

*Opening the newly equipped Vale of Health playground in Peggy's honour
Peggy with her eldest great-granddaughter performing the opening ceremony
Summer 2006*



photo: Angela Humphery

*"I think the work I have done as Chairman of the Heath & Old Hampstead
Society has been the most worthwhile and satisfying in my life"*

From Loves & Labours, Peggy Jay's autobiography, 1990



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Peggy Jay

1913 - 2008



Photo: Nigel Sutton

A tribute



The Heath & Hampstead Society

Margaret 'Peggy' Christian Jay
Chairman, & President
of the Heath & Hampstead Society



Photo: Nigel Sutton

Introduction

Tony Hillier *Chairman, The Heath & Hampstead Society, April 2008*

Peggy above all had clarity of vision. Combined with a passion for Hampstead, a sharp political instinct for where the power lay to make things happen, an exceptional gift for promoting her many causes and a finely focused belligerence, her qualities have left their mark on all our lives.

We see her legacy throughout Hampstead and across the Heath. All of us in the Heath & Hampstead Society are conscious of the demanding example she has set for us over so many years of dedication and hard work.

This booklet is a small and very personal token of our gratitude and admiration.

Eulogy at Hampstead Parish Church given by Peter Jay

January 28 2008

My text is taken from Chapter 3 of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher, the fourth verse, which Claudia has already read to us: “a time to mourn, and a time to dance” This, I want to tell you this afternoon, is truly not a time to mourn, but a time to dance, a time to dance with joy and in triumph - joy and triumph on her 95th birthday for Peggy's life, the life in which she so fearlessly and ferociously fought the good fight, which we have made today's theme on the front of the service sheet, but also joy at the triumph of her death. If ever we could ask “death where is thy sting?”, we can ask it now, because Peggy did, in a very deep sense, triumph over death.

Thomas Hardy in the reading we heard tells us of “The eternal thing in man, That heeds no call to die”. But Peggy did in a way heed that call. She thought much about death in recent years, not fearfully or wanting to dodge it, but with all that extraordinary emotional intelligence that informed so much of her life.

She died where she wanted, when she wanted, with those she wanted, how she wanted, with serenity and without pain, having had the final conversations she wanted to have, having resolved in her mind the remaining issues of her life, still in the fullest possession of her formidable wits, in her final days dissecting the private agonies of the Labour Party, quizzing a grand-daughter about the exact focus of her work,

confiding in me her final resolution of the ever-absorbing subject of her marriage and having had one last precious week in the Isle of Wight with Helen and more recently Christmas in Dorset. She long ago decided that the only thing about death which she feared was being a burden to others, more particularly a burden whose mind and recognisable personality had fled from an exhausted body. She never was that sort of burden; and to the end she knew who she was and who we were. She wanted death to come before that happiness was taken from her. And it did.

It is true - and I am happy to be able now to pay tribute to them - that she inspired such devotion and affection in her dedicated carers that she certainly was well supported as bodily strength ebbed away. But it was a labour of love; and I give thanks above all to Catherine, who with Stewart's unstinting support, made it possible for Peggy to triumph over death in the way she wanted; but also to Jill and Larissa and most recently to Egne, and Lynn and Hyacinth and her caring team from Camden. Peggy's very last words, ever thoughtful of others, were thank you to them, who loved her and whom she loved.

But even more than her triumph over death, it is the triumph of Peggy's life that we celebrate today. Deeply interwoven throughout most of her ten decades were, in fact, two lives: her

public life as campaigner, tribune of the people and fighter for causes both national and local; and her family life, also highly combative, as daughter, sister, mother, aunt and matriarch. The list of the causes which she championed is long, spectacular and extraordinarily successful. Sister Catherine has perhaps best diagnosed the key to her effectiveness, namely a rare gift for perfect timing, launching her campaigns just when an idea's time has come. As Victor Hugo remarked, there is no more powerful force. Perhaps this came from her endlessly repeated conviction that her much loved father's career was wrecked by his gift for launching daringly radical and eventually successful new ideas two decades too soon.

