

Oxford Quaker Meeting
Record of Remembrance
HELEN KIMBLE nee Rankin
born 24.07.25, died 04.12.19

Helen became a member by conviction of Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting in 2003.

Helen belonged to the first generation of scholars who took Africa seriously and who helped develop the academic study of the continent. From 1947- 49 she was a tutor at the University of London where she was the first Tutor trainee of Thomas Hodgkin, a famous pioneer of African Studies. Her subjects were English and Economics.

She married David Kimble in 1949 and worked with him editing three bold adventures in publishing “the Penguin Africa Books”, an African Current Affairs series of short popular readers which undoubtedly reflected her editorial skills. She went on to work at the University of Ghana where she thoroughly enjoyed teaching students in Economics.

David and Helen’s four daughters, were named with the initial letter of J. Jane, Judy, Jenny and Joy were born during Helen and David’s time of teaching in Africa. She was a clearly a loving, interesting and inspirational mother, who passed on her gentle sense of humour and her love for the African continent. When David was appointed Professor of Political Science at the University of East Africa in Tanzania Helen moved with the family from Ghana to Dar es Salaam and continued her own teaching there. She and David co-founded the Journal of Modern African Studies in 1963, and jointly edited it during its formative years, thus establishing it as one of the leading academic journals in African Studies. In 2018 the Journal instituted the David and Helen Kimble prize for the best article published in the journal during the previous year.

On return to live in the UK, Helen came to live in Oxford. Together with Terry and Shelagh Ranger, she became a founding member of Asylum Welcome and Detainee support which was set up as a registered charity in 1996, to tackle poverty, suffering and isolation among asylum seekers. She helped plan and organise visitors to Campsfield Detention Centre in nearby Kidlington. A fellow volunteer and friend, Fiona Morrison, said that Helen fought tirelessly for the welfare and legal rights of detainees. Her efforts were not appreciated by the staff at Campsfield, where she assiduously took up the complaints of their detainees. She was eventually banned from visiting. Her daughter Joy recalled an article in Oxford Mail reporting on the campaign at Campsfield in pouring rain, where they described her as a “Brolly Granny.” She was always a fighter for Justice, and a key figure in establishing the rights of Asylum Seekers in Oxford.

Kate Smart, until recently a Director of Asylum Welcome, stated that “Whatever is being achieved today is built on the shoulders of those who had the vision and energy to get it started.”

Helen remained deeply committed to equality for African people in their search for independence and an end to colonial rule and fought tirelessly with the anti-apartheid movement to bring about change. She travelled to South Africa to work as a monitor during the General Election in 1994 and was overjoyed to see Nelson Mandela become the first black President of South Africa. Marieke Clarke remembers her as an indefatigable and brave chair of the Oxford Anti-Apartheid movement.

Very sadly, Helen had to call on all her reserves of strength to handle the heartbreak of outliving two of her daughters, Judy and Jane.

We remember fondly Helen's regular arrival at Meeting for Worship where she and her beloved Jack Russell dog, Poppet, could be heard climbing the stairs and tiptoeing across the gallery on Sunday mornings.

She eventually had to give up attending Asylum Welcome committee meetings and Quaker Meeting for Worship because she was overcome by severe hearing difficulties which she found incredibly frustrating. However, she remained independent and confident for quite a long time and was always delighted to receive visitors, some of whom tried to help by gathering a reluctant Poppet from under her chair and leading her out for a walk, though she was always anxious to return home to her regular position.

Eventually she had to move as a result of a fall at her home, to a Nursing Home near Tring, and her family chose a good one, close to their homes, where they were able to visit her frequently, and where she died on the 4th December 2019. Several Friends attended her funeral at Oxford crematorium on Tuesday 7th January, where we enjoyed a very genuine and heart-warming celebration of her life.

Written for Oxford Meeting by Jill Green with thanks to Marieke Clarke and Joy (Kimble)Younger for their help.