

Miss Gwen Rawlings 1914 - 2004

Former SGS games, art and maths mistress GWEN RAWLINGS died in Swanage Hospital on Sunday, November 7 shortly after celebrating her 90th birthday on October 7. Her funeral was held on Thursday, November 11th at Swanage Methodist Church and Gwen's nephew, the Rev'd N. V. CARTER, gave the address, from which the following is taken.



Gwen photographed at the 2004 SGSA reunion, only 4 months before her death.

Gwen, Hilda and Idris Joseph were born to Betty and Will Rawlings in or near Crosskeys in Monmouthshire. Sadly the little boy died when he was a toddler but it was a close knit family and Gwen and Hilda grew up with many loving relatives nearby. They were bright children and grew up to be intelligent teenagers, and Gwen went off to Wimbledon Teacher Training College. Her first teaching post was at Newtown Grammar School, near Crosskeys. However, Gwen sought "pastures new" especially pastures which were warmer and sunnier than Wales. She arrived in Swanage c. 1945, fell in love with the town and climate, found a post at Swanage Grammar School and a home at Kings Garn (now part of the Pines Hotel). Auntie Betty and Hilda followed, Will had died in 1942, and it did not take long before strong and lasting roots were put down.

The family later moved to Redcliffe Road and the roots were strengthened by the close proximity of Peggy, Wilf and later Marjorie (Scott), who lived just around the corner. It was at Redcliffe Road that we younger members of the family remember visiting and we always had a tumultuous reception from them. The car would pull up and out of the house the dogs would rush barking, closely followed by Gwen and Hilda waving, and Auntie Betty, with failing eyesight and wearing her green sun visor, asking who was there and what was happening!

Gwen loved children and she loved teaching. She was of course a very athletic woman and became an excellent P.E. teacher. She played hockey for her county, and once for her country. Later, in 1962, Gwen retrained and became a very proficient maths teacher, Then sadly, in the mid-1970s, education once again became a political football and all changed at Swanage, as in many other places. The beloved Grammar School disappeared in 1974 and Gwen and Hilda felt it was a change too much. Early retirement was taken and from then on their lives were as busy and hectic as always - new opportunities seized and new challenges met.

All of us know how Gwen was affected by the sudden, unexpected death of Hilda - her sister, friend, confidante and companion - but because she was tenacious she picked up the threads and stoically battled on, regaining her love of life.

For a second may we turn to Gwen's interests? First the two strands which recall our diverse family roots and history - Methodism and liberalism. Her Nonconformist Welsh roots were boosted by the Lees side of the family, who brought with them a strong and vibrant Methodist ethos and adherence that gave Gwen solid foundations. Her beliefs, though never paraded in public, were acted out through her love of family, friends, neighbours and this community of Swanage. Her faith compelled her to care, whether that was through Swanage Town Council, being a school governor, supporting the Swanage Railway, or the rebuilding of Swanage pier. She put all her time, thoughts

and energy into the community. Methodism has always had strong links with liberalism and it was no surprise that in auntie Gwen there was a strong fusion of the two - faith and politics.

Let me throw other things at you; the trip to Paris in a double decker-bus and camping in the Bois de Boulogne, the driving lessons followed by the purchasing of a car which was rarely used and, for all I know, is still rusting in the garage. The skiing in Austria, the cruises, the eisteddfods eagerly awaited and enjoyed, the beach barbeques, the picnics, the picking of apples and peaches in the garden, the swimming in the sea, the procession of dogs that went through the house, her eye for a good bargain, her refusal to throw things out because they might come in useful and the Welsh accent she never lost. Her character was unsurpassable - generous in spirit, both in time for us and with her possessions. She was easy to love because she was so loveable - never judgemental, always supportive. Her laughter and sense of humour were infectious. Did you notice that until near the end of her life she never seemed to change? She always looked the same.

Gwen kept her keen intellect to the last and my wife and I think you should all know that when she was dying but still conscious it was stories, reminiscences of the family and thoughts of you that were with her to the last. We meant so much to her as she did to us.