Examples abound of her ability to see when the moment was right to put her formidable energies behind a new cause:

- abolishing the hated 11-Plus exam which condemned those who failed to a second-class existence from that age onwards;
- stopping the splitting up of homeless families so that mothers and children were sent to reception centres without their husbands;
- fighting hospitals which thought sick children did better when their parents were kept away from them (unfortunately this insight arrived some years after I was isolated for many weeks in an oxygen tent in Great Ormond Street at the age of 2; but happily not before Catherine, age 6, was in hospital for 2 weeks with pneumonia, when Peggy hardly left

the hospital, much to the fury of the matron. She was rightly proud 20 years later when grand-daughter Emily spent 5 weeks in Great Ormond Street with parents and families woven into the fabric of the nursing teams);

- opening the One O'Clock Clubs for mothers and young children, realizing long before it was well known that new mothers could be isolated and needed somewhere to go where they could get support and make friends;
- campaigning to bring mentally handicapped children out of long-stay hospitals (often, as in Friern Barnet, in an adult psychiatric hospital) and into community family homes where they could be offered education as well as basic physical care;
- appreciating - long before the environment and protecting it became fashionable - that the Heath needed protecting, and that having a beautiful and large open space in London is a hugely important asset;
- fighting McDonalds and their proposed take-over of what is now Waterstone's long before burger bars became unpopular (even if her reasons had more to do with aesthetics than obesity, which fortunately she did not regard as a great evil);
- protecting Well Walk's great trees by interposing her person between them and Council vandals armed with power saws (even if her response to the argument that local Council tenants were otherwise forced to live in the dark 24 hours a day was not politically entirely correct, remarking as she did that such people were not fit to live in Hampstead).

This penchant for direct action could be unnerving to her accompanying children, not least her tendency on hearing, or fancying she heard, a crying baby in a house she was passing, to hammer on the door, reprimand the inmates for gross neglect or worse, and threaten to summon the police or other guardians of abused children, sometimes to be told that the bawling infant was in fact on the telly.

Peggy was too an early pioneer of spin, making full and effective use of the press to advertise and broadcast her campaigns, supplying them with good copy, which she was always ready to dictate to any willing reporter. The Ham & High in the great days of Gerry Isaaman's brilliant editorship - I see him in his place - could hardly, it sometimes seemed, fill the space between the ads without her. This too was an idea whose time had come, even if some of its latter-day practitioners have lacked Peggy's ability to distinguish the "good fight" from a squalid brawl.

All in all, as the obituaries have so extensively recognised, Peggy the public person was a great lady, a woman with a super-charged social conscience, a suffusing sense of public duty, the courage of a passionate and resonating heart, an intuitive knowledge of right and wrong and a liberating indifference to wealth and recompense. Whether in council chamber, committee room, parole board, magistrate's bench, on the open Heath or out in the street, wherever she found herself and wherever wickedness showed its face, she fought the good fight with all her might.

And now I come to family. In this too she was a fighter, a tigress loyal to her progeny, loving, encouraging, directing, sympathizing, at times also bossing, nagging, bribing, poisoning and stealing, or - as she called it - recycling.

I was her first-born; and there will be those here who know what I mean when I say that a special load is carried by an eldest child, placed as it were on the steepest slopes of its mother's learning curve, experimented upon, victim of both trial and error, doomed to suffer the absurd indulgence extended to undeserving younger siblings and ever bound to shoulder the lonely responsibility for the well-being of the whole family. None understood this better than Peggy, the first chapter of whose memoir is most poignant on the subject. Accordingly I account myself exceptionally fortunate that from the earliest years - after Great Ormond Street anyway - my memories (with Martin through the blitz, the V1s, the V2s, falling ceilings and exploding front doors, to say nothing of the far more threatening hazards of Peggy's cooking and Douglas' conviction that the way to keep warm was to run the stove full on without bothering to ignite the gas) are of huge fun and all-encompassing love.

