

## Mary Thomas – MBE, 1928 – 2011.



Mary was born in 1928, the second eldest of six children. As the oldest girl, Mary was called upon to help a great deal with the other children and about the house. This may have helped to form the high standards and sense of responsibility for which Mary was later renowned. In 1940, at the age of 11, Mary was evacuated to Llanelli entrusted with the care of her younger sister; only returning to London after the War in 1945 to complete her Higher School Certificate.

Mary had many interests, particularly in sport and dance, amateur dramatics and dressmaking. She gained her teaching certificate in 1948 and took up a post at a Secondary Modern School. She then moved on to become a Lecturer in Physical Education at Bishop Otter College in Chichester. From there she moved to Bromley High School and later Dartford P.E. College.

Her netball career was illustrious. She first qualified as an Umpire at 15 and then gained her Panel Umpiring Award at the age of 19. From 1948 she coached her school netball team over five years to become County Champions. In 1949 she was selected for England's first national team and completed her first coaching award in 1952 progressing to the Advanced Coaching Award in 1963. She was selected for Sussex County in 1954.

From 1972-1982 Mary was an England Selector and from 1978 – 1987 she held various administrative posts at AENA including Vice-President. In 1989 AENA awarded Mary with

Life Membership. After further work with IFNA and FENA she was awarded the MBE in the 1995 honours list for her services to netball and the IFNA Long Service Award.

Mary wrote her first publication 'Tackle Netball This Way' in 1961 and was subsequently involved in the publication of many training manuals, culminating in her appointment as Producer of Resources for AENA in 1986.

In 1987 England Netball published Mary's book 'Planning a Tournament' which became a vital tool for tournament administrators of the time. Mary succinctly summed up how best to plan an event by saying, "Ease, democracy and fairness all have to be reconciled with time, numbers and courts to arrive at the best adaptation of the IDEAL to suit the conditions at a given time."

Mary was a very strong character, who must have made a marked impression on all with whom she worked. She could be quite formidable, always demanding excellence and 100% commitment. But she also enjoyed a challenge and had great respect for those few who dared to question her methods.

To the Dartford students training to become P.E. teachers, Miss Thomas was someone they looked up to with the greatest of respect. Amongst other things, she lectured in Dance and Netball and although students could be terrified of her, they were also in awe, and proud to be one of her students.

For Kent Netball, Mary was a highly respected President, County Coach and Selector who gave freely of her knowledge and expertise to produce highly skilful county players. She was coach to the teams in the early 1960s. She was President from 1988 – 1990 and a Life Member. She was also very involved with running courses for the AENA.



When Mary retired from Dartford College she and Jill Pendrill moved into a retirement village in Eynsford by the River Darent. The sprightly pair could be seen skipping over the little bridges from their home to the car park, laden with huge bags of netballs and kit, as they were still very active in County Netball even in retirement. When Mary retired from Netball the world of Bowls were to gain from her involvement at a national level too.

Mary was a very private person that few knew really well, but she was supportive to the endeavours of Kent Netball. Her dedication, commitment and professionalism will long be remembered by everyone who knew her.

Sandie Hillson and Mary Thomas (right) supporting Kent against Hertfordshire in 1988.

### **Contributors:**

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## England Netball Announcement - Mary Thomas MBE - update

It is with sadness that England Netball has to announce that Mary Thomas Mary Thomas MBE Honorary Life Member passed away suddenly, although she had not been in the best of health for a couple of years on Wednesday 23 February 2011.

For many people Mary Thomas was England Netball and Umpiring.

Her playing, umpiring and coaching started in Lincolnshire in 1948, then various moves saw her in Kent, then Norfolk and finally in Sussex. In 1947 gained Panel umpiring award at the age of 19 and represented England in the first senior netball team in 1948 together with receiving Advanced Coaching Award in 1963 – amongst only 6 people who received this.

She gained international umpiring status and presented papers at the first World Championship in 1963.

Held National positions of Vice Chair, Vice President, and National technical Officer between 1978 – 1987. Was awarded England Netball Honorary Life Membership in 1989 and awarded an MBE in 1995

Together with International Representation on Rules Board in 1979 and she was awarded IFNA Service to Netball 1995.

Was instrumental in the production of England Netball's first videos which include Coaching, Umpiring, and Netball for the Under 12's to name a few. The Planning a Tournament booklet together with producing 'Netball' Part of the Sportsmasters Series for CU Press. In 1993 re wrote the 'Know the Game – Netball ready for publication in a more updated format in 1994

This does not cover all what Mary did for Netball both within England or Internationally and her CV is currently being updated

Retired from Netball in 1999 and moved to Norfolk where Bowls became her first sport and played at the Gallow Club in Fakenham. She became Norfolk's Zone 5A Competition Secretary and on the National Executive Committee for several years. Was made EWIBA Trustee, until the EWIBA joined with the EIBA and qualified to for the County but ill health over took her in November 2008 when her bowling became less and finally stopped in mid-2009.