

## PATRICIA MARY SPENCER (1930-2020) – AN APPRECIATION

Huntingdon DFAS was a formidable society at the end of the nineties; ‘Trial by blue rinse and pearls,’ as one lecturer put it. Our poised chair spoke with a French accent and members comported themselves with a certain air of omniscience and hauteur. With no prior introductions whom should the newest member dare to sit next to on the coach? My eye fell on a small, plump, bright-eyed lady with a mischievous smile and the complexion of a weathered russet apple. Did she have a travelling companion? She did not - and from that moment our journey to Norwich passed in an instant. Pat Spencer introduced herself: unaffected and welcoming. Over the course of the journey I learned that she had trained as an architect at the Manchester School of Art. There she had met her husband, enjoyed life to the full and made many friends before moving to Pidley and later settling in Somersham. We found that we had enjoyed holidays in the same places: Scotland, Northumberland and



*Sniffing the air on a Garden Heritage Volunteers' visit to the Cotswolds.*

North Yorkshire to mention a few, though Pat had also travelled in Switzerland and China. I discovered on that same journey that we enjoyed similar passions in classical music and poetry, quirkily, both of us sharing a particular admiration for Aphra Behn. But it was the garden that was to bring us particularly close in our leisure time. Pat became a founder member of the HDFAS Garden Heritage Volunteers and brought her energy, her architect's eye and her abundant knowledge of history, including local history, into the research and

analysis of parklands, houses and gardens large and small. Whatever the weather Pat was in the fray climbing walls and dykes and struggling through barbed wire fences. On more temperate sites it would be she who was consulted to name the unusual trees and plants learned by keen observation and by her talent for selecting and growing an amazingly eclectic selection in her own garden (which she opened for charity) and from which she distributed unstintingly to plant stalls, friends and visitors alike.



*Taking a well-earned rest in one of the country houses.*

Rarely alone, Pat's energy and enthusiasm encompassed a plethora of good causes. Even after relinquishing her roles as parish councillor and PCC member at various times for both Pidley and Somersham she immersed herself in community activities. On numerous occasions when I phoned, shouting over the music of Radio 3 playing loudly in the background, we struggled to arrange dates around commitments to Time Bank, blood transfusions and Somersham library. Her love of history and architecture made her a keen supporter of the Churches Conservation Trust at whose study days we shared sandwiches and dozed through the afternoon sessions. Mysteriously, Pat was always on the ball at the close with her knowledgeable and insightful questions. Such was her enormous breadth of interests, she remained insatiable to the end for all manner of lectures and activities, turning up in her tiny gaily coloured Citroëns. It is a measure of the camaraderie she engendered that even after giving up her car she was never short of a lift, most recently in my memory a visit with Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust to the David Parr House in Cambridge. Exceedingly modest, she was nonetheless blunt in her appraisals of unseemly

behaviour or inadequate performance. Holidays were a particular delight whether with HDFAS or her family. Following a family holiday, we would be regaled with the exploits of her 6 grandchildren and of stories of 80th and then 90th birthday parties arranged by her son Kim and her two daughters, Sally and Kay.



*Pat, proudly displaying her osage orange while at work with the Garden Heritage Volunteers on the Wood & Ingram ledgers.*

AS members will remember her infectious laugh and wry sense of humour as she sipped a glass of sauvignon blanc with her meal. Kind and considerate at all times, I remember asking if she would mind sharing a room with me on a garden group trip to the Cotswolds. 'Oh, you won't want to do that,' she said, 'I snore.' She did. Most recently, as nearly all AS members will recall, Pat would welcome us at the registration desk before meetings. She has brought joy and friendship to many of us and will be remembered with affection by all who knew her.

Judith Christie