Family custom, however, obliges me, on all occasions honouring Peggy, to tell the story of her attempted intervention in my naval career. Having contracted German measles in Hamburg, yes really, I was isolated in a Scottish hospital and therefore

unable to attend the board on which my promotion to midshipman depended. Terrified as I then was of all forms of naval authority, a petty officer for example or even worse a two-striper lieutenant, I was struck closer to permanent paralysis than at any time before or since by receiving a letter from Peggy telling me not to worry because she had spoken to Uncle John's neighbour, the First Sea Lord.

Peggy, despite her lifetime commitment to left-wing and radical causes, was on occasion an unashamed snob. Family members who brought reports of appointment to Head Office were warmly received, after years of vital work in the field had been sedulously ignored. Those who won places at universities not attended by her father or herself were referred to in particularly sepulchral tones usually reserved for news of fatal illness. She would have liked the title Dame Peggy which the Ham and High, if not, alas, the Sovereign, posthumously bestowed upon her last week.

As well as an occasional snob Peggy, though no athlete, was a good sport. Few who were there will forget the awesome spectacle of her in her eighties and in the fullness then of her well-nourished frame rowing out to sea in a tiny dinghy not far from where Nelson boarded the Victory for the last time, to rendezvous offshore with Hugh Stephenson, who I also see in his place, in his catamaran LaRoha, into which she was then hoisted by

bosun's chair slung from the end of the main boom. Stern indomitable men looking on could not stifle a cheer.

Thus to our mother, our aunt, our grandmother, our great-grandmother, our mother-in-law, our friend, our neighbour, our champion, our comrade in the fight, all the roles which she so magnificently filled in one way or another for all of us here today, we say thank-you, we say well done, we say we loved you and we miss you. You made us live. You made us laugh, you made us cross, you made us think and feel and care. We are better because of you; and now we lay you to rest, not with tears and sad faces, but with pride and hearts aglow.

So, let us rejoice. Indeed let us dance in celebration of Peggy; and, even if British decorum and the all-too-slowly changing climate prevent us from issuing forth from the Church door in the manner of the African funeral dance Umlalisa with drums and fantastic steps to surge across Hampstead Heath proclaiming the death of our Queen, in our hearts we may jump for joy and say to one another 'My God, she did it. She fought the good fight and now looks down on a world that is better for her victories'. Had she been a Roman she would have been awarded a triumph and we would have saluted her, as I do now Peggy *Imperatrix*, Peggy the conqueror, Peggy vanquisher of so many of humanity's foes.

Peggy the politician by Illyd Harrington

from the Guardian, January 22 2008

Peggy Jay was the last of a line of Hampstead middle-class Labour *grandes dames* whom Herbert Morrison selected, or more likely groomed, to take over the London County Council in 1934. Among the recruits to his A-Team were Helen Bentwitch, Margaret Cole, Mrs Douglas Bolton (Beatrice Webb's secretary) and Freda Corbett, later MP for Peckham.

Jay was among his "elect" and her opportunity came sooner than expected. A by-election in Hackney, east London, occurred in 1938. She was thrown into the turbulent and violent world of East End politics, confronting communists and the presence of Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. In her 20s, she won and arrived before the inevitable Labour LCC victory that year, remaining until its successor, the first Labour Greater London council, was defeated in 1967.

Peggy's marriage ended in divorce in 1972, but she never played the part of the betrayed wife. On one occasion in 1964 it is alleged that Douglas did not want to take her to the State Opening of Parliament. Peggy, arrayed in formal attire, drove off in his old banger, which "broke down" in Hampstead High Street.

