



Cumbria Local Involvement Network

Report from the Keswick Drop in Session on the Proposed Closure of Ravensfield Residential Care home.

Thursday 16th September 2010.

Cumbria CVS supports the Cumbria LINK



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Cumbria Local Involvement Network (LINK)

Local Involvement Networks were established in England to represent the views of patients and the public on health and social care issues.

NHS Trusts and Local Authorities are required to respond to Local Involvement Networks for information requests and to reports and recommendations made by them.

Background

Cumbria LINK has been aware of the strength of feeling in and around Keswick over the proposed closure of Ravensfield Residential Care Home and in response arranged a drop in session in Keswick for people to express their views.

The drop in session was held on 16th September 2010 in the Moot Hall, Keswick. The session was advertised through posters in the town, local press and through our own networks. Cumbria LINK representatives also talked to local people on the street, local market traders and those at a local drop-in centre for older people.

In addition to the LINK attendance representatives from Adult Social Care, West Cumbria Carers, Age UK West Cumbria and MIND West Cumbria were invited to provide information to those who attended the drop in session. An invitation was also extended to Derwent and Solway Housing Association but was declined.

Findings

A total of 30 people attended the drop in session with a further 15 who gave their views on the street. People also contacted us by phone, letter and email to express their views. A full account of all the views recorded on the day can be seen at appendix 1. Some local residents have sent letters of concern over the proposed closure to Cumbria LINK which can be seen at appendix 2.

Reasons for Closure

None of the people we spoke to on the day supported the council's reasons for the proposed closure as evidenced below. We are also aware that a petition of 3000 signatures opposing the closure had been handed into the council.

1 Flood Risk

- Ravensfield never actually flooded
- Recent flood defence improvements have significantly reduced the likelihood of future flooding
- Issues with the lift, the only thing affected by the flood water, could easily be resolved with a backup generator

2 Demand for Residential Care

- Whilst some people choose to receive care at home there are major concerns that in some cases residential care is the only option for example those who have dementia or are vulnerable. As the numbers of older people increase over time it is inevitable that more people will need residential care.
- Isolation is a major cause for concern. For those people living alone, care at home cannot solve the feelings of isolation that many people we spoke to feared.
- Ravensfield also provided respite care, as we lean more heavily on unpaid carers in the future the need for respite will increase. With the reduction of beds at the local Cottage Hospital available respite care is decreasing.

3 Alternative Residential Care

- There are only two private Residential Care Homes in Keswick, one of which did actually flood. There are no alternative Council run homes.
- Ravensfield was rated 3 stars in a recent CQC inspection and rated better than the alternatives.
- On the issue of Extra Care housing, this is an aspiration for the future not a reality now, so that choice simply does not exist.
- Sheltered accommodation has also been reduced in Keswick, again reducing choice.

- The families and friends of those people who were given alternative residential accommodation outside Keswick reported difficulties in getting to the new residential care home. Public transport is poor and many that we spoke to did not have access to a car. Free transport by bus for friends or family without access to a car does not start until 10.30am making some longer journeys to visit those referred out of Keswick very difficult or in some cases impossible.
- With personalised care and choice high on the health and care agenda people that we spoke to could not see how this could be achieved through only offering care at home providing no real choice.
- The cost of providing care at home could result in higher financial implications, given the amount of carers needed and travel costs as well as not being able to offer individual choice.

4 Quality

- Ravensfield was rated 3 star by CQC
- Most elderly people who are residents of care homes currently do not expect to have en-suite facilities
- EU regulations on new build homes do not apply to existing properties
- There is huge support from the community to Ravensfield and its residents with an active core of committed volunteers that provide a range of services.
- Ravensfield is also supported by local businesses.
- Without a doubt the quality of care provided at Ravensfield and the added value provided by the community is exceptional.
- People are able to pop in and visit very easily without the need for public transport, so support from families and friends is maintained.

