

Tribute to Betty Hudson

In Autumn 1981, a small group of Worcestershire farmers met to share their concern over the growing, and obvious, imbalance between over production of food in Europe and the chronic shortage in parts of Africa, evidenced by appalling starvation and loss of life in Ethiopia in particular. Among that group were Martin and Betty Hudson invited because of their widely admired experience in hosting overseas agricultural students at Merevale Farm.

Subsequently, in September 1982, the first formal meeting of FOAG was held and Martin and Betty were invited to serve on FOAG's fledgling committee, an invitation which they readily accepted and which was the start, for both of them, of a lifelong commitment to working hand in hand with farmers in Uganda.

Betty was a doer. Yes, she could hold her own in conversation and company anywhere - she was networking long before the word came into common use. Her talent for socialising was a gift enhanced by life in the public eye with the WI, Malvern Hills District Council, Rotary and others – but at the end of the day she was not just a talker, she was a doer!



Betty Hudson with a village elder in 2008

When FOAG needed food preparing for a fund-raising event, when FOAG needed someone to work on big occasions, when FOAG asked for help in accommodating Ugandan and British Council students who came to stay over the years, when FOAG needed tickets selling for a forthcoming concert or play and then to be on the door to greet when the big day came, when FOAG was planning another journey out to Uganda to spend two weeks on the road visiting every project with which it was involved, when FOAG needed a home for our next committee get together – who was always among the first to respond? Betty Hudson! No ifs, no buts, no maybe's just unconditional, utterly reliable, sleeves-rolled-up, 100% practical service and commitment.



Betty delivering a speech in Soroti, 2008

That's the way she was. A hardworking, fully involved farmer's wife and loving mother and grandmother. She and Martin had had to work their way up from fairly modest beginnings. They were both natural grafters and together they gave their talents freely to FOAG and, as a result, to countless hundreds of people in Uganda who FOAG sought to support, encourage and help over the years.

Away from the 'public' aspect of Betty's Uganda activity there was another side - much less to the forefront but nevertheless so practical, what else would you expect from this remarkable lady? Her financial generosity came into play when her heart was touched by a particular need and she would quietly research what was required and then make a personal donation. Connie Akiror, from Ceele Osera village in the bush outside Kumi, eastern Uganda, will tell you that, as she currently completes her final months at Birmingham University writing up for her Doctorate in Immunology and Immuno-therapy, it would not have been possible without Betty's personal help and friendship.

The Luboga family from Gayaza in Kampala revere her memory as part of their family thanks to her constant love and care for them over 30 plus years. To Sister Sophie, pioneer of Pamba Cheshire Home for disabled children in Soroti she was like a mother.

Wherever one travelled in Uganda it wasn't long before the question came, 'How is Betty?' She was loved and respected by so many there because her friendship to, contact with, and interest in them continued long after she had met them.

Who can forget her wonderful sense of self-deprecating humour and her huge pride in, and devotion to her family for whom she carried so much affection and admiration? It was a privilege to know her and she has left us with many sweet and cherished memories of a life lived to the full with so much energy, purpose and achievement. Although we miss her we can draw comfort from the knowledge that she slipped away so gently at the end and that she is now reunited in peace with her beloved Martin.

Malcolm Rankin

A message from Betty's daughter Jenny

Mum got involved in all sorts of schemes over the years for Uganda. She and Dad hosted a number of Ugandans on visits to the farm and enjoyed having Sam and Christine Luboga and their family to stay when Sam was studying in the UK. Mum was thrilled to host Sister Sophie when she came to the UK in 2012. She was excited to stay with Sister Sophie in Soroti on her final trip to Uganda in 2014.

She did some slightly crazy things too - collecting and sending out wedding dresses, which my, then unmarried, brother Richard took out in a suitcase for hiring out - a local money-making idea.

Mum was reluctant to travel to Uganda after Dad died in 2003, but found great support from other FOAG members, who over the years had become very close friends and felt able to visit again in 2004.



Betty at a project in Masindi, 2008

I accompanied her on a project monitoring trip in 2008 which she said was going to be her final trip. No way, 78 was far too young to stop. It was wonderful to be introduced to Ugandan friends and to places she had been on previous trips. Her final trip was in 2014 with her granddaughter Rachel.

Mum's physical energy decreased, but she retained a very active interest in FOAG activities right until the end of her busy and fulfilling life.

Betty's last trip to Uganda – a message from her granddaughter Rachel

I feel incredibly lucky to have spent time in Uganda with my lovely Granny. It makes my memories of the wonderful country all the more special. Although I didn't actually get to spend too long with her because in true Granny style she had lots of places to be and lots of people to meet! She was so independent and she absolutely loved meeting people. She always wrote down the names of everyone she met to make sure she remembered them, just one of many examples of her caring character.



That boda-boda ride! 2014

We did make one journey together by boda- boda. She wasn't fazed at all and hopped straight on with a huge smile on her face. The photo of her on the back of that boda-boda is my absolute favourite picture of her and one I will always treasure.

One day she joined me for the day while I was performing ultrasound scans at the hospital in Soroti. Watching someone perform ultrasounds is incredibly boring, particularly when you have no idea what the blurry shades of grey actually represent. I was worried she would be very bored but she absolutely loved having the opportunity to see her granddaughter at work and was telling everyone about it for a long time afterwards.

If possible, I became even more proud of my Granny during that trip. I am still in awe of her resilience, independence and amazing kind nature. She was a truly amazing woman.