Douglas glided along the Corridors of Power. A member of Clement Attlee's praetorian guard, he was brought up sharply when he pronounced: "The man in Whitehall knows best". He represented Battersea North in

Parliament and Peggy mirrored him as the LCC member for Battersea. She was, at first appearances, haughty, perhaps imperious, but she used the Rolls-Royce efficiency of the LCC to help alleviate areas of poverty, children's needs and the shortage of decent housing for working-class families. Her friendship with Audrey Callaghan on the LCC's children's committee is still talked about as a partnership of practical compassion for deprived children.

We became close during the GLC period, and when I pressed for improvements and greater access to the London canal system, she defended me and threw the weight of the GLC's parks department behind the proposal. Her last County Hall chairmanship, of the arts and recreation committee, was a fruitful three years. Our parks bloomed, events were popular and democratic. She coaxed Henry Moore, a difficult man, into supporting sculpture in the parks, particularly in Battersea Park and the spectacular setting of Kenwood, and perhaps most of all One O'Clock Clubs, places where harassed young mothers could bring toddlers for organised activity in the early afternoon.

I can see the horror on her face when I took her to a hostel for the homeless in Stoke Newington. Things changed. Or I can see her encouraging park keepers and gardeners or even, best of all, in recent months staring out a developer who was eyeing up Hampstead Heath. Perhaps that is where she should be buried.

Gerald Isaaman, retired Editor of the *Ham and High*

Committee member 1976–1990, Vice President 1994–2003, Patron 2003

Peggy Jay was a dangerous woman. My most vivid memory of her was when she drove me to a Corporation of London banquet and got lost in the maze of one-way City streets, the result being that we suddenly headed the wrong way down a one-way road, Peggy groaning: “Why the hell are all those cars flashing at me!”

We survived because nothing daunted her. But it was an important evening because Hampstead Heath and its future was on the menu, and the guests included the principal players - Virginia Bottomley (then Margaret Thatcher’s Environment Secretary), and happily Peggy’s Tory niece, Sir Godfrey Taylor, autocratic chairman of the London Residuary Body, which took over control of the Heath when Mrs Thatcher destroyed the GLC in 1986, and Peter Rigby, astute leader of the City fathers. There was a delicate tightrope to be walked. And for ever vigilant Peggy was there watching every move to ensure that the Heath she loved, saved for London by Hampstead’s visionary forefathers, was not again used as some political pawn.

As chairman and subsequently President of the Heath & Hampstead Society, she was a formidable opponent who could be a brilliant battleaxe demolishing any argument hurled against her, and the next moment pouring soothing charm and delight over those she had so mercilessly conquered. It was obvious to me that Peggy was the compelling

voice of NW3, someone you simply couldn’t ignore because her passion, right or wrong, was the very fuel that ignited success. She threatened to chain herself to plane trees that were threatened with the axe, persuaded generous benefactors to part with their cash for admired causes, helped to ban McDonald’s from Hampstead Village for a dozen years, and backed campaigns to keep local shops, but did not use them herself.

Such were the contradictions of a woman of influence whose Huxley genes provided her with endless energy and enthusiasm, even at times when she was suffering the grief of her own marriage to Douglas Jay, the boy from next door in Well Road, which ended in humiliation. Yet Peggy Jay was the Phoenix of Hampstead, who could champion and rise above hot ashes to win the irresistible campaign of the day, and, moreover, make you feel proud to be on - or at - her side.



Diana Raymond

From Hampstead Parish Magazine, with kind permission of Father Stephen Tucker

“Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth!” I don't quite know why this line from John Magee's poem has haunted me since the news of Peggy's death. I do not think that she saw the “bonds of earth” - however you interpret them - as surly. Those things of the earth which Peggy encountered in her life were - amongst others - the chance to perform what she did exceedingly well, and to be justly acclaimed for it. Few can ask for more. This is not to say that she didn't have her full share of pain and sorrow, but the legacy of her life is a positive and happy one.

