline she ran the Women's Fellowship.

Her greatest joy was when her family was around her, particularly at the summer and Christmas gatherings hosted by Helen. Seeing her children together, and grandchildren, brought her immense pleasure and comfort.

However, not a day passed when she didn't miss Les, and it's fair to say that after so many years of separation she had a yearning to be reunited with him. Having maintained relatively good health, and her healthy complexion, for so much of her life, we pray that after her recent ill-health and with God's good grace, her wish is now fulfilled.