

## MARIANNE ELSLEY (1923–2009)



Marianne was born in Rostock, Germany in 1923. Her Jewish parents were a judge and a doctor. When Hitler's brutality escalated, realising that their child's life was in danger, they sent her aged 15 to England by the Kindertransport. A complete stranger, she was lovingly cared for by a Quaker family who enabled her to complete her schooling. She never saw her parents again; they were murdered in Auschwitz.

Having trained as a nurse, she met Ralph at a hospital in Salisbury. They had two children, Judy now in the United States and Nicky in London. For ten years she assisted Ralph, who was a Housemaster at Bedford Modern School. When they moved

to Banbury in 1970, she was secretary at Overthorpe Hall School for 20 years.

After moving to Deddington, Marianne was President of the Women's Institute, editor of the *Deddington News*, and member of the Craft Group and the Writers' Group. Her articles on both gardening and cooking were a regular *DN* feature.

To honour the memory of her parents, she wrote two books about her escape from the Nazis and the terrible fate her parents suffered. She gave over 100 lectures based on the books, one in the States before an audience of 1500, who gave her a standing ovation. Her books were used recently in a Radio 4 series, 'Writing the Century'.

Sadly, for ten or more years Parkinson's disease progressively stopped her doing many of the things she enjoyed so much and did so well; she won a needlework prize at last year's Parish Show. Her profound deafness also robbed her of the pleasures of social life and her love of music.

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## RALPH ELSLEY (1923–2010)

Ralph was born in Eastbourne on 24 July 1923, the elder of twin boys. His mother died a few days afterwards. Jack and Ralph went to local schools, but they were evacuated to Wellingborough when war broke out. After school, Ralph became a conscientious objector and was sent to Salisbury Infirmary as a porter. Here he met Marianne, a German Jewish refugee training to be a nurse. They married a year or so later.

After the war he finished his education, completing a first class honours degree at Birmingham University and then to Southampton to complete a Master's. He went on to work on a BLit at Lincoln College, Oxford.

In 1952 their daughter Judy was born in Oxford. Ralph found a job in Magherafelt, Northern Ireland, where the family lived for a couple of years and where their son Nick was born. When Ralph was offered a job at Bedford Modern School in 1954, the family moved into one of the school's boarding houses. Ralph hoped to become Head of the English Department at Bedford, but when that did not happen, he took a post in 1970 as Head of

Department at Magdalen College, Brackley. He was not happy there, but met the headmistress of Tudor Hall School who offered him a teaching job. He was very happy and was an active member of the school community until his retirement in 1983. Meanwhile, the family had moved to Banbury and then Deddington where they lived for 40 years.

From 1983 Ralph took an active part in Deddington events. For a short time he edited the *DN*. Perhaps he and Marianne are best remembered by their friends for their hospitality. They regularly gave dinner parties, often had overnight guests, and we can all recall the splendid summer parties in their beautiful garden. Ralph appeared at a village fête many years ago as the Deddington Dandy, perfectly adorned with bow tie and boater.

The last few years were difficult for Ralph and Marianne. He cared for Marianne at home when she became ill, refusing all help until it became necessary to move her to a nursing home. For the few months he was on his own Ralph liked to entertain friends to tea, and always brought in an impeccably laid tray with delicious cakes. He would then fix stern eyes on his visitor and enquire, 'What are you reading?' at which we searched our minds for an approved author, fearing schoolmasterly disapproval. He loved word games and provided we played intelligently he would invite us to join him. He enjoyed the village play reading group, put up with what he termed 'runonthemill' stuff and, when his turn came to choose a play, chose Shakespeare. His camp rendering of some of Shakespeare's fools was hilarious.

After Marianne's death in December 2009, Ralph moved to Featherton House in May and lived in comfort there, but the combination of depression and poor physical health led to his death on 17 December.

*Molly Neild*