

## **Eleanor's biography and a few Unitarian reminiscences**

**Read by Rev. John Harley**

### **Eleanor Dixon (Davis nee Blake)**

Eleanor was born on 16th August 1932 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She was often found to remark that she was nearly born on an aeroplane as it was touch and go on whether they would land in time! And was certain that the closeness of her birth to the flight resulted in her not suffering from travel sickness on any form of transport.

Her parents Arthur and Millicent Blake lived in Patagonia, Argentina on the family sheep farm where she grew up with her brothers John and Hugh and her younger sister Rosemary. She was taught by her mother at home up to the age of ten, and then boarded on her own until Rosemary arrived two years later, at St Hilda's English School in Buenos Aires.

After the war, the family returned to England.

Eleanor then attended Roedean School, Brighton originally a Unitarian Foundation, (Her mother and grandmother had also been educated there). She then went on to the Froebel Educational Institute to study for her three year Teacher Training course. Once she had graduated, she had concurrent teaching posts at Colwyn school and Embleton Road school, Bristol and both were Primary Schools.

As both her parents were lifelong Unitarians, it was only natural that Eleanor became an active member in the Lewin's Mead and Oakfield Road Unitarian Chapel congregations, in Bristol; she took part in Choir, FOY (Fellowship of Youth) and the Dramatic Society and led Sunday School. She met Christopher Davis whilst at Lewins Mead, they married in 1957 and honeymooned in Paris. They had three Children; Penny, John and Robert.

They moved to Crewkerne in 1961 when his employers opened an office there. Christopher died suddenly in 1963 of a Cerebral ulcer.

Eleanor met Peter Hodge, acquiring four more children, a family now of 7, leaving no time for teaching but making great demands on home-making attributes and they spent 12 years together. He died in 1976 of cancer.

Eleanor had since 1972 been involved with the Crewkerne Unitarian Chapel as treasurer and helping with the Sunday School, she also became the Youth Secretary for the Western Union in 1975. Whilst she was on various committees for the Western Union, she met Rod Dixon. They married in 1978. He was Lay Charge and Minister at Taunton, Bridgwater and Bridport where she supported him. Rod died in 2013.

Eleanor was greatly honoured to be the President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in April 1982 following in the footsteps of her father Arthur Blake in 1960.

Following many years of hardship and lack of support following the deaths of Christopher Davis and Peter Hodge, Eleanor was determined to make other women's struggles easier with grief, hence her journey to become a Lay Pastor, she also became a Cruse Councillor.

She became Lay Charge of Crewkerne Unitarian Chapel in 1989 to 1991 and then Lay Pastor from 1991 to 2002. In this time, she was also Chaplain of the Crewkerne Royal British Legion for which she was very proud to represent.

Eleanor retired from the Crewkerne ministry to spend more time with Rod at Bridgwater, however in 2003 she became an Honoured Citizen of Crewkerne for services to the town. In May 2012, Eleanor was invited back to Crewkerne in her role as Honoured Citizen to meet Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Eleanor was Lay Pastor for Bridgwater Unitarian Chapel from 2002 to 2014 and then Lay Pastor Emeritus for five more years.

In June 2013 she was given honorary life membership of the Western Union of Unitarians.

### **Tributes from Celia Cartwright**

Sad news indeed. I remember her well and very fondly. In my early days of Lay Leading she was a wonderful support. I remember us going together to a UALL conference in Great Hucklow. It was a great weekend, but it snowed heavily on Saturday Night and was a good six inches deep on the cars. I didn't have a scraper so your mum and I used a hair brush and comb

to clear all but the roof! Neither of us were tall enough to tackle that! That snow clung on till just before the M5 turn off to take Eleanor home.

We had such a giggle about the whole thing.

Eleanor led my induction service as Lay Leader in Charge at Torquay, when I led Torquay, Sidmouth and the little Fellowship Group in Exeter.

Just a couple of many wonderful memories.

### **and Elizabeth Birtles**

Dear Eleanor - she knew me for more than seventy years : we were both participants in the vibrant life of the Lewins Mead congregation in Bristol. I remember I did my first baby sitting job for Eleanor's first baby- it must have been about 63 years ago : so exciting for me! 😊. Decades later when I found myself back in the Western Union district, Eleanor gave me great encouragement and support as I moved, via shared passion for Religious Education, towards ministry. Perhaps the strongest memory was from 1982 when Eleanor was GA President, and a small group of us from the Unitarian Peace Fellowship walked for two days from Greenham Common. Our arrival near the start of the GA meetings in Oxford was pre-arranged (with President Eleanor 😊). We were allowed to walk in with our peace banners and messages, knowing that there was a motion to be debated that was going to be contentious. Bless her, Eleanor, in the chair, interrupted the business to say, from the stage, "Pilgrims for Peace, you are welcome!"

Eleanor inspired many of us, and generously shared her energy and gifts with many Unitarians in countless settings. Thanks Be.

Eleanor loved gardening, playing the piano, singing in the choral society, cooking, knitting and meeting with friends and watching her extended family grow. Eleanor endeavoured to keep in touch with every part of her family and her partners families, she wanted to keep them all included.

Her dislikes are being asked "Do you work?" !