

A celebration of life
Margaret Parsons

15th February 1924 to 31st December 2019



A ceremony to remember her life.

Held at Rawdon Crematorium, Leeds on the

31st of January 2020.

a personal goodbye

A Tribute to Margaret

Madge was born at home, on Friday the 15th of February 1924, in Holbeck. Her parents were Adam and Eliza Moscrop. Madge had a brother and sister, and also twelve half sisters and half brothers. Dad was a joiner and her mum, well with 14 children; her mum was kept busy so lets not worry about that. Madge would always speak with great fondness about her dad in later life. She talked about how they were very poor when she was young, but when she talked about her dad her love for him shone through when she described how he really was the gentlest of men.

Now, before we move on from this large family it's worth saying that, although 1924 is a long time ago, Madge is actually survived by one younger sister Audrey who was born in 1926.

As a little girl Madge was educated at Ingram's Road Primary School in Holbeck, and by all accounts she really enjoyed school.

She may not have excelled academically but Madge was a very talented swimmer and nothing brought her greater pride than winning a voucher for entry to the baths in a swimming competition then presenting the voucher to her family to use. Madge won the Silver Cup for open water swimming in Roundhay Lake and she also went on to represent Yorkshire. This is quite an achievement especially when you consider that she suffered St Vitus Dance as a youngster.

On leaving school Madge began work as a seamstress but before we pass on to her adult years I do think it's worth pausing on her early years and trying to imagine what it must have been like.

Madge's full life story, as we shall see, is that of a lady who had a good life. A woman who provided well for her family; who did everything she could to give them a secure and comfortable start in life. And so I think that before we look at those achievements it is worth reflecting upon how humble, and indeed difficult, were her beginnings.

We tend to think, especially if we let ourselves lose sight of history, that nowadays we are living through times of rapid, frightening change and of great instability. But Madge was born only 6 years after the First World War, a war that destroyed a whole generation of young men right across Europe. Bear in mind that when she was only two years old there was the only ever general strike and the country was thought to be on the abyss.

Her early years must have been so different to our life now. Leeds in the 1920's and 30's was a grimy, industrial city and her teenage years were the time of the Great Depression when ordinary people experienced genuine hunger and lived without the security of the safety nets we have today.

And of course, by the time she is a teenager, the build up to the Second World War had already begun. No doubt the family, like many others, must have struggled at times. By the time Madge was 15 years old the whole world was engulfed in the Second World War, a war in which she lost her brother James, who was killed in action with the Scots Guards in 1943 at Salerno in Italy. But strangely, war also brought great opportunity for many women, Madge included. In 1942 at the tender age of 18, she joined the Women's Land Army and she served the next four years near Thirsk. With many male agricultural workers joining the armed forces, women

were needed to provide a new rural workforce. The basic working week for land girls was 48 hours in winter and 50 in summer. Initially there were no holidays - paid or unpaid, just a free travel pass after six months, so life was hard in many ways; but for a young woman brought up in grimy soot-blackened Holbeck, the countryside was a great adventure. She was well liked by the Woods family who took her in instead of leaving her in billets. She even got to ride the Shire horse on the farm and Madge would always speak with great fondness of her years as "Land Girl".

It's easy to forget that the freedoms that our daughters, sisters and wives enjoy now weren't available to women of Madge's generation and so for many land girls the war brought escape, and it brought freedom.

It was in Thirsk that she met her future husband, Claude at a dance. He was serving in the Parachute Regiment at Catterick Camp after overseas action in North Africa and Italy, where he had been wounded. He asked Madge to dance, she accepted, he led her on to the dance floor, he then proceeded to ostentatiously read from a How to Dance book, to the amusement of his mates.

Despite this beginning, she still married him, in December 1945 in Lower Wortley. Married life commenced in Claude's hometown, Tipton in Staffordshire, but she did not settle there, so the young couple returned to Leeds, where they lived in number 245-7 Lower Wortley Road.

Claude was an upholsterer but in the immediate post war years it was very seasonal work and so he worked

at various times as a bus conductor, milkman, scaffolder and printers assistant. Madge was working as a seamstress and so the young couple started to build a life together. That soon became a family life because John was born in 1947 soon to be followed by Andrew in 1949, and finally Christopher, in 1952.

And so the 50's find Madge living in Wortley and raising a young family. Through sheer hard work the family got by in what were difficult times for many people.

Indeed they worked hard enough for them to have an annual family holiday which they usually spent at Lime Kiln Lane holiday camp in Bridlington, where they would be joined throughout the week by various members of the extended family, many of whom would cycle to and from Leeds just to spend the day together.

