

OBITUARY – MISS OLWEN M. HUNT SOWERHILL
IRISH SETTERS
1929 – 201



How sad I am to write this obituary and tribute to this lovely lady who died on April 4th 2012. Olwen was a person of charm, quality and distinction who almost throughout her life from the age of 10 years in 1939 right up to “last year” always kept and bred Irish setters. In that time she bred some of the most important and influential setters which were the basis establishing great dogs such as Sh.Ch. Kerryfair Night Fever (By Sh. Ch. Sowerhill Sahib ex Cornevon Spring Melody) who in turn passed significant genes on to Sh. Ch. Caspians Intrepid. Olwen’s record in “Irish” speaks for itself and is to be seen and found as the foundation of many lines.

In the 2009 ISAE review appropriately the club honoured Olwen, one of it’s former committee members, with a fine article written by Olwen herself recording her life and showing some truly enchanting photographs of many “typy” setters, who to my eye have a depth of quality and soundness which so correctly endorse the breed standard and such a pleasure to behold. This lady was always courteous, modest, unassuming, gentle honest and very principled – She was kind and reserved almost shy at times – but at the same time she held very definite views and was decisive and sure and in a quiet way would not be easily swayed. There was an inner strength to her character....and her close and true friends knew this to be so – it belied her outwardly reserved quiet manner. I believe she possessed an unusually fine “eye” as a judge and knew exactly what she sought and looked for in a setter and watching her judging this breed was an education in itself and a delight.

Olwen was born in London SW2 and after ten years moved with her parents, sister and two brothers in Purley in Surrey. Between 1941 and 1944 Olwen and her brothers and sister were evacuated to Stroud in Gloucestershire. On returning to Purley she had much to do with the Young Farmers Club and at their Field Contests she represented Surrey for dairy cattle judging, beef cattle judging and poultry judging. In the latter she got the top award at Olympia and was asked to represent England. In 1951, her parents bought Higher Sowerhill Farm where Olwen and her brothers' dairy farmed up to 1999. The farm was sold but 4 acres were retained and they had a bungalow and stables built which remained her home until her sad passing.

She had her first Irish setter in 1939 called Norlan Tessie Belle, based upon Wendover, Boyne, Nutbrown, and Rheola lines bred by Mrs. E. F. Leighton-Boyce. What followed were a number of champions such as Sh. Ch. Sowerhill Sahib, Sh. Ch. Sowerhill Satyr of Fearnley, Sh. Ch. Sowerhill Nobleman, Sh. Ch. Sowerhill Storm, Sh. Ch. Sowerhill Sarong of Kingscott, Sowerhill Sailor who was exported to Sweden and Sh. Ch. Sowerhill Sarah who proved to be an outstanding brood bitch and there were many other notable dogs and bitches. She used predominantly "Wendover" stud dogs to great effect. Most notable of these was Sh. Ch. Wendover Jeeves. If you can lay your hands on the article in the ISAE 2009 review you will be well rewarded by enjoying photographs of these lovely setters.

I am hoping that because Olwen Hunt was "so special" and such a wonderful advocate for Irish setters, it may be possible to somehow reproduce this really grand photograph of 12 of her setters taken in her beloved Dulverton farmland under the caption "Seventy Years with Irish Setters"....so beautiful and speaks volumes.

In the year 2000 Olwen's life changed significantly when she had a replacement knee operation which went disastrously wrong and she contracted MRSA resulting in further operations culminating in having the leg fused in a fixed position which in turn led to her being immobile and eventually having to use a wheel chair and a Zimmer frame. She was determinedly private and self reliant and would never have wished or accepted a "retirement home". It just would not have been right. She lost her last Irish setter Sowerhill Sintra last year and was very lonely without a setter at her side as you might well imagine. In these later years Rob and Marlene Budgell were kind and constant friends and helped her in so many ways.

Steve and Stephanie Wood (who had Sh. Ch. Sowerhill Sahib) went to visit Olwen last autumn and used to keep in touch. In the earlier years when Pat and Jim Rutherford (Clonageera) lived together in Cricket St. Thomas they were friends of Olwen and I know they both respected and were fond of Olwen and her dogs/breeding. Pat remarried and now lives in the USA. Pat and David Pike (Redclyst) had several dogs from Olwen which were the foundation of their present day kennel. Her sister and her brothers supported her but of course this wasn't easy as one has to realise that Olwen was the youngest of the family circle.

I thought the world of her as you can probably tell and when she was unable to get to shows I used to write and send her letters, catalogue extracts and post cards and kept in contact over the years. I did not want her to think she was forgotten. We shall always remember her as a very special lady and will miss her...her legacy will live on through her dogs and in a host of extended pedigrees.

Priscilla's mum Vera who died aged 98 in August 2010 had met Olwen just once when she came to our house to a garden party after Southern Counties one year. She took an instant liking to Olwen and often said "how is Olwen I did like her. What a sweet person". How right she was. In the summer of 2010 some friends managed to get Olwen to the Pike's party which they host after the Paignton show. Sadly Priscilla and I did not attend Paignton that year so missed the opportunity of catching up with her.

To her immediate family go our sincere condolences. Olwen looked after her mother and her father in their old age at Dulverton. Olwen died in hospital while medics were endeavouring to improve her breathing which was giving her circulation/heart problems and she did not sadly survive the operation. It would have been terrible to think of her hospitalised or in long term care and this she would have resisted and mercifully her passing was without distress and when unconscious.

Funeral details and family wishes regarding flowers and donations in her memory will follow when known.

JAMES S. F. SMITH