

**A personal Tribute to a College Personality by Friends of Millbank**

**Mary Kerslake (1938 – 2020)**

**Officers' Mess Manager, Royal Army Medical College**



*Mary Kerslake*

## Chairman's note

The following tribute has been composed from information kindly provided by Mary's daughter, Val O'Connell.<sup>1</sup>

Mary commenced her connection with the College in the early seventies assisting her husband John Kerslake who had been appointed mess manager. She was appointed mess manager herself after John's death, remaining at the College until the doors were finally closed in 1999 and the College was sold off to the University of London. All told, she served at the Royal Army Medical College, the HQ Mess Army Medical Services, for some 26 years, but renewed her connection with the College through her role as an active committee member of Friends of Millbank. She was a founder member of Friends of Millbank in 2006, and served primarily as wines member for many years until illness intervened. She was unanimously elected as Life Member.

## A daughter's tribute

During her time as mess manager, she was involved in all aspects of the running of the mess, from bookings, the overall housekeeping, overseeing the numerous functions and regimental dinner nights, ladies' nights, Royal visits, and much more besides.

These evenings ran like clockwork, she oversaw the running of the kitchens and the waiting staff, also making sure the Corps band was looked after on these occasions. Mum would also be front of house on these nights. We have at least a hundred letters from numerous Naval, Army and RAF Unit representatives who praise mum for all the work she put in to make these evenings memorable.

The lovely people I have spoken to since mum's passing have all said how kind, generous, funny and caring she was, all saying she was like a mother to them whilst staying at the mess, she made friends of the officers and the staff that helped her run it for all those years. If anyone knew Matthew Dooley (Head Waiter at the mess) she was friends with him right up to his passing.

## Further tributes

**Peter Fennell:** My wife Cathy and I go back a long way with John and Mary Kerslake. Back in 1963-65, we shared the same block of flats as them in 12 Broadwood Road, overlooking Happy Valley, in Hong Kong.

John was Chief Clerk at the Military hospital in BMH Bowen Road and I worked in the Path Lab. We would often see them at the flats and at the hospital and they were always a friendly couple, willing to help anyone. John and I would often share a lift to the hospital which was some miles away. We later bumped into Mary when we were both stationed in Aldershot in the 70's, when Mary worked at the Nursery on Middle Hill. Then of course, we met occasionally, when I stayed at the Officers Mess at Millbank.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to Mary's daughter, Val O'Connell, for providing much of this information about her mother, and for vetting the accuracy of this tribute.





*Royal Army Medical College staff and professors, c. 1998 (Mary Kerslake, top row, 10<sup>th</sup> from left)*



*HQ Mess, Army Medical Services (view from Embankment)*





*The Queen Mother thanking Mary Kerslake at the HQ Mess*



*Embroidered cushion presented by Valerie Abraham to Mary Kerslake*

**In memory of Mary Kerslake**