

Rosemary Coleridge Middleton (1940-2020)

Tom Mayberry

WE WERE VERY SORRY TO LEARN THAT Rosemary Coleridge Middleton, a Patron of the Friends of Coleridge, died unexpectedly in Taunton on 5 January aged 79. Rosemary, who was known to many of us through her attendance at Friends events, was the great-great-great-granddaughter of the poet, descending from him through Coleridge's youngest son Derwent and grandson Ernest Hartley. She was also, like her elder brother Gerard, a redoubtable defender of her famous ancestor's legacy and reputation.

Rosemary was born on 30 July 1940 and lived her early life in Esher and Thames Ditton. She qualified as a librarian and worked at libraries in the London area, also becoming in these years part of the circle that helped and supported Professor Earl Leslie Griggs (1899-1975) in his great scholarly endeavour to edit Coleridge's collected letters. She would often speak of Griggs with great affection and respect.

Rosemary married Peter Middleton in 1974 and together they had two children, Robert and Sarah. They made their home in Axminster, Devon, where Rosemary took a full part in the life of the church and community. Anyone who visited Rosemary in Axminster will remember a house filled with vivid reminders of Coleridge—his mahogany writing table in one corner of the room, his snuff box on the shelf, Sara's brass kettle standing by the fire and an array of china from Greta Hall displayed in a glass-fronted cabinet. There was as well the gold mourning brooch woven with Coleridge's hair, his silver spoons and a fine oil sketch of his son Hartley. Visits were made memorable not least by Rosemary's fund of Coleridge family stories, told with unstoppable enthusiasm, and by her own striking resemblance to STC.

Rosemary gave important support during the first phase of restoration work at Coleridge Cottage, led by the Friends and completed in 1998, and was a guest of honour when the completed phase two was opened by Simon Jenkins for the National Trust in 2011. She was also a lively presence at Coleridge events of many other kinds. At her funeral in the medieval parish church at Axminster on 24 January there were many members of the wider Coleridge family, as well as representatives of the Friends and the National Trust. Readings from Coleridge, including his own epitaph, and reflections on Rosemary's life, were followed at the last by 'Thine be the glory'. It was an appropriately rousing finale for a person who seemed determined never to be sombre. To her children, Rob and Sarah, who supported Rosemary so much in her last years, we offer our sympathy in their loss.