

Jean Symons 1928 – 2018



Jean had a long association with Chichester and the region. She was brought up in Petersfield and educated at Bedales School. She lived at Upwaltham during the war and thereafter studied at the Architectural Association in London. Determined to learn how buildings were constructed, she eschewed the studio for experience in the Clerk of Works office on the Royal Festival Hall site from October 1949 after completing her 4th year at the Architectural Association.

Her logbook of that time was commemorated in the RFH's 60th anniversary celebrations. Early in her adult life Jean had TB, and it was at the Swiss sanatorium that she met Cecil a doctor who became her husband. She helped setting up his successful practice in Harley Street as his 'receptionist'. Following the death of her husband she took on the management of the Symons collection of medical artefacts which is permanently exhibited at the Royal College of Physicians. In 2011 she was elected an Hon FCRP for her work with the collection. She later continued her architectural career specialising in design for the disabled in a period when accessibility became established in construction regulation. She was Director of the Centre on Environment for the Handicapped and a consultant architect specialising in the needs of disabled people.

In 1987 Jean joined the Franco British Union of Architects, an association formed in 1921 by a group of French and British architects who met in the trenches of the First World War. She was treasurer of the association from 2001 – 2007 and was elected president in 2004. During her presidency she organised a successful reunion based in Chichester which was attended by nearly eighty French and British architects. The reunion included visits to Goodwood House, Chichester Cathedral, the Rolls Royce factory and a special visit to the newly opened Gridshell at the Weald and Downland Museum designed by fellow FBUA member Edward Cullinan.

Jean and Cecil lived at the Rubbing House up on The Trundle for many years, and she took an active interest in local institutions particularly The Weald and Downland Museum. She also served on the Chichester Conservation Area Advisory Committee up to 2018. At the Chichester Society, Jean was an enthusiastic member of the Executive Committee from 19?? – 20??. She always had a forthright opinion to express and frequently ruffled feathers, but she was known to all including The Duke & Duchess of Richmond. It was ironic that she resisted applying for a blue badge, she bore her late frailty with cheerful stoicism.

Jean died peacefully in her sleep on October 28th. It was a surprise to her friends She had the previous week been the guest of the Royal College of Physicians at the inauguration of the Symons bequest of historic surgical items. In typical Jean fashion she refused to have an attended funeral but instead arranged for a party and celebration of her life to be held in the Gridshell at the Weald and Downland Museum. This very successful event was enjoyed by a great many friends from far and near.