

A Tribute to Terry Spens on her 90th Birthday

By Ivy Ellick

Mary Theresa Spens, MBE, affectionately known as Terry has been a great friend to St Helena for the past twenty-five years. In 1983 she became the Social Welfare Adviser for ODA's St Helena desk and came to the Island the following year to undertake a review of the Social Welfare Department. On arrival she fell in love with the place.

Terry did a thorough job in reviewing the Department's work and recommended radical changes to improve the lives of the vulnerable. She took a firm stand with the SHG on the issue of the equal rights for women as at that time women were discriminated against and were only allowed to do certain jobs. This caused a stir in the Castle but it was finally accepted that things must change. St Helena was ahead of its time as equality came not only in job opportunities but also in pay. She was also responsible for a major review of the Social Security/Benefits Scheme in 1988/89. This was undertaken with a team of consultants from Coopers and Lybrand and brought great improvements to the benefits system.

Terry has always been young of heart and I have fond memories of her during her first visit to the Island – the one that sticks out is of her whizzing around, riding pillion on a bike with Clive Warren who was on ODA's St Helena desk at the time – if you did your sums you will realise that she was not so young then but she still did many of the Island walks.

When Terry retired she was determined to stay connected to St Helena. She did this by founding the Friends of St Helena in the UK with assistance from several people who had good St Helena connections as well as with St Helenians living in the UK. She became the first chairperson of the Friends and over many years championed the cause for a new museum. Although some preliminary work had been undertaken before, the project gathered momentum in 1999 when Terry returned to St Helena for a holiday. She spent many happy hours in the Archives doing research and, along with Clare Clancy the wife of the then Chief Secretary, put together a project memorandum to secure funding for the conversion of the old Power House building into a museum. It took three years to complete with the new Museum being opened during the Q5 celebrations in 2002.

Terry is a very caring person, generous and kind, she welcomed St Helenians to her home in Cambridge and she visited and supported a Saint prisoner who was serving an 18 year sentence in a UK prison. She is a woman of substance, I could say much more but for now we the people of St Helena, would like to wish Terry a very, very happy 90th birthday. God bless and may you live to see many more.