

# A celebration of life Audrey Emily Laura Hawkes

27<sup>th</sup> January 1928 – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2022, Eden Valley Woodland Burial Ground, Kent

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

Catherine will now talk to us about her mother.

*You know the saying: 'Behind every great man stands a great woman'.*

*In our parents' domestic life it might be nearer the mark to say  
'Behind this great woman stood a man waiting to be told what to do'.*

*For our father adored our mother. He was, fundamentally, a chef. But the kitchen at home was hers. Most definitely. Apart from the curry incident. Worth it though, it tasted nice.*

*She was intelligent, talented, and wise. She loved her children, her grandchildren, music, roses, chocolate and cars. Not necessarily in that order. She was a clear and deep thinker, an emotional person but not sentimental.*

*She escaped from a modest background; her own parents disinterested in any talents that she had that would certainly be recognised and nurtured in children by families today.*

*Commencing her working life at The Dorchester Hotel in London when she was fourteen changed her life profoundly. As more of the male staff went to fight in WWII, her responsibilities increased and, aged sixteen, she was running the section of the accounts department that calculated and issued all guests' bills. In late 2020 she dictated her memories of her time there. We sent the paper to the development manager who wrote back that some of her memoirs were being included in the historical tours of the hotel that sometimes take place. Which is nice. Our mother told me recently that those years were the happiest of her life.*

*Motherhood intervened and curtailed her working life for a long time. She had three 'only' children as we were well spaced apart. Her first child born in 1953 and her youngest reaching 18 in 1985 – that was a long haul. She was a good and loving mother who, along with our father, was determined that we take all educational and professional opportunities and encouraged and supported us along whichever paths that we chose to follow.*

*However, she engaged in many other worthwhile activities during that time which usually involved helping others, serving the local, and wider, community such as hosting tea parties for inner city pensioners from London (with my young sister on compulsory waitress duty) taking food and blankets to refugees kicked out of their country by Idi Amin, at West Malling airbase, hosting a huge jumble sale in the garden for the Tonbridge Flood Relief Fund, hosting the Golden Green village fete in the garden (complete with snakes from the local zoo) and cooking yummy Christmas meals for as many people in the village who wanted to come along.*

*She undertook a lot of voluntary work, working first in the old scout shop and latterly in the Tonbridge Hospice in the Weald shop. Her last voluntary position was in the Romanian shop in Tonbridge, partly because she had visited my brother and his wife there (in Romania, not in the shop) and because the shop supported a children's hospice in Brazov. We had a brick laid there in our father's name.*

*Our mother sang in several choirs, both religious and secular, was a good singer with a light soprano voice and an excellent sight reader. She played the piano (even at her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party). She was a competent calligrapher and was the ultimate romantic gardener.*

*Really, she wanted to go to work and, in her 60s she worked at the GP surgery in Hadlow, staying for 10 years as receptionist and dispenser.*

*Like most of us, our mother was a mass of contradictions. She knew how to be difficult. Contrary. She had fixed ideas. But her thinking became gentler as she aged, she became more open minded and, thankfully, remained curious and inquisitive about fundamental issues, world issues.*

*And she listened.*

And now Emm.

***Mum was many things to me in her life...***

***A great listener and confidante***

*whenever the need was there*

***She had a wicked sense of humour***

*We would laugh so much - laughter was often the medicine that dried the tears!*

***She was a harsh critic of me at times***

*She would take my face and say 'Let me look at you', study me intently and, in my earlier years, slowly pick me apart, but, as she softened with age, it seemed more a gesture of affection and I hope, pride, when she did that.*

***She was a loving, giving person***

*Always seeking the latest charity shop bargain to give to each of us on her way round what she called the 'better' charity shops nearby.*

*We'd often say 'You never know what you might find'*

*She always wanted to know about everyone else's lives - particularly of Amelia, her adored granddaughter, but also of my step children, Ben and Chloe and little Henri.*

***Reminiscing the past at Leigh Court/Grey Walls***

*Often, we'd talk about when I grew up in Golden Green and as a child the people we knew in Tonbridge - 'Do you remember when...?' conversations ensued for hours - good memories, sometimes with tears from us both, that she cherished and loved to share again and again.*

***Mum loved music, music hall, theatre and films***

*Mum would play the piano and call to me 'Sing Emm sing..' I'd accompany her with songs from musicals, old time music hall songs or songs that mum and dad liked the most from their youth. If we were lucky dad would play the spoons on special occasions too or mum would load up the pianola for us to enjoy the many rolls of music she loved.*

*Last summer, one of my few precious afternoons with her, we talked about how she and dad loved going to musicals and seeing horror films – I played clips from musicals and she had to guess the tunes which she did so with alacrity! I recorded these few moments her words really resonate:*

*'it took you back to a time you were happy...they were an important part of life...you never forget.....What else can you think of that is so real'*

### ***She loved the outdoors***

*Her love of the garden, flowers, trees and shrubs was boundless and is instilled in me.*

*For many summers past I'd sit on the grass next to her weeding talking endlessly about the Latin names of flowers and roses, sharing her incredible knowledge with me. She missed her garden terribly.*

*I see you in the flowers, the leaves, in the rain, sun and wind.  
Rest now without any pain*

*We will never forget you and we will always love you.*

So what else made Audrey special? There were the animals, of course. Cats, dogs, and of course Jason the goat, who was supposed to keep the grass short but who frequently yanked himself free of his chain and shortened the roses too. On one occasion Jason was so startled by a hot air balloon that he ran into the house, terrifying Great Aunt Diz. And there were Anthony and Cleopatra the geese – Anthony regularly terrorised visitors, giving quite the wrong impression of Audrey and Fred's so-hospitable home.

They lived longest at Leigh Court in Golden Green, a splendid house with a long drive, where tea and cake were always to hand. The number of trees there was drastically reduced by the 1987 storm, when 13 wellingtonias were uprooted, but Audrey converted the holes they left into a new garden feature. At Golden Green she started up a WI branch, a great outlet for both her creativity, her hospitality, and her skills with figures as she was treasurer. She's still remembered in Hadlow as "a legend".

Fred died in 2000, and in 2003 Audrey moved to a smaller house, and there the communal garden gradually filled up with her roses.

Nick will now read to us a piece "On Growing Older", attributed to a 17<sup>th</sup> Century nun.

*Lord, thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will some day be old.*

*Keep me from getting talkative, and particularly from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.*

*Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs.*

*Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point.*

*I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others' pains. Help me to endure them with patience*

*But seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by.*

*Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.*

*Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint - some of them are so hard to live with – but a sour old woman is one of the crowning works of the devil.*

*Make me thoughtful, but not moody; helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.*

We often think of death as a cruel enemy, taking away those we love, but for those who are suffering or who have reached the end of their endurance, it can come as a quiet friend, closing the curtains, turning out the light, and settling us into a last sleep, free from pain and weariness.

I hope it was so for Audrey.