

## Chris Catling – A tribute

SLHS members were shocked to recently learn of the passing of Chris Catling, a founder members of our society. Primarily basing ourselves on information gleaned from Chris's sister-in-law Mary Hooper, we'd like to thank Chris for his life and his contributions to our community.

Chris was born in 1943 in Surrey and had an older sister, Joy, who still lives in that area. He grew up both with the church and the scouts, as his parents were involved with both. Chris loved outdoor adventure and camping with the scouts and it's there that he met his wife-to-be, Beryl. She was in the guides, and the scouts and guides were doing some joint activities and Chris and Beryl really hit it off. They married and after several years moved to Bishop's Stortford, from where Chris could commute fairly easily to his job in a yacht chandlers in London. Chris was well suited to his job as he was a keen sailor, and Beryl and Chris kept a sailing dinghy down in Portsmouth harbour.

Chris and Beryl had three children, two boys and a girl. Sadly, Beryl died in 2007 from cancer. Chris and Beryl had been members of the Congregational Church since moving to the area and, once Chris was retired, he had time to become involved with driving the minibus to take elderly people to the Hailey Centre for lunch, and to church. He set up a gardening rota to look after the churchyard and visited elderly folk.

With so much of his life in Sawbridgeworth, he made the move to his bungalow in Farriers and was very happy there.

Theo van de Bilt, met Chris in 2014-2015 through meeting Elizabeth Waugh. He was thinking of an oral history project, based on the lovely stories he was hearing from the people he had as passengers on the bus he was driving. In 2016 he came a founder member of our society.

Chris was a regular at the Hailey Centre for lunches and was on the team leading church services there for older folk once a fortnight. Kerry Reynolds, the manager at the Centre, tells us how she often witnessed him deep in conversation with Wally Wright, who was for many years the leading light amongst local historians in our area.

It was through the Hailey Centre that Chris met his partner, Pauline Couchman, who very quickly became a part of the family, as he did of hers. They shared a common enjoyment of life, of going out to shows at the Harlow Playhouse, or day trips out and holidays. The chances are that if anyone ever called round on the off chance to see Chris, he wouldn't be there! His life was full. He had lived with leukaemia for many years, but he didn't let it get in the way of living life.

Local history was indeed to become a great enthusiasm of his, and whilst he did not write up stories himself, being such a social person, he was best placed to point us towards those with relevant information. Together with Chris Finch he worked on an oral history project concerning the Second World War and organised a presentation. Similarly, he organised two afternoon gatherings at the Hailey Centre, giving senior people the opportunity to share their stories. He could also always be counted on when stands had to be set up at events such as the Sawbridgeworth May Fayre and the High Wych Scarecrow Festival. He located newspaper articles of interest and helped to scan them in on the A3 scanner at High Wych School.

Family was always of great importance to Chris, and his home has been the scene of so many happy family get-togethers, for Christmas, birthdays, barbecues in the summer. Friends were also very important. In September 2023 he celebrated his 80th birthday with local friends assembled from the bowls club, the Hailey Centre, church and the local history society. It was a gathering that demonstrated the breadth of Chris' friendships. He'll be missed by so many of us.