A Celebration of the Life of

Barbara Ann Woodhead

16 August 1946 – 1 October 2025

30 October 2025, Golders Green Crematorium
Celebrant: Kate Hobson

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Introduction

For over five decades Barbara and her husband David enjoyed simply being together, especially in their retreat in Millau in France, a town made famous by its viaduct. They never went by car, though they had discovered it while hitchhiking in the area back in the 70s. More recently they arrived by train and, armed with their red Michelin guide, they punctuated the journey down by overnight stays where they knew they would eat well – French food and wine had always been a particular pleasure for them.

Back in London Barbara enjoyed plenty of walks on the Heath with David, and was kept busy with friends and family. She had been very close to her father, particularly after her mother died, and at his funeral Barbara described him as, ‘a gentleman and a gentle man’.

The same could be said of Barbara. She was thoughtful and equable, but never bland. Although generally easy-going, when she wanted to hold her position she’d stick to it. If she vetoed a suggestion of David’s she usually got her way.

She was also precise and conscientious, which meant she suited her job at the British Standards Institution very well. Work colleagues respected and trusted her, and many became friends over the years. They remember her fondly in the messages they have sent to David, describing her as ‘a legend … She always looked so healthy and full of life’; ‘a lovely, thoughtful, fun lady’; and ‘one of the best as a colleague’; someone who had ‘a special presence’.

One very long-standing colleague, David Bell, remembers:

> *I was somehow … her line manager for a few years … I say ‘somehow’ as no-one came close to her knowledge of the system – the European system in particular – especially me. She was always incredibly patient and accommodating when I asked some basic questions. And of course she was always great company, especially at our many socials. When we met up at the post-retirement dos she was always the first person I looked for. We will all miss her greatly’.*

And another colleague, Isabel Quintana-Soria, on the European Committee for Standardisation says:

> *She will be remembered as one of those wise and spirited witnesses of our organization’s earlier days — always positive, deeply professional, and profoundly committed to our mission.*
>
> *I know that her warmth and sense of purpose left a lasting impression on those who had the privilege to work with her.*

Barbara enjoyed going to work, and it’s clear that her relationship with her workmates was one of the reasons why this was so.

Now, I have the honour of reading a eulogy written by David.

Barbara – her life remembered: David Woodhead

Barbara was born and grew up in High Wycombe. She was the only child of Florrie and Frank, and any of you who ever met them will understand how it was that Barbara became the person she was. At that age, she was a keen supporter of the Canine Defence League, an early and very literal manifestation of her lifelong inclination to want to side with the underdog.

After Wycombe High School, Barbara went to Exeter to read History. While there, she formed friendships which remained as close as any for the rest of her life. Graduating in 1968, she naturally gravitated to London, where early jobs included a spell with Oxo, presumably not as a cube-maker. In those days, new young arrivals in London could afford to rent accommodation in the nicer parts of London, and Barbara settled for Kensington where she shared flats with university friends, among others.

In the early seventies she also had an evening job working behind the bar in a pub in the heart of Chelsea, and it was here that she met David, who had just moved to London and was living nearby in accommodation somewhat less grand than the SW3 postcode might suggest. Their first date, in 1972, was sitting on the floor on the uppermost level of the Albert Hall, with a very restricted view of that night's Prom concert. They never remembered what the music was. Perhaps they only had eyes for each other!

It was not long after that that she joined the British Standards Institution as a technical editor, and this was to remain her employer for the rest of her working life. It was also to be another source of long-term friendships.

Barbara and David moved into Hampstead in 1976, after a search for a flat almost anywhere in London, even south of the river. All they knew about the area was that it was quite posh, and this was confirmed for them when they went to view the flat and they heard the potential landlady ask whether they had their own staff! Fortunately, they misheard – the question was about stuff, meaning sheets and towels. They soon discovered that Constantine Road did not have many premises with domestic servants.

The following year they got married. Their honeymoon included a one-night stay, for the first time, in the little town, Millau, that eventually became their second home.

In 1979 Barbara embarked on another long-term relationship, by joining the Labour Party, as did David. But it was Barbara who became a stalwart of the local branch, often spending her Saturday mornings on the campaign street stalls around Hampstead, delivering leaflets and, for many years, serving as the membership secretary, where her counsel was listened to across the range of branch business.

1982 saw the couple become first time buyers, moving into a flat a stone's throw along Constantine Road, which they were encouraged to go for by their friends Brigitte [KH - Bri/ghi/tte] and Philip. And these two were even more directly involved in the Woodheads' second and last UK property transaction, by selling them their flat in Parliament Hill in 1986.

It was around this time that Barbara's job was relocated from Mayfair to Milton Keynes, which meant a very long working day with commuting against the flow each day. Mercifully it was not many years before BSI moved back to London, to premises directly above the Gunnersbury overground station, which could hardly have been more convenient – when the trains were working. Barbara's work was increasingly international, involving quite frequent trips, mostly within Europe. She finally retired from BSI in 2005 with rather mixed feelings, for she cherished the friendships she had formed at work.

This enabled Barbara and David to spend rather more time in Millau, at the flat they had bought there in 1990. They loved cycling into the wonderful local countryside, with its dramatic scenery. Here in London, Barbara worked on developing her already quite good French by attending advanced classes at the City Lit, supplemented by participating in the French literature reading group there. She kept this up until the end, and it was another vehicle for her making close and enduring friendships.

It was some time now that Barbara had not felt like getting on a bike, and her walking had become increasingly restricted. It was obviously sad to see her lacking energy in this way, all the more so because she had been so active, verging on the sporty. David recalls the way she could whack an unplayable tennis shot past him! Such shots were a sort of metaphor for her strength of character – possibly unexpected, but definitely there!

