

26th August 1931 ~ 7th January 2020

Jean Mellanby

Jean Wilson was born on 26th August 1931 to Mark Milburn Wilson and his wife Edith, née Bentley, in Stockton on Tees, County Durham. Her sister Freda was born two years later. Mark worked for the London and North Eastern Railway company, probably as a sub-station master and at one point the family lived in a station house with the platform running along in front of the house.

When Jean was only three, she developed scarlet fever and was in hospital for quite a period of time. There was probably little to do for a three-year-old and she used to love looking at the cartoon stories of Rupert The Bear in the Daily Express. Rupert remained a firm life-long favourite of Jean.

Sadly, Edith died of TB when Jean was only eight and later, Jean and Freda went to live with Edith's sister Dolly and her husband Maurice. Aunt Dolly and Uncle Maurice had no children of their own and the girls were happy there, with Edith's wider family also in Stockton.

Jean went to the Richard Hind School for Girls where she did very well, enjoying sports and her passion for Art and she left aged seventeen in 1948 after obtaining her school certificate, with subject prizes in History and Religious Knowledge. Jean went to work at ICI Billingham, as an illustrator in the chemical engineering laboratory, where she made tracings for experiments.

One of the momentous days in her school life was the day she met Harry, her future husband. This was on the 4th of May 1946, when she was helping with refreshments and Harry was no doubt drafted into the girls' school as a dance partner. I remember the story that she and her friend Margaret were both interested in Harry and for a time Margaret's parents held out hopes that Harry could be a good catch for their daughter but it was in Jean that he was really interested and their relationship lasted over seventy-one years.

Their courting days were spent at the cinema – there were seven in Stockton - walking, playing tennis, cycling on their tandem through the Dales and to Youth Hostels, and playing a lot of sport: netball for Jean and football and cricket for Harry. There is a lovely photo of the two of them on the beach at Redcar, where Harry would swim in the icy waters of the North Sea.

Harry chose to do his National Service at the age of 18, in the Navy, was posted to Portsmouth, and on their engagement he returned to work for local government in Billingham-on-Tees and Jean and he were married at St Paul's Church, Stockton on Tees on 28th February 1953.

They moved to Swadlincote near Burton-on-Trent, and John was born in 1954, then a further move to Aldridge in Birmingham where Steve was born in 1956, then to Hatfield near Doncaster where Liz was born in 1962. Jean had given up work on her marriage and the moves were for Harry's career in local government. There was a further move to Dronfield near Sheffield and the completed family finally moved to Street in 1966. As a very sociable couple Jean and Harry made firm friends along the way, many of whom have remained friends throughout their lives.

Jean worked at Street Library for over thirty years, in a part-time capacity and also as a relief librarian. She also worked at the Wellspring bookshop in Wells. She was an avid reader, had so many hobbies and was part of many social groups: the Ladies Circle, the W.I. in Ashcott, and obviously through Harry's work in local government she enjoyed attending functions of all kinds.

Jean indulged in stained glass making, pottery, jewellery making, cake decoration, knitting, creative writing with the Portway Group and poetry and she wrote sketches for the W.I. and a few rude limericks, but her abiding passion was for drawing and painting. She was a good mum, a decent cook but she clearly found household chores a bit of a bore and used to hide the ironing in the loft where it couldn't accuse her.

Holidays when the family was growing up were very often in Cornwall, on a bit of an ad hoc basis as Harry rarely booked anywhere. Jean was definitely not a camper, and they relied on guest houses or hotels: John remembered one hotel in Barmouth in Wales, but Newquay, Looe, Polperro, and Falmouth elicit lovely memories and time was spent lazing on the beach, bodyboarding and swimming. They also used to return north sometimes, and the family remembers going to shows during the summer seasons, to see people like Max Bygraves and Jimmy Clitheroe.

Later on, however, after the children had left home, Jean and Harry travelled widely, including visiting Steven's family in America, where they went to Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon. After Jean stopped being able to fly, they thoroughly enjoyed going on cruises: the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Baltic amongst them. They have probably done around twenty and they loved meeting interesting people and continued to relish social occasions.

The children produced grandchildren, of whom Jean was very proud and also great grandchildren, and she loved being their grandma, lovely grandma, or mama. There are John and Angela's sons Kristian and James, with partners Anita and Sue and great grandchildren Isaac, Freya, Isla and Everley; Steven and Marjorie's son Matthew; Liz and Tom's children Harry and Isobel. Jean loved them all very much.

Before Harry died in 2017 Jean and he would enjoy popping down to Yeovil, to see a film at the cinema and have lunch and this became a regular Monday jaunt. Jean's fall just before Harry's funeral meant her move to Wessex House in Somerton where she was very comfortable, and she continued to love laughing and chatting with the staff. She missed Harry though, he was always the love of her life and this little poem reflects her memories of May 1946.

A poem by Jean Mellanby

I saw this handsome
stranger

He was heading my way

Good Lord, I thought

It must be the 4th of May

As I caught his eye

He turned to say

Let's go out

On the 4th of May

That seems rather fast to

Me, kind sir

As the 4th of May is
today, I say.