But the line still stays, and I think because the time I knew Peggy well (and happily) was in the later years of her life, a time, inevitably, of winding down. Though she never lost interest in the world of politics, who's in, who's out, and the state of her fellow man, whether in Hampstead, or in far and threatened places, she was beginning to be aware of a different voice, a whisper of quiet. The cut and thrust of public life, the battles - sometimes lost, more frequently won - were fading now. She would recall them from time to time, but with a trace of amused detachment, as if she spoke of travels in a country which she would not see again.

Left: Peggy in 1965

Photo: from her auto-biography, Loves & Labours

She was rightly proud of her achievements and would have been delighted with the chorus of praise in the media which followed the end of her life, but the compass needle of interest was moving a different way. The country where she now moved was an unfamiliar one in which she found herself an uncertain explorer (as we all are). Her uncertainty made her the more loveable, for she became the person who asked questions, rather than the one who (necessarily) knew the answers. But this country was a welcoming one, she was becoming prepared for it.

On one of the last occasions when I saw her, with Father Stephen, she had beside her a photograph of her twelfth great-grandchild, recently born in Australia. Her family meant a great deal to her, but our children belong to the future, and as she proudly showed us the photograph she seemed to be at ease with the knowledge that this child would live beyond her into an unknown world.

There is a part of Peggy which would go on protecting the amenities of Hampstead, and would fight (fist clenched, as in the picture on the Order of Service) for those endangered by estate agents or developers of any kind. But there was another part, coming clear, who would rise above the pressures of battle, who would rest, who would hear the still small voice of calm and relish it.

Doughty defender of Hampstead and its Heath who sat on the LCC for the Labour Party for three decades *From The Times, January 23, 2008*

Of all her various claims to distinction, Peggy Jay was always proudest of the 21 years she spent defending the Heath and village in which she had grown up. Her name became synonymous with the preservation of Hampstead and the protection of its neighbouring open space against the depredations of the modern world. No area of London ever had a more zealous champion.

Although she was born in Manchester, where her father, Maxwell Garnett, was principal of the College of Technology, she was in every sense Hampstead-bred. Her parents moved to London from Manchester in 1920 - on Garnett's appointment as general secretary of the League of Nations Union - and, from the age of 7, Peggy Jay was to spend more than 70 years of her life as a Hampstead resident. To many, at least in her latter years, she came to embody the whole political and social ethos that Hampstead is supposed to represent.

The product of a distinguished, progressive family, Margaret Christian Garnett was educated at Malvern Girls' College and St Paul's Girls' School before going up to Somerville College, Oxford, in 1931. She did not take a full degree course there, resting content with a two-year diploma in economics.

At the end of her first term her engagement was announced to a rising young Fellow of All Souls who also happened to be the boy-next-door at home in Well Walk, Hampstead. Her marriage to Douglas Jay took place in 1933, when she was only 20. Although he was a

mere six years older than her, he necessarily came to assume the role of something of a tutor and mentor towards her. (She was certainly very biddable, not even blenching when her husband-to-be announced even before they were married that he had always regarded monogamy as a sin.)

Peggy Jay was one of the last of a long line of emancipated, able women never to hold a paid job. It was simply not thought proper for the daughters, or wives, of middle-class families in those days to seek employment. A naturally energetic figure, Jay was to regret this all her life, and she certainly came to envy the relative economic freedom enjoyed by her daughters and grand-daughters.

By the time her first son was born in 1936, she was already active in Labour politics. In 1938, at 25, she became the youngest member to be elected to the old London County Council. She was to represent the borough of Hackney for 11 years, returning to County Hall, after a three-year gap, as one of the councillors for Battersea for a further 15 years in the 1950s and the 1960s.

Her defeat in the bleak electoral year for Labour of 1967 distressed her greatly - even if she had never wholly taken to the extended GLC, which replaced the LCC in 1964. The loss of her Battersea seat may well, though, have been a blessing in disguise. Certainly, it freed her for the kind of service on official committees at which she excelled.

