

TRIBUTE TO JEAN

I first met Jean around 1997 when Christina and I invited her and her husband John to drinks at our house Priory Court in Duns Tew not long after we first moved there from London. We got on very well and many years later Jean confided to me that she had taken a great liking to Christina from the moment they had met. Praise indeed and the foundation of a friendship that was to last for the rest of her life.

Perhaps it was a common interest in things equestrian that drew us together. At that time our young children, two sons and a daughter, were at the pony stage and Jean offered her support and encouragement in helping them to develop their riding skills. She was wonderful with young people generally, always finding time to work with them, and she very kindly offered us the manège and other facilities at Heath Farm. She was generous in awarding marks for dressage, particularly where boys were concerned.

Over the succeeding years and after we moved to Over Worton in 2001, we were to enjoy many convivial evenings at Heath Farm. Jean loved to entertain and always ensured that her guests were not wanting. Her dinner parties continued until the small hours and sometimes after dinner the jollity spilled over on to the dance floor, a place where Jean was never more at home and her skills evident. When the music started to play, she would make a clicking sound to the rhythm, impatient to get on to the floor.

Other memorable events at Heath Farm included the annual meet of the Heythrop Hunt where I was put in charge of dispensing stirrup cups to those attending. Fox hunting was a passion and John and Jean were Joint Secretaries of the Heythrop for over twenty years, a remarkable achievement. Jean was a distinguished competition dressage rider and dressage judge, travelling to Europe in both roles. For many years she judged at the Blenheim Horse

Trials and presented the prizes, sadly for the last time in 2010 due to her failing health. On that occasion, Christina persuaded the event officials to allow her to drive Jean directly across the showground to the organizers' tent where she was met with a most enthusiastic reception.

Jean took great interest in the Oxford Riding Club and always tried to attend the annual dinners which were usually held in local pubs such as the Mason's Arms near Swerford where on one memorable evening I escorted her, immaculately turned out in a favourite red dress. On our way to the dining room we both slipped on the short staircase, ending up in an inelegant tangle on the floor but quite unharmed. I was to be gently reminded of this incident in years to come.

In the middle of the last decade, Jean was struck down with a mysterious illness which left her unconscious in hospital for a couple of weeks or so. The doctors could offer no explanation and a general air of pessimism prevailed until, without warning she regained consciousness, and it is said that her reply to the hospital staff on being offered liquid refreshment was: "A large gin and tonic, please", her favourite tippie. There was no doubt that she had made a miraculous recovery ! The cause of her illness is not known to this day. On her return home she continued to look after her husband John, who was in declining health and had virtually lost his eyesight.

After John died and over the next few years, Jean's health deteriorated. She had a number of falls and broke a leg which resulted in her having to give up riding and driving a car, but she always remained optimistic about resuming those activities. She enjoyed a good social life, entertaining at home, bridge parties and excursions whilst becoming increasingly housebound. It was during this period that Christina and I and other friends would regularly visit her on Mondays, when she always took the trouble to be

beautifully dressed and made up. I had the opportunity to learn more about her past life, her first meeting with John, a dashing young army officer about town, whom she first met in the most unlikely place, in the sluice of the London hospital where she was working as a nurse during the Second World War. She confided that this was love at first sight and then would recount at length about their marriage, honeymoon at Claridge's, life in London, postings abroad in Africa and Europe and then Oxfordshire. My impression was of a devoted couple happily married for over sixty years. A friend of mine told me recently that about twenty years ago when she was having difficulty in conceiving a child, she consulted Jean who said: "Come over and see me tomorrow and I'll give you some advice. My friends and I talk about sex all the time !" Jean never lost her sense of fun and zest for life. She was a most attractive, charming and gracious lady.

During our visits, Jean and I discovered that we had a shared interest in the music of the 1930's and 1940's which later I used to play for her on the piano at parties at Heath Farm. I also gave her several Compact Discs, containing classic tracks from those periods. Her favourite song was probably "How do you do, Mr Right" recorded in London in 1938 by the delightful Frances Day. Jean said that it reminded her of her first meeting with John and I would like to read you the lyrics.

"How do you do Mr Right ?
Can it be true, well it might.
I have searched the whole world over,
It's like looking for a four leafed clover,
Out of the blue, Mr Right.
But now I've met you Mr Right,
I'll stick like glue day and night,
If you were to make advances
and imagine that your chances might be bright,
You'd be right, Mr Right.

Every time I go to a dance
I know there's a chance
I'll meet the right man,
and if he's a bright man
then he'll sweep me off my feet,
and if I should meet him today
this is how I'll greet him and say:

(And then back to the first verse).

We shall miss her greatly.

God bless, Jean