

# BARBARA'S EULOGY

*Given by Chris Stanners at an Arts Society (Chilterns) reception to pay tribute to Barbara Cullimore held at the Chalfont St Peter Community Centre on June 27, 2019*

It has been my privilege to be asked by our Committee to weave for you a little of the pattern of Barbara's life.

I had only known her through my membership of our Society but in that time had learned much about this private, elegant woman.

When I became Chairman for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year I came to rely on her 'society memory', her common sense and sensitivity, her decorative artistry - and her copperplate handwriting! It was not commonly known that she was dyslexic.

She was born in Wales and later moved to Penn . Her first job pre-war was Secretary to the Manager of ICI; then to the Manager of Ladybird, children's clothes manufacturer, and in 1947 she became PA to the Managing Director of the pharmaceutical company which developed The Pill whilst she was in their employ.

During the war she was on an ambulance in Slough, Windsor and Eton.

She met her husband playing badminton. He was a National Champion . She was not so good, she said, but obviously good enough .

Barbara's father was a Master Builder and he designed & built them a handsome house just out of Penn Village, sadly no longer there. And their daughter Nicola was born. She is a member of our Society and has provided this opportunity to celebrate Barbara's life & work. Thank you Nicki. (applause)

Nicola married and lived locally, producing two grandsons for Barbara, of whom she was very, very proud and rejoiced in their burgeoning lives in which she took an active part, spending many hours watching them rowing at Eton and Henley. The arrival of a Great- Grand-daughter, Matilda, just weeks ago was a crowning glory to her life.

As an early Member of CDFAS and a colleague of the Founder Patricia Fay, she worked for 46 years as the Team leader on NADFAS Heritage Volunteer projects. Her work earned her the respect and admiration of the curators and owners of ancient properties who would not have had the resources to employ professional conservators, and of the volunteers she recruited, trained and supported.

## 2.

She acquired skills in textile conservation consulting with experts and attending Restoration Workshops at the V&A which she put to good use on a number of projects, including the green cloth she embroidered for our Society with the Chiltern DFAS logo of the cornucopia, designed by another member, which was carefully spread on the table by Barbara at every lecture. Perhaps that will be her Society memorial!

Some of the projects she worked on make a mouth-watering list:

- Cleaning and packing for safe keeping the Lace and Costume Collection and riding silks at Penn House for the Earl Howe, later one of the Vice Presidents of the Chiltern DFAS.
- Leather-dressing 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century books in the Kedermister Library in St Mary's, Langley (she was married in the Church)
- Dusting 43,000 valuable books after the fire in Windsor Castle
- Cleaning thousands of vellum and paper documents from the time of Henry VIII in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle
- Packing up Household Cavalry Museum artefacts in Windsor - including the Duke of Uxbridge's cork leg and priceless regimental silver and uniforms – for transportation to the new Museum in Whitehall . A photograph of the Team in their white aprons appeared in the 40th Anniversary Booklet with the heading: 'Major Barbara's Household Cavalry'
- Archived 14<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century documents in Dorney Court, an ancient House owned by Mrs Palmer and inherited by her husband a descendent of the Earl who was 'defrocked' and the title lost. Sadly she was widowed leaving her with 3 young sons and an ancient house to support.

On one occasion I joined the group and there was a sudden exclamation from one of the team 'Here's a letter signed by Charles I' and a little later 'I've got one signed by Richard II' A thrilled Mrs Palmer was summoned! Barbara diligently researched estate laws to interpret some of the documents.

Most recently the team worked on perhaps their most prestigious project to create an electronic catalogue of the collection of ancient books at Chequers with strict security measures ensured by Barbara who organised the rotas (using spread sheets!) and supervised the delicate work on the priceless collection..

### 3.

One major event which few people in the Society may know is that she ran a national Lottery for NADFAS'S 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to raise funds to purchase a Headquarters in London instead of paying expensive rents. It was her suggestion and was put to the National Council by our then Chairman, Catherine Dolman, now one of our Vice Presidents, **and here today** and on returning from holiday Barbara found she had been designated responsibility to run the lottery.

Raffle tickets were sent to all NADFAS Societies (some sent them straight back!) and £51,000 was raised.