5 Consultation

- There was negative feedback from the consultation with residents undertaken by 'Shaping Our Lives'. Some families reported that no consultation had taken place at all. Others reported that interviews with Ravensfield evacuated residents were held in the temporary place with care home staff present making it difficult to give an honest and open response. Generally the questions were closed questions and did not provide an opportunity for those affected to be listened to. If former residents had been asked where they would prefer to live and it had been specified Ravensfield, rather than just being offered Keswick care homes in general they would have chosen Ravensfield.
- The majority of people that spoke to us had also attended the public meetings on the consultation and reported feelings of frustration at not having been listened to.
- The general feeling from the community was that the real reason for the proposed closure of Ravensfield is purely financial and that the decision has indeed already been made.

6 Other

- We were made aware of the fact that the land on which Ravensfield is built was gifted to the community. We would like to know what plans if any are in place for the site should Ravensfield close and have asset transfer plans been explored?

Recommendations

What came across to us very clearly was the 100% support from the community for Ravensfield which is seen as central to the community. We feel that this has not been fully explored. This would seem to provide the basis and opportunity for co-production, with a strong sense of community ownership, an active base of committed volunteers and support from local business. We would therefore recommend that any decision be postponed to allow this opportunity to be explored fully. We further suggest that this work be facilitated by an independent organisation.

We are all aware of the Governments vision for a big society and this we feel has the potential to deliver a very positive result.

With no alternatives in place with regard to Extra Care Housing and Sheltered accommodation we feel it would be inappropriate to close Ravensfield at this time. We therefore recommend that Ravensfield be re-opened until such time when alternative housing choices are in place and enough time has passed to assess effectiveness and need.

Our listening exercise suggests that there is a great need and desire for places at Ravensfield which contradicts your report. We would recommend an independent review of the need for residential care in the locality an assessment of the social impact of potential closure to inform the decision making process.

Contact Details:

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Appendix 1 - Responses to Consultation Questions

1. Do you agree that the Council is right in aiming to support more people to stay at home?

- Feel that the consultation document was flawed. Ravensfield never flooded and am 99.9% it won't flood.
- Yes but provision needed for those who wish not to stay at home.
- No people will become isolated with only carers going in twice a day if they have no other visitors, volunteers used to take the residents from Ravensfield out.
- This is neither tried nor tested and will cost much more to pay for carers to attend people at home, particularly dementia cases.
- Aiming to support more people at home! Sounds fine - but not at the expense of choice.
- Are you saying nothing will change in the future? None of homes meet all excellence.
- There are other homes in a worse condition than Ravensfield. It doesn't matter about fixtures and fittings; it's the care that counts.
- Yes in some ways but would it work e.g. isolation and waiting for care to arrive, getting agitated – all small problems are mountains.
- Only for people who want it. There must be choice, for some it could be very lonely i.e. with on one to talk to between visits.
- Some people cannot be at home. What about them?
- In Cumbria's terrain? In Cumbria's winter?
- Who looks after people that are no longer capable of self care? 24 hours a day is needed, not 2 or 3 daily visits. Has a trial run been tested?
- It depends on their needs sometimes it is vary difficult for families 24/7 they need respite care.
- Broadly yes, but not when it puts a strain on families and carers.
- There comes a time when many elderly can no longer be maintained in their own homes, having a proper community residential home prevents this becoming an issue.
- The council need to realise that not everyone wants to stay at home, it can be lonely and people are happy living amongst their friends in Ravensfield.
- Can not see how it will work, travel costs, different carers unknown to patient and carers going at different times or the day so no routine in care.
- People feel they are being pushed into it; it's a pity it can't be done rationally and calmly.
- More people are opting to stay at home which is fine but people need choice.

2. Do you think that by supporting more people in their own home or in extra care housing that we will not need as much residential care?

