

Maggie Roberts (1941–2024)

Tom Mayberry

WE WERE VERY SORRY TO LEARN that Maggie Roberts, former custodian of Coleridge Cottage and a longstanding member of the Friends Committee, died in July at her home in Bexhill-on-Sea. She was eighty-two years old.

Maggie was born in East Sussex in 1941 and grew up in Peacehaven, where the South Downs meet the sea. Her love of art and literature was fostered during her education at Clark's College in Brighton, and her skills as a writer began to find scope during her early working life as an advertising copywriter in London and then as a literary agent. Those who knew Maggie in her London years recall a person who was 'effortlessly stylish', a quality that never left her and that served her well when, as a fluent French speaker, she moved to Paris to work for French *Vogue*. She loved Paris, and hoped she might stay there, but circumstances drew her back to London in the early 1980s, and later to Sussex where she cared devotedly for her mother until she died in 2004.

A new and very different chapter then began in Maggie's life. She had long been an admirer of Coleridge's poetry and when the role of custodian at Coleridge Cottage became available in 2007, she was encouraged by Shirley Watters, Secretary of the Friends, to apply. Soon afterwards she moved into the gloomy surroundings of 37 Lime Street, adjoining the cottage, as tenant of the National Trust and was undaunted even when, as she often recounted, she heard the sound of unexplained footsteps on the stairs and voices in neighbouring rooms. For almost four years she was the face of Coleridge Cottage, as well as a very knowledgeable and sympathetic presence for visitors and for a loyal group of volunteers.

Maggie's tenancy ended in 2011, the year that the cottage reopened after a second phase of restoration, but she continued to live locally and to serve as a cottage volunteer. For four years, from 2013, she also took on a major role for the Friends as Administrative Secretary of the Coleridge study weekends at Halsway Manor, providing essential support for Peter Larkin, the Director.

In her last years, Maggie returned to the Sussex of her childhood, and though her life was increasingly overshadowed by ill health, she maintained old friendships and continued to serve on the Friends Committee. Many people will think of Maggie with fondness and gratitude, remembering her unfailing kindness, her gentle humour, and her quiet determination. Not least, she will be remembered for the many ways she supported the work of the Friends and for all she did at Coleridge Cottage to introduce thousands of visitors to the life and achievements of STC.¹

¹ Information about Maggie's early life was kindly supplied by Colin and Ivy Brunt.