

Agneta Wright, 1909–2009

Celebrating a century of transforming & lasting gifts



Carsy, Bridgwater



J. Intihar



Sarah Wright

Agneta Coates at 22, Somerset, England, 1931. St. Gerard's after first Mass, 1971. Fr. Beauregard, left; Agneta, back. Agneta Wright at 99, Bowen Island, BC, 2008.

In early June 2009, the Archdiocese of Vancouver obtained an Apostolic Blessing from His Holiness Benedict XVI for Mrs. Agneta Wright of St. John the Apostle Parish in Vancouver and St. Gerard's Mission on Bowen Island. It was to be presented to her on the occasion of her 100th birthday in August. Sadly, Agneta passed away on June 20th, just short of the milestone.

The obituary below this article describes Agneta's life.

A deeper insight is found in a letter from Father Murray Abraham, a Jesuit from Canada who serves the needy in Darjeeling, India: "Owning a home of their own has brought about a truly miraculous change in once pitifully poor families. How grateful I am that God has made it possible—through you—for us to give the very special, transforming and lasting gifts of homes to these families."

Agneta's one luxury was her roomy but simple Bowen Island seasonal home that helped knit her family. She gave much of her income to good causes like Father Abraham's.

At 23, in Bridgwater, Somerset, England, the then Agneta Coates met Canon C. W. Davey, the much-loved pastor of her fiancé, Harry Wright. Canon Davey guided Agneta into the Catholic Church, and his framed portrait held a place of honour in her living room ever after. His was the first of her ongoing spiritual friendships with priests.

Father Anthony, her parish priest in her Karachi years, 1937–45, was a friar as poor as St. Francis, and his meagre vestments were threadbare. Agneta took it upon herself to learn all about vestments and sewed a beautiful set for him.

Over the years, several priests and religious sisters benefitted from Agneta's prolific letters, penned in firmly flowing handwriting, that sustained her far-flung ties. Father Boniface Aicher, OSB, of Westminster Abbey, Mission, recently wrote, "Thank you for your lovely, faithful letter—at 99!" Father Boniface, 87, said his final goodbye by concelebrating Agneta's Mass of Christian Burial on June 25th, fulfilling a promise made years ago.

Back in the early 1960s, Agneta's letters told of a wonderfully dedicated priest, Father Gerard Beauregard, who celebrated Sunday Mass at Evergreen Hall on Bowen Island from spring to fall.

A historical account inspired by Agneta's recollections describes him as "devout, ebullient, brilliant, eccentric, and deeply good." His homily style was stream of consciousness, but his enthusiasm conveyed a message beyond words.

He found kinship with the islanders, and he drew new energy from the mission's steadfast trustees, including Agneta's husband Harry. Together, said Father Beauregard, they could build a church, and in 1971 they did. The church website fills out the tale.

In due time, Agneta suggested naming the church after St. Gerard Majella. Father Beauregard, who was devoted to his baptismal patron, was delighted. "I always promised Saint Gerard," he said, "that I would one day build a church in his name."

Quietly, Agneta and Harry gave to the limit of their means, as they had

done before to help build Vancouver churches. For the annual strawberry tea that raised thousands of dollars every summer, Agneta and Bowen Islanders of all faiths prepared for months. Soon there was a little rectory too—and no debt.

Harry died in 1976. Agneta carried on with faith and joy.

Each year, Agneta Wright's extended family gathers at St. Gerard's Church on the closest Sunday to August 17th, her birthday. This year, when Agneta was to have received her Apostolic Blessing, her family will instead present it to the people of St. Gerard's, and all will give thanks for Agneta's century of "transforming and lasting gifts."



This article was written by Agneta's youngest son, Jim Wright, for the *B.C. Catholic* newspaper. It was published in the July 13, 2009, edition, which included the following obituary.

The St. Gerard's website is located at <http://stgerards.rcav.org>.

WRIGHT, M. Agneta, passed on peacefully from this life on June 20, 2009, in Vancouver at almost 100 years of age, with family at her side.

Agneta was predeceased by her parents Dr. Richard and Margaret Coates, brother Jack, and sister Janet; husband Harry; and sons Peter and Raymond.

She is lovingly remembered by daughters Josephine (Sister Jo Wright, RSCJ), Cecilia (Stephen) Sothy, and Rosemary (Max) Anderson; sons David (Antoinette) and Jim (Sylvia); daughter-in-law

Patricia; grandchildren Joe, Liz, Andrea, Paul, Jennifer, Teresa, Janet, Dean, Trevor, Jasper, John, Quinton, Daniel, Sarah, Matthew, Christopher, Maria, Josephine, Suzanna, and Lisa; great-grandchildren Carmen, Lauren, Carson, and Trinity; and many other family members and friends.

Agneta was and is the loving heart of her family. The love she gave and received extended widely from there, and her prolific correspondence was global.

Agneta was born in August 1909 in Bridgwater, Somerset,

England, her home until a young Catholic engineer from Lancashire, Harry Wright, built a transmission line through Somerset and met a tall, slim actress and field hockey player. Brought up in the Church of England, Agneta studied and embraced the Catholic faith.

Agneta and Harry married in August 1933. His career would take them to Scotland and Karachi and back to England, and the family grew to the seven children, ages two to 17, that Harry and Agneta brought to Vancouver in 1952. After Harry semi-retired in

1959, the next seventeen years featured his sculpting and Agneta's painting at their seasonal home on Bowen Island. Along with other islanders, they worked to establish St. Gerard's Church on Bowen.

Harry died in July 1976, and Agneta's acumen and social nature continued to flourish. The final third of her life was truly a golden age. Agneta's pace slowed in later years, but her intellect and common sense remained as strong as ever. She shared great joy and wisdom in her family and church activities.

A prayer service was held on June 24th at St. John the Apostle Church, where Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on June 25th by Monsignor Mark Hagemoen, with Fathers Thomas Nicholson, Peter Chiang, Boniface Aicher, OSB, and Thomas Smith concelebrating. Interment at Ocean View Cemetery.



Note: Harry Wright carved the crucifix above the St. Gerard's altar—entirely in one piece from a driftwood cedar log from the shore of Deep Bay, Bowen Island.