

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
Ivry, Lady Freyberg

GERALDEEN TATTON-BROWN née MORTIMER

SEPTEMBER 2016

It is now over a year since Geraldeen (#1944 on the family tree) died, but because of the many kindnesses she and Peter bestowed upon our young family history trust – Cobbolds and Tatton-Browns are related twice over – we want to reproduce the eulogy given at her Service of Thanksgiving.

Geraldeen was born on 27th March 1919, at home, into the Mortimer family, in County Cavan, in the newly formed Irish Republic.

She and her elder sister June grew up on the family farm, Lakeview, near Mullagh. Their early education was entrusted to nannies and governesses; Geraldeen told tales with glee, of how they got through 7 governesses in 5 years, one they liked stayed for 3. Subsequently they were sent to boarding schools in Wales and England. At Moreton Hall in Shropshire, the headmistress asked her to break in her young Welsh cob; an excellent excuse for missing dull lessons! At finishing school in Switzerland she learnt French, and how to skate and ski, not a lot of use in Ireland, except when the lake at home froze over.

Returning home to Ireland, Geraldeen and June bought and trained young horses, hunting and show jumping them before selling them on. One year, she drove her favourite horse, Zircon in his trap to the local train station, and loaded him and the trap on the train to Dublin. Once there, she hitched him up to his trap again and drove him across Dublin to Ballsbridge, where he was stabled for the week at Dublin Showground. She show-jumped him successfully there all week, stayed with friends, enjoying all the Show parties in the evenings. At the end of the week they returned home to Cavan the same way.

In 1945, a friend of June's, Nancy Saunders, brought her youngest brother Peter, a Naval Officer, to stay at Lakeview. He was smitten by Geraldeen instantly, but her parents were very doubtful that a naval life would suit Geraldeen, and made them wait 2 years before allowing them to marry. They were married in 1947, and moved house 9 times during Peter's naval career. Geraldeen had to adapt to living in towns, abroad and often being left alone with her 4 children while he was at sea, for months at a time.

She provided a loving stable home for her family, often with extra children, cousins or friends, staying for holidays. Each summer, she took her children back to Lakeview for a few weeks, sharing her beloved home, and the freedom she had grown up with. She never had formal employment, getting satisfaction from home life, children, dogs, ponies and her garden. Her cooking was legendary and she found feeding hordes of hungry children an easy task. Large formal dinner parties in 1950s and 60s for visiting naval dignitaries in Caithness and Washington DC, were more daunting.



Geraldeen Tatton-Brown née Mortimer

When Peter retired in 1975, they moved to Grasspark in North Devon, the first home that she had ever been able to choose. She was very happy there as they farmed their hilly 40 acres, with an assortment of animals and livestock. She had time to ride again and enjoyed visits from her children and grandchildren. The deaths of her two beloved sons, Gerald in 1988 and Anthony in 2002, shook her world. Later, she wrote in her diary: "I cried every day for more than a year, such very dear boys. The death of one's child is very deep, but one pays a high price for love." She found it so hard to understand how her God could let such a thing happen, not once but twice.

In her later years she was very crippled by arthritis and became housebound. The pain of getting in and out of a car, or even up the steps into her garden was too great. However, she never complained. If you asked her how she was feeling that day, she usually changed the subject by asking what the day outside was like instead. She looked forward to visits from family and friends, especially those from her daughter-in-law Olivia and great niece Fiona and her 11 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren.

Despite failing eyesight, she enjoyed seeing the flowers in her garden and listening to the birdsong. She knitted, made tapestry cushions for all her family, wrote letters and cards, and read large print books. Peter died in 2009, after 62 years together. She was sad, but relieved that his suffering was over. Over the last 7 years she was looked after by a succession of live-in carers; over 40 different carers came for periods from 3 to 6 weeks. To help her remember each of them, she wrote cryptic notes on each and scored them out of 10; this made it very easy to know who would be welcome back again!

So what is Geraldeen's legacy to us all? She was a true example of love and kindness, an uncritical, non-judgemental mother, with a wicked sense of fun, a twinkle in her eye when telling stories, and who always saw the good in everyone. She was selfless throughout her life, always putting others first. Her family will all carry part of her in their hearts, with their own memories, stories and thoughts, and may her life be an inspiration to us all.