She had already been appointed to the Royal Commission on Population in the days of the wartime coalition government, and in her later years she was to serve on many similar bodies. She took particular satisfaction from her chairmanship of the Friern Psychiatric Hospital Management Committee, to which she was appointed by Richard Crossman, and - since her interests had started to run in this direction - also from heading a departmental committee inquiring into the training of staff who worked with mentally-handicapped patients.

When this particular committee produced its findings, which raised a howl of rage from the nursing profession, Barbara Castle, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, who had established it, is reputed to have commented: "If I hadn't expected a controversial report, I would not have appointed Peggy Jay."

Although more than 50 years of her life had been spent in the Labour party, in 1983 Peggy Jay abandoned it and joined the SDP. By then she had been divorced from her former Cabinet Minister husband - who in 1987 attained, at the age of 80, the life peerage that might equally well earlier on have been hers. It was greatly to her credit that, after the break-up of her 40-year marriage, she settled down to defending her native Heath, to becoming the undisputed matriarch of a family that was growing through the generations, and eventually to writing, without rancour or bitterness, a highly evocative volume of memoirs entitled *Loves & Labours* (1990). She rejoined the Labour Party fold when Gordon Brown became Prime Minister.

Matthew Lewin

*Former Editor of the Ham & High and
Chairman of the Burgh House Trust*

I witnessed every side of Peggy Jay during my many years on the Ham & High. I saw her in her political prime chairing various GLC committees with skill, understanding – and a rod of iron.

Former Hampstead Tory MP Geoffrey Finsberg once told me that he thought she was the only Labour politician who could ever beat him in an election, but she never was at one with her local Party.

One of my enduring memories was the morning I rang her to tell her McDonald's were planning to open in Hampstead High Street. "Oh no they're not!" she snorted, and she went on to play a leading role in the resulting 'Burger off' campaign.

In recent years I worked with her as a Trustee of Burgh House (which she had helped to save) and although she was physically becoming frail, she was still full of fire and ideas – and still full of love for her beloved Hampstead.

I particularly remember the words of her son Peter Jay at her 90th birthday in 2003 at Burgh House:

"She was in every fibre of her being a tribune, an advocate of a cause, a champion of the casualties of society and the victims of injustice, a dragon of right descending in a clap of thunder on the luckless head of bumbling officialdom, institutional inertia or even unfortunate neighbours who permitted their child to cry a minute too long."

David Sullivan

Heath Sub-Committee Chairman in the 1970s

In my lighter moments two stately but fanciful images remind me of Peggy. They are Peggy the genie of Hampstead and its Heath; and Peggy the figurehead, on the prow of her 100-gun First Rater. Whenever the magic lamp was rubbed, it was Peggy the genie who loomed, huge and stern: to erase the tower block, or the

vandal with his chain-saw. And later in her life, it was Peggy the figure-head who still sailed first in line ahead, to break the enemy's formation. I saw both of them in action at close quarters. When I told the second image to Kit Ikin, he said "She's well away from the quarterdeck".

Christopher Wade

Committee member, 1976 - 1980

"Working with Peggy ? Watch out!" I was told, when we were both involved in the Keep Burgh House campaign of 1978/79.

"She can be a tower of strength, but she can also be a beetle-crusher."

But the Keep Burgh House project, led by David Sullivan, brought out the best in Peggy. She threw herself into

the thick of it, cajoling, bullying, browbeating all manner of Hampstead worthies to join the campaign.

She took her turn at the High Street publicity desk, handing out leaflets, harassing the passers-by. She had a voice that carried and ordered...and won.

Burgh House was kept!

Rex Cowan

H&HS member, friend and fellow campaigner

Peggy Jay was not just your predictable campaigner. She had unique style as well as zest. My first encounter with her was during the late '50's. I had just been appointed by the London County Council as one of the first male members of the management committee of a council Approved School for difficult girls. This handsome mercurial young woman (the Chairwoman) swept into the committee room with complete authority and a welcoming smile as though this was

no ground-breaking event. I looked around at the others – she was the only woman not wearing a hat!

