

Helen Bissett

When Helen was living with her family for a short time in Morden, she used to hang over her gate and call out to the schoolchildren passing by, “when I’m a big girl, I’m going to come to your school too”. Little did she know that when she did go finally to that school, it would be as its Deputy Head.

Helen was born in Clapham in 1930 and had two much younger brothers. From Clapham, the family moved temporarily to Morden, and then out to Banstead, where they bought a house. Helen went to the village school and, like her father before her, she outgrew the education available at primary school before it was time to move on to secondary school,



so she went to an interim school before moving on to Rosebery Grammar School. Helen left after matriculation, much to the Head Teacher’s chagrin, and went to work for the Bank of England as a ledger machine operator.

It was at the Bank of England that Helen first met Malcolm. She thought he was dishy and forward, and they hit it off immediately. And there began a romance that lasted over 60 years. Malcolm married Helen despite strong opposition from his mother and they moved to their house in Walsingham Gardens.

After her marriage, Helen decided that she would rather work closer to home, and she got a job at

Bentalls working on the same type of machines that she had been using at the Bank of England. She stopped working just before she had her three children, Andrew, Gillian and Brian, and stayed at home to look after them until Brian had almost completed secondary school.

Malcolm was not keen on Helen returning to the workplace, saying that she had the children (and him) to look after, but she managed to win him over, and enrolled on a 3 year teacher training course at Whitelands in Putney. Helen trained to be

an RE teacher, with music as a subsidiary, and it was a joy for her to return to studying as well as music. On graduating, Helen began working as an RE teacher at



Helen and Malcolm in 1954

Coombe, and then she moved schools to take up the position of Deputy Head at The Willows in Morden. The very same school (though now a senior girls' school) that she had wanted to go to as a small girl. Helen became Acting Head when the Head retired. Then she herself retired early when the school merged with a nearby co-educational school.

Helen found retirement at 53 very boring. After some time off, she decided to go back to work, and worked as an outside clerk for the solicitors Lewis and Dick for seven to eight years until retiring again.

Helen has always felt she had an affinity for the Church. As a girl of 13 she would ask her mother if she could attend her village Church in Banstead, where she listened intently to the sermons (not always understanding them) and she loved the singing. After her marriage to Malcolm, they would both attend Evensong at St. John's, Stoneleigh, three or four times a month. But it was after a house visit from the Curate of St. Mary's, who informed them

that they actually lived on the borders of his parish, that they decided to try out their own parish Church.

When John Atkins became Vicar at St. Mary's, he encouraged Malcolm to become more involved and, before long, Malcolm became the Chair of the PCC. Helen had young children at the time, who took up a lot of her time, but she too was encouraged to play a more active role, and she taught children up to the age of 14 at Sunday School.

Later on, Helen trained as a Reader, by doing a Bachelor of Divinity, and she became more and



Helen became a Licensed Reader in 1984

more involved with the Church and was on the Readers' Board at Diocesan level. Her great disappointment was not being accepted for ordination. But

she eventually came to terms with this and attributed it philosophically to something that God meant to teach her, and it was therefore a learning experience for her. Helen's family is tremendously important to her. She thanks God for Malcolm and for her three children.

A feisty, intelligent lady with a spirit of independence, who was married to a man of routine with very traditional values, as a couple they are an example of compromise, persistence and great love.