

## As we celebrate the life of Beryl Clinch

The name Beryl: Meaning a precious stone, emerald or aquamarine in colour

Born on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1923 in Brighton, Beryl was the only child of Edward (Ted) and Irene (Rene) Wigelsworth. They met whilst serving behind the front line in Etaples, Northern France in 1917. Ted a Yorkshireman and Rene a Londoner.

Beryl's father was a master tailor and ran a number of Gents outfitters along the Sussex coast with her grandfather. Her early childhood memories were of happy times spent on the esplanade and pier in Brighton and picnicking on the South Downs.

The family regularly holidayed on the IOW, taking the same beach hut at Shanklin each year. Her father was a keen cricketer and with Beryl in tow would umpire teams of children playing beach cricket whilst her mother kept score from the hut steps.

These were happy days as a family but in 1936 Beryl's parents parted company, when she was 13. These must have been difficult times for an only child despite the love they both gave her. Beryl remained in Brighton with her mother.

Much to her excitement, Beryl gained a scholarship to Varndean Grammar School for Girls in 1934. She was an active member of the school choir and loved sport. Tennis and swimming were her favourites, the latter her real passion, which led to her representing the school and county. In later years, she assured us that if war had not broken out when it did, frustrating her swimming activities, she would have had an Olympic career!

As for many of her generation, war did interrupt her childhood and she had to grow up quickly.

Beryl left school in 1939 and commenced working at Boots (then a department store) in Brighton. This was her first experience of retailing and one that she enjoyed very much.

She used to work on the cosmetics counter and when not busy advising on lipstick and perfume, her duties also included acting as look out on the roof of the building, for the German bombers as they came across the Channel on route for raids on London.

It was not long before the seriousness of the war led to young women like Beryl realising that they were required to replace men in the work place.

Beryl opted to join the Women's Land Army, a rude awakening for a townie like her!

She commenced training at Plumpton Agricultural College in 1941 along with numerous other girls drafted in to work the farms of the UK to ensure that Britain did not run out of food.

Beryl soon realised that a full face of make-up and painted nails were not going to be appreciated by the cows in the milking parlour at 4am!

As hard as the work was, Beryl was fortunate to have found favour with the man in charge of her training. He was called Bill Clinch, a student asked to stay on and join the regular staff when war broke out.

Beryl, was always keen to inform us that her liaisons with Bill had to be kept low-key. This was to avoid upset amongst the other girls also vying for his affections!

Bill's way of handling this was to ensure that Beryl was shown no favouritism, often given the worst tasks to handle, as a result, but all with a twinkle in his eye!

Beryl survived the ordeal and had very fond memories of her time in the Land Army, whether ploughing or hay making, with people who would remain life-long friends.

It appeared that after 5 years this townie had finally been converted into something of a country girl!

In 1947 Beryl married Bill and the hunt for a home and job, of their own, commenced. The result was acceptance of an offer of employment from Toby May of Pitt Hall Farm, in Hampshire. Bill would join as Farm Manager. They initially took up residence at Ewhurst Park before later moving into the farmhouse at Pitt Hall. This was to become the family home until 1974.

Beryl was ideally qualified to be a farmer's wife and took to her supporting role with gusto. The farm and its employees became her extended family and much of her social life revolved around them and the immediate community for years too follow.

Beryl was soon joined in Hampshire by her mother and, as was fairly typical of women in the countryside at the time, both joined the WI with Beryl doing a stint as president of the local branch, Ashford Hill & Wolverton. These were the 'jam and Jerusalem' years that I remember from my childhood! Needless to say, on many occasions Beryl was ribbed by us for her WI activities. In later years my suggestion that she ought to pose for an OAP version of WI calendar girls was met with a quick clip around the ear!

Her maternal instincts kicked in around 1952 with the arrival of John, followed in 1956 by Anne and, after some years ruminating, myself in 1963 and Mark in 1965.

Beryl was an attentive mother and her children's early years all the better for it. She was always there for us, joining in with our friends and adding to the banter. Whether playing the piano, singing at the top of her voice or dancing a merry jig, she enjoyed the company of all age groups.

