

Rhoda Collingwood 1920 – 2013, from Margo Jales

Rhoda was born in Swansea in 1920. Both her grandfathers were ministers, Methodist and Baptist, so it is not perhaps surprising that the Church played such a large role in her life. Her childhood was not easy as her father left the family when she was young and there was no further contact from him. In 1937 she moved to the bright lights of London to work as a shorthand typist at the Department of Trade. In 1939 she transferred to the Ministry of Shipping and was involved in secret work on teleprinters. In 1940 she met her husband, Stanley, who had been evacuated to Llandudno with the Inland Revenue. They married in 1941 and lived in Conwy. Their first child, Ann, was born in 1944, followed by a son, David, in 1947. In that same year they moved to Barrowgate Road in Chiswick and became regular worshippers at St Nicholas Church. In 1951, the year they moved to Edensor Gardens, Stanley, a barrister, was appointed Churchwarden at St Nicholas, a post he was to hold for 25 years. In 1959 their third child Jane was born. They remained at Edensor Gardens until 1985 when they moved back to a flat in Barrowgate Road. Stanley's failing health resulted in a move to Thames Ditton, in 1995, to be near their family. In 2002, following Stanley's death in 2001, Rhoda moved to Hordle in the New Forest to be near her daughter Jane.

In his tribute to his mother, David explained that she lived her life through others. He spoke movingly of the fact that her life was built on two rocks – her faith and her family. He described her as a good and faithful servant but one who perhaps struggled to find her place in life. She found it easy to love her neighbour but loving herself was more difficult. Her life was disciplined and full of routine. She had huge energy and stamina and always needed to have something to do. This might mean changing the winter curtains to the summer ones (how many of us bother to do that now ?) or happily facing a large basket of ironing. She enjoyed holidays and was well travelled at home and abroad. She was an only child and it was a delight for her to have such a large family. She had three children , eight grandchildren and eleven great grandchildren. She maintained high standards throughout her life and her advice to her grandchildren was:

1. Do not deliberately hurt someone
2. Remember to say sorry
3. Say prayers morning and night.

She enjoyed doing crosswords and word puzzles and she particularly loved music and singing. She was a member of the London Welsh Choir for over 40 years and when St Nicholas allowed women to join the choir she was the first one there. She sang at the Albert Hall, Festival Hall and even on the Black and White Minstrel Show. As well as being in the church choir Rhoda was a staunch member of the Mothers Union, being the Overseas rep for many years, and she played a very active part in the life of St Nicholas. Her home became a haven for numerous curates – a testimony to the role that Rhoda had played in their lives.

I have many fond memories of Rhoda, a couple of which I would like to share with you. George and I were invited to Sunday lunch shortly before our wedding. George wanted a particular Agnus Dei to be sung at our wedding but could not recall the name of the setting. He hummed it to anyone willing to listen in the hope that someone would identify it. At lunch that day he decided to try it on Rhoda and she immediately recognised it. It was particularly poignant for me that Rhoda chose the same Agnus Dei setting for her Funeral Mass. Another summons to lunch arrived when George was appointed Church Warden. I was to go round to be instructed in the duties of a Church Warden's wife. It was with some trepidation (and clutching a pen and notebook) that I set out. It transpired that my main duty was to ensure that George never departed for Church on a Sunday morning without the church keys in his pocket !

Heather Hay and I were fortunate to have been able to attend Rhoda's funeral in Hordle. Heather and Rhoda had been friends since meeting in the Old Vicarage garden in 1947. Rhoda was a lovely, warm lady and a good friend. Her faith shone out from her. She was sorely missed when she left Chiswick. I was not surprised to hear from her friends in Hordle that she had participated fully in Church life almost until the end, even attending an Alpha course at 90 years old – just as she would have wanted it. Rhoda would have been particularly proud of the fact that her funeral service was conducted by her daughter the Revd Ann Fraser