Barbara and her long-suffering husband with the help of another ex-Chairman Anthea Fyler and other stalwarts undid all the counterfoils placed them in a large hot water tank lent by B & Q and stirred by a large oar lent by a member. Barbara phoned the lucky winner. The prize was a cruise for two and a scream of joy met Barbara's call. Closely followed by gloomy tones in the background from husband 'Do we HAVE to?' They did and had a wonderful trip!

There is a plaque at 8 Guilford St. giving credit to our Society.

#### **There were rewards.**

Barbara never wanted the limelight- she did not seek public acclaim. She said once that she considered it a huge privilege to be able to work with any aspect of this country's remarkable heritage.

But in recognition of the work at Windsor Castle and St George's Chapel she was invited to the Order of the Garter Ceremony in St George's Chapel to see Prince William invested as a Knight of the Garter in June 2004. As Chairman of CDFAS at the time I was honoured to be her companion. We had front row seats. And wore hats!

A mark of appreciation from the Household Cavalry was to invite CDFAS members to the Pageant in Horseguards' Parade in June 2007.

The room in which the volunteers worked in Dorney Court has been named after her- The Cullimore Room - and she was invited on a private visit to see the Christmas decorations at Chequers with greenery all culled from the Estate.

AND OF COURSE she was awarded an MBE in 2012 presented by HRH the Prince of Wales in recognition of her voluntary work in preserving our national heritage. A very great honour which her family were able to share at the PALACE. It was researching her history to prepare the Citation which enabled me to learn so much about her life. Over 20 people wrote letters in support of the nomination. Country Life had an article and a very nice photograph of her in the April 2018 edition.

And she was made a Vice-President of CDFAS.

And now may I share with you my personal sadness at the loss of a dear friend, neighbour and colleague.

We travelled together on group holidays initially with my husband Rob, and Hazel Walker both well known to the Society members ....sadly both now deceased ... We had such fun.

In Guatemala Barbara and I were in a small van which the driver took across a ford in a river and got stuck. We had to get out, roll up our trousers and push!

In Belize we went out in a glass bottomed boat to view the coral reef. We were issued with snorkels and flippers. Barbara and I declined to use them as we never had. The man in charge of the boat insisted. I said I couldn't as I couldn't swim. Barbara succumbed. She was a good swimmer.

The man said his son would tow me in a life-ring and gave a quick instruction, Over the side I went near Barbara . She made encouraging signs and I laughed. My mask filled with water and I thought I was going to die.' Blow! said the man...and Barbara demonstrated...

We were v proud of ourselves and Rob took a picture of Barbara in her flippers and snorkel to send to her grandsons who, she said would never believe it!

After Rob died she & I joined a Society cultural holiday to Istanbul organised by Colin McBride who had taken over from me as Chairman of the Society and Judith.

On our arrival at the hotel Colin was told there were not enough single rooms available for that night.

Colin approached Barbara and I and asked if we would share for the night. Somewhat taken aback we agreed. We were rewarded with a suite with a balcony overlooking the Bosphorus and unlimited G & T's.

When it came to the second night we said if it would help him we would remain in our room....

Colin regrets he couldn't be here today (she said he had been a great support to her when her husband died) but thanks to him Barbara and I shared on several future adventures.

She introduced me to cruising

Our first adventure was in the Mediterranean. The ship was large and our cabin noisy. Barbara went to the Purser telling him we were 'over the screws'. I was very impressed! We were moved to the Bridge Deck and after dinner the Captain asked Barbara to dance. And very glam she looked.

We went up the Amazon and found ourselves dining with Mack, the cartoonist for the Daily Mail, and the Mayor of Hobart in Tasmania. I asked them to raise a glass to Barbara for her recent award of an MBE. They did, enthusiastically, and then told us each of them had also been honoured. Further raising of glasses!

Also on that trip we swung in a cable car high over Caracas in Venezuela-pretty hairy- and hurtled around sand dunes in Jamaica in a jeep. Barbara would have been approaching 90!

So thank you, Barbara, for all that you were –you will be remembered with respect, admiration and great affection.

Her last words to me were a dignified –'I've had a good life, Chris'

AND WE RAISED OUR GLASSES....