

Vida Bates

1st October 1908 - 12th September 2010

Vida was born at Chatham on 1st October 1908 as the 7th child in her family of 8. Vida was brought up at 'Macklands' in Rainham, Kent, and followed her 3 older sisters to Rochester Grammar School for Girls from 1917 to 1923.

Having reached form 4b, she went to a boarding school at Ramsgate for 3 years. After leaving school she then went to train as a children's nurse at a college at Kensington. Her first jobs with a 3-month old baby at Oxted in Surrey and an RAF family whose daughter Diana she kept in touch with to the end of her life. She then took a job in a children's home where children whose parents were on the stage boarded their children from week to week. Later, she went to work as housekeeper for her brother Geoffrey at the cottage, which was in The Quarries at Boughton Monchelsea. It was one mile from the bus and three miles from Maidstone. There was some tennis and sometimes occasional dances at The Tudor Barn at Hildenborough or at Oceans of Cream. She took a copy of Mrs Beeton's major cookery book to guide her!

In 1942 she was asked to go first to a house opened by the Kent County Council at Wadhurst for a month. Then the War Office opened a house for 5 year olds in Crowborough from where they could go to school. She was there as a House Mother for 9 years. She remained in touch with one of the children and the two little RAF girls (long grown up now). All her family survived the war unscathed. Her mother knitted oiled-wool stockings for men in the Navy, and her Father was still involved in the family business in Chatham, trying to cope with war-time problems with very few staff. At home, her parents put the beds downstairs, as bombers passed overhead each night on the way to London.

Her parents moved to Stella Maris in Birchington after the war where they celebrated their Golden Wedding, and joined them soon afterwards. She had learned to drive the first family car, and together they explored Kent and Sussex, and occasionally further afield. Her Mother died in 1957, and Vida became the chatelaine of Stella Maris, and she cared for her Father until his death at the age of 96, in 1968.

Vida moved to a bungalow in Essex Gardens, and enjoyed her new-found freedom. She travelled to the USA, Canada, and in Europe. She studied, and took a keen interest in both church and village. She enjoyed going with friends to concerts and to the theatre in Margate and Canterbury. She adored her garden and its roses. As she grew older, one would have expected her to slow down a bit, but there was little sign of this until and after a broken hip, she moved to Kent Gardens to be nearer both to the church and High Street. Vida became her family's archivist, and kept up an active correspondence with members of the family in Canada, USA, Alaska, Australia, New Zealand and Majorca, as well as with several of the children she had cared for, getting great pleasure from this. She opened her garden to the public, and in 2009 raised nearly £150 for charity in this way.

She went to Watlington for Christmas for a number of years, and on several occasions spent Christmas Day with great-nephew Edward & his family in their converted barn at Goudhurst. Vida astounded everyone by bringing carefully chosen small gifts for all the children present, beautifully matched to their ages. Most of all she revelled in her 100th birthday party organised for her at Alresford, by Sarah and Marion.

Extreme old age robbed Vida of many of the pleasures that she had enjoyed, but she never lost her love of children, rejoicing in news of them and knowing where everyone fitted in. She loved to have letter from her friends and her old school. Vida's final months have been spent at 'Highfield Care Home', and at 'Westonville Lodge'.

We shall remember her as a loving sister, aunt, great aunt & great-great-aunt, who lived her long life as a disciple of the Jesus she got to know in infancy, and whose faith she taught to children in Sunday School at St. Margaret's Church in Rainham all those years ago, and to many other children throughout her life. She was a believer in service to others, in goodness and in family virtues. For me, this is her legacy to us.

Edward F. Bates
23rd September 2010.

Vida, aged 100, at a party
arranged for her by her
family in Hampshire

