

celebrated **W.A.T.C.H.** **women**
Women And The Church

DAPHNE FRASER 1922–2007

Jean Mayland and others write about a pioneer for women, whose life and story we recall with thanks

When I attended the WATCH AGM in St John's Waterloo on 3 November 2007, I was contentedly listening to Revd Canon Christopher Hall give a brief account of the work of the Li Tim Oi Foundation when I sat up with start. He had just said that the Foundation had been greatly assisted by a generous legacy from Daphne Fraser. I did not even know Daphne had died and I had just included a prayer by her in the final edition of *'All the Year Round'*, a prayer anthology published by CTBI (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) for a great number of years but now sadly ended by the General Secretary in favour of the web.



ecumenical work all brought her into areas of controversy. She had two audiences with the Pope. The second time she was discussing with her sister what to wear for her visit. 'Well there's always your mantilla, dear,' suggested her sister. 'Don't be so silly,' Daphne responded, 'I wore that the last time I saw him!'

Audrey Shilling, retired priest and member of both MOW and WATCH helped to fill in some of the facts of Daphne's earlier working life. She writes as follows: *'I first met Daphne in 1946, when we worked together in the*

Housing Department of Mitcham Borough Council. She was one of a staff of 6 or 7 women who were all members of the Society of Women Housing Managers, which trained women to manage property in poor areas following principles laid down by Octavia Hill. Daphne was a qualified assistant and I was the newest student. On three mornings a week we would all sally forth on our bicycles, with our leather bags round our waists, to collect the rents from our own group of tenants. The other days were given over to wrestling with accounts, repairs, the needs of tenants, and legal matters. It was a lively office, with a strong Christian ethos, and I treasure those days which I shared with Daphne. We lost touch for several years, but were able to resume contact through our mutual friend Christian Howard'.

I had worked with Daphne on the Liturgical Commission, the Board for Mission and Unity and latterly *'All the Year Round'* (AYR) but suddenly realised that I did not know when and where she had been born. I also knew that many of the other people with whom she had worked at various times had died – including nearly all of those who served on the Liturgical Commission which produced the Alternative Service Book (ASB). Her story, as with those of so many earlier pioneers, could so easily have been lost. With the help of her sister Angelica, Audrey Shilling, John Arnold, Mary Tanner and Julia Butterworth, I have pieced together this article. Julia herself had been greatly helped by Daphne's sister-in-law, Jan Stafford, with the obituary she wrote for the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF) of which Daphne was a member.

I myself (**Jean Mayland**) first met Daphne when I was invited to become a member of the Church of England Liturgical Commission in 1966. At that time she was the Secretary and made me feel very welcome. The other woman on the Commission at the time, Elisabeth Montefiore, I always found a bit distant and scary. I soon realised that Daphne was a very capable and knowledgeable woman – probably knowing more about Liturgy than many of the men on the Commission. The men often seemed to resent her knowledge and wanted her just to concentrate on the Minutes and not put forward ideas of her own. Even Ronald Jasper seemed to be almost relieved when she left and was replaced by someone who knew nothing about Liturgy and was really just a short hand typist.

Daphne was born in 1922 and died on 21 May 2007 aged 85. She studied French and History at Oxford and later she gained a Masters degree in Theology in Canada. **Julia Butterworth** wrote: *'She hitched around New Zealand with her sister Angelica, in the days when young ladies didn't do that, and taught there for a year subsequently. She visited her brother Alister, working with his wife in Ethiopia, and trekked for miles with him, enduring days and nights of extreme discomfort on a crowded three-day bus journey, and making friends with Orthodox priests whom she met in Addis Ababa. Her brother Graham and his wife worked in a medical mission in the Northern Frontier of Kenya, which was at that time a war zone. Nothing daunted, Daphne visited clinics and joined in safaris. The roads and airstrips were mined, travel was only possible with a military escort. After encountering a herd of aggressive elephants, one of the soldiers remarked: 'That sister is not afraid of bullets, beasts or bandits!'*

Daphne maintained her own love of liturgy by becoming a member of *Societas Liturgica* and attending International Conferences. She also wrote prayers for a number of publications. When I took over the *'Church Life'* post at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) one of my responsibilities was to oversee the publication of AYR four times a year. I found that Daphne was the Secretary of the Editorial Group. There she was valued and welcomed by men and women alike. She typed careful minutes on an ancient typewriter, with some missing letters and also contributed prayers of her own. In my penultimate year at CTBI she gave up being secretary but still

Daphne's sister-in-law, **Jan Stafford**, added: 'she wasn't afraid of bishops either!' She also tells a lovely story about Daphne and the Pope. Her work with the Liturgical Commission, her membership of the Movement for the Ordination of Women and her

sent in contributions typed on her ancient machine. We welcomed them with an affectionate joke about 'still the old typewriter?' and always accepted them. Her prayers were not scholarly or feminist but reflected her own personal and down to earth piety. Her last one of the final edition ends this tribute.

