

## **Peggy Bennett's Obituary 1921-2000 (part 2 continued from previous magazine)**

*We are grateful to her son, Andrew, for submitting this article about her*

Sometime in 1942, Margaret found herself nursing Barry Cortvriend, a young soldier who was in the process of transferring to the new GHQ Liaison Regiment founded by Lord Astor. Readers of David Niven's autobiography *The Moon is a Balloon*, may recall something of the unusual set up that was the phantoms! Barry and Margaret were married at West Grinstead in 1943 and I put in an appearance, during an air raid over Henfield in July 1944. My father was away from home until 1946 and on demobilization he found civilian life rather boring after the excitement of the Phantoms. Margaret, understandably, with lots of commitments, could not cope with the uncertainties of the continuing quest for adventure on this scale, and my parents were divorced when I was still very young. Shortly afterwards, Margaret changed her surname back to Campbell and mine was changed too.

Margaret then entered a very difficult period of her life, effectively being a single mother. In this her own mother, Lena, and her aunt Daisy Boniface, (affectionately known together as the "Old Ladies") played a great supporting role, virtually bringing me up, while my mother returned to full-time nursing, first in Horsham and then in London at the Millar General. Margaret returned to live in West Grinstead around 1950 and wasted no time in picking up old friendships. One friend she valued especially was Rhona Fisher, a member of the much-loved Partridge Green family, with whom she had been at school. Despite her family difficulties, my mother was always very positive about life; she could be very determined and amazingly tenacious (she passed her driving test first time at the age of 50!). One event summarizes this very well. Along with many others, she became deeply involved in the Dial Post and West Grinstead WA. I can still remember the subtle aromas of the main marquee! Several years she ran a tombola stall at the show and on one occasion a budgerigar in a cage was given as a prize. Somehow or another the bird escaped and flew up into the ridge of the marquee. "Coo" said Ralph Short, a well known Dial Post worthy: "That's b\*\*\*d it!" "It's no good just standing there cursing." retorted my mother, as her hand toyed with a three-pronged toasting fork lying amid the other prizes, "You'll just have to shin up the tent pole and catch it!". I was rooted to the spot by the near impossibility of this task, but amazingly, whether driven by thought of the toasting fork connecting with his posterior, or the real need to catch the bird, Ralph did shin up the marquee pole and did catch it! I was immensely impressed!

Helped no doubt by the Chelsea aunts, Jack Bennett. now a Captain with the New Zealand Shipping Company, became a frequent visitor at West Grinstead, and it came as no surprise to most people (myself excepted, being far too busy with country boy pursuits to notice) that he and Margaret decided to get married. From this point on Margaret's fortunes began to improve. Baby Sarah arrived in June 1952, a very happy event, and Jack and Margaret decided to look round for a house of their own. Pound Cottage, near the corner of Mill Lane and the B2135, was chosen. From early 1956 this became the family home. The first major event in the new house was the birth of Timothy, brother to Sarah and Andrew. Somehow this set the scene and Pound Cottage became a wonderfully happy house. Margaret now had the chance to develop her interests in the Parish. She was already a stalwart church worker, cleaning brasses and arranging flowers at St Michael's and singing in the choir at St George's. Additionally she became a committed WI member and served on the Conservative Association committee. Deborah was born in 1960 and completed the family of two boys and two girls. Jack, very sadly, had to retire early from the Merchant navy through ill health and died in 1975. At this point Margaret decided to move to a smaller house and bought the Old Granary in Dial Post where she lived for ten years, most of the time with her mother and aunt. These two elderly ladies, who formed such a strong link with the past in the parish, passed away in the early 1980s both having reached ninety years. At this point Margaret made her last move, to North Cottage, Littleworth. By this time the family had occupied eleven houses in the parish spread over six generations, and the great sense of family history prompted Margaret to become very involved with tracing roots investigating local antiquities. Always a prodigious

letter writer, she corresponded with people all over the world and the results of these endeavours gave her great satisfaction. Her time at North Cottage was also very happy, close to married children and able to watch over the developing grandchildren. Very sadly, in January 1999, Margaret contracted an infection while in hospital for a routine operation on her knee. She never overcame this and the quality of her life plummeted. Despite every effort she became terminally ill and died at Red Oaks, Henfield, on April 2<sup>nd</sup> this year. Margaret was buried in St George's churchyard on a stunningly beautiful April morning with wall-to-wall blue sky. Her funeral was very well attended and at the party afterwards many people remarked that it was just the sort of occasion that she would have enjoyed so much!

Andrew Campbell