- No. You will always need residential care in Keswick – Ravensfield is part of the fabric! It is in a great place to visit residents.
- No.
- Where the hell is this Big Society? This is DIY, Downgrading and Degrading.
- Vulnerable people will always need residential care in their own community.
- No, increasing levels of people aged 60/70 +.
- People need care 24/7 and families need a break.
- Will always be a need for residential care.
- No. Unpredictable someone will always need residential care. There will never be anybody who does not.
- We need residential care for residents in their own community. We now travel to Silloth to see our mother – 60 mile round trip, her friends cannot get there.
- No. By 2020 there will be a 30% increase in over 85's in this area. Dementia cases up 130% so there is a need for more residential care.
- Where is the extra care housing in Keswick?
- I believe there will not only be a continuing need for residential care but also an increased need due to the ageing population. We also need day provision in residential care and more support for carers and families.
- No because not everyone wants to stay at home, I was hoping to become a resident at Ravensfield myself in the near future and do not know what I will do now as I don't have family to care for me.
- No, I believe from speaking to locals that there are more than enough residents to fill Ravensfield should it reopen and I can not see the demand lessening in an ageing community! There was always a waiting list for Ravensfield until one day the council suddenly stopped bothering to fill the empty beds like a decision had already been made!

3. Extra care housing schemes provide people with their own self contained homes with the extra benefit of care staff, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Do you support the Council's intention to develop extra care housing in Keswick?

- Yes, for some but there are degrees of care which could only be met at a place like Ravensfield.
- Too late for some of us already in our 80's
- The immediate need is now. Future plans can be discussed with Ravensfield open.
- When will this happen? How will you fill this gap?
- Will this be affected by cuts?

- There is no extra care housing in Keswick and unlikely to be for some considerable time. The proposal for extra care housing at Greta Court has failed to secure funding.
- Actions speak louder than words.
- Yes but when will this happen? Fill the gap.
- Yes but hardly likely to happen in the present economic climate.
- Ideal in theory but what happens in practice, 24 hour a day?
- When comes on live. No early prospect.
- More provision at cottage/community hospitals and beds reduced.
- I support all these comments – use what we've got until [allegedly] better facilities are available.
- What's the point? Stop pretending that you all listen. This is lip service. The only type you all understand.
- Enough step down care needs to be available in Keswick.
- Keep Ravensfield open until a new home is running and good.
- Don't believe the council have this intention, in fact quite the reverse.

4. Do you have any other questions, comments or suggestions on the types of services you would like to see provided in the community?

- More care provided for Dementia patients.
- Concerned about bed reduction at the cottage hospital.
- Hospital needs to cope with winter pressures.
- More elderly care and mentally infirm is necessary and needs to be secure.
- I am furious that the council are not listening to the views of local people.
- I have been told by the family of a resident that neither they nor the resident were consulted or spoken to before they were moved, yet the council said in a press release that everyone had been consulted?
- Extremely angry that loved ones have been moved out of the area and we are struggling to be able to afford to visit them.
- My mother was admitted to hospital after a fall but it was a long time before she was moved to Ravensfield there seemed to be bed blocking going on as many admissions were moved or declined long before the flood warning as if they wanted Ravensfield empty.

5. Do you understand the concerns the County Council have in re-opening Ravensfield given the future flood risk, the reducing demand for residential care and the fact that Ravensfield does not meet modern day accommodation standards required to support high quality care?

- Dishonest – Ravensfield has not flooded. There is growing local need.
- Millfield is much more likely to flood than Ravensfield
- Ravensfield has never been flooded. The river walk has been strengthened and simple door flood gates could be installed.

- Understand them but do not agree with them!
- Ravensfield does meet required standards for building of its age. Past residents moved to other establishments of lower standard.
- It never flooded. Waiting list and full until June 2010. Ensuite = own toilet only which is not a problem, many can't bath or shower unaided.
- This notice is untrue – Ravensfield did not flood. None of the care homes need EU criteria. Let us have a level playing field please!!
- Ravensfield worked very well before floods. Why not reopen it until a suitable replacement can be accommodated?
- Flooding is a red herring, a weak excuse. What about houses nearby are they going to close?
- Ravensfield did not flood, everyone knew 24 hours before hand about the weather, and residents were offered the use of a nearby hotel's rooms.
- Not likely to be a flood risk.
- Reducing demand not true there is an increasing demand as Keswick has an ageing population.
- It didn't flood please stop using this as an excuse.
- Need of some upgrading is a poor excuse for closure, these issues can be easily addresses and it is the quality of the care accounts.
- These reasons are not enough they are just excuses.
- Should focus on improved quality of life, the council needs to listen to the human side.
- I agree the standards were not the best but it is wrong to take something away before an alternative is put in place.

