

Merril Lilley 1931-2024

Sheila and Jeremy Cope

Merril was Editor of the Dover Society Newsletter for fourteen years, having taken over from Philomena Kennedy who was responsible for producing the first ten issues, the first seven of which were A4 pages stapled together. With the major assistance of Budge Adams, the eighth issue became the booklet which is so familiar to this day and Merrill succeeded Philomena for No.11 in September 1991. Budge and Merrill worked closely together, and it was under Budge's influence that Merrill bought her first computer. Imagine trying to produce such a publication without one now! The role of Editor was supremely suited to Merrill's talents and interest in creative writing and language. Articles were varied and interesting and Merrill drew upon a wide selection of resources, using some gentle arm-twisting in the process. Our Newsletter became an important ambassador for the Society and made a connection with members who were unable to attend meetings and events.

Merril was born into a close-knit community in Pontypool in Gwent. Aunts and grandparents lived nearby and she had a younger brother Colin. At the local Girls' Grammar School, Merrill's main subjects were English, History and Geography and she continued with these at Aberystwyth University choosing PE as a subsidiary subject, having always enjoyed hockey as she was a fast runner. This proved to be a good choice which served Merrill well when applying for subsequent teaching jobs.

While working at a holiday camp in Rhyll during the vacation, Merrill met Eric, her future husband, but in the years before marriage she enjoyed halcyon days, including



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a trip to Paris with a girlfriend and many London theatre performances, as she was living with an aunt in Essex. Merrill's first teaching post was at a comprehensive school in Dagenham, where she was able to engage the pupils with Athletics and Gymnastics. Merrill and Eric, also a teacher, had three children, Derek, Peter and Alison, and remained in the Greater London area, moving homes as the needs of their growing family and promotions dictated. Merrill became a lecturer in English and Primary Studies at Middlesex Polytechnic and with the children approaching adulthood, she and Eric agreed to an amicable divorce.

Sometime later Merrill joined the Jane Austen dating society. One may imagine why the name appealed. There she met Bruce, a widower. After a few meetings, Bruce surprised Merrill by booking a room at the hotel in Cala D'Or, Majorca, where she was staying with Alison and her friend. Their subsequent marriage surprised no-one. Merrill's brother Colin and his family had settled in Cala D'Or and Merrill and Bruce spent many summers there, eventually buying a holiday home of their own nearby.

Approaching retirement, Merrill was offered redundancy and Bruce sought to sell his business. It was called Indeline and manufactured the white paint used for marking out sports' pitches. Fortunately for us all, Merrill and Bruce decided to settle in Dover and bought a house at East Cliff which was large enough to accommodate Merrill's mother, Betty, in her own suite. Later, Bruce's mother, Ivy, went to live there too. For a time Merrill did supply teaching locally and then joined U3A and started a writing group. The couple

played golf and went on cruises, making many friends along the way. Merrill and Bruce had a gift for friendship and hospitality, and recognised the importance of bringing people together. All this time Merrill was editing the Newsletter.

For five years Merrill and Bruce lived at Cavalry Court in Deal but finally returned to The Gateway and the Dover they both loved, in all spending a total of almost thirty years here. Sadly, Bruce's health deteriorated and Merrill was left alone, helping to keep his memory alive with Bruce's Story, Newsletters 81-84. Two years later, she was persuaded to move to sheltered accommodation near to Peter and Alison in Bishops Stortford where, needless to say, she set up a creative writing group. An anthology of poems and articles was published in 2018. At Merrill's funeral, The White Cliffs of Dover was the introductory music and Matthew Arnold's Dover Beach was read by Peter.

We have a copy of the anthology and also a booklet of Merrill's poems and her autobiography, which any member is welcome to borrow. In her autobiography Merrill often mentions her luck, but she achieved her own luck, having the courage to perceive and seize opportunities. With her sharp intelligence, Merrill's contributions to committee meetings were relevant and valuable but her greatest legacy to the Society will always be Newsletters 11-52, published under her Editorship.

We knew Merrill and Bruce quite well and were invited to their home at East Cliff on several occasions. Merrill recognised the importance of bringing people together and was always active in promoting the social side of the Dover Society.

I took over from Merrill as Membership Secretary in the early days when she offered to become Editor of the Newsletter, a role

supremely suited to her talents and interest in creative writing and language. We understand that she continued with this type of work even after leaving Dover.

Merril was much missed when she left the committee because her contributions were always valuable. We regret that there will be no more Christmas cards arriving with small notes inside.

The Sea

Written by Merrill Lilley

Read by niece Victoria at the funeral service

I love the sea,
 I like to live on the edge of it.
 I lived on the seafront
 For four years in the fifties,
 Now I only remember
 (I don't know why this is)
 The sweep of the grey,
 Of Cardigan Bay,
 And days when violent storms
 Could lose the promenade,
 Obliging us to battle our way home
 Buffeted through the backstreets.
 Now, on the kinder south coast,
 Half a century on,
 I have time to observe its complacency.
 It may lie, languid and limp,
 Lapping innocently on the shoreline,
 Lulling one to a tranquil contemplation of its
 beauty;
 While beneath it may be simmering
 Like an unattended pan,
 Waiting to froth and boil
 Over the unsuspecting quay
 In unexpected fury.
 The chameleon furtiveness of it
 Fascinates me;
 The change from limpid blue,
 Through turquoise to sea green,
 The slate grey, is accomplished
 Within the hour.
 It can lift flagstones, move buildings,
 Shatter windscreens, terrorise us
 With immense ten-foot waves.
 I fear the sea.