

Beryl

I had hoped that after having such a small funeral, we would be able to arrange a memorial service for Beryl, but unfortunately time has marched on. Kieran and Sarah are still unable to leave Australia; and Eamonn, Keeley and Hattie the USA. So I thought I would send out a small eulogy which we would have used at the service.

Beryl was born in September 1927, first child of Harold and Ellen Gibbons. They lived at Speen to begin with then moved to Sands when she was a toddler. Peter was born in 1930. They both attended Sands primary school and then moved to Millend Road secondary school. Beryl left school at 14 as she had lost interest by then!!

Her passion for music started at an early age, Harold played the cornet in West Wycombe brass band which was her introduction.

Mum wrote this article for a church magazine and I would like to share with you:

Organ playing through the years

Beryl Peatey

I was nine years old when I was taught to read music. My teacher was a lady at Sands Methodist chapel where I was brought up. I seemed to pick this up very quickly I having been nurtured on brass bands! Joking apart! I do believe that this is a god-given gift, which I try to use for His honour and glory.

My first instrument was a harmonium, which had to be pedalled to make a sound. This is how I learned to play the organ at home. My granny also had one, and I used to love going to Prestwood to play hers, and making up tunes on the black notes. These always fascinated me-how I wish pupils today thought the same! Sands chapel had a harmonium which was used for weeknight meetings and it was at one of these meetings that I met Ken.

Once I could read the notes I was well away, and my mother complained that I was always playing hymns. Hymns are not the easiest things to play as the notes are so close together. This is a good way to conquer sight-reading. When I went to secondary school I was able to play for hymn practice.

When I was thirteen I began playing the organ at Sands chapel-this was a bigger reed organ which had been put onto electricity. Previously a church member used to pump it! I didn't use the pedals at first. There were other people at the chapel who could play hymns quite well, and so I joined the team.

We used to be given a small piece of paper with the numbers on at the time of the service (no time to practise). One local preacher told me, years after, how I used to scare him when he came to preach: the organ faced the pulpit!

The day came when my father bought me a piano. I was so thrilled with this piano which was delivered in a truck on the back of a car. We lived on a bank - how it was pushed up to the house was a miracle. Now I started having piano lessons with a proper music teacher. I took grade 5 exam straight away and had to learn all the theory. After a couple of years, I began organ lessons with Owen Hickman, the Borough organist. I had lessons on Trinity and Oxford road organs, as they were bigger instruments than the one at Sands. I remember what a struggle it was, grinding through the first book of Bach (this involves reading three staves of music including one for the feet.) This is probably why I rarely play any Bach. I took one exam on the Town Hall organ and passed with merit.

My first visit to play at another church was Cores End where I was paid 7s 6d. I had to go on the bus and didn't care for this organ as the swell box was stuck on the side. It was like playing a traction engine!

During these years I was learning all kinds of music, and accompanying small orchestras, going out on concerts-most of this during the war. It was during the war that the circuit choir was formed, , met Ken Fox and continued lessons with him on Wesley organ. This was a lovely instrument and in a position where you are not on view. The organ we have today is not to be compared. Lots of music I have can't be played on the present one-and' hate being on view.

The first wedding I played for was a friend's at Sands chapel. I was not at all confident.

One Sunday morning I played for a wedding at 9.30am-the bridegroom was on embarkation leave. One or two weddings have special memories for me-not at Wesley let me add! I had been playing for half an hour when the minister came upstairs and said 'Keep on playing, the bridegroom's done a bunk' I shall never forget it. I went on for another half an hour, then the wedding was called off. The reception was all ready in the schoolroom!' understand the guests were looked after-and I did play for the wedding three weeks later.

An organist friend asked me to play for his wedding and gave me a list of music to perform. This took half an hour. Then I had a message to say that the bride's father's suit didn't fit (he was a very tall man) and someone had to go to Wycombe for another suit, so I had to start the recital all over again!

Then there was the day I played for a wedding and three weeks later played for the bridegroom's funeral. Funerals are very hard to cope with especially when the person is known to you.

Years ago I attended a seminar at Victoria street chapel with the Rev Francis Westbrook, who gave demonstrations on music and hymn playing. He stressed that the organist sets the pace when playing the pattern tune, and not to let the congregation change the speed. I have always tried to abide by this, as no two hymns are sung at the same tempo. I like to play each verse, trying to read the words as well as the music.

Organists are there to encourage people to sing, I do pray for strength to do this for a while longer.

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Harold went off to war and instructed Beryl to look after Mum and Peter. She took this responsibility seriously and became quite bossy. In fact, she nagged Peter so much one day because he refused to do his music practice, he threw a bowl of apples at her!

Beryl went to work in a solicitor's office in High Wycombe, in Rectory Avenue (just above the station), and used to ride her cycle each way. One day her brakes failed as she was coming down the hill, she lost the heels from her shoes trying to slow down.



In the 1940's, the social life centred around the Methodist church and music. Churches were very lively at that time, lots of *activities* and a great place for young people to get together. Ken was a local preacher, still in the RAF, and quite dashing in his *uniform*. He came to Sands Methodist church to preach one

evening and I think Beryl was quite smitten! They were married in 1946.