Another characteristic of Barbara's was her attachment to her extended family, which was fully reciprocated. This is reflected in the extent to which she held onto, and cherished, letters from them going back over the decades.

This all fits in with Barbara's warmth and generosity. She had a quiet wisdom and a gentle sense of humour. But she loved having fun and a good laugh. As recently as 2018, she went to a weekend-long hen party in Somerset and apparently entered into the spirit of the occasion to an extent which David thought it best not to enquire about too closely.

Above all, David knows how incredibly lucky he has been that they have shared their lives together.

Thank you David for those lovely words. And now let's hear some more memories from her family. I invite Susan to the lectern.

More memories of Barbara: Susan Yates

> *Hi, my name is Sue, and I am the daughter of one of Barbara's cousins June. In fact, Barbara was one of my mum & dads bridesmaids in 1955, so aged about nine. She was the youngest of all the cousins and I was the oldest of my generation so always looked up to her.*
>
> *My first memory of Barbara was her playing badminton with my Uncle David, her cousin, Louisa's dad up at Greenhill, Bledlow Ridge on my grandfather's tennis court, probably in her early 20's*

Then there were the Christmas's, Christmas day at my Nanna's and usually Boxing Day at Barbara's mum & dads in Hughenden Ave, such a massive spread was put on. Oh, and the games, so many games, I remember us all queuing up in the hall on Christmas Day to be blindfolded in the kitchen and given a spoonful of a drink to identify, I remember feeling jealous that Barbara and Uncle David would always get the good stuff, and I was left with things like lemonade!! Equally on Boxing Day running round all the rooms with Barbara in her family home, different places I remember were train stations where I think there were clues to the next train station, families dashing all around, laughing, always a jam on the stairs, how nobody got injured I would never know

Many years later I returned to that family home a few times a week as I teamed up with Barbara to look after her dad, my Uncle Frank, in his later years. My daughters & I listened to many a story of him in Iraq building runways during World War 2 and having to walk for days across land to get back to the boat to take them home.

And then we all grew up and for both my husbands, Barbara & David became friends even though family, in fact I always called them our foodie friends. With her great love of food, we would save our pennies and every now and again would splash out on a posh meal, always relying on David to choose us a good bottle of wine. Our last meal out altogether out was at Tom Aikens restaurant Muse in London where we were VIP guests with complimentary champagne on arrival as Tom used to work in our restaurant.

I can still hear her witty reply to my teasing, I still hear the little cough every now and again in our frequent telephone calls where we discussed which part of the world we were currently in, but most of all I can hear her laugh. One beautiful soul leaves our world but remains forever in our hearts and memories.

Reading − Vivien Small: 'Leisure' by W H Davies

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?—
No time to stand beneath the boughs,
And stare as long as sheep and cows:
No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass:
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night:
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance:
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began?
A poor life this if, full of care,

We have no time to stand and stare.

We shall now sit quietly for a moment while we listen to *La Mer*, a song inspired by a train journey that Charles Trenet took, and that Barbara and David have made frequently.

[La Mer by Charles Trenet plays]

'The light of my life' – David Woodhead

As a conversational gambit, my declarations to Barbara that she was the light of my life were not particularly successful. In fact, she usually ignored them, politely of course, which was her way when she thought I was talking rubbish. However, this phrase immediately came to mind when I came across this photo a couple of weeks ago. Because, to my eyes at least, she is absolutely radiant in this picture [on the front of the tribute] *, in her characteristically undemonstrative, definitely un-sequinned way.*

Admittedly the rather dark background contributes to this, being the bottom of a north-facing cliff which doesn't see much sun. This place meant a lot to us. When the picture was taken, nine years ago, we would climb up the difficult path which starts just behind where Barbara is standing and find a rock to sit on near the top. From there, we had a commanding view of the valley and the soaring vultures which have been reintroduced to the area. Once one of these glided past within a few feet of us.

We were last at the scene in the picture just over a year ago, on what turned out to be our last trip to France. There was no question of our struggling up the path, and Barbara just spent the morning contentedly sitting on one of the rocks, contemplating the little river in front of her and reading.

The spot is about 20 miles from our French flat, and just upstream from a little hotel where we had spent a few days nearly every year for almost twenty years. It is basic, but so welcoming. An idyllic spot in the sunshine, full of laughter, copious traditional meals, and even, some days, dancing on the terrace until late in the evening – which I liked to think had been laid on for my benefit!

I am not going on about this place as a plug, rather because it was somewhere Barbara was particularly happy – I think this is reflected in the picture – and it was a happiness that we shared. I sometimes wonder whether people are comfortable now about using the word "happiness", but I do not hesitate to do so. I like to think it characterised our relationship. I have long understood how fortunate I have been that Barbara shared her life with me, an appreciation which is of course all the greater now. The many moments of sadness now are tempered by the numerous memories of our life together, enjoying simple pleasures, among which the times represented by the photo feature prominently.

Many of you have kindly spoken or written to me about Barbara and what she meant to you. These have all moved me, including a letter I received from our dear friend Esther, who wrote "how lucky are we who have enjoyed having a loving companion in this wicked world". And another from Peter, with whom Barbara worked in the local Labour Party. He wrote that Barbara "often managed to restore my faith in human nature with an injection of good humour and competence." Perhaps everything we think and say about Barbara can be summed up in two words that Sue used today, when she said that Barbara was a "beautiful soul".

So, dearest Barbara, a real soulmate and the light of my life. And, of course, most definitely the love of my life.