Her 'take us as you find us' attitude and open door policy meant waifs and strays were often found around the kitchen table at all hours of the day, more often than not being treated to Beryl's home cooking and sympathetic ear.

It should be noted that whilst Beryl liked a chat she was not one for gossip.

Often forced to indulge in her children's sporting activities, horses were one thing but motorbikes another! On the latter, if riding pillion, her laughter would normally be heard well ahead of seeing her!

Beryl, amongst other things, was a good sport and took pleasure from the simple things in life.

Following her father's death in the mid-Seventies Beryl commenced round two of retailing.

As Director of E. Wigelsworth Ltd she ran the remaining Seaford shop, selling menswear and school uniforms, beyond its Centenary year in 1989 before closing the door on that chapter of her life.

In 1988, following forty plus happy years of marriage to Bill she welcomed their retirement together. Time to enjoy Windrush and the garden they had established as the family home since 1974. Sadly, this was curtailed by Bill's untimely death. It was at this point in her life that Beryl had lost her constant and closest friend.

However, with the support of her family and friends Beryl's own retirement was to be full and active. She was an independent woman who, with wheels, would travel. She sought to enjoy holidaying with friends in the West Country and with her children and grandchildren. "Days out with Grandma are special" the grandchildren were often heard to say.

I am sure you will agree that the bond between those that have seen a lot of life and those who are just starting to embark on life's journey is unique.

To that end, it is a credit to Beryl that she was able to influence the lives of not only her own children but that of her six grandchildren, Alicia, Julian, Lucy, Emily, Toby and Joshua. Much to Beryl's joy Alicia made her a Great Grandmother in February with the birth of Richard, living proof of the circle of life.

Some of you will know that Beryl had latterly suffered with vascular dementia. She hated the confusion this brought to her life and in her moments of clarity would often suggest that we took her to the vets to be put down, so she wasn't any trouble to anyone.....We did consider this as an option, but a burial in the garden would probably not comply with current Health & Safety regulations!

Getting older for Beryl also meant having to make the decision when to stop driving. Motoring had always been an enjoyment for her and obviously a car was a necessity to escape the country and get into town! As such, the suggestion three years ago that Beryl should stop driving in the interests of hers and others safety was not an easy sell. None of us were keen on broaching the subject knowing the reaction we would get and that it would be a further blow to her independence. However, we bit the bullet, the discussion was had and the keys were taken away. Ouch!.....the touch paper had been lit and the reaction was a little like telling a teenager they can't go to an all night rave at the age of 14!

When the dust settled, Beryl accepted her new position as co-driver, offering her advice as we took to the roads. Fortunately, some of us were quite used to having others tell us how to drive, so it was like water off a ducks back!

Beryl enjoyed her days out and would often provide a running commentary on the state of the countryside as she was driven through it. This was always made more enjoyable by a picnic or a cup of tea at the other end.

Beryl especially enjoyed visiting National Trust properties taking a keen interest in the gardens, a passion shared with her children. She could often be seen sitting on a garden bench, contemplating horticultural matters with anyone who cared to join in.

It is fitting that one of our last days out together as a family was to Hinton Ampner, a National Trust House near Winchester. It was Mothering Sunday, a glorious sunny April day, and the Hampshire countryside had come alive. We were a world away from the current global economic and political upheaval. Beryl was happy, appreciated being surrounded by her family and seemed fulfilled. A good day was had by all.

On the day she passed away, Beryl rose later than normal and looked out of the bathroom window. She saw the pond and the paddocks and said "I'm at Windrush, I'm at home".

For the family this was a great comfort to hear. Beryl had always hoped that she would end her days in 'her' own home and when that time came that her release would be quick, which it was.

To this end, her wishes came true.

On a final note.....perhaps passing through the gates of death is like passing quietly through the gate in a pasture fence. On the other side, you keep walking, without the need to look back. No shock, no drama, just the lifting of a plank or two in a simple wooden gate in a clearing. No pain, no floods of light, no great voices, but just the silent crossing of a meadow.....

Let's all take a minute to remember Beryl and what she meant to us individually.

MINUTES SILENCE

Thank you.

Paul Clinch May 4<sup>th</sup> 2011