A Celebration of the Life of

Brenda Mary St John Lewis

13 October 1934 – 21 July 2026

10 August 2026, Maple Park Crematorium
Celebrant: Rachel Mears



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Brenda Mary Proud was born on 13th October 1934 to Dorothy and William, also known as Dobbie and Bill. She was the middle child with two brothers Peter and Tony. When their father retired from the police force Dobbie and Bill took on The Bay Horse pub in Masham, North Yorkshire, from where Brenda watched the world go by from the upstairs window and learned to play dominoes downstairs.

Brenda treasured the memories of her visits to Sleddale and Farndale to see her cousins and she loved spending time outdoors with her father. Farndale, in particular, always held a special place in her heart. She returned almost every year to see the daffodils in bloom. Later, she shared those much-loved places with her own children and friends because, once Brenda discovered somewhere special, she believed everyone else should experience it too.

As a young woman Brenda's energy and independent streak was evident in her keen membership of the local cycling club, happily covering mile after mile, without the luxury of gears. She often delighted in telling the story of cycling "120 miles in one day!"

As a teenager Brenda worked part-time at Swinton Park assisting the butler and house-keeper, when it was still a family country house. Here she expanded her knowledge and appreciation of art, a love that stayed with her throughout her life. She also learned to drive, passing her test before either of her brothers – which she was particularly pleased about!

Brenda sought an independent future – leaving Masham to train as a teacher in Matlock. She took advantage of her education and the opportunities newly opening up to women who did not wish to conform to some of the social and cultural expectations of young women in rural communities at the time.

At teacher training college in Derbyshire Brenda formed friendships that lasted a lifetime – more of which later. Once qualified, she took teaching roles in the Midlands and the North-east before returning to Masham with her three young children where her mother still lived. Although a primary specialist she was one of the founding teachers of Bedale High School, helping to create a new school community. As a teacher she also had the opportunity to visit places such as Paris and Venice – feeding her love of travel.

Brenda worked tirelessly to provide for her family as a single mother at a time when doing so was not only difficult but often met with prejudice. Her strength, determination and resilience carried her through. She passed on her love of the countryside, history and adventure to David, Delyth and Melanie, and family camping holidays took them to Scotland, Whitby, Wales and many other places, always with plenty of stories and adventures along the way.

Alongside her teaching career, and life as a busy mother, Brenda quietly gave her time to the local community. She was one of the original committee members of Masham Steam Rally, supported the Town Hall, and, after retiring, raised money for the RNLI. She

never sought recognition –if something needed doing, she simply rolled up her sleeves and got on with it.

Brenda also loved the theatre and found a second family with the Masham Players, where she was a member for many years. But acting alone clearly wasn't enough. She'd also be making costumes, painting scenery, lending a hand backstage and, quite possibly, making sure everyone else was where they were supposed to be!

Family mattered to Brenda, as did her community, her friends and her dogs. There were a few very lucky dogs who found their forever home with Brenda. Each one received endless love, plenty of walks around the river, and probably a few more treats than any vet would have recommended. Bonzo, of course, held a particularly special place in her heart, and perhaps you can imagine the two of them setting off together once again for one more gentle stroll.

Brenda's friendships endured throughout her life. She remained close friends with Joan and Eileen for decades and she continued to enjoy annual holidays with her "College Gang" until only a few years ago. Those trips were always a highlight of her year. Retirement wasn't a time to slow down. She continued travelling with family and friends, enjoyed annual reunions with her beloved College Gang, made the most of local days out, and set off on countless caravan adventures with special friends. I am told that if anyone was looking for Brenda in Whitby, there was every chance they'd find her at The Magpie Café, happily enjoying her favourite fish and chips. Some traditions are simply too good to break.

Brenda also appreciated time at home and in her garden. If there was a craft to be mastered, Brenda probably had a go at it. Knitting, sewing, lacemaking, painting –you name it, she could probably do it. She had the remarkable ability to turn a ball of wool, a length of thread or a blank piece of paper into something beautiful. Some of you are lucky enough to have something she made, and those creations will no doubt become wonderful reminders of her.

Brenda's life was rather like one of her own pieces of handiwork – a rich tapestry woven with kindness, creativity, friendship, family and determination. Brenda embraced all the phases of her life, often seeking independence, but also accepting responsibilities. She had a very long retirement and embraced her older years as a period of exploration and enjoyment, as well as an opportunity to contribute to her community. She loved her garden, and understood nature. Brenda taught others that happiness can be found in making something with your own hands, helping someone without being asked, sharing a meal with friends, watching a play, or simply walking a dog. She had a wonderful gift for finding joy in ordinary moments, and she reminded the rest of us to do the same.