

Margaret Holt Reprint of Obituary (Sussex Record Society)

Margaret Holt died on Good Friday at the age of 86. She joined the Society in 1971 and, for a quarter of a century served on the Council, as an elected member until 1994 and then as a Vice-President. With a lively mind, boundless energy and enthusiasm, she made valuable contributions to our debates and was the first to volunteer to undertake any task that required doing. Her associations with a number of other Sussex historical organisations gave breadth to her opinions. These included: serving on the Council (and later as a Vice-President) of the Sussex Archaeological Society; being a founder member and twice President of the Wealden Buildings Study Group; a member of the Committee of Management of the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum at Singleton; and for a time the Council for British Archaeology representative for listed buildings in Sussex. Besides these she was a trustee of three museums and President of the Danehill Parish Historical Society.

Margaret's main historical interest was ancient buildings, both timber framed and brick. Taught and encouraged by the late R.T.Mason, she soon became an expert in this specialist subject. Her great charm and tact gained her access to most of the old houses in mid-Sussex, which she surveyed and photographed, amassing a large collection of slides showing their principal features. She also for a time owned Cuckfield Park, an Elizabethan house with a brick gate house. She opened it to the public, organising everything herself; including the provision of teas (she was a good cook) and the conducting of guided tours.

An excellent lecturer, Margaret ran adult education classes for many years, some times three a week, and was a popular speaker at local history society meetings. One of her specialities was taking groups round villages and such tours were not complete without going inside one or two of the most interesting houses. Not only was she able to talk with knowledge from her own observations, but from the documentary sources she had consulted.

Married at twenty one, her husband, a solicitor, was disabled by a stroke at an early age

when they had a young family of five children. She nursed him devotedly until his death seven years later, whilst looking after and bringing up her family. A family that was to remain as devoted to her as she was to them. She said, and in many ways it was true, that her family came before everything. Nevertheless, she always seemed to have time for the many committee meetings that were her lot, for a visit to the Record Office, to survey an interesting house at short notice or to add one more lecture to her itinerary. Her reply when asked was 'yes, I think I shall have twenty minutes to fit that in' when most of us would have required several hours and a week's notice. A remarkable woman whom I was proud to know.

Derek Rawlings

