

Eleanor Patricia (Ina) Warnock BEM 26th March 1925 – 16th September 2021
Tribute read at the funeral service, Monday 20th September 2021, by Dawson Stelfox.

There are relatively few people about whom we can say 'I've known them all my life' but I had the good fortune of being Ina's godson and so I am privileged to be able to say that about her, to be able to share something of her long and fulfilling life with you today and to read out the remembrance written by her niece, Roberta Michna, who like her sister in law Nora Warnock and nephews, Julian, Tim, Rowland and Jason, and their Australian families, are watching the livestream of this service from the other side of the world.

Ina being Ina, she set down very specific instructions for this service – what she wanted and also very clearly what she did not want – no photograph on the order of service, no slideshow of her life, and no long oration – it is to be 'short and sweet'. I can confirm it will be sweet but to properly recognise all her 96 busy years, it will not be short!

Ina has been a parishioner here in St John's since 1955, initially attending with her mother, and until illness prevented it just a few years ago she played an active role in parish life. She wanted it known that she has greatly treasured the friendship and the worship that this church has given to her for over 65 years.

Ina's brother Robert emigrated to Australia so all her closest family are now living there but they have all maintained strong connections over the years and her niece, Roberta, oldest of Robert's five children, has sent through this eulogy which I will read on her behalf.

Ina was the first child of Dr Archie and Mrs Pattie (also Eleanor Patricia) Warnock. Her father ran the medical dispensary and was the GP in Trillick, Co. Tyrone. He was an only child, his farmer father having died when he was a toddler. His mother was the youngest of a large farming family of girls. Ina's mother's maiden name was Mitchell and she had two brothers – George, killed in action in World War 1, and Fred, who became Bishop of Down and Dromore, retiring in the 1960's.

Aunty Ina was devoted to her mother, her constant companion after the death of her father in 1946. They moved to Belfast, initially to the Antrim Road, later to Bawnmore Road, and then, following the death of her mother, Ina moved to Trossachs Drive where she enjoyed many years with dear neighbours and friends.

Ina is the last of our immediate family in Northern Ireland. Her brother Hugh died as a young man, and our father, Robert, migrated to Australia when I was 4 years old. The Waterson and Mitchell families are our closest relatives in this country.

Ina chose the hymns for this service, in memory of her Presbyterian father and Church of Ireland mother, and for the memories of her youth. She loved the country she grew up in – the fields, woods and rivers, picnics on Lough Erne and family holidays at the seaside. She had a special affection for horses and riding and even won a hunt cup for hunting hares.

How will our Aunty Ina be remembered?

Firstly as a dear friend – she made many lifetime friends from right back to her schooldays – Manor House School in Gilford, Cambridge House and Alexandra College in Dublin, as well as those met through her life with the Northern Ireland Electricity Service, at St Peter’s on the Antrim Road and here at St John’s and in her home neighbourhood.

She was also active in the wider community, through the Alexandra College Old Girls Association, Guides Association, a Friend of the Ulster Museum, an activist in the Alliance Party, campaigning for them well into her 80s, active involvement in church life and in later years as a committed member and organiser in Probus.

She was a caring godmother to the children of dear friends, including myself, and I still remember the first prayer book she gave me, with a veil and cross for my first communion. She, and her mother, infused a spirit of the Universal church in me, she valued the nourishment of worship which kept her in touch with a spirit that kept her focused on the goodness in all people and the importance of loving in her lives.

