

## Margaret Holt. Ann Knowles Memories

Ann came into Margaret's circle later in Margaret's life.

In 1979 Ann joined one of Margaret's classes being held at her home when she lived just outside Balcombe, on the way to the water tower near High Beeches. It was a class on 'Ancient Buildings'.

Ann, who lived on a farm, found herself enlisted because Margaret thought, being a farmer, she could shed light on the problem of leading/driving pigs of the medieval variety to and from their pasture in the Weald. (A practice known as 'transhumance'). Ann was unable to cast much light on this one but the knock-on effect was to see her become very involved with rare breeds and an acknowledged expert on Soay sheep.

Little did Margaret or Ann know that a request for specific knowledge with reference to the droving of animals from winter to summer pasture, would have such an impact on Ann's life. The class were discussing the droving of pigs when Margaret said: 'Ann will know. She's a farmer'. Ann duly got in touch with an old friend whose wife worked at the Natural History Museum. This lady had written books on rare breeds which piqued Ann's interest and spurred her on to find out more about Soay sheep. Ann became a specialist and an 'Agony Aunt' for the rare breeds society with specific interest in Soay sheep.

The impact of Margaret's apparently casual remark led eventually to Ann being involved, through her expertise with Soay sheep, with research at Cambridge in understanding the ongoing impact of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Could Margaret ever have imagined such important connections? Nor, indeed, do any of us realise the influence any chance remark that we make can have?

Towards the end of Margaret's life Ann began helping Margaret by typing up her notes with a view to compiling an autobiography.

Sadly, these notes are missing. How wonderful if they were to reappear.

Margaret had lived in various places in Sussex including the house near Balcombe: Cuckfield Park: possibly Blackstone, Twineham; Pear Tree Cottage, also Twineham; The Rye, Henfield. In times past The Rye could become an island and Margaret told the tale of being isolated and her husband having to row across the over flowing water course in order to get to work!

Her husband, unfortunately, had a severe stroke and Margaret nursed him. In order to give herself something to do she took up studying geology. We're not sure where she did this but, as with all her other interests, we feel confident she was extremely thorough in her studies.

Ann's 'Adventures with Margaret' included visiting Poynings Church whereupon she was called upon to help Margaret move the altar in order to obtain a better view of a particular feature. As always, the altar was replaced and no-one ever knew it had been temporarily shifted. On another occasion a local farmhouse near Lindfield had scaffolding around the chimney stack. Needless to say Margaret scaled the structure in order to view the chimney masonry in close up. The view must have been amazing.

Margaret's final house was in Haywards Heath backing on to Victoria Park. Her interest never waned and neither did her friends who took it upon themselves to transport her to the many events she continued to support throughout her career as a local historian of note and one of the pioneers researching timber framed buildings who put so many local houses 'On the Map'.