

In 2008 Esther moved to a flat on West Princes Street just two doors down from where our Community Garden is. Back then our garden didn't exist. It was an unloved gap site, abandoned since the previous building had burnt down in the 70s.

The following year she attended our first public consultation meetings about turning the gap site into a community garden. Esther and Woodlands Community Garden fitted together beautifully from the start. Like us she was passionate about everything to do with nature, gardening, growing food, healthy eating and building community.

In March 2010 she was at the first workday to clear the site. And she has been an ever present at garden since then. For me she was as much a part of the garden as the trees, the plants, the birds and the soil.

I remember her most as the person who greeted new visitors to the garden with the warmest of smiles. She would always be on the lookout for people hovering by the gate, nervous about coming into the garden for the first time. And she would go out of her way to beckon them in and make them feel especially welcome.

She volunteered at our first ever community café in 2014 and over the next 6 years helped out at the cafe every Monday night. She was incredibly hard working, thoughtful and modest. At all our events she would nearly always be the first volunteer to arrive and the last to leave.

Jerry one of our staff team describes how: "At the cafe, she was a source of immense practical help. She was my team-mate and right hand person. She was there every week because she believed in the work we were doing, she believed in helping people in need and believed in bringing the community together."

Ed, who joined our staff team last year, has told me: "I am just filled with lovely encounters with Esther. She was in the garden every time I went there. I found her quiet, warm confidence to be endlessly calming, reassuring and full of love."

For many years Esther also served on our charity's board of trustees. She helped our organisation to grow, and always ensured our discussions took account of the priorities of both our service users and volunteers.

In 2020, our garden's 10 year anniversary, we interviewed 10 of the founding members of the garden for an audio history project. Esther was one of those we interviewed.

These are just a few of things she told us:

'It's really important to me to live somewhere where I feel part of a community, being part of the garden is as much about creating and fostering a community as it is growing vegetables.'

'We've been all involved in it together for 10 years now and we have become really good friends, it's a real community of friendship.'

'I have lived in various places but I can honestly say that I feel more rooted, grounded and more at home here than any other place I have lived in my life.'

For over a decade Esther was an integral part of every single thing our charity has done. She was part of our Woodlands family, an inspiration and a joy to be with.

Esther helped Woodlands Community Garden grow in the same way that soil nourishes the plants, a bee spreads pollen and the rain waters the trees.

A garden never dies. Plants may die down for the winter, but their seeds travel far. Esther is someone whose love and influence has travelled far. Her spirit and memory will long live on in all that we do.