They lived in High Wycombe and went to Westbourne Street Methodist church, joining in as much as possible. Dad was not at all musical!!

They moved to Booker in the early 50's, Kerry was adopted in 1954, I was born in 1956. Wesley Methodist church became the centre of our lives, as there were lots of young families, mum was involved with the music and we joined in the choir, cubs/scouts/brownies/guides etc. We used to look for mum's hat bobbing above the

blue curtain while she played the organ on a Sunday morning. She played for many weddings and funerals, and also did the church flowers.

Mum had a baby grand piano which was her pride and joy. I remember hearing mum playing the piano sometimes after I had been put to bed in the evening-very soothing,



and must have helped me drift off to sleep. We had several concerts in the garden at home, and mum was involved in many choral productions: Gilbert and Sullivan, Easter-Messiah, Crucifixion etc. She was an accomplished pianist and organist and ran the choir at Wesley. I am sure many choir members will have very happy memories of those times.

Mum also played the piano for dancing classes and ballet exams, Womens league of health and beauty (before recorded music was used). She was the reserve accompanist for Wycombe Orpheus choir for many years, and was also involved with the Wycombe philharmonic choir (ladies), and the Swan singers. Beryl enjoyed singing with various different groups of people over the years, and loved doing afternoon entertainment for residential homes and other groups. She was never keen on pop music. I remember she was quite perturbed when asked to play 'fa whiter shade of pale' at a wedding. However, she went along with it and managed very well.

We always had great Christmases at home, singing carols, musical games etc. We had lots of visitors to the house, Mum used to say anyone was welcome - 'sinners and all!' She was a good cook, having been taught by her mother who had been in service'. Kieran recently reminded me, we used to get the occasional 'disaster pudding' but it was usually edible.

We used to go on Methodist guild holidays, these were great fun and we met some lovely families. Entertainment night was on the final evening of the week and everyone was expected to participate. On one of these occasions, mum had organised a group of the men to dress up in crepe paper skirts and attempt some ballet moves whilst she played the dance of the sugar plum fairy. I remember the hairy legs trotting down a beautiful sweeping staircase. Brought the house down!!

In 1969 we moved to Kingsley Crescent, which was nearer to the town and my school. My friend who called for me in the morning to go to school would always be asked in

the winter if she had a vest on Mum felt the cold badly and was very sensitive to draughts.

Mum took a job as a dinner lady at the nearby church of England primary school. She really enjoyed the company of young children, but was strict with them. They always had hand inspection before they were allowed into the canteen!

When I went off to university in 1974, Beryl took up piano teaching to keep herself busy. She found this very rewarding, and I am very proud that she has passed on her talents and enthusiasm to so many of her pupils. One pupil was very reluctant to continue with the piano aged around 9, but after mum's determination, went on to do a music degree and has a good career in music. (This same student later taught Kieran to play the trumpet!). She encouraged and accompanied me and my cousins Ruth, Ian and Diana with their music exams, sometimes practice was done via telephone landline.

Mum and Dad were fortunate to be able to take some lovely holidays, sometimes with friends. It has been great looking through all the photos (she loved taking pictures). They visited Rhodesia in 1982 where Ken had been stationed for part of the war. (They were tempted to emigrate!) Their holidays included visits to Portugal, Cyprus, Scotland, Italy, and many more places and included a Caribbean cruise.

She took a particularly good photo of Bradenham church which was made into notelets to be sold at the annual fete.

Mum enjoyed helping to organise our wedding in 1979, particularly the music. Choir members were in attendance so we had great singing. I was NOT allowed to be late for my wedding, Mum had played for many weddings and in some cases the bride could be up to an hour late! She considered this to be very bad manners, and disrespectful to the organist!

In 1985 Mum and Dad downsized to a bungalow in Hughenden. It had a lovely garden which they both enjoyed, and they had some very happy times there. Beryl continued to teach the piano and also enjoyed going to the local primary school to help with singing sessions, school productions etc.

Mum and Dad were a great help to us with the boys, they really loved helping and watching them grow up. Kieran, Eamonn and Rory have very fond memories of their regular after school and weekend visits throughout their childhood, and of course, Mum gave them piano lessons and encouraged them with their other instruments. We had some fun holidays together when the boys were small, and have many great memories of the times we spent together.

In 2011, Mum and dad moved to a flat in Flackwell Heath as the garden had become too much for them. They decided to attend Christchurch nearby as the journey to the town centre was too difficult. The church members were very welcoming, and have been a constant source of support and friendship. After dad passed away in 2012, this was a real lifeline for mum, she knew she was always welcome at coffee in the mornings and various other meetings during the week. When mum had to give up driving lifts were organised for her and she was very grateful for that. Everyone at the church has been very supportive and we cannot thank them enough.

It was a pity we were not able to have a better funeral for Mum, but the circumstances were very difficult. Her ashes will be buried with Dad early next year, at Speen.

Thank you all for your kind messages and cards, they were very much appreciated. I hope you have enjoyed reading this. Please share with anyone who may have known Beryl.

Carol & Joe December 2021



Beryl's & Ken's 60th wedding anniversary