

This was my housemistress (Molly Colls) at Wells House, Wymondham College. 1963-1966.
I later was the person at the end of this eulogy at Benjamin Court.

TRIBUTE TO MOLLY

As those who knew her well will remember, Molly was always early for everything and this occasion has proved to be no exception. We all planned a 100th birthday party with Molly but I think she always imagined it this way; to gather everyone to celebrate her 100 years of life on this day but not necessarily for her to be there. She slipped this thought into conversations while planning sandwich fillings and party music. Hopefully she imagined a service of celebration very much like this and I feel she is definitely here in spirit.

So here we are, gathered to celebrate a very special and very, very long life. A life that spanned 2 world wars, a century of amazing technological change, and developments in art, design and architecture that Molly always embraced with enthusiasm and excitement.

For the family Molly has not only been an amazing aunt, great-aunt and now great-great-aunt, but also, a friend, an inspiration, travelling companion, confidante, substitute mother and grandmother. In all these roles she has given her all and has asked for little in return. Being an unsentimental person, Molly gave us little opportunity to tell her just how important she had been in our lives but when we wrote to her recently telling her that she had done a wonderful job bringing us up all these years and that our father, who died at the age of only 39 would have been very proud of his big sister, she was delighted with the letter and reread it again and again. She was always more interested in those around her than herself and somehow, she remembered every detail of everyone's lives; their families, their problems, holidays and plans. None of us are sure how we will cope without this fund of information; they haven't yet invented a Molly app!

Molly's long and wonderful life began even before the First World War, in 1913; a year after the Titanic sank!

One of Molly's early memories is of running into the house to tell her mother there was a strange man at the door only to find it was her father returning from the war. Molly was 5 then.

Molly had a happy childhood, she attended Norwich High School when it was still housed in the Assembly Rooms in Norwich and half a century later was to have several successful exhibitions of her paintings in that same building.

Molly, her sister Betty, brother Dick and often her cousin, John (who was the same age as Molly and more like a brother), spent many carefree holidays by the sea at Walcott, Happisburgh and West Runton and here Molly developed a lifelong love of the sea. In fact she has asked that some of her ashes be scattered from West Runton cliff top, (when the wind is in the right direction of course. She was always very practical!)

In recent years, Molly took a particular interest in the excavation of the fossil remains of the 'West Runton Elephant' from these cliffs and was pleased to be asked to design and illustrate the mugs that commemorated this event. We all have one!

While at school Molly developed a love of art and went on to Norwich School of Art and from there into art teaching.

With her new-found love of travelling Molly soon found a job at a girls' school in Guernsey where she was very happy; cycling the flower-filled lanes, painting, exploring, swimming and making many friends. When Guernsey was about to be occupied in the Second World War, Molly's school in St Peter Port was evacuated at the last minute to Denbigh in North Wales and feeling too far from the action, Molly joined the Womens Air Auxilliary Force and moved south again.

She was, at first, put to work in an office job but this was not for Molly and soon she was an operations officer, briefing the pilots on their nightly missions and staying up til the morning to see who returned,. Of course many did not, and Molly lost at least

one very special young man; she always kept a photo of him standing by his aircraft. With a clear speaking voice, she was sometimes asked to make the morning announcements to the air base about who had been lost the night before. This must have been a very hard time; exciting and very much part of the action but very sad. So many young men were lost in a very short space of time and many were Molly's friends.

With her art training Molly soon volunteered for an RAF job interpreting the aerial reconnaissance photos returning from war-torn Europe and was one of the team that discovered secret munitions supplies, hidden weaponry and prison camps.

It was during the war that Molly formed a life-long friendship with war artist Frank Wootton. They often painted Norfolk landscape scenes together and he frequently visited Molly and Betty at the Anchorage until his death only a few years ago.

After serving in the WAAF for several years Molly went back into teaching at a school in Maidenhead. While living there she and a friend once had tea with the notorious painter Sir Stanley Spencer, but she just dropped this into conversation many, many years later, adding, forcefully that she had not been one of his models! I think he had asked her! While living so close to London, Molly was able to explore all the galleries and museums that were coming out of hibernation after the war. She loved this and soon knew London very well but said she always felt just a little too far from the sea.

After 8 years in Maidenhead she returned to Norfolk to look after her ageing parents and found a job at Wymondham College where, as well as being head of art she was housemistress to 80 teenage girls. Many of these girls and the staff who worked with her, have said that she was always so kind and compassionate, firm and fair like the very best of parents. So many girls passed through her care in the 17 years she was a housemistress it would be hard to count, but for every one I am sure she will have left an indelible mark on their lives.

As well as running a house, Molly designed sets and costumes, posters and publicity for the lavish school productions that the college put on each year. She painted, taught printmaking and life drawing in the holidays and, whenever she could, she set off travelling.

She developed a love of Spain where she made many friends, painted, explored and returned again and again. After Spain she explored more widely and soon, often accompanied by Betty or teaching friends, she had explored much of Europe, sometimes towing her little caravan, that she never did learn to reverse!

She loved painting in the more remote Greek Islands, throughout the wildest parts of France, Italy, Sicily and Corsica. She documented her adventurous travels with diaries and travel journals, illustrated with photos and sketches. Wherever she travelled she was always concerned with human and animal welfare and would have rescued every donkey in Spain if she could.

Unlike Betty, Molly was not a natural linguist but her French was good and she said she got by in Italy and Spain by adding an o to the end of most words. "Toasto and marmalado always worked" she said "I never went hungry"

When she finally retired from Wymondham College, 40 years ago this very day! she joined Betty at the Anchorage in West Runton and at last had more time to pursue her great love of painting. She travelled the highways and byways of Norfolk painting wherever she went, joining art groups and the prestigious Norwich art circle and exhibiting locally and further afield. She gardened and cooked and did adventurous and slightly wobbly DIY and latterly became Betty's carer. This enabled Betty to remain at home almost till her death at nearly 90 years of age, 12 years ago. Molly remained in the house for another 9 years, thoroughly enjoying her

independence and living alone for the first time in her life. When she found she was unable to manage without help she decided that a sheltered flat at Benjamin Court in Cromer was the right place for her.

What a wise decision this proved to be. Here her friends were able to visit, she had the most cheerful, caring and dedicated staff you can imagine and her care was second to none. All her carers quickly became good friends who shared their thoughts, plans and family secrets with probably the best listener ever. Molly will be greatly missed by them all I know. One of her carers turned out to be one of the girls from Molly's house at Wymondham College who said 'you looked after me all those years, now it's my turn to look after you.'

Molly said she coped with getting old by living for today. She did not dwell on the past or plan too far ahead, she concentrated on what was happening now. We should do the same. We must remember a very special person who has been a very large part of so many lives but we must remember her with humour, fun and joie de vivre.

Molly didn't quite get her telegram from the Queen but she told us that she really wanted it from Prince Philip (who I think she saw as being rather like herself) a little bit naughty, with a love of the sea and the great outdoors and only conforming when being watched - and sometimes not even then!

I find it remarkable to have had an aunt, nearly 40 years older than me for over 60 years. Like me - you will all have many happy memories of times together, and I will finish with Molly's words heard so often at our partings; "Bye for now"

Bye for now Molly