6. Please tell us any reasons why the council should not proceed with its proposal to close Ravensfield residential care home.

- They have nothing to replace Ravensfield. We have only 2 private homes and both have very little accommodation to spare.
- Disgracefully bias public consultation.
- Keswick's aging population will increase.
- It's the people and the community.
- Mother was in Ravensfield and well cared for, it needs to be kept open until something else is in place. Choice is really for those who are not alone. Care at home could be isolating! Difficult to tailor care at home to individual preferences.
- What do you do if residential care is the only option?
- Can walk to Ravensfield but would need a car for elsewhere.
- Affordability of private homes would mean the sale of own home.
- The need for residential care will always be there.
- Yawning gap in provision for next year, due to lack of preparation. There is huge local opposition.
- It feels wrong to deprive people of their choice of residential care in their own community.

- Be honest what is the real reason? Ravensfield is perfectly adequate until such time as a new home can be built in Keswick.
- I understand the land Ravensfield stands on was donated to the town by the late Hal Raven, certainly not to any council.
- Depends on options and what will take its place.
- There are poor transport links to visit residents in the care homes they have been moved to.
- Because nothing better is in place and because the council are not taking into account the wishes of the town.
- If Ravensfield is not reopened, Keswick is highly unlikely to get proper local provision for the foreseeable future.
- A local home for the elderly is vital in this town so they can retain their links with the community.
- I along with many residents of Keswick believe the land was bequeathed to the community by Mrs Raven, so how can the council say in their proposal it is theirs to sell?
- Many residents who have been moved out are now lonely and isolated as they have been moved to homes so far away for family and friends to visit. This is not helped by the fact people can not use their bus passes early in the morning.
- A friend of mine has gone down hill since being moved out of the area where they no longer have visitors as it is too far and we can not get there.
- I would be very sorry to see it closed it should be kept open.
- The staff do not want to leave and work somewhere else this just proves what a lovely home it is.
- My father used Ravensfield and my mother was there until it was evacuated, they both chose and loved the place. My mother is now at Silloth as this was the only place that could cope with her care needs; she is desperate to move back to Ravensfield, her home.

Appendix 2 – Letters from Local Residents

1.

To whom it may concern,

My mother who is now 90 still lives on her own but for how much longer I don't know. It is becoming increasingly stressful not knowing from day to day how my mother's day will be. She still manages with the help of family, taxis and Age Concern to get out and I hope that continues.

We as a family would like to think that in the near future that warden controlled accommodation would be available if needed for her. The next step after warden controlled accommodation would be a care home. With the amount of elderly in and around Keswick I feel it is very important that Ravensfield should re-open for the 24 hour care and also for families who may need rest bite. Or Ravensfield should re-open until suitable accommodation has been found or built in Keswick to replace it. I fell in the near future I might benefit with the rest bite facilities for my mother as I have family in other parts of the country and abroad whose jobs sometimes take them away for a few days and I like to feel available to help them by looking after the grandchildren so they do their jobs with peace of mind.

I am in my sixties now and am looking into the future when I also might need care somewhere in Keswick rather than burden my family with my old age.

Recently whilst I was on holiday my mother was taken quite ill and needed a doctor at one o'clock in the morning and should have been admitted to hospital only to find Penrith Hospital was full, Keswick Hospital beds has been cut down to only 13 and were full and my mother felt insecure about Carlisle Hospital with it being so far away, it was also doubtful about a bed for here there. So with a nurse arranged to go in for her at three o'clock in the morning to give her her medicine, the rest of the night she was on her own too weak to get out of bed not knowing what time of night or day it was.

