

IN MEMORY OF JANE (KENYON)

Born in 1922 to a Welsh farming family, the Bennet-Evans, Jane was immersed in farming activities from a young age. Her father was a dominant force in her life, though she achieved her own independence early on. Educated at St Mary's Wantage and showing considerable prowess at sport, Jane had hoped to study physiotherapy at the Middlesex Hospital. This hope was dashed by her asthma problems and she returned to the family business. During the war she worked with the Timber Corp and at home she became Chairman of the Young Farmers Club. Finally, her father bought her a 375 acre farm in Shropshire which she ran with three men.

Having seen an advertisement for the newly established Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust, aged just 23, Jane applied with little hope. She was interviewed on her own farm and by a panel in London. To her amazement she was awarded a Scholarship to study hill sheep farming in New Zealand. She was one of the first three Scholars to receive Awards. She had to set up all her visits and never having flown before set off for New Zealand via the States. A full description of her tour can be found on the UK Scholars website (Jane – my story).

On her return to the UK, Jane decided to follow John Kenyon to Kenya where he had been appointed Agent to Lord Delamere. They had met when judging for the YFC. Her father was so angry that he sold the farm over her head. Whilst living at Ol Pejeta near Nanyuki, John and Jane bought their first farm, Sera. She had to deal with fencing, stocking and employing help single handed. From there they eventually bought Mogwooni, also near Nanyuki, where again Jane had to establish the boundaries armed with a theodolite and a team of eight men. She ran water pipes from the river to tanks and even built a bridge over the river. Having lived through the times of the Mau Mau she had no intention of leaving at Independence when many did.

John joined Jane on Mogwooni in 1971 and took over much of the organising work. The property eventually covered 16,000 acres. They renovated the house and Jane became very active in the neighbourhood helping to establish the Nanyuki Cottage Hospital in 1951. She also took over a tannery in 1971 and established it on the farm with 25 employees. This ran for several years. Attempts were made by the Masai to grab back some of the land but this failed. Their daughter, Markie, emigrated to the States, but as their son, Jackie, grew up he joined in the family business. With his wife, Mandy, he worked in partnership with John and Jane until Jane passed away in her own cottage hospital in November, having suffered ill health for several years.

Jane showed her amazing pioneering spirit throughout her life and established a high standard for subsequent Scholars to follow. She will be sadly missed.

Tribute by Gill Bullock