In between these two pieces of Liturgical work Daphne had worked for the Board of Mission and Unity (BMU) and enjoyed some years of active retirement. I knew her at BMU as a fellow member. At the time **John Arnold** (later Dean first of Rochester and then Durham) was Secretary. He writes as follows: 'I was involved in Daphne's appointment to BMU in or about 1975. I think she came to us from the Liturgical Commission. She wore hat and gloves at the interview and always retained some of the style of a grande dame of the old school. She was a good colleague and a good friend and mentor to me, putting up with a younger boss with good grace. She made a strong second row in BMU with Fr Austin Masters SSM, hard working, reliable, committed. She certainly regarded her work for the Church not just as a job but as a form of discipleship, integrated with her profound spirituality. She was good fun, too. She had an endearing habit, under stress, of lighting up a cigarette and smoking it right through in voracious gulps in about half a minute. I think she had a private income. Certainly she had a pleasant flat in Kensington, just round the corner from St Stephen's, Gloucester Road. I remember taking Frances and Matthew there one Saturday and leaving them with Daphne, while Austin and I went off to a (men only) event at the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. She had a ginger-pop machine – which intrigued the children – and she made them drink up all that they had made, which made them feel so sick that we couldn't go on to the Science Museum. I was very fond of her and mourn her passing. Requiescat in pace.'

At BMU Daphne's work was more appreciated but she was still in the 'second row'. She was also never allowed to represent the Church of England at International Ecumenical Events but she prepared the ground on which **Mary Tanner** was able to flourish. Daphne and Christian were first of all instrumental in getting Mary Tanner appointed to the Faith and Order Advisory Group (FOAG) and from there she was later made Theological Secretary of BMU. Mary says: 'her friendship with Christian was very special and gave them both great pleasure. Together they took me to lunch one day to persuade me to join FOAG and look where that led!'

At the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975, when I (Jean) was elected to the Central Committee and then appointed to the Nominations Committee of the WCC, I was ordered by Christian to see to it that Mary Tanner was nominated for the WCC Faith and Order Commission. During an all night session, which was a baptism of fire, that objective was achieved. From there Mary has become the European President of the WCC and was awarded a DBE in the New Year's Honours

List this January 2008. Those strong women of years ago such as Christian and Daphne who did not always have the same opportunities as the men could work the system as well as any man!

Daphne was an ardent supporter of the ordination of women, and of course a member of MOW. Twice a year she would visit Christian and stay at Castle Howard and they usually descended on me for lunch in York. Daphne attended Christian's funeral in Castle Howard Chapel and also her Memorial Service in York Minister.

I am so sad that I missed Daphne's own funeral, which took place in St Andrew's Church, Jevington on 31 May 2007. She is buried in the churchyard there, which her sister says is a lovely country spot. Some time I must visit her grave and lay some flowers for one who was a real pioneer for women whose legacy we enjoy and whose story we must not forget.

Daphne's prayer for each day of the week:

*Let us pray on Monday
for a fresh, renewed start
in work, and in perception
of all around us.*

*Let us pray on Tuesday
for steadiness of purpose
and rejection of provocations
either given or received.*

*Let us pray on Wednesday
for more attention and concentration
on the needy, and on the difficulties
that arise because we're human.*

*Let us pray on Thursday
for all our friends and neighbours
and for unity in fellowship
among churches and nations*

*Let us pray on Friday
for more courage and steadiness
and openness to change and growth
to conquer our apathy and greed.*

*Let us pray on Saturday
for willingness to be approached
and to be approachable -
to volunteer and keep with it !*

*Let us pray on Sunday
in joy for our salvation,
in thankfulness and repentance for our sins
and for strength for next week.*