I feel at this time a few days rest at Ravensfield or Keswick Hospital, if more beds had been available, would have been beneficial to her and to us the family. Is this the way elderly people of Keswick should be treated? I don't think so.

Yours sincerely,

2.

I oppose the proposals to close Ravensfield

The home has not actually flooded but residents have been moved out as a precaution.

The home requires minimal refurbishment to include shower rooms and WC en suite with a communal bath area to allow the use of hoists. Refurbishment should include flood defences.

Feel that providing care in a care home is more cost effective, one carer can care for 6 residents but it would take 6 carers to care for 1 person at home. The cost of care at home also has an environmental impact on the increased need for travel to and from service users home.

There is only one other County Council care home within a 20 mile radius of Keswick, with poor public transport provision visiting family and friends a distance from home would be difficult and this would impact on the wellbeing of the resident. Residents regarded Ravensfield as home and if it were to close it would be a sad day for the elderly.

3.

Dear Cumbria LINK,

This is to give you some idea of how much elderly people and residents of Ravensfield have been valued and continued in this community, they may not be able to speak for themselves today but we want you to know how much they are cared for in Keswick.

The residents have a right to have their emotional and social needs met, at the moment this is not the case. Many have been moved away from family and friends and have lost their social life, the support from family and friends and the feeling of belonging to a community. Unlike other residential care homes there was no question of isolation at Ravensfield as it was so involved with the community and they always had a busy itinerary of activities.

This is my opinion and experience with Ravensfield, I have worked there as a carer and now do voluntary work within the local community since I retired. I meet a lot of older people and they are very concerned about where they will go and what will happen to them, as a lot of them live alone. Ravensfield had a day care service which ran 4 days and people could go at weekends to join in activities, all that is lost if Ravensfield closes.

So it leaves me to say how disgusted we are with the actions of Cumbria County Council. They are human beings not cattle.

Yours Very Sincerely

4.

To whom it may concern,

It is a local resource with a lot of involvement with local people. The floods came, the building did not flood the council are using this as an excuse along with the fact they claim the building is not fit for purpose and closed the resource by not allowing people to return but with no discussion or consultation.

The importance of continuation of care should be the council's priority, residential care, respite and day care. Residential resources are valuable and important to the

local community. Many local people have experienced difficulty in getting relatives local residential care places, but the council do not seem to have listened to this.

As well as direct full time care are the council aware of the need for such a home to provide much needed respite care and do they realise the strain put on carers by taking this service away. I wonder how many councillors involved in making the decision not to allow the home to reopen have direct experience of caring for the elderly and people with dementia.

I do not understand how the council say there is a reducing demand for residential care when Keswick has an ageing population and we need to have the resources to deal with this. I agree with extra care housing but this will only work alongside residential and respite care not instead of them, this would put far too big a strain on families, carers and the local community. A local GP made the point that care in the community could be provided by staff coming from West Cumbria so travelling time would impact on the direct care time available, has this been considered? At Ravensfield residents have immediate care available.

The council have stopped the home reopening before there is an integrated plan for the care of the elderly in Keswick which has been discussed with the local community. Ravensfield should remain open and become part of this plan. There is much suspicion locally that this is purely a financial decision by the council.

Over 3000 signatures from a small town have been collected against the proposed closure. Keswick town council have expressed significant concerns about the county's ability to offer extra care housing as an alternative for placing people in residential care homes. E.g. would care in the community be ring fenced for Keswick (finance). Keswick town council did not think this would be possible by Cumbria County Council. They have put recommendations to Cumbria County Council. Individual members felt the official response form was misleading in the type of questions and provided minimum opportunities for concern to be expressed. The petition was taken to Kendal on 22nd September 2010, but because not prior notice had been given the matter was not discussed by the full council. The 'cabinet' will meet prior to the next full council meeting; will the decision already have been made by then? Those MP's I have spoken with so far cannot detect any rationale behind the proposal to close Ravensfield and fear as always that this decision is being financially driven.