When the boys had grown up a little Madge returned to work in the clothing industry, and later still she would work in the mushroom farm near West Leeds School; home of a rare animal found nowhere else on earth ... The Yellow Footed Whingate Dog. Well that's what Chris told me anyway. Don't ask me. Ask Chris about it in the Main Line this afternoon. If it makes sense to you later on today you will have already drunk too much.

Working somewhere where she was involved in growing things would have been a surprise to nobody because she always retained a love for gardening and producing her own food.

Maybe it was a hangover from her childhood, or her work as Land Girl or even the memories of years of rationing? Whatever the reason, she never really

stopped growing her own food. She certainly had green fingers, and even when she lived in Lower Wortley she had an allotment.

So when the family moved to number 7 Gamble Hill Drive, in Bramley in 1959, she gradually developed a very productive back garden which made the family virtually self-sufficient in vegetables. Her tiny beetroot were always appreciated by her late daughter in law Karen who would pickle them and bring some back to Madge every year. And of course it helped that Madge was a wonderful cook, something her family always enjoyed to the full. Her elder sister Ada moved in next-door and Madge also had her sister Charlotte, living in the same street.

So, the sixties see Madge settled in her new house, surrounded by family, both her and Claude working, and the boys growing up fast and building their own lives.

By the late sixties and early seventies they could afford to enjoy some great winter breaks in Majorca, usually with her sister Audrey and her husband Dennis.

Madge enjoyed travel and she was fortunate in her life to see so many wonderful places.

She was very close to her widowed sister in law Doris. They travelled a great deal together until Doris's death. She travelled twice to Hawaii, each time staying for 3 months with her son John who was living on the island of Molokai at the time. She also travelled with John in France and Spain and with Chris to Malta.

Besides travel and gardening, Madge loved knitting and reading, but most of all she loved her family. She was a brilliant mother and an equally fantastic grandma to Michael, Shane, Jemma and Keeley, and later on a wonderful great grandma to Joshua, Millie, Anna, Eva, Maisie, Lewis, Charlie, Maddie and Betsy.

Family was never far away for Madge. Even as she entered her later years Madge still cooked many meals for her sisters Ada and Charlotte, and her legendary Sunday roasts were also shared by two very elderly widowers who lived nearby, Charlie and Tommy.

Old age comes to us all of course, if we are lucky that is, and it brings its own trials and tribulations; but Madge was a very resilient lady. Not one to moan about the creeping aches and pains.

Indeed, the family found the poem "I'm fine thank you" in her stuff. If you don't know it, well it lists all the effects of old age but it invites the reader to laugh at old age and to put on a brave front. Well it must have chimed with Madge for her to keep it; it's quite long but if I read a little bit I think you'll get the idea.

An excerpt from "I'm fine thank you".

*"The moral is this, as my tale I unfold,
That for you and me, who are growing old,
It's better to say "I'm fine" with a grin
Than to let folks know the shape we are in.*

*How do I know that my youth is all spent?
Well, my "get up and go" just got up and went.
But I really don't mind when I think with a grin
Of all the grand places my "get up" has been.*

*Old age is golden; I've heard it said,
But sometimes I wonder as I get into bed,
With my ears in the drawer, my teeth in the cup,*

*My eyes on the table until I wake up.
Ere sleep overtakes me, I think to myself
Is there anything else I could lay on the shelf?"*

Always active, Madge largely tried to ignore the advancing years. But eventually she did have a bad fall in her garden and that winter she had no choice but to move into sheltered accommodation in Thorn hill Court. She enjoyed her time there, especially the communal coffee mornings and she was loved by all the staff and her new friends there.

That is no surprise of course because Madge simply didn't have a bad word for anyone. She was, by nature, one of life's givers. A humble and a loving woman. When they were young her boys relied on her totally and an unbreakable bond of trust grew between them; a trust that endured for the whole of her life. The boys got to repay her in their own ways of course because for many years they maintained her house, dug her garden, mowed the lawns, and installed double glazing and central heating to keep her comfortable.

When her illness had taken away her independence they made huge efforts to ensure that she got the very best care that they could find.

Later in life that meant moving her to Aire View where Madge was adored by all the staff and where she was very happy in her final days.

When she did pass away, at 3.30 in the morning on New Years Eve, it was on her beloved fathers birthday. Madge lived not just a long life; she lived a life filled with family and love and friendship, the vast majority

of which she lived in remarkably good health. Who could ask for more?

But nevertheless, when that moment inevitably came, her family did lose a remarkable mother; and the world also lost a gracious and a humble lady. A woman who had been a ray of light in the lives of her sons, and later in life for the whole family. A lady who had been a beam of sunshine on even the darkest of days.

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