

Winifred Fitz – 1913 to 2012

My mother, Winifred Fitz, formerly Hardy, née Reynolds was a remarkable woman. She was born on the seventh day of the seventh month of 1913, in an age before both world wars, when life was very different to today. Her father (Dennis William Reynolds) was a steel engineer in Sheffield, making the big guns in WW 1, and her mother Edith Ellen Rippon (who had been banned from consorting with him because his parents ran a pub) married him as soon as she reached majority.

Win had an older and a younger brother (Bill & Jeff), and a generally happy childhood. Growing up between the wars, she would have been in the 'Flapper' generation, dancing the Charleston and the Black Bottom and I'm sure shocking her grandparents.

She had always wanted to be a teacher, so after doing well at secondary school she entered teacher training college. Here, as well as getting vocational training, she met Elizabeth Smith, who as Cissie Spencer remained a close friend for some 70 years.

She started teaching at a Junior Mixed school in one of the tougher parts of Sheffield. She told the story of how in her first week she pushed the headmaster down the stairs (for having wandering hands) – then stepped over his semi-conscious body and went off to teach her class. The head apologised and she had no trouble from him afterwards! She later taught in other rough area schools with senior as well as junior boys and girls in classes exceeding 50 at times.

We recently found some testimonials from when she left various posts, and I will read a few parts as illustrative of the high level of appreciation that existed of her teaching.

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In 1941, in the middle of the war, she married my father (George Durham Hardy), and Michael was born in 1944. While the schools in Sheffield were closed due to the bombing of the Blitz, she was a volunteer ambulance driver, handling the horrors of war at close hand.

I was born in 1953 when she was 40 (a surprise, she said). Two years afterwards, her life fell apart as George died of polio, in what was probably the last epidemic before the Salk vaccine became available. Their life had been about to take a step up, as George had just been appointed as the swimming coach to the British Olympic swimming team for the Melbourne Olympics

In 1957 she married John Fitz, a fellow teacher, and in 1961 they moved down to Bedfordshire where she had a challenging role as a 'peripatetic head teacher' filling in at different schools as needed. In 1965 she settled as the headmistress of Little Staughton Primary school, continuing until her retirement in 1978.

A few years after John died in 1980, she moved back to Sheffield, as she missed the hills, and felt her roots were here. We bought her a new rucksack for her 75th birthday, and she continued to have an active life for very many years, running the French class for U3A, and helping 'the old folk' at the Cheshire Home. At 91 and 92 she travelled to see us in California, and lived by herself at home to 95. Truly she had a long and productive life.

I'm sure that many of the thousands of children that she taught over the years will remember her as a formative influence in their lives.

Paul Hardy

Woodthorpe (1936-44)

Mrs W Hardy was my colleague at Woodthorpe Jnr Mxd School from 1936 to 1944, and during this time we worked in close cooperation.

She is an exceedingly capable and efficient teacher, whose art of arousing and stimulating the interest of her children ensured a spirit of happiness and enjoyment, which resulted in sure foundations in the basic skills and marked progress in all subjects. It was a delight to take over a class which she had taught.

Mrs Hardy was a valued and popular member of the Staff. She possesses qualities of judgement, sympathy and a high sense of responsibility, which secure for her the goodwill and cooperation of all with whom she works.

Alice Clarke

Brightside (1946-50)

Mrs Winifred Hardy has been known to me since my appointment as Headmaster 8½ years ago to this Mixed School containing 300 Junior and Senior pupils. For over 3 years we valued her presence on the Staff, and greatly regretted her move to Derbyshire in September 1950.

As a class teacher with J1 & J3 she showed herself so thoroughly competent that we were pleased when she took J4 – and with good results. Her preparation of lessons is thorough, her classroom manner is brisk and bright, and as she is at ease with any age group and either sex – Senior boys presented no difficulty.

She helped ease things considerably for younger and less experienced colleagues who joined the staff. Girl's swimming and netball were in her charge, and under her direction the tradition of Brightside prowess at Rounders was well maintained. A competent needlewoman and teacher of art and Craft, it will be readily understood that my timetable took shape around Mrs Hardy's activities. The highlight of the School Concert was the Dramatic Interlude offered under her guidance.

Good relations were sustained with scholars, parents and colleagues, and I especially remember the young students whose presence in the teaching profession today is due to the encouragement offered by Mrs Hardy.

A hard worker herself, she expects and obtains a high standard of achievement from her class, of whatever age, in every subject.

I have every confidence in her ability to conduct a school of her own, can recommend her unreservedly, and will gladly answer further questions.

E.C. Gathercole.

Charnock Hall (1950-53)

Mrs Winifred Hardy worked with me at Charnock Hall Junior School from September 1950 to May 1953. During this period, she taught all the age groups in the Junior School, and due to the timetable, it was necessary for her to teach infants on certain days of the week.

Mrs Hardy was a most successful teacher, bringing to her classes an enthusiasm and energy which obtained a ready and eager response from the children in her care. Personal relationships were pleasant, and a high standard of work in all subjects was achieved.

She was responsible for all girls' activities and needlework. She was the holder of a post of special responsibility as Senior Mistress. Special mention must be made of Mrs Hardy's work in art and craft. Her approach was refreshing and presented new vistas to many of her children.

This work and experience with Primary children together with her previous experience with Junior and Senior boys and girls ensures that she has a broad and mature outlook on education. I hope Mrs Hardy obtains the promotion she so deserves, and I was very sorry to lose a trusted and loyal colleague.

F. Knight.

Charnock Hall (1957-61)

Mrs Winifred Fitz has been a member of this staff since May 1957, during which time she has held a graded post.

Mrs Fitz possesses outstanding ability as a teacher, and her work can only be described as excellent in every way. She is thoroughly reliable, most conscientious and a keen (but not harsh) disciplinarian. Mrs Fitz is able to convey her own enthusiasm to the children in her charge, and one can always be certain that all the children in her class are kept working to the very limit of their ability. Her classes have produced first-class topic books, both individual and group books, and the written work in all subjects is very pleasing indeed.

Needlework is a subject at which Mrs Fitz excels, and the standard of needlework produced by the girls in her class reaches the high level of all other subjects. All out-of-school activities such as School Journeys, Sports Days, and Country Dance Festivals etc. have had her loyal and enthusiastic support.

Mrs Fitz has served this school loyally and well – none better. I shall be very sorry to lose Mrs Fitz and I know that the Staff will too. Fortunate indeed is the school which has her services. She has my very best wishes for the future.

CWK Carter