

Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the Life of Edna Woodhouse

19/09/1925 – 21/08/2016

Edna was born in Bradford. She was brought up as an only child, as her sister died in infancy of meningitis. For this reason her mother was very protective towards Edna and discouraged her participation in physical games at school. An old school friend described Edna as an earnest, clever little girl, eager to please, with a precise speaking voice.

She may have inherited her musical gifts from her father who played the clarinet for the silent films. Playing the piano to accompany singers, and attending orchestral concerts were life-long joys to Edna.

After a spell working in an office, she qualified as a teacher, specialising in teaching “deaf and blind children” as they were known at that time. She travelled from Bradford, first to Wakefield, then Sheffield and later to Harrogate to work in special schools. She was eventually persuaded by her colleagues to learn to drive. This shortened her journey times and gave her elderly mother a great deal of pleasure in their visits to the Dales.

Her desire to please and help others seemed to be innate in Edna and it seemed to come naturally to her to put others before herself. While working in Wakefield she travelled to Wakefield Gaol in the evenings teaching some of the inmates how to translate children’s stories into Braille, thus benefitting both parties.

She began to attend Bradford Quaker Meeting in the early 1950s and by 1955 she was a Member of the Society. Bradford Meeting was to become her spiritual home and she threw herself enthusiastically into serving the Meeting as Clerk, Elder, Overseer and Librarian. She also represented Monthly Meeting at Meeting for Sufferings. She took all these responsibilities very seriously.

Her love of children meant that she joined the Children’s Class Helpers and became the Convenor for many years. She befriended the young families in Meeting, visiting them in their homes and sometimes baby-sitting so that the parents could go out.

Many of Edna’s friendships developed initially from helping people. She visited bereaved Friends beyond Bradford Meeting, and as a result many became lifelong friends, sharing holidays, outings, and especially Afternoon Teas, for which she was famous! One Friend described her as being “selfless in her devotion to duty”. She was a faithful and loving friend.

For several years Edna gave financial support to an African student, quietly paying both his course fees and living expenses. Similarly she became a surrogate grandmother to a Chinese student, helping her with her English and remaining in touch long after her return to China.

Edna was a much valued member of Bradford Meeting. Being denied the family life she would have loved, she dedicated her life to serving others. Always compassionate towards those less fortunate than herself, she founded the Friends Fellowship of Healing group at Bradford Meeting in the 1980s and this met monthly before Sunday Meeting until Edna was too frail to attend, though she continued to pray for those in need to the end of her life.

Her prayer life, her Quaker faith and her devotion to Bradford Meeting were central to her life. Whatever Edna did she did with a smile and generosity of spirit.

She was a gentle, benign presence in Meeting, always encouraging to others, never critical, and always grateful for any small thing done to help her. All her acts of kindness towards others were done quietly, behind the scenes, often not known of at the time. She was accepting of a broad interpretation of Christianity within the Quaker tradition, and her life spoke in the love she showed everyone. She gave of herself and enriched many lives and she in turn received the love and respect of many.

Signed in and on behalf of Brighouse West Yorkshire Area Meeting September 10th 2017.
Catherine Putz Clerk, Susan Clarkson Assistant Clerk.