I have experienced the problems caused by lack of local facilities 4 and 12 years ago through the placement of elderly parents. No local options were available and there are still not enough today.

5.

Dear Cumbria LINK,

Resident of Keswick feels very let down by the County Council. Her mother had to go into Ravensfield originally for respite care. Whilst her mother was there, she received a phone call that shocked her, to say her mother would not be coming home. Actually she had been offered a room and had made the decision to stay,

she liked it so much. The decision to evacuate residents all over the County is very upsetting and confusing for those who have an interest in it, as residents from Millfield were evacuated into a local hotel, taken by wheelchair. Why did this not happen to residents of Ravensfield? Previously, when the flood had been a risk to Ravensfield, residents were simply taken to the local hospital, and returned the next day as it never flooded. The lift shaft could have been sorted with a generator. The County Council have told this lady Keswick is well served for care, but there are now no respite beds, and the hospital is often full, meaning elderly people being shunted about the County. Ravensfield is a community centre where local people come and go freely, sharing their skills from nail polishing, hair dressing and fund raising events. She fully disagrees with the closure and thinks the Council should listen to public opinion before making their decisions

6.

Dear Cumbria LINK

My mother lived with my husband and myself for nine years and remained until her death completely compos mentis. During that time she often stayed at Ravensfield for Respite care. On one of these occasions she was offered and accepted a room, when I asked her why she replied "I like it in here and I am safe". She lived happily for a further two years came back to us for little holidays.

The council in their scheme for care in the community admit there is no provision for respite care so no provision for carers which is wrong. It is a fact of life that we are all living longer and many carers are themselves pensioners.

Yours very sincerely

7.

Dear County Councillor,

Ravensfield residential care home closed in November 2009 due to the threat of flooding and its residents were evacuated to various homes around the county. There is deep concern in Keswick regarding its continued closure. Some relatives and friends need to use public transport to visit which in some cases entails a 4 hour round trip.

Ravensfield has 30 rooms, some with en-suite facilities and has a secure unit. The home has a very strong support group. Cumbria County Council is mindful to close the home permanently with the original reason being a threat of flooding although the building itself never flooded. The reason now being given is that the premises are sub-standard, even though a recent survey reported it as being one of the best in the County. The town has a 32 bed privately owned nursing home and a privately owned residential home which was also evacuated in November but which was re-occupied within 24 hours. In view of the current political situation it is unlikely that there will be funding for a replacement build.

Why is Keswick being targeted? Especially as it has a higher than average population of residents aged over 65. The number of patients registered with

medical practices covering Keswick and district is 8,379, 27% over 65, of which 7.3% are 75 – 80 and 6.6% are over 81. The National figure for those aged 65 and over is 16%.

The town is addressing this situation which affects us all and as our parliamentary representative we would ask if you could please use your considerable influence to support your constituents.

Yours sincerely

8.

Dear Sirs,

We write to express our view that Keswick's Ravensfield residential care home should be re-opened as quickly as possible. Five honest facts support this request: 1. The Ravensfield building is ready for immediate re-occupation, water in the lift shaft and garage has been mopped up, there is no flood damage. 2. Many of the residents evacuated on November 19th wish to return to Keswick where they are close to their wives, husbands, families and friends. 3. Keswick has an above average number of ageing people; our town needs its local provision now and more so in the future. 4. The re-location of Ravensfield as a new "Close to Home" Keswick hospital campus looks like moonshine. Building a new hospital at Cockermouth is behind schedule, not a brick has been laid. 5. The public mood in Keswick and district is one of suspicion, anger and protest. People are beginning to think about taking to the streets as happened in the save our hospital campaign.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 3 – Extract from ‘An Offcomer’s Tale – Keswick 1983 – 2010’ by Margaret Armstrong

Whose house is this?

