

Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of Margaret (Peggy) Thomas (1920 – 2025)

Peggy was born in London, the second eldest of 5 children. Aged 8, the family moved to Derbyshire. Her memories of the junior school she attended there are thus: “the classes were huge, the teachers shouted, corporal punishment was common, the headmistress a dragon...But some of the teaching was excellent and gave me a real love of history.” Those early thoughts resonate with the thoughts, principles and actions of the adult Peggy, condemning cruelty and violence, but always seeing and praising the good. She moved on via a scholarship to the local grammar school.

After leaving school, having taken 4 subjects for the Higher School Certificate, she took a “gap” year, doing part-time social work with the Personal Service League in Derby. The outbreak of the 2nd World War disrupted her hope of going to university. Her father had returned from fighting in the 1st World War as a convinced pacifist and Peggy shared his feeling about the horrors of war. She attended Peace Pledge Union meetings in Newcastle (by 1940 her father’s job had moved there) and contacted International Voluntary Service for Peace. They asked her to volunteer to work in a hostel for conscientious objectors, Esthwaite Lodge, near Hawkshead. Here she met David, one of the conscientious objectors, who had been sent there to work on forestry. They married in 1942, in Worcestershire where the War Agricultural Committee had asked David to work on a farming scheme.

In this time, Peggy was studying for a degree by correspondence, which she gained in 1944 and later, when they had moved to Newcastle, a Diploma in Education. David was also a trained teacher and teaching took them to Wennington School, a progressive boarding school near Wetherby, where Kenneth Barnes, a Quaker, was the headteacher.

In 1952 David got a job teaching Maths and Science at Scalby School, Scarborough and the family moved into 21 Red Scar Lane. Peggy ran a little nursery school at the house. Around 1960 she returned to teaching, initially part time, History, English and Geography. She was an excellent teacher but said that she always felt that it was not the best career for her and wished she could have further explored her early interest in social work.

That interest is evident in her organisation between 1966 and the early 1990s of an annual holiday in Scalby Church Rooms for “underprivileged” children who were accompanied by social workers from the Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield Family Service Units. She did this with the support of Scarborough Quaker Meeting. She and David had become members of the Religious Society of Friends after attending Scarborough Meeting for a while. They were drawn to the Society, having lived and worked alongside many Quakers during the war.

David died in 2000, following a long decline in which Peggy cared for him. She continued to live at 21 Red Scar Lane until she was well over 100 and then moved into Combe Hay Residential Home, where she spent 4 happy years.

Peggy was a stalwart in the meeting well into her old age, serving on many committees, often to be found in the kitchen, but everywhere positive and active, in her quiet unobtrusive way. Over many years she was actively committed to the work of Amnesty International, by letter writing and fund-raising, and to Quaker Peace and Social Witness, notably through holding coffee mornings in her home, the recycling of greeting cards and organising the sale of white poppies in November. She was always interested in other people and their stories, encouraging and supportive, remembering birthdays, and the names of children and grandchildren, alert and responsive to others' needs - a wonderful pastoral carer.

Peggy was simply a lovely, kind and gentle person. She exuded a quiet, serene presence, but with a spine of steel when it came to the principles and beliefs she held dear.

She was modest and reliable, with a freshness of thought that could surprise, stir and spur change. She would counter fear and despair by saying she trusted the essential kindness in the nature of human beings. To counter negatives, she would say "well rainy days are good for the flowers."

Despite severe deafness and sight loss in her later years, Peggy still radiated warmth and love of life and in this way connected with others. She could and did express her feelings with a light in her eyes and lovely smile. She was a joy to spend time with. She had a facility to pick up a sense of the needs of others and take action to help in a rightful, sensitive way.

Peggy is sadly missed but will be long remembered with affection, admiration and love - **a joyful embodiment of a true FRIEND.**

Signed,

Helen Rowlands, Clerk this time

Pickering and Hull Area Quaker Meeting

(Minute PHAQM/2025/54)