

TIMES REMEMBERED

Mary Hews and Eileen Burton

Mary and Eileen met over a labour ward bed in 1962. Mary was a Sister at the time, and Eileen was a Staff Nurse and they have been the very best of friends ever since.

Mary was born on 5th December 1931. She lived with her parents and brother in Sherfield on Lodden in Hampshire, where she spent a very happy childhood. When she was eighteen she trained as a nurse at Westminster Hospital, and then went on to train as a midwife in Cardiff, where she qualified in September 1955. Having qualified, Mary worked in a maternity home in Basingstoke for three years, before taking off to Toronto in Canada for a year, where



she worked as a general nurse. When she returned, Mary worked at The National Hospital in Queen's Square, which specialises in diseases of the nervous system. Dr Roger Bannister was working there at the time.

In February 1961, Mary came to Kingston Hospital where she started as a Sister, then became Departmental Sister, then a Tutor and, finally, Director of Midwifery Services, a title she retained until she retired in 1988. "I had always been keen on teaching all my life – I wanted to teach or nurse, and I ended up doing both." On two occasions, Mary got her whole set through

their midwifery exams. The consultant had said that if this ever happened he would take the whole set, tutors and some of the senior Sisters out to dinner. He had to do this twice.

Another important part of Mary's life was her membership of the Royal College of Midwives. She was Secretary, Chairman and President of the local branch. Then, nationally, a Regional Representative, then member of Council, Chairman of the English Board and on retirement, Chairman of the Benevolent Fund. Every three years an International Congress of Midwives is held somewhere in the world. Mary went to five of these; London, Israel, Washington, Vancouver and Japan (where Eileen was the official delegate).

Mary used to ring the bells in the Church in her village from a young age. This was tower

ringing. She loved it and can remember ringing on New Year's Eve at Midnight Mass. When Mary moved she joined a hand bell group in Tolworth, and the group played at St. Mary's several times.

As Director of Midwifery, Mary lived in a designated flat in Kingston Hospital. But in 1975 she bought the house in Worcester Park where she has lived ever since. When her mother died, Mary no



Mary Hews

longer went to the Church in her home village and started attending St. Mary's more regularly. She had already attended the Church when supporting Eileen's children, Louise and James, at Church parades.

Mary never married. At that time, most midwifery sisters were single. It used to be expected in general nursing that one didn't marry.

Eileen was born in 1936 in Wisbech in Cambridgeshire. She was an only child and at first she lived with her parents in her grandmother's house in Wisbech. She was not there very long before the family moved up to the outskirts of London - Barking, then Hayes - as her father was working for Fairey Aviation until the end of the War. After this the family moved to Bideford in North Devon, where Eileen lived until she was 17. She then went to work first at the Bristol Dental Hospital, and then the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

Eileen did her midwifery training at Queen Charlotte's Hospital, doing 6 months at Queen Charlotte's and then 6 months at the newly-built

Hillingdon Hospital. She had always wanted to be a district midwife, but after she actually worked as a student district midwife, she went off the idea.



Eileen Burton

Eileen used to pedal around the cobbled streets of Kilburn and Willesden on a rickety bicycle with no gears, and often found herself "kneeling on the floor, with brown paper under the mattress and putting the bed up on bricks so you didn't break your back". She remembers going to her first delivery on her dreadful old bike. Coming from a middle class background where everything was nice she looked around for the cot, only to find that it was a bottom drawer, padded out and resting on two chairs.

After completing her midwifery training, Eileen went home to work in Devon, where she worked in a small maternity unit which was, “Still in the Dark Ages”. They were still keeping the patients in bed for three days after the birth, or seven days after a Caesarian. But she certainly honed her midwifery skills there as she found herself in charge (just qualified) with no back-up. There was a doctor in Casualty, but not an Obstetrician only GP Obstetricians, who came in from time to time.

From Devon, she applied to Kingston Hospital, who accepted her without an interview, and she started as a Staff Midwife, becoming a Sister a year later. Eileen worked at Kingston for about 10 years before she got married and had a family, returning to work part-time when the children got older. Eileen moved from New Malden to Worcester Park in 1976. The children went to Cubs and Brownies, and that’s how Eileen started

coming to St. Mary’s. Later, when Mary came to Worcester Park and started going to St. Mary’s, Eileen began to go with her more regularly. She remembers with amusement the chaos of a pet service held by Michael, the gorgeous Curate, in the Vicarage garden.

Mary and Eileen have a rare and enduring friendship, which is based on a deep respect and love for one another. It is a joy to behold. They themselves admit that they are very different. Mary is very correct and proper, and Eileen is bolshie and speaks her mind, but they both have a wonderful sense of humour and it is a joy to spend time in their company. Mary and Eileen cleaned the Church every fifth Friday of the month, with Sue, Jenie and Sara, until they were no longer able to do so.

Footnote

Sadly, Eileen and Mary passed away within a few weeks of each other. Eileen on the 27th September and Mary on 20th October 2020