

## Eulogy for Joan Charlton

25 January 1921 - 5 February 2023



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Joan was born in Stanley, Co Durham where her father was a cashier at the local colliery. Joan's mother trained as a milliner and made the family clothes whilst teaching Joan sewing skills. Educated in Stanley, Joan's abiding memories are of Alderman Woods Secondary, now Tanfield School, where she developed her enjoyment of Latin and a lifelong delight in literature, especially the Classics.

In 1939, a Presbyterian Minister encouraged Joan to apply for an open scholarship at Oxford or Cambridge University. In this mining community, it was rare for anyone to go to University, particularly to Oxford or Cambridge - and a

woman at that!! So began her academic career gaining a place at Kirton College Cambridge.

Graduating from Cambridge with a BA Hons in English and a post graduate teaching certificate, Joan's first post was at Heaton High School Newcastle then, 5 years later, she became Head of English at Redland in Bristol. Another ten years passed and in 1958 she was back up North to take up a headship at Clitheroe in Lancashire before relocating to Carlisle County High School for girls to be nearer to her ageing parents.

Joan's final posting was at Queen Mary's a girls school in Lytham near Blackpool. It was at Lytham that she made the most progressive changes in educational and social opportunities.

She created a proper advanced science course resulting in a threefold increase in the number of students specialising in the sciences. Although a "Chalk and Board" person, Joan was very keen on her staff using Audio visual aids to teaching, building an audio visual room at the school, with a projection booth and a screen wall. Modern technology was not for Joan though who described herself as *uncomputerate*, finding computers terrifying.

She herself taught Classical studies and told the students stories from memory including from Homer's Odyssey and Beowulf. A number of staff members and pupils who were taught by Joan have remained in contact, many remembering her story telling as quite magical for them, awakening an interest in the Classics.

After Joan retired in 1971, her cousin Bob helped her to find a house (in Catton) which was described as a ruin at the time. After extensive renovation and rebuilding she moved into Brant Garth where she has lived for over 40 years. There was a near miss during the renovations when the gable wall collapsed whilst the builder and joiner were working inside - luckily no-one was hurt.

During the relocation to Catton, Joan's cousin Peggy was instrumental in helping her to sort out all the equipment, furnishings etc. for her home as Joan was starting with a blank canvas. Over the years Jill, Peggy's daughter, has taken on that mantle and has had increasing involvement as Joan's health deteriorated. Jill and her husband,

Harry took Joan on many holidays and day trips. Harry was amused when, after a fall over some cannon balls on the deck of the Trincomalee, an ambulance was called and Joan expressed her disappointment that no sirens were sounding. Asked about current medication at the hospital, she replied NONE. With instructions for the hairdresser about the head wound she admitted that she never saw a hairdresser and always cut it herself.

Brant Garth has a library of over 1200 books and Joan was an avid reader, continuing to increase her stock with much pleasure. Her garden was also very dear to her heart and I often caught her outside early morning in her dressing gown rejoicing in the new growth and opening buds. Of course, her overriding pleasure were her cats and Joan was delighted to hear that her beloved Grizelda was lovingly re-homed just across the lane from Brant Garth.

A loyal member of Catton Chapel, Joan involved herself in all activities. Her love of Poetry and wish to share this led to the Poetry and Music nights at Chapel which continued for many years.

A waitress at the monthly community lunch in this Chapel, she was always steady and sure footed despite still serving at 99 years old! Unlike Julie Walters in the 2 soups sketch, Joan never spilt a drop.

Together with her friend Mary, Joan was a volunteer at Talking Newspaper and was always well prepared with newspaper clippings of the more interesting items together with a freshly baked cake for the tea break. Mary remembers the pair exploring the countryside together searching for wild flowers and identifying those they didn't know in the book. In their late 80s and early 90s, Mary, Joan and Nell enjoyed travelling by plane to places like Delft in the Netherlands and Shetland. They were treated with such respect, 3 gentile older ladies exploring together.

Joan introduced me to Catton WI where she had been an active member for almost 40 years. She was a keen environmentalist and in 1988 she went to the WI AGM at Royal Albert Hall where she spoke to a resolution about CFC pollution.

She regularly attended Music in Allendale with Mary, particularly enjoying the music of Schubert and Mozart. When I told Joan that I was a First Responder she said "What can I do to help?" and joined the group as minute taker - so like her to say that.

As you can see Joan immersed herself in community life in Catton and was a well respected member of this village and the surrounding area. She was a kind, gentle and inspirational woman and we were blessed to have her among us.

And, as Joan would say when you were leaving, BLESS YOU.