

In May 2011, Ginny had been in her new home for a mere two weeks when the die was cast. Castle Howard had asked me to write a magazine article about the famous black swan that had lived on the Great Lake for many years. They also wanted a photograph of the author (me!!). I shaved, put on my best fleece and practised posing. The photographer arrived, spotted Ginny and insisted she should be in the photo. The magazine came out in June. The black swan and myself were completely ignored and all the talk was about how photogenic Ginny was!

In July of the same year, I took her to the Coneythorpe Village Fete, playing safe by having her on a short lead and a harness. There was quite a gathering in the car park outside the church hall and a group of us stood chatting on the roadside eating our ice creams. Ginny was sitting quietly watching all the people passing by. From the roadside to the door of the church hall there is a very slight slope which played a part in the event that was about to happen. I was in deep conversation with two friends, but Ginny had her eyes firmly fixed on the doorway through which came her best doggy friend, Tali. Ginny decided to go and play with her friend so the next thing I knew is that I was pulled over, causing me to roll down the slope and end up on my back with my feet facing the road! Thank goodness I remembered my parachute landing technique because a hip replacement was definitely on the cards!. Ginny left Tali and dived on top of me, furiously licking ice cream off my face. The looks on people's faces were priceless. I began laughing hysterically, totally unable to rock myself onto my feet because of the slope. I think *someone* asked if I was okay, but generally speaking everyone seemed to find it more amusing than life threatening! I heard someone say, "I wish we could have got that on video, we'd have got £250 from Harry Hill!". Me and Gin were the main topic of conversation and, a year later, when we returned to the fete, several people asked if there was going to be a repeat performance! Happily, there wasn't!

One of Ginny's extraordinary talents was to find balls of all shapes and sizes in the most unusual places. During her time with me, she amassed 73 quality balls and many more rejects. I stored them in the car, in bags, and in her beloved toy box and I have recently taken it upon myself to visit our old haunts and hide them for others to find. She also loved to lie in puddles and streams 'cooling her bits' so I have painted very visible orange or rainbow stones with her name on and placed them in six of her favourite streams. If you're walking in the Coneythorpe, Slingsby and Hovingham areas - keep your eyes peeled for stones and balls.

Finally, if you're ever in the Coneythorpe area, take the time to walk up to the church and rest a while on Ginny's bench. Spare a thought for her and for all the other unforgettable companions we love and miss so much.