

Doris Thomas 1926 - October 2006

At her funeral on 25 October, Annette Hendry, who was previously Chairman of CADRA spoke about Doris' lively contribution to CADRA and to Caversham. Below is her tribute to Doris published in the December issue of the Caversham Bridge.

I first met Doris about 15 years ago when I joined the committee of Caversham & District Residents' Association, of which Doris had been a founder member in the 1960s. Doris had come to Reading to study at the University, had met her husband there and they had settled in Caversham, living for most of their married life in Cromwell Road with their two sons, Gareth and David. Later, Doris' sister, Winnie Darter, lived there too. Winnie wrote the "Watchdog" column in the Caversham Bridge for a number of years. This was the precursor of the current page, "From the Lookout Post".

Doris had firm views based on strong ideals, and worked hard for a number of causes during her life. She was a lifelong member of the Co-operative Movement and a committed socialist. Her strong pacifist convictions led her to support the Greenham women's protests in the 1980's, when she visited the camp on several occasions. Doris had a keen intellect, and the courage of her convictions; she would speak up when hers was a minority or even a solitary voice.

So Caversham was fortunate to have someone of Doris' calibre to look after the community's interests. During the years we served together on CADRA's committee, Doris took a particular interest in planning matters. She scrutinised every Caversham application that was made to the Council, went weekly to the Civic Offices, wrote letters of objection when required, and fired up others to campaign when necessary. She cared enormously that any local development should be sensitive within the context of Caversham, and that local people should be consulted. There were successful campaigns, such as helping prevent a hyper-market being built on the old Eliot's site in Gosbrook Road. There were big disappointments, such as the Bugs Bottom development, when Doris shared general outrage that the Government could set aside such strong local opposition. But Doris carried on with undiminished determination, and I truly believe that she has left a lasting legacy, which is that Reading Council know that Caversham has a lively Residents' Association that is difficult to ignore .

Doris had so many attributes to respect and admire, and we in CADRA valued her contribution enormously. I'd like to include a brief description of Doris at a CADRA meeting, sent to me by Tom Chadwick, who was chairman for some years;-

"Doris and I were colleagues on the Committee from the mid nineties up to the time she stepped down. The Committee took her views and advice very seriously, even though it might be at odds with the majority view. She had an extensive and accurate memory of changes and events in Caversham following the end of World War 2. Doris always occupied a particular chair at Committee meetings at the Boltons' house. On the occasion when Bruce Manning and Derek Bartlett were busily explaining our new Constitution and all appeared to be going well, from the depths of this (up till then silent) chair came the remark, "I can't agree with that!" And of course Doris had spotted a significant flaw in the draft document."

Tom also commented on Doris' keen sense of right and wrong, which led her to champion those whom she thought were not getting a fair deal from whatever source, the Council, from shops etc. Doris always gave CADRA full support, even on a very cold day when we met in a huddle on the Thames promenade while the Mayor planted a tree donated by CADRA. I remember that morning well, (partly because the mayor found her ceremonial shovel had been left behind, and we had to borrow from a nearby house.) I also remember, however, that the tree was a species chosen by Doris, who among her many talents was a very keen gardener.

Doris broke her hip nearly 3 years ago, and sadly never regained her health. In her prime there was very little that went on in Caversham that Doris did not know about. More importantly, she cared about Caversham, and battled to preserve the best in our community and environment. For that she deserves all our thanks.

Annette Hendry.