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Obituary

# BARBARA ANN WOOLLINGS

Born 12th June, 1924

Died 21st June, 2003

by *Malcolm Woollings*



**"I WILL always remember Barbara as a caring person; conscientious, loyal, dependable BUT FUN with a strong sense of duty and a dislike for fuss and emotion. She trained as a nurse at Great Ormond Street and University College Hospital during the war, specialising in child care and midwifery, becoming a State Registered Nurse and State Certified Midwife. She practised not only at hospitals in the UK (Kingston, Chelmsford and Colchester) but also in Norway and Canada and as matron of a school in Switzerland.**

Her six months in Norway in 1950 were especially memorable; "Had bacon today, first meat in three weeks; eating enough raw herring to last 60 years" as was her return overland through Germany and the Low Countries.

She took a break from nursing in the early 60s but returned to become the Assistant Matron at Orsett hospital. She then became part of the management team to plan and implement the new Basildon hospital where she was responsible for equipping all 2,000 rooms and "putting a heart and soul into the building" winning several battles with the architects over very practical details like the right height of chair for outpatients. She was awarded the Florence Nightingale Scholarship which enabled her to visit Canada to study the work of a nurse planner. In 1974 she became Area Nursing Officer moving to Witham soon afterwards and remained

there until that echelon of the NHS was disbanded in 1982 in one of its many re-organisations. However, Barbara's experience was not wasted as she continued as a member of the local NHS advisory board as well as working as a volunteer at St. Helena's Hospice. Her compassion for others was not just limited to her professional career but the love and care she provided to her relatives and friends whenever she was needed.

Barbara's great interest outside of her work was adventure. She learnt to ski in Norway and always had a love of walking. Then in the late 50s after a three month spell at Ullswater Outward

Bound School, she joined the Dartmoor Outward Bound School as Matron and Instructor. Here she instructed girls in the arts of climbing, canoeing, camping and potholing. On getting lost underground once, she was relieved to find a sign MP (Main Path) which she confidently followed until she fell into a muddy pool. At that time there were few opportunities for girls to undertake genuinely adventurous trips, and Barbara became one of the leaders for the newly formed British Girls' Exploring Society taking expeditions of 20 girls to the Faeroe Islands on two occasions and also on two archaeological digs to Loch Fyne.

But perhaps the achievement of which Barbara was most proud was completing her education after retiring from the NHS with a Bachelors degree from the Open University and a Masters degree from Essex University for a dissertation on the smallpox ships moored in the River Thames. For many years she had an interest in archaeology, going on a number of digs (including Mucking) and this grew into a general interest in Local History. She was a member of many local history groups including the Witham & Countryside Society, a churchyard enumerator and also wrote a children's church trail of St. Nicholas's church, Witham.

But her greatest interest was in genealogy which combined her love of history with her love for people. Scarcely a month went by without a distant relative visiting (often from New Zealand, Australia or Canada) and she would take them on a trip around Essex visiting their ancestors houses, farms or villages. Her sense of theatre and ability to tell a good

tale would culminate in the church at Colne Engaine when she would throw back a carpet in front of the altar, lift a trapdoor and reveal the grave of an ancestor who had been vicar of the church.

She has had numerous articles published in the Essex Family Historian and wrote books on the family connections with Colne Engaine and Orsett. The churchwarden at Orsett recalled often seeing Barbara "on her hands and knees, peering through a cardboard tube and making copious notes. Also often heard to make noises of delight when she found something new and little grumbling noises when she had difficulty in reading the ancient inscriptions".

Barbara had boundless energy, a great enthusiasm for everything that caught her interest and an infectious sense of fun and adventure. An intensely practical person, Barbara was unfazed by anything, except perhaps her computer!, and could be absolutely relied on to cope in all situations. Her working life was spent in the care of others, and it is for the care and love that she lavished on her many relations and friends that she will be most remembered and missed." *Mr. Malcolm Woollings (Nephew) 16 Wyke Oliver Road, Preston, Weymouth, Dorset DT3 6BN. (ESFH6905) ●*

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