

WENDY BURROWS 1936–2026



Aunty Wen began planning her funeral several years ago, when the family was issued with typed copies of the service, complete with who was to read what. Last February I was summoned to Market Place Cottage for what can only be described as a master class in organisation. I was given a strict running order, delivered with the authority only a seasoned teacher can command. During the numerous editorial meetings for the order of service, Wen cited examples of poor public speaking and so provided coaching to all invited speakers in the use of the public address system.

Ben Burrows

Wendy was born in Oxford at home in Five Mile Drive to Walter and Daphne Burrows. Daphne descended from the Seaton family, farmers and property owners in Aylesbury. Walter was the only child of Harry and Letitia Burrows, also born in Oxford. In 1890 Harry founded Holywell Press in Alfred Street, Oxford, a thriving firm still owned and run by the Burrows family. Wendy's love of the natural world and gardening came from her father. In September 1945 her brother, Peter Seaton, was born.

Wendy was educated at Greycotes School from 5 to 7 years and then at Headington School where she was above average in sport, singing and art, but also gained 10 O levels. She played in the 1st hockey team and then in the Oxfordshire Junior X1 and the 1st tennis team and in 1954 won the Junior Oxfordshire County Championships.

She trained as a PE teacher at Bedford College of Physical Education. Her first post was at Yeovil High School for Girls, a grammar school of about 360 pupils. After five happy years there and following a terrifying interview at Newport, she was appointed head of girls PE at Carisbrooke Grammar School on the Isle of Wight, a mixed school. She stayed there for three years and then needed to be nearer home as her father became seriously ill and was desperate to have her home.

She was appointed PE teacher at Holton Park Girls' Grammar School (now Wheatley Park School) in September 1965. The school was housed in what was Holton Manor in beautiful grounds, including a moated island over which staff could walk from the new block which housed a hall and gymnasium. The games facilities were two netball courts, four tennis courts and one hockey pitch. There was also an outdoor unheated swimming pool.

Wendy's father died four months later at home on Yarnells Hill, North Hinksey, aged only 61. She lived with her mother for two years and helped her move into a smaller bungalow. Their home was then sold – one of the worst times in Wendy's life.

After six years, Oxfordshire's grammar schools were lost and comprehensive education caused Holton Park to be amalgamated with Wheatley Secondary Modern. Unfortunately, instead of building it up from the bottom with 11 year-olds, they moved the whole school. Wendy stuck it for two more years and then applied for a lecturer's post at Chelsea College of PE in Eastbourne. She was then 37 and, to her amazement, got the job, in charge of tennis and also helped teach hockey. Later she became head of gymnastics and taught Scottish and English folk dance, badminton and table tennis.

Her first home was a small terraced house at Herstmonceux which backed on to fields and she had two cats who loved being taken for walks. Her love of miniature dachshunds started here, as one half term her mother brought her cousin Ruth and her two dachshunds to visit. They were well behaved and did not attack or chase the cats. Wendy decided that when she bought a dog, they would be dachshunds. She decided on two which she called Alice and Hannah.

Tutoring students on six-week teaching practices was an important part of the job. Secondary schools covering Oxfordshire, East Sussex, Hampshire and Kent were used and it was essential to watch students teaching games, gymnastics and dance.

Working out her timetable to see all the students was a bit of a nightmare with the long distance between some schools, with the added pressure of finding digs for six weeks. The 25 years teaching at the college were fulfilling and interesting. She retired in 1996 and stayed on one more year to help with teaching practice.

She and a friend decided to have a holiday in Canada, even though she had to get over her fear of flying. Based in Vancouver, they had booked a 2-berth camper van. They were offered a 6-berth one for the same price. Soon after returning home she decided to buy a second-hand VW camper van, which had some mod cons, but no toilet. Most of the time before she sold it, she had holidays in Britain, although she did go to Norway, France, Switzerland and Austria.

Her mother became ill with dementia and Wendy secured a place for her in a care home in Eastbourne, visiting her twice a week to take her to see the sea or up on the South Downs. She died in December that year. This was the second traumatic period of her life.

Wendy had sung in choral societies all her adult life and after retirement she was elected chairman of the Eastbourne Choral Society. She then decided to move back to Oxfordshire to be nearer the family. Her college room-mate and friend, Liz Dickinson, had moved to Deddington, so Wendy decided to find a house in the village and was lucky enough to buy a small cottage in the Market Place. She moved in October 2003 and was very happy there, joining in village activities, singing in the church choir, putting on shows in the church for the community, and starting Deddington Parish Show in December 2008 which grew in popularity with a range of sections. She also sang in the Oxford Bach Choir, the rehearsals for which were in the Sheldonian. Into her 80s she felt too old to carry on with all this activity and handed it on to younger people, but kept on writing the rotas for church services involving many church goers.