

# Janet Smith



**Janet Smith ( 23 Aug 1945 - 18 Apr 2023 )**

*Janet's own words written in 2009:*

I was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1945 in Wheeler End, but I have lived in Marlow all my life. After attending Wycombe High School, I joined the County Library Service as a trainee librarian. Later I attended Ealing Polytechnic, where I took Library Association exams, qualifying as a librarian in 1970.

Most of my professional life was spent as a Children's Librarian, first in Slough, then for twenty-eight years in High Wycombe. During this time, I worked with hundreds of school classes and youth groups, thousands of individual children. I hope that I made a difference to some and inspired

a few. A boy at Frieth village school springs to mind. in a class where most children were well-heeled, he wore plimsolls with frayed laces and spoke with a Bucks accent, but when I made my return visit, he was the one bursting with enthusiasm over an author whose books I had introduced, overjoyed to discover that he could ask for more, free, from the mobile library which served the village. It was this child and others like him who made my job worthwhile.

I have continued this interest into retirement, having been for seven years secretary of the South Bucks Children's Book Group. I am at present their publicity designer.

As a teenager I had been a Guide, and then a trainee Guider. For over twenty years I was associated with the movement, either as a Guide Guider or helping with local organisation. I only gave up entirely when, as the only one left in my generation in my family, I found myself part-time carer, first to my mother's brother, then to my father, who was latterly crippled with severe osteoarthritis. Soon after my uncle's death my mother's macular degeneration took a turn for the worse and, two years after my father's death in 2000, I retired early in order to care for her until her death in 2008.

My father, who was born in Bovington Green, had always been interested in the history of Marlow and concerned that so much was being irretrievably lost. I have continued this interest and am at present am a committee member of the Marlow Society History Group.

*Val Beadle remembering Janet in 2023:*

I met Janet during a Missenden Abbey course on public speaking many years ago, when we were both working for Bucks County Library, I became aware that Janet was a very good speaker. This was subsequently borne out by all her research and talks for the Marlow Society Local History Group in her retirement.

I would like to mention some of the subjects Janet covered in the past 10 plus years, most of which I was able to enjoy and which were perhaps triggered originally by her father and her interest in family history. This led to work on Lovell's, the builders, where her father worked for many years.

Appropriately for her, the company built the Marlow Institute in 1889/90, later purchased by the County Council to house the Public Library, joined fairly recently by the Tourist Office. The company is still operational, although not in Marlow I believe.

Then there was her long, interesting and rather impressive work on Marlow's Medieval Manor Hall. This fascinating and excellently-researched talk was one I remember well and enjoyed greatly. It can now be found on-line, on the Local History Group pages. She gave a persuasive description of the old building built of flint and clunch, which was down by Marlow Bridge but demolished in 1878. It is known to have housed French prisoners-of-war during the Napoleonic Wars and is now the site of Tierney Court.

Other topics Janet worked on included:- locks and weirs; Pascoe Grenfell, MP for Marlow 1802-20; watermills in

Marlow/Bisham and the Wye Valley; Marlow Mills and New Court - a house left to the town behind the High Street; Kenneth Grahame, author of *Wind in the Willows*, and A High Street furniture business - Mealing's.

She also wrote up various talks given by other speakers, such as Medmenham and aerial reconnaissance in WWII, originally given by Mike Mogford and one on Barmoor Farm, now Wycombe Air Park, given by Frances Kerner.

Janet's attention to detail was remarkable, bringing many Marlow landmarks, events and historical figures to light, which have greatly added to Marlow's considerable and excellent store of researched information available to future historians. She will be much missed by everyone in the Society, especially those who value the richness of Marlow's past.