

Mrs. A. S. Astbury

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By Carl Whiteley



Mrs. A. S. Astbury and the silver salver which was presented to her at the annual meeting of the Christchurch and Highcliffe Floral Decoration Society. C.T. Photos

CHRISTCHURCH and Highcliffe Floral Decoration Society has accepted with great regret the "temporary resignation" of founder-chairman Mrs. A. S. Astbury.

Her presence in the chair and her personality and guidance will be missed. But no one regrets the decision more than Mrs. Astbury herself for she has been compelled to resign because of her own and her husband's ill-health.

For the past two years she has been suffering a great deal of pain through osteo-arthritis in her hip, the result of a car crash when she was 21.

It was in November 1952, that the society was formed to "help and encourage the art of flower decoration in the home". The inaugural meeting

was at the British Legion Hall but the first committee meeting was held in the offices of the Christchurch Times.

But first mention of a society in this district was made during a conversation between Mrs. Astbury and Mrs. B. A. Mead, now president of the society, at a cocktail party at Mrs. Astbury's home in July, 1952.

"We thought it would provide an interesting hobby for housewives and be something different from the usual women's meetings", said Mrs. Astbury.

The idea caught on and 59 members were enrolled at the inaugural meeting. There are now 130 members and Mrs. Astbury hopes that the society will continue to flourish and increase its membership still further.

GREAT SKILL

Mrs. Astbury has herself shown great skill in the art of flower decoration. She has exhibited her works at Chelsea, Bath, Salisbury, Dorchester and Bournemouth as well as at the society's annual exhibition in Christchurch.

In 1954 she was first in her class in a floral decoration competition organised by the Daily Telegraph, her exhibit being selected from 1500 entries and she has received such comments as: "Truly the work of an artist," "Delightful in every way" and "One of the most outstanding exhibits in the show" from experts including Constance Spry, Julia Clements and Mrs. Cecil Pope.

Mrs. Astbury did not take up the art of flower decoration seriously until the society was formed. Previously she had illustrated her artistic capabilities in the form of embroidery and tapestry. Some of these works can be seen in the sitting room of her present delightful home at Hinton Park Lodge.

Her interest in embroidery started when living at Cleeve Hill, Gloucestershire. At that time her husband, a former senior local director of Barclays Bank in Birmingham, travelled to Birmingham each day and Mrs. Astbury met him at the local station with their car. It was while waiting at the station that she would work at her embroidery or tapestry.

But there happens to be an artistic streak in the family. Her father's sisters were talented in painting and embroidery.

Mr. and Mrs. Astbury moved to Highcliffe in 1939 and their home was at Cleeve Lodge, Wharncliffe Road. They had not been in the village very long before the Hon. Mrs. Violet Stuart

Wortley called upon Mrs. Astbury to assist in charitable work at Highcliffe Castle.

For Mrs. Astbury this was the beginning of a very long friendship and also the beginning of many years of voluntary service for the benefit of charity and the village of Highcliffe.

LECTURES

During the war Mrs. Astbury and her husband were largely responsible for organising the series of lectures at Highcliffe Castle given by diplomats and other notable friends of Mrs. Stuart Wortley. These lectures were given for the information, instruction and benefit of people in the village and, on occasions when Mrs. Wortley was away, Mrs. Astbury acted as hostess.

Also during the war Mrs. Astbury started the jam centre in Highcliffe which was part of a new Government scheme to make use of surplus fruit in the area, Her efforts were also devoted towards work for the W.V.S. and Red Cross and she spent a good deal of time helping evacuees at Beech House, Holmsley.

While at Beech House she was put in charge of making puddings for the evacuees. "I was just an ordinary housewife then and I remember spending practically a whole evening working out how many ounces of flour it would take to make puddings for 200 starting from the fact that I knew it took four ounces to make a pudding for two," recalled Mrs. Astbury.

CULMORE FETES

Mr. Astbury's cousin was the wife of the late Mr. F. A. Power and when, after the war, it was possible to think of raising money for charities, Mrs. Astbury's energy and organising ability found a new outlet in the annual Culmore fetes which she organised partly for the benefit of the R.S.P.C.A. (she was secretary of the Highcliffe Auxiliary).

She presided at the meetings of the Culmore fete committee and her, personality and flair for "getting people to do things" certainly pervaded every meeting she attended, and it would be impossible to estimate how much Highcliffe has benefitted from her work and example in community service.

Recently, and on top of all the work she did as chairman of the Floral Decoration Society, she has brought delight to the old people's homes in Highcliffe with her Christmas decorations—to say nothing, more recently still, of all the preoccupations of planning her own new home jointly with her husband.

PRESENTATION

The presentation of a silver salver which the Christchurch and Highcliffe Floral Decoration Society made last week was, in a sense, more than the token of a society's affection for a retiring chairman. The members who so gladly and generously contributed towards it were showing their appreciation of the kind of service which Mrs. Astbury herself has given unstintingly to the village for nearly 20 years.