

Dorothy Bartram 1929 - 2022

A patchwork of her life, with thanks to Robert Bartram, Anne McBride, Heather Hay and Diane Daly

Almost the whole of Dorothy's life was lived locally in Chiswick, although she was born just over the border in Hammersmith, in Black Lion Lane. Within two years the family had moved to the southern end of Airedale Avenue. That was in the days before the A4 from Hammersmith had been driven westwards through W4 and before the creation of the Hogarth roundabout, with the result that a section of Chiswick near the river was rather cut off from the rest of the town.

During her teens she went to Staveley Road Secondary School for Girls after which she and her best friend, Jean, from Chiswick Lane, went on to secretarial school. She got herself a job in London and that was when she met Robert Bartram, chauffeur to her boss. Pretty soon they were engaged but Dorothy was only 20, and in those days anyone under 21 had to have parental permission to marry. Luckily her father agreed to the match, the marriage was celebrated at Caxton Hall in 1949 and the couple moved to live in Bond Street. There followed what must have been some difficult times in the next few years when Dorothy had several miscarriages, but her fourth pregnancy, which was spent mostly at West Middlesex hospital, resulted in the successful birth of her son Robert in 1953. Robert Senior, Dorothy and baby Robert were welcomed back to the family home in Airedale Avenue where Dorothy's parents looked after the young family. I wonder if it was then that she became an avid reader of the Lady Magazine ?

Nearby, facing Chiswick Mall, was the Cottage Hospital which Dan Mason, founder of the Chiswick Soap Company, later Chiswick Products, had originally established in Burlington Lane. When in 1911 Mason bought Rothbury House on Chiswick Mall, he added new buildings and moved the Hospital to this site, where it served the local community, as well as injured soldiers during World War 1. Completely rebuilt in the '30s, and opened by the founder's nephew, another Dan Mason, in 1936, it remained surprisingly unused until 1943 when maternity patients were moved there from West Middlesex Hospital, the start of Chiswick Maternity Hospital, with which Dorothy was to have a long association later on in her life.



From 1965 she worked for the Matron there and was very much at the heart of the organisation. She has written about its history and of this period she notes: 'Many happy years passed at the Maternity Hospital and various projects took place alongside the everyday arrival of babies'. When the hospital closed in 1975, the building was used as accommodation for students and doctors and also for filming. During these years Dorothy acted as Warden. In 1986 the site began a new existence as Chiswick Lodge, a nursing home for patients with motor neurone disease, Alzheimers and Hodgkinson's Chorea. Dorothy was an unstinting

supporter of the League of Friends, working voluntarily for patients and staff alike. So marked was her charity work that at a ceremony in London she was awarded the League of Mercy Medal, 'the first person in a hundred years', her son tells us, 'to get this medal'. When the hospital site was sold and new luxury homes were built on the Mall, Dorothy was a key person at the ceremony to unveil a commemorative stone marking the site of the Hospital in all its incarnations.

She was a devoted member of the congregation at St Nicholas Church. She was confirmed there after receiving instruction from Sister Winifred, one of the Sisters from Warminster who lived at St Denys's Cottage (as it then was) and worked in the parish. We will always remember Dorothy sitting in the front pew opposite the pulpit and how she insisted on walking up to the altar to take Communion for as long as she possibly could. Her faith was evidently hugely important to her, and led to her going on pilgrimages to Santiago da Compostela, to churches on the Continent with Black Madonnas, and in this country to Walsingham. Her strong connection with St Mary's Convent and Nursing Home started when she and her husband would visit her brother-in-law who went to live there. During the years I knew her she would often go to the Convent for a chicken lunch on a Sunday. What's amusing is that although a self-proclaimed vegetarian, she made an exception for the Convent's chicken (she considered poultry not to be meat) and Paul Cook's sausages. When it came to baking, it was Heather Hay's rock cakes that had her complete approval.



She was always challenging, and rightly so. I remember her asking what we were going to do about having more social events at St Nicholas Church. In response the monthly lunches at St Denys Hall were started. Dorothy loved music and enjoyed concerts at St Nics. Her main passion was opera and Wagner's works in particular; there were visits to Bayreuth on several occasions to hear The Ring Cycle. Her son inherited his father's passion for jazz, became a drummer and played his first professional gig at age 11 at the Fuller Smith and Turner social club ! He reckons his early start as a pro may have led to some parental arguments !

Dorothy was wonderfully cared for in her last years, with her son, grandson or carer bringing her to St Nics when she could no longer walk there. Eventually she went to live in the Convent which she knew so well, a fitting place for her last days, until she died on 27 November 2021.

Christabel Ames-Lewis, February 2022

See Dorothy's article 'The History of Chiswick Hospital' on the Local History Society's website: brentfordandchiswicklhs.org.uk