



**Oration on the Interment of the Ashes of Kathleen Mary Rew (Nee Shefford)
Member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (b. 11.06.1930 d. 12.01.2024)**

By David Anthony Rew

At Foxways, Mathern, Chepstow, Gwent on 9th July 2024

Most of us in this room today grew up in comfortable middle class homes in post war Britain, secure from the woes that afflict many around the world.

In reality, we are all here through the luck, good fortune and the mysteries of biology of countless generations of our ancestors.

We are particularly dependent on the life choices and sacrifices made by our parents, grandparents and great grandparents.

My mother, Kathleen Mary Rew, was born Kathleen Mary Shefford in Swansea in 1930, at the end of the Great Depression that followed the First World War.

She died peacefully in the home of my sister, Frances Mary McConvey, on Grand Cayman of advanced dementia at the age of 93 on 12th January 2024.

She was among family and friends to the end. My father, Kenneth Richard Charles Rew, who is our host today, was at her side.

As an itinerant wife, mother and grandmother, Kathleen neither expected or achieved great public recognition for her life's work.

She brought up well a family of four children from the late 1950s onwards, while working as a part time hospital and community pharmacist into her 70s.

I still recall as a child the visits with her to the local community health centre for our ration of orange juice into the early 1960s.

However, my mother's real story is that of the one time greatness of Welsh high school education for girls, when young women of a very different era and social expectations were encouraged by their visionary teachers and parents in ambitious, competitive and forward-thinking Presbyterian Wales to take on England and the world.

Kathleen Shefford was born long before television, computers, jet aeroplanes and the internet. In fact, her parents did not own or use a telephone well into the 1960s. Communications were always by weekly handwritten letter, which usually commenced with the past week's weather report.

She grew up at 47 Bellevue Road, West Cross in a house with glorious views over Swansea Bay. We stayed there every summer during my childhood.

From the house, we could also see in the distance the Docks, Refineries and Metalworks of Port Talbot and Industrial Wales. These were rich and regular targets for the German Air Force through much of the Second World War.

Kathleen's father, Raymond John Bennett Shefford, had played rugby for Ebbw Vale before the First World War. He served and survived four years in the Rifle Brigade in France from 1914 to 1918, rising to the rank of sergeant. He subsequently pursued a life-long career in cost accountancy at the Cwmfelin Steel Works in Swansea. He was also reportedly a popular Mess Hall pianist. I still cherish his 1913 Ed. Seiler of Liebnitz Piano, on which Kathleen, her children and his three great grandchildren also acquired their musical skills.

Kathleen's mother, Clarice, born Clarice Lilian Fischer in 1891, was a teacher and homemaker. She was descended from a German family from Württemberg. Her great grandfather was an engineer who came to England in the early 1800s. Her father arrived in South Wales from London in the 1890s.

Kathleen proceeded to Glanmor High School for Girls on Swansea's Townhill, where her arrival coincided with that of the bombs of the Luftwaffe in 1940.

Many long and noisy nights between 1940 and 1943 were spent by Swansea children under sturdy tables or in Andersen shelters. One splendid example survived in Grandfather Archibald Barrow Rew's back garden in Middle Road, Gendros for many decades.

Following my mother's death, I spoke at length in early 2024 to her enduring school-friend and my godmother Doris Clewett-Price. In her mid 90s, Doris is still sharp as a pin and self-sufficient in her home in Bishop's Stortford. She became one of England's first female consultant ophthalmic surgeons.

I learned from her that one benefit of the Blitz for children was that school in central Swansea did not restart until 1100 on post- Bombing Raid days. No remote learning by Teams or Zoom there.

Doris recalls a carefree adolescence of cycling across town to School every day and around the Gower peninsula when the bombers had departed.

She also recalls the extraordinary encouragement from their teachers to high academic ambition and achievement, most memorably from then Glanmor Headmistress and Oxford graduate Miss Olive Stewart BA.

Kathleen proceeded to an apprenticeship with Boots the Chemists, and then to Nottingham University to read Pharmacy.

Following graduation, she met my father while working for Boots in Swansea and subsequently married him during his National Service. His parallel education in Dynevor Secondary Grammar School in Swansea and in Pharmacy at Nottingham University led to a career in retail management with Boots.

Boots the Chemists was to dictate the rhythm of much of her subsequent life and ours. Ken Rew's employment with the company took the family on regular moves and upheavals around the UK for a further 30 years, until my

parents finally settled here, some 45 years ago, on this peaceful plot next to the church.

Mathern church long predates the Norman Conquest. It has stood in since the 6th Century, from around the time that local hero King Tewdric was buried here. Tewdric is reported to have fallen in battle against the perfidious Anglo-Saxons on the banks of the River Wye.

His coffin was re-discovered in 1881 under the church altar, with evidence from his remains of death in battle. Mother's ashes now lie in royal company.

From her own solid and principled schooling, Kathleen oversaw the education and security of her three sons, including David Anthony, a Consultant Surgeon, Christopher John (a financial adviser and cricket parent), Jonathan Martyn, (a sportswear entrepreneur), and her daughter, Frances Mary, who married Desmond McConvey, and who is a music teacher on Grand Cayman.

Frances moved to there in 1984 in response to an advert in The Times Educational Supplement and she has remained there ever since. She provided a safe, caring, warm and sunlit home for our mother in her last few years.....

Kathleen observed the young lives of her 12 grandchildren, one great grandson and an extended family of Caymanian foster children through dimming eyes over her final decade, but the Welsh singing voice only faded at the very end.

The slow burn of Vascular Dementia relentlessly extinguished the ever burning Welsh fire within. It relentlessly erased her own memories of a transformative wartime upbringing in South Wales, the challenges of motherhood in the rapidly changing post-war world, and the recognition of her own children.

We are proud to honour those memories with you here today.

David Rew: Mathern, 9th July 2024