So we meet together this afternoon to give thanks for Mollie’s life.

She would have been delighted and thrilled to have known that so many of us have gathered for today’s service because Mollie really did both believe in and value community.

Perhaps that came from her Lancashire roots, the county of her birth in the 1920’s.

Mollie wrote a few things about her early years in this journal.

She tells us that her family were very poor and that her father was often out of work. Yet even in these tough times they knew, and here I quote, ‘the kindness of neighbours’.

For example, even though the local butcher’s wife had lost a child she nevertheless sent a pint of milk for Mollie most days. On other occasions the family were given coal, and another ‘kindness’ she recalls is the time she had rheumatic fever and was helped by a local doctor who, even though he went unpaid, kept attending her.

These ‘kindnesses’ formed within Mollie a kind of core belief in the goodness of people and the value of community.

In the 30’s the family made a big move south to London and North Kensington. It wasn’t a grand move because home was a basement flat in which, apart from two beds the furniture was made from orange boxes. Around this time, she remembers being given the present of a toy grand piano – she looked back on that as a sign of things to come!

‘Our food’, she writes, ‘was nearly always faggots and mushy peas’. And her dearest wish was that she, as they were the same age, might possess a pair of Shirley Temple shoes.

As the war approached Mollie remembers going to Hyde Park Corner and hearing speeches from the Black Shirts – her father belonged to that group and was himself a natural orator. She actually recalls sitting on Oswald Mosely’s knee and thought him a very nice man.

By the end of the 30’s the family had moved out to the country and Mollie loved the companionship of her hunt terrier called Pip.

Around the age of 15 Mollie was working in the local laundry for a weekly wage of 8/6 and at 16 she became a ‘Daily’ in a big house. The mistress nurtured Mollie, taking her to the theatre and to church – where she was confirmed, however she writes: my main reason for going in the first place was the ride in the Bentley’!

By now her father was sending her 5 shillings a week to save up for a bicycle, but she chose to spend the money instead on piano lessons. Without a piano, at least to start with, she practiced on a dummy keyboard she drew out on bits of paper.

Alas – it’s at this point the journal stops, but how grateful we are for those fascinating insights into her early life and with just those few examples we can see how her character was being moulded.

You will probably know that Mollie taught at Heatherton School for over 30 years and entered dozens of students for the Chesham Festival and that after her father’s death she looked after her mother.

A number of you, included Mrs Julie Burrell have reflected with me on her time at the school and Jenifer, who served as school secretary during Mollie’s time has written: I would be walking around the school on some mission and stand outside the school hall listening to Mollie teaching a class. How she would thump out tunes, nearly falling off her stool, jump up and down like a muppet and have the girls laughing and singing and totally enjoying themselves.

Molly is remembered by us here at Amersham Free Church with much affection. She was one of the great characters of our congregation. She could at times express her views with a certain passion.

Some of you here today remember her as your Sunday School teacher and marching around the room with her playing Onward Christian Soldiers. Others will recall her as a great friend at Women’s Own, a faithful attender at LunchBreak or a neighbour with whom you enjoyed spending time and for whom, especially in later years, you could support. And many – including Daniel – remember her as an inspirational teacher.

I always found, whenever I spoke with Mollie, that she was a broadminded and generous person. She wanted the best for people and had an understanding and caring spirit. Recently at Wexford Park hospital she was visited by the Roman Catholic chaplain. Once he found out she was a Protestant he offered to go away and find someone from her own tradition. She was having none of that – she told him to stay put as she was enjoying their conversation and, if he was happy, she was very happy to receive communion from him – well, how could he refuse, and he gave her the sacrament.

Music meant the world to her and I’m so please that Gillian suggested we might put her diploma from the Guildhall School of Music on the reverse of her order of service. Mollie regularly told me that she was at college the same time as the cellist, Jacqueline Dupree.

I would sometimes speak with her after the recitals at LunchBreak – the ones she loved best were not the most technically brilliant but performances that had shown feeling and found the essential emotion of the piece. As she discussed these with me there were regularly tears in her ears – music went that deep with her.

Indeed one of the events I’m really pleased we put on at LunchBreak was the day – just about a couple of years ago, when she gave her final recital. She weaved together a group of pieces all connected with women – and she gave a little talk in between each piece. The audience simply melted as they heard her, many for the first time, play these pieces with such finesse and feeling. She asked them not to applaud each piece but save it up for the end. She was disobeyed and the audience applauded each piece louder and louder – it was a beautiful moment here in the Sanctuary and one I’ll never forget.

But I want to bring this little tribute to close with this final observation. On my last visit to her at Wexford Park she beamed at me as I walked into her side room. She was gracious and courteous and valued the prayer we said at the end of our time together. She was always a joy to visit, whether at home or in hospital.

The thing that struck me that day was the remark she made, that the year had got off to a troubled start and she hadn’t kept up with her bible reading notes.

It was just a throwaway line but it said so much about the faith of this courageous lady. She loved reading her bible. She loved worshipping here week by week.

Faith in God sustained her and gave meaning to her life. It helped form her into a lady with a generous spirit who wanted the best for people.

We gather in the season of Lent. It is a period of the Christian year when we especially remember the harshness of life that sometimes comes our way. Mollie rose above her struggles and found inner resources in herself as she trusted in God and walked through life.

Yet this season points us to Easter and the hope which is ours that God is for us and will bring us through and prepares a place for us. For we are Easter Morning people and today I firmly believe that Mollie dwells now upon another shore and in a greater light and is surrounded by the music of the angels as she too joins in with the worship of heaven praising the God she so faithfully served here on earth.

Upon every remembrance of our sister in Christ, Miss Molly Maclerie, we shall never cease to give thanks to almighty God.