

Testimony to the Grace of God in the life of Elisabeth Margaret [Elma] Harland [3.3.1929 - 10.7.2024]

Our Friend Elma came to Quakers in Skipton in the early 1960s, after she and her husband Richard came to live in Grassington. She brought much to the meeting, having a strong Christian Quaker faith which was grounded in the Bible and in a deep knowledge of the faith and practice of Friends. She had, too, an attentiveness and openness of character and an instinct for hospitality which drew people to her.

An early memory of Elma's, and one she ministered about more than once in meeting, was the price paid by a Congregational minister in her home town for his conscientious objection in the First World War. This had led to social and professional isolation but Elma was clear that the principle he had proclaimed was a necessary, godly one and worth the price he had had to pay. In her Quaker life, and beyond, Elma sought always to support and promote activities for peace.

She became a stalwart of Mothers for Peace, an attempt - in the chilliest days of the Cold War between western governments and the Soviet Union and its satellite states - to build relationships across the political and physical barriers between those two blocs. She corresponded with women in Bulgaria, visited that country and Russia and attended an international peace conference in Bulgaria. Remarkably she and Richard were able to build a community within the small Dales village of Grassington which supported those bridge-building activities and joined in the creating and fostering of individual friendships. Years after Richard's death and Elma's illness the life of the Grassington Peace Group remains a testament to her work and character.

Elma was welcoming, encouraging, accommodating and hospitable. Her home, Four Winds, on the outskirts of Grassington was a place where the activists of Mothers for Peace could gather to reflect, discuss and recharge. But it was often visited by others: neighbours, and Quaker and non-Quaker friends who had a concern to reflect on, who were uncertain of next steps or who simply hoped for companionship. In the local meeting Elma often served in caring roles, ensuring that all Friends and attenders were known, and supported where that was needed.

For many years her home was the site of a summer garden party (if the Yorkshire weather allowed) for those connected with Skipton meeting. Elma understood that her Quaker life and that of others grew when it was given care. To that end she supported and participated in study groups over the years, some of which would gather at Four Winds. When there were painful disputes in the Area Meeting over property issues Elma was part of the Healing Hurts group which sought to listen to all affected by those.

Her love of music, singing, and dancing at a good Ceilidh was close to the heart of her. She knew and embraced joy in those activities and wanted to share them with others, a secret joy was not one with any attraction for her.

After Richard died in 2013 it became clear that Elma's intellect was weakening, her grasp on affairs lessening. She would spend the remainder of her life in care with less and less understanding of the world around her. However, those who visited her could say of her - as was said of William Penn in old age - that she was, 'as near the Truth, in the love of it, as before' and she retained her 'very loving deportment to all that came near.'

Signed in and on behalf of Craven & Keighley Area Meeting
held at Keighley on 9 November 2024

Handwritten signatures of David Heslop and Chris Skidmore. The signature for David Heslop is written in a cursive style, and the signature for Chris Skidmore is also cursive and includes a long horizontal flourish at the end.

David Heslop & Chris Skidmore, co-clerks