

Arleen Tanner

by Dr Richard Halliday

It is with a heavy heart that I have to report the sad passing of my friend Arleen Tanner. Many of you will know Arleen and Grahame from their research and publications, especially on their favourite subject; Swansea Cambrian.

Arleen was born into very poor circumstances in a village near Aberdare in South Wales. She was the only child in a household of nine adults living in a three-bedroomed house. She was highly-intelligent and as such, attended the local Grammar School, but in a second-hand school uniform. She trained as a teacher in Home Economics at University and subsequently, she quickly became head of department in a succession of various Secondary and Grammar Schools. Latterly, Arleen took a degree in Cognitive Psychology in the 1980s and took early retirement in 1990.

She met her husband, Grahame at Cardiff University in 1958 and married in 1961. Within a year they started collecting blue and white pottery and porcelain. Grahame tells me Arleen was his financial guru and was brilliant at it! In the early stages of their collecting career, they decided to concentrate upon buying and learning about Swansea Pottery. Anyone who had the pleasure and honour of visiting their house will know just how amazing their collection is. I took my good friend Loren Zeller to visit in 2014, and he too was wowed by what he saw. Loren did do a full write-up of this visit as a bulletin article which would be well worth reading (Bulletin 2015 XVI No. 1). The Tanners live in a relatively modern house, and the main collection is displayed in a very large room, lined with purpose-made cabinets to show-off their wares. That said, the collection, as my many people's, extends to almost every room and space within the house. It's a very impressive show! In 2008, this amazing collection became by the basis of their first book of five on Swansea's Transferware. Grahame admits that the books were written as a partnership, but the leadership was performed by Arleen, and he was left to be the research assistant!

Not only did they write five books on Swansea, but were prolific contributors to the TCC bulletins, the Friends of Blue bulletins and the Northern Ceramic Society. Their brand of fearless and tireless research and publication will surely be missed.

I have two really strong memories of Arleen to share with you. The first is about a Duke of Wellington pattern jug. This particular Swansea Cambrian pattern is extremely rare and both Arleen and Grahame were desperate to add an example to their collection. They had seen one in a museum, but knew of very few other examples. Every time I called them on the telephone, she would answer with: "You've found us the Duke of Wellington?", even before I had chance to say a word! This went on for YEARS! Every single telephone call started the same way! It became a standing joke. Then about four years ago, by some miracle, I bought a Duke of Wellington jug. I was so excited to call them straight away. However, when I called, it was literally the ONLY time she didn't start with the usual question! I was devastated! That feeling soon passed when I told Arleen what I'd found and we both shared the joy of the purchase! The second memory is that the Duke of Wellington's seemingly impossible discovery was replaced with an even more unattainable quest; 'Pontypridd Bridge'. So, the phone calls inevitably started with: "You've found us Pontypridd Bridge?" And this is where I feel a great sense of failure; I was never able to find her an example. When I heard she was

really poorly in late 2025, I knew I would be really up against it to find her the elusive pattern. Sadly, I did not.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1 – Swansea Duke of Wellington jug

Figure 2 – One of Loren Zeller’s images taken during the 2014. Credit: Loren Zeller.

From 2015 her health declined until 2025 when she had a series of heart attacks. She died in Ipswich hospital in Suffolk on February 4th, 2026. She will be greatly missed by her family, Grahame, her husband and her fellow pottery friends such as me. She had become somewhat of a mother-figure to me following the loss of my own. I would often take girlfriends to meet Arleen for ‘vetting’! I can hear her now calling me now in her sing-songy Welsh accent following a visit: “Oooo, Richard, she’s a keeper!” Rest in peace my friend....

Link to Loren’s collection review:

https://www.transferwarecollectorsclub.org/bulletins/15_TCC_XVI_No_1.pdf