Her first jobs were as a cook – initially in Dunmurry and then at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution – ‘Inst’ (where she could still recall stirring the custard pots with a large paddle over 70 years later) before becoming a Cookery Demonstrator for the NI Electricity Service at a time of post war rural electrification, eventually becoming the Senior Home Economist. Her work in travelling the breadth of the NI countryside, demonstrating the use of new fangled electrical goods to community groups, home calls for those with faulty equipment and Shows, was recognised in the Queen’s Honours list in 1980 with the award of the British Empire Medal. The citation for this recognised the difficulties in her work caused by the Troubles, power outages and security checks (telling me that she was occasionally stopped in her work by the Army or UDR but never the IRA). As she gained experience and seniority her work involved recruiting, training and managing staff, overseeing and testing electrical equipment, school domestic science sessions, compiling Cookery books, and, a high point for her, speaking at a conference for Home Economists across the British Isles in Harrogate, about her work with rural communities. The esteem in which she was held by her work colleagues is best summed up by them hosting her 80th birthday party, 21 years after her retirement! Her commitment to her employer is demonstrated by her resolution never to have gas in her home – all powered by electricity!

Ina lived a simple, unpretentious life. She was generous with her time and financial support but could never countenance getting rid of household items that could still be used. She was the only one she allowed to use her electric carving knife as its wiring she thought potentially lethal.

For us, Ina was a treasured Aunt. She took 6 months leave from work to sail across to Australia to join us young children when our parent’s marriage was breaking up and subsequently bunny hopping in aeroplanes across the continents to give us support in those turbulent times. Christmas and birthdays always bought their surprises and memories.

Over the years she has hosted many of her Australian family members and their friends, showing them around Northern Ireland and entertaining them at home and at a range of her favourite restaurants. The memorable visits to Belfast began with my parents bringing the three little boys – Tim, Roly and Jason - to visit in 1968, Julian and I followed 2 years later. All family members were recalled with a story - my oldest son was always the 'little fellow' visiting from the Kingdom of Tonga who wondered how Santa had time to eat his banana, skin and all, when he visited at Christmas.

Ina has been a steady influence on my life. She always accepted my mother despite her leaving a young family, and was also happy to welcome my step mother Nora as part of the fold. In recent years I have come to understand our bond. "I cannot be easily bossed" she told me. She was a pioneer in her workplace, demonstrating a spirit that was equal to and comfortable with her male colleagues, firm and consistent in application – I like to think we are made of the same stuff!

I will carry my aunt with me always and I am proud of the Warnock heritage of dedication and service she helped pass on and the faith and spirit we are both imbued with. I don't think I can ever surpass her graciousness, hospitality and commitment to community and country.

Rest in peace Auntie Ina, with your brother who died so young, and whom you could not leave alone in his grave.

And to that passionate eulogy from Roberta, can I add my own tribute to my godmother. Ina was clever, smart, witty, sharp as a tack, and had great rational and emotional intelligence. She had, at heart, a genuine interest in people and could relate to anyone, young and old. She could build a rapid rapport with whoever she met and had a fascination with interpersonal relationships. She was aware of the world and all its foibles, tolerant yet principled. She went out of her way to welcome newcomers to the Trossachs Drive community and in return received love and care from her neighbours when she needed it. She had travelled widely and had an amazing recall of all the places she had been, sometimes giving me complex route descriptions across cities she had visited decades before. She was a woman of the world, yet with a special place in her heart for anyone from Trillick. And of course she was particularly proud of her Australian niece and nephews – Roberta, Julian, Tim, Rowland and Jason, and all their partners and children, and their partners and their children, many of whom travelled to Northern Ireland for Ina's 90th birthday, a very special occasion.

Over the last few years, Ina became the focus of a new group of carers and friends who looked after her, rewarded by the interest she took in their lives, and we would like to thank everyone - doctors, nurses, carers, her shopping lady and her 'button' ladies, who allowed her to fulfil her wish to remain at home, surrounded by the warmth of her Trossachs Drive friends. And yes, one of the carers was, of course, from Trillick!

Ina was a very special lady, much loved by many and she will be sorely missed on both sides of the world. We give thanks today for her long and fulfilling life which has enriched all of ours.

Thank you for coming today and sharing in our farewell to Ina – Eleanor Patricia Warnock, holder of the British Empire Medal.