Sometime in the spring of 2006 I went to pick up Harold from Ravensfield, the Care Home where he had been since November 2003. We were going to Sally's, our hairdresser, for his regular trim of hair and beard. It was one of those little outings that I felt important, to keep him looking tidy, and to provide some semblance of normality in his fragmented life. This time, when we got there, I found that I had misread the time on the appointment card and there was an hour to spare. What should I do? A drizzly morning, not much point in driving round or sitting in the car by the boat landings. Not worth going back to Ravensfield. I decided to take him home, something I had not done for quite a long time.

I ran the car down the drive to the front door of Peel Wyke our bungalow. We went through the porch that he had tiled with such patience and care twenty years previously and into our kitchen that had taken him three or four years to create to his satisfaction. He glanced around and then went into the living room and sat down in the red chair, part of the suite that he had chosen. He looked at the electric fire in its slate surround as I switched on the flickering lights of its mock coals, lumps of glass which he had washed and replaced many times. Above it was a large picture of our two oldest grandchildren, seated on a rock beside Lake Ontario. It was a memento of a holiday we had spent with our son Phillip and his family in Canada. To the side in the bookcase was a full set of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels. Harold had read every one since retirement. On the wide sill of the bay window, through which he had watched with interest the passers by, there was a group of familiar ornaments, collected and displayed through the years as we had moved from house to house.

As I brought in a mug of tea Harold looked up at me and said, "Whose house is this?"

A black wave of disbelief and dismay swept over me for one shocked moment, and then gave way to relief, as I realised that his memories of our life together in this place had gone for ever. He did not pine for what was past, and neither should I. I replied calmly, "It is mine"

He seemed satisfied and asked nothing more. It was reported recently that there are twenty thousand people in Cumbria suffering from dementia and that there will be problems in caring for them in the ageing population. Certainly those who do so, whether professionally or individually, need all the support that can be given. Any family dealing with the dementia of a member will know of those situations when they had to laugh or they would have cried. They will also know of the feeling of despair, of the inadequacy to cope, and the knowledge that there can be only one end.

At first there were only the slight deviations from normal that affect us all as we get older, the inability to remember people's names or be sure what day it is.

Harold had always risen first in the morning and made tea. That tea began to come with floating leaves. The water had not been boiled. Then he would get dressed and try to make the tea at two or three o'clock in the morning. Out shopping he sometimes wandered off and could not find his way back to the car. Using public toilets was a nightmare especially if there was more than one exit and he chose the one I was not watching. Physical afflictions and the indignity of many diagnostic procedures leading to several periods in hospital all added to Harold's confusion. He had always been a very private person and I felt so sad for him. As with all couples of a similar age, difficulties are not limited to one partner. A broken ankle, circulation problems and the fitting of a heart pacemaker, then a knee replacement, certainly slowed me down, although I did basically manage very well. I am grateful for all the help we both received, but eventually twenty four hour caring overwhelmed me, and for Harold to be looked after professionally seemed the only solution.

With remarkable good fortune there was a vacancy in the secure unit at Ravensfield in Keswick. Harold went there from Keswick Hospital, after having walked out more than once. On one occasion he was missing for some time and if he was making for home, he was going in totally the wrong direction when the police found him. I just felt terrible about this, as if somehow he was making a break for freedom. Once he was settled at Ravensfield a different way of life began for us both. I was able to visit most days. The staff made me welcome and I often stayed for a meal. I came to know Harold's companions and the friends and relatives who came to see them. There would be afternoons when, over a cup of tea, it seemed like any other social gathering except that the residents did not engage each other in conversation. There were parties and special events when everyone in the home came together, and at Christmas a wonderfully happy atmosphere was created as if we were all one big family. Father Christmas (the husband of one of the carers) came with his reindeer (his two large Saluki dogs sporting plastic antlers) and presents were given all round. Church groups sang carols. I had tremendous admiration for the energy that went into stimulating drifting minds and seeming indifference.

