

Remembering Margaret Faulkner

By David Seaton

On Monday 11th November 2024, I attended the funeral of former writers' group secretary Margaret Faulkner. Although the service was short, which included looking back at Margaret's passion for writing, it was a privilege to have been a part of the congregation.

During her writing years, Margaret was an accomplished author. Her successes included two books she wrote about her childhood where she spent in Great Stukeley having been evacuated to Huntingdonshire from London during World War Two. She also wrote magazine articles.

When I first joined the group in 1994, then known as Huntingdonshire Writers' Group, before becoming known as Huntingdon Writers' Group, Margaret was the secretary. She was also a founder member. Her enthusiasm for writing and her unwavering support for her fellow members soon became evident. I'll never forget how Margaret put me at ease during my first meeting. I didn't see myself as a writer – just someone who had an interest in writing. And I'll never forget how she went on to give me confidence in sharing my own brand of writing, especially my surreal look at life.

When I was invited to serve as Chairman in 1998, my immediate thought was, 'How am I going to get out of this?' I certainly didn't see myself as a chairman. But with some trepidation, I agreed. But I shouldn't have worried. With Margaret by my side, still serving as secretary, and providing me with encouragement and support, I developed my own unorthodox approach to chairing meetings, namely my scripted opening and closing words. Amazingly, that approach worked for me. In fact, I served for two years as chairman although, admittedly, it remains a mystery to me how I managed it.

I'll never forget Margaret's love for cricket. She regularly attended matches played at Northants Cricket Club. And with myself also a cricket fan, I often included references to the game when addressing the group. So, thanks to Margaret, talking sport certainly helped my confidence and I'm sure that is still evident today.

The last time I spoke to Margaret was when, as a guest, she attended the group's 30th anniversary celebrations in 2015 at the Dolphin Hotel in St Ives. She had not lost any of her affection for the group.

While waiting in the waiting room before the funeral, Macha Pumphrey together with her husband Richard joined the congregation. Macha was chairman of the group when I first joined. It was good to see her again having not seen her for a number of years.

I have many fond memories of both Margaret and Macha. Sadly, though, Margaret is no longer with us. But those memories of Margaret live on and have inspired me to write this tribute. Those same memories have also helped inspire me to put together a file containing selected memorabilia with accompanying notes of my early days with the group. Margaret and Macha will, of course, both be included. I will also be adding selected memories of more recent times.

I was hoping to have finished the file this year to celebrate thirty years since I first joined. But now I hope to finish it next year when the group will be celebrating its 40th anniversary. Although it is a personal project I will, of course, bring the file to meetings.

I know Margaret would have loved the thought of being among us as the group turns 40 next year. She would have seen how the group has developed over the years yet also seeing how certain aspects have remained the same; such as meeting on the first Tuesday of every month, our continued affinity with the mini saga concept, the friendly supportive nature of the group or seeing the warm welcome new members still receive.

Over the years, the group, now known, of course, as Hunts Writers, has been graced with writers of all abilities, many of whom have been influential in the success of group continuity. Margaret's contribution is without question. She has, indeed, reserved a special place in our history. On behalf of the group, I will conclude by simply saying, "Thank you, Margaret."

Photo: 30th anniversary celebrations with Margaret fourth from the left standing next to me.