

TESTIMONY TO THE GRACE OF GOD, SHOWN IN THE LIFE OF DENA (RITA BERNHERDINA) HEBDITCH, 7 APRIL 1922 - 15 MARCH 2019.

There can be few Friends who have served one Local Meeting & one community for more than 90 years, but Dena served Scarborough for all that time. She was a birthright member of the Religious Society of Friends & her deep Christian faith was a dominant influence in every aspect of her life.

A family story tells of her aged four, living in simple circumstances becoming a childminder for her younger siblings. Her father worked long hours to support the family & her mother was ill for a prolonged period. Dena became a carer (in a time when there was no State support.)

As a secondary schoolgirl she attended the first Yorkshire Friends Holiday School in the 1930s. She then went on to become a student helper & later a member of the staff. As an active Young Friend she participated in peace & reconciliation work around mainland Europe in the late 1940s & early 1950s by joining Yorkshire Young Friends, travelling in The Ark - a hand built wooden cabin on an old car chassis, kitted out with seats & basic camping equipment. Dena provided warm, thoughtful considered comments that gently encouraged others to reflect, a lifelong skill.

She served Friends locally & in the (then named) Monthly Meeting. Appointments included representing them on the central standing organisation, Meeting for Sufferings during the 1970s. Alongside this she was widely involved in the life of the local community, actively belonging to more than 20 organisations that are known to Friends! Her particular concerns were in the development of a peaceful society & in equality. Having undergone teacher training from 1940 onwards, education became her main life's work. After some years she became a headmistress & was able to set up the first autistic unit in a mainstream school.

The Scarborough Amicable Society was one means of her helping disadvantaged children. For decades she acted as warden, quietly taking responsibility for the welfare of those in need - & making lifelong friendships with pupils & their families in the process. Latterly she was a trustee & Life Vice President of the Society. Soroptimist International of Scarborough was a further great involvement. With them she travelled overseas to attend international conferences, & worked for them for over 50 years.

Dena had four great enthusiasms: above all, the sea; then wildlife; & music too, which she enjoyed sharing with others. Last, but not least, sport. She avidly followed cricket; the rare times she missed Meetings for Worship were usually because there was a major cricket match being played in town! She also followed tennis, golf & snooker. Her family meant much to her & their annual visits to the town were greatly enjoyed; however, she was a very independent person who was content with her own company.

In retirement she shared a winter holiday flat on Tenerife with old friends from the Meeting, enjoying several weeks of sun & wonderful sea views. There they regularly held Meetings for Worship, upholding the life & work continuing at home. We give thanks for her life & contributions to her beloved Scarborough.