

**Paddy Nesham
1920 -2009**

I have been asked to speak on behalf of Paddy's family and I am very grateful to the vicar of this parish, Jean Burrows, for allowing me to do so from this lovely old pulpit.

I had better start with a personal admission of guilt; for over 20 years Paddy had been 'on at me' as her neighbour, to persuade the Diocese of Canterbury Property Services, to cut down the Leylandii trees which used to be all along the front of the vicarage garden, and spoiled a lovely south facing view from Scarbutts Manor across the valley.

It was only when the tree roots finally burst the mains water pipe to the vicarage that I could bring literal pressure to bear on the Diocese, to have all trees felled, and by that time it was too late; she had moved 3 doors down the road to Britannia House, and the view was lost. She, now being in heaven and able to see all she needs to see, will, I know, be smiling down on us all in a forgiving mood, on this gorgeous Spring morning. .

All that an obituary or eulogy can hope to do, is to give a thumb-nail sketch of the person's life, and it is for you as individuals to pick up on the story from there. It is your thoughts and memories which are the most important part of the exercise, and will provide you with suitable remembrances of this remarkably energetic woman. It is very likely that you first met her, or first saw her, performing a public duty, because it is my impression that Paddy was always there, whatever the occasion. The last time I saw her, was at Gordon Ottaway's farewell from being Chair of the Parish Council of Boughton - sitting down, which was unusual for her, but there nevertheless, doing her duty when it mattered.

Paddy's birthday was the 13th Aug and she was born in 1920 in Gosport Hampshire, the daughter of a naval surgeon, so that she was used to moving house & home on a regular basis in her young days. I suspect that it was her father who drilled into her, the importance of duty and service. She had a good Roman Catholic Girl's School education at the convent school in Tunbridge Wells, and then spent a year at the Sorbonne in Paris, studying French and French literature.

In 1938, she joined her parents by then stationed in Malta. Malta was the Mediterranean base for the Royal Navy at that time, and was a place, so it is said, of endless socialising and parties for those who were stationed there before the outbreak of the 2nd WW. John Nesham was a soldier not a sailor, but his unit was stationed on this strategic island along with many others. He was unusually placed as an army liaison officer with the Royal Air Force

In Paddy's father's view, this young officer called Nesham was an "impecunious,

wild and entirely unsuitable man.”

His future father-in-law's opinion did not stop John and Paddy marrying, and despite the declaration of War, the young couple lined up for the ceremony at St John's Cathedral Valetta, in November 1939.

They duly arrived, as arranged, at the Cathedral door at 2.00pm, only to find the place locked and the caretaker gone home for a three hour siesta. The Roman Catholic priest took pity on them and sent them to his flat to await developments. At 5.00pm they were finally allowed into the building and to hold the ceremony which was to herald a lifetime's commitment to one another as man and wife

In the following year, in 1940, Paddy returned to England from Malta, and became involved in the rescue of the British Expeditionary Forces returning from the fateful experience of Dunkirk. She provided food and comfort, and wrote letters to anxious family members at home, to let them know their loved ones were safely back in this country.

She then moved to Devon, to live once again, with her parents. They had bought a market garden and she was fully occupied with growing and marketing the produce. John meanwhile, was in North Africa for two and a half years without any home contact, but as chance will have these things, she was reading a magazine one day, waiting for her turn in the dentist's chair, when she saw a photo of troops in a magazine, and one of those soldiers was without any shadow of a doubt, her husband John. So she knew he was at least alive, and this wartime photo has been treasured ever since.

Their war was to continue with a whole series of events, each one more astounding than the last, but we need to move the story on.

After the war was over, in 1948, they bought a barge at Conyer creek, near Teynham. There was a housing shortage after all, and by this time they had two children

The barge was converted back from being a static boat, into a sailing vessel and according to John, was considered to provide not only a home, but also holidays at home with the bonus of a two week sail every year.

Now here is a strange quirk of fate. Their next door neighbours on the water, in a similar barge moored alongside in Conyer Creek, were a couple called Arthur and Di Couchman, who were friends of my parents, and I was taken to The Creek as a 7 yr old, to visit these strange people who lived on the water. I was intrigued and entranced by the whole romantic notion of a floating home. Knowing of this story, Paddy arranged a re-union lunch with my parents' old friends, almost as soon as we arrived in Boughton in 1983

The Nesham family moved to Scarbutts in 1958, which then had uninterrupted views of the countryside. No motorway and no vicarage, just hop-gardens in the valley.

Paddy soon threw herself into village life as a keen member of the Women's Institute, then a Parish Councillor, Borough Councillor, County Councillor, responsible for Kent's Educational Services, and eventually the first woman chairman of the Kent County Council.

She retired from this in 1988, but the list goes on to include the Kent Association for The Blind as chairman and president, she was on the Council of Kent University from 1979 - 1995, she was a Deputy Lieutenant for the county, chairman of the governors at Ashford School, a member of Boughton Parish Council and Boughton Village Hall Committee, which is why we are all destined for Boughton village hall after this service. Her breathtaking energy also included the KSSA. (Kent Schools Sailing Association)

I could go on, but I don't think she would thank me for it, because despite her astounding energy, she was essentially a self-effacing and modest person, and this made her very good company. She was one of those people who when you were at a large gathering, could be relied upon for a self-effacing joke and a memorable conversation. Her hobbies were actually quite solitary; embroidery, reading, gardening and looking after her beloved animals.

She will be remembered for always being there and doing her duty, both private and public. These days that is a very rare quality, but in the eternal quest for staying young and active and involved, Paddy's life is a shining example. For those who may imagine that retirement is a time when the feet go up and brain switches off, she is a reminder that life is for living, and no moment on this earth, should be wasted. In her case, no moments in her long and distinguished life, were ever wasted.

May her soul rest this day in peace, and her dwelling place be in Heaven. Amen.

Revd William Mowll 13.03.09.

Chaplain to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Formerly vicar of Boughton Under Blean w Dunkirk & Hernhill 1983-2007