With all the kindness and care, the fact of having to leave was always difficult. I would say that I was going to play golf, or that I was going shopping, or going to see a friend. Sometimes Harold would say, "Well I'll come with you." Not possible alas. However I did take him into the Supermarket, where we would have a coffee and watch the people passing by. It was good when friends that we knew came to talk to him. He responded cheerfully, although he never knew who they were. The best outings were when I could take him out in the car to visit his brother and sister for an hour or so. When I look back now I realise that the times when we drove a short distance, and then just sat in the car watching the lake and the wildlife, or parked high up in a lay-by with a view over the fields and fells that we loved, were very special. We were together as we had been for so many years. Nothing else

mattered. There was no past and no future.

However there is a present. I am truly blessed with two sons and one of them Steve, came to live in Keswick in 2002. He bought a house in Wordsworth Street and began to adapt it so that he could live in a flat on the third floor and let the lower part as holiday accommodation. His brother Phillip came from Canada for weeks at a time to help. They knocked walls down and laid a laminate floor. Steve's two sons, Neil and Alex, came and together they erected an outside spiral staircase to give independent access to his top flat. There was a patio garden made at this level, a viewpoint to look over all the great variety of Victorian chimney pots to Latrigg and Helvellyn. Equipped and ready, the house called "Brooklands" had four bedrooms, a spacious lounge/dining room and a large well fitted kitchen. It is popular with holidaymakers, but also it became the focus for our family. Those who came to Peel Wyke as babies now brought their own children to Brooklands. There were convivial gatherings of near and extended family. They came from Wigton, Manchester and London, from Canada, Japan and Australia. For several years we were able to bring Harold to join in, and Steve's presence was a wonderful help to me. Phillip organised group holidays for members of his Canadian walking club. Some were based in Brooklands and some in nearby guesthouses. In the evenings they came together to eat and drink, ease tired limbs and plan the next day's walk. It was great for me to help my daughter-in-law Anne with the catering and meet their friends.

I was, and still am, so fortunate. There are some of my retired friends, who have no family, or have children too pre-occupied with their own lives to come to Keswick very often; but there are many who, like us, chose to live out their remaining years in a place that would be enjoyed by their children and grandchildren. They turn up in droves at half-terms and holidays.

The years went by, and in January 2004 there was a joyous party of family and friends held in the golf club for my eightieth birthday. Harold was brought for the lunch, and I tried to get him to put the engagement ring on my finger, as he had done sixty years before. He was a bit confused but the company appreciated it and it meant a lot to me. When in August of the same year it came to the date of our Diamond Wedding I was quite happy to let it pass uneventfully, but Canon Brian Smith gave me a commemoration to remember. He organised wine and Christine made a cake. Stephen fetched Harold from Ravensfield part-way through morning service so that I could lead him to the altar, and we took our last communion together. At the end Rachel played the Wedding March for us to walk up the aisle. It was absolutely wonderful. Harold was happy and responded to the many people who spoke to him as we all enjoyed the cake and wine. I can never thank Brian enough for that day. It was so impromptu that no one had a camera. Perhaps it was just as well.

Ironically it was on our wedding anniversary, the fifth of August two years later, that Harold went into Keswick Hospital for the last time. After days of

gentle

care and skilled nursing he lapsed into unconsciousness. Phillip and Anne came from Canada, and with Steve, one of us visited him every day, until the news came on Saturday morning twenty-sixth of August that he had died.

My good friend Reverend Dr. David Edwards conducted a moving and deeply significant funeral service for me and all the family, friends and neighbours. Rachel played and we sang Harold's favourite hymn, "God is our strength and refuge" to the tune of the "Dambusters" march. It reminded him of his work of designing the aircraft parts during the war. I was so grateful to be in St. John's church amongst people who knew us both. I stood by the graveside, holding David's arm and, shielded from the drizzle by his big umbrella, and as he said the final words I looked across and saw in the next row of gravestones that of Kelly Mason aged twenty-two. A prayer of thanks came in to my mind for Harold's eighty-six years. I hoped that I had been the best that I could for that dear man and I felt fulfilment and peace. My tears had been shed years before and I felt a sense of release for both of us.