

Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of Barbara Bowman (27.4.1923-11.5.2020)

Barbara Bowman was born in Shanghai, China, to British parents. Whilst attending boarding school in England, she discovered Quakers, attending Scarborough Friends Meeting. She finished her studies in 1943, having begun her unshakeable commitment to a Quaker path.

Barbara trusted that the spirit would give her the strength to be a pacifist and registered as a Conscientious Objector. After four years working for the Ministry of Agriculture, she offered to serve Quakers overseas and in 1947 was sent to China.

Barbara's constant belief was shown in the way she engaged with whatever she took on. Her spoken ministry was strong and clear, but what stays in our minds is the manner of her life. Kind, loving and open hearted, Barbara was in love with a divine spirit that guided her throughout her long life. She knew how to offer spiritual accompaniment to one's questionings, journeyings and discoveries. Sometimes this required bravery which she showed when the Red Army arrived in her local Chinese town. She felt she must cycle through them to get to Meeting. She explained that she had to go, she felt more good would be done in calmly turning up as usual to the local Chinese Meeting. She loved China and had many Chinese friends throughout her life.

Back in England between 1952 and 1956, Barbara became part of a Young Friends group which hosted a visit in England of six young Russians – an exceptional event during the 'cold war' and recorded in their 'Roots of Friendship'. From 1956 to 1972 she taught English at Wesley girls' high school in Ghana. Efficient, brave and hard-working, she expected the same high standards of the staff and the girls in her care, treating all she encountered fairly and with respect, helping to create an environment where all could feel valued and shine.

From then until her retirement in 1983 she served as Asia Secretary to Friends' Service Council. Her pacifism was constant throughout her life. She had a spiritual depth and balance, refusing to be dogmatic. As she got older, she would say "So much I don't understand and don't know" - coupled with some tremendous certainty.

Service was a powerful thread throughout her life. Wherever she served, she made lifelong friendships.

We give thanks that she chose to retire to our Area Meeting. Barbara continued to serve; whether in one of the many roles to which she was appointed or on her own initiative. We could, and did, rely on her, just as she did on her inner teacher. Barbara didn't judge others and was loving and kind, especially towards children: celebrating their achievements and always taking care not to talk over their head. She cared for all around her, when you left her company, you always felt she cared for you.

Once, a Friend confessed that she did not have a job. Barbara said, "Oh, but I think people who are not in paid jobs are terribly important, because they have the flexibility to respond to the moment to what is needed. We need people who are not 'working'."

She trusted that God would guide the gathered meeting. As she became more frail, she would say "my role now is as a listener, to bear witness".

Generous with her time, her knowledge and her hospitality, Barbara's life was full of 'the fruit of the spirit': 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law' (Galatians 5, 22-23).

Signed in, and on behalf of, Craven & Keighley Area Meeting on
13 February 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Skidmore". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chris Skidmore, clerk