Many years later as local Hampstead neighbours we walked down Gayton Road disfigured by a poisonous forest of estate agents' boards. "Someone should get those boards removed – at night" she said, knowingly looking at me. To my eternal shame I slept like a wimp. In the morning the entire road was clear – every board had been torn down.....

Nicola Beauman *Committee member 1983 -1996*

Founding Chairman of the Town Sub-Committee in 1986

Peggy Jay was Hampstead personified but a large part of her heart was in the Isle of Wight, which is where her ashes were interred on Easter Day in St.

Helen's Church Yard. Her parents, Maxwell Garnett and Margaret Poulton, had met in 1909 playing hockey on the beach there, and holidays were spent either at St Helen's Cottage with the Poultons or at the Garnetts' house on the beach near Seaview.

In 1926 Peggy's mother inherited some money from her Huntley and Palmer uncle and used this to buy Horestone Point, where Oliver Hill built "a white house with a steep-pitched green tiled

roof. The house had a great feeling of openness to the view, the sea and the sun." On the Seagrove side of Horestone Point a former cow house was used to store the canoes and sailing dinghies; here the Garnett children and their cousins and friends spent many happy hours. 'It was a time of deep pleasure and complete innocence' Peggy wrote.

And she ensured that her numerous descendants enjoyed, and continue to enjoy every Easter and summer, that magical Isle of Wight experience. We may associate her totally with Hampstead; but she is also "the island".

Pat Carvel *Committee member 1981- 1986*

I knew Peggy best in the '80s and early '90s, when she ran the H&HS with a majesty that lifted it out of the ordinary.

She understood the big picture, having little time for petty detail, which she swiftly delegated to those who did. When neighbouring London boroughs were squabbling over the state of the gutters on the run-down Spaniards' Gatehouse in terms allegedly of "Your water is falling into our borough" she just blanked: "They're not demolishing the gatehouse!"

Her grandmother lived next door to where I live and she would talk of being there. Was it her grandmother, or one of the John Lewis family who lived behind, whom she said had a suit made of wool from the lambs on the heath

every Spring? When Paul Robeson was invited there to escape McCarthyism, she said "You could hear him singing all the way to Heath Street".

It was the Heath, more than the Town (not, she insisted, the Village) she loved. Although with the air of a grande dame from another era which frightened many people, she was warm and generous, and her main motivation seemed genuinely to help improve the lives of people at large. She was certainly generous to me in my work with the Civil Service and the BBC, introducing me to people, often in her wide, influential family, who could help, descending down to Langham Street in her little car or lunching with us on the terrace of Burgh House. Her energy, directness and *weltanschauung* are irreplaceable.

Margaret Rodgers *Membership Secretary 1973 - 1988*

Vice President 1995 - 1999

My first contact with Peggy was on moving to Hampstead in 1970 when my neighbours in Heath Street took me to the AGM of the Heath & Old Hampstead Society in the Baptist Hall. They pushed me to my feet and proposed me as membership secretary. In those days membership had to be proposed and seconded! After being interviewed I was duly elected and so began a lasting friendship with Peggy. Committee meetings under her chairmanship were lively and memorable as were the campaigns to save the Heath from Camden and to defeat McDonald's!

Through Peggy I became involved with the Management Committee of her beloved Burgh House, particularly with fundraising and catering, together with Brita Wolf. Peggy was a great support and loved parties.

Joyce Jeal, *Secretary 1989 - 1992, Newsletter Editor 1995 - 1996*

Many people will remember Peggy as the rather formidable campaigning Chairman of the H&HS with a keen eye for a photo-opportunity. In fact she had a fabulous sense of humour, especially when relaying everyday incidents of family life which she could build up into hilarious and complex mini-dramas, often with a surprise punch-line at her own expense.

Peggy could be genuinely self-deprecating, and was never backward in giving praise where it was deserved.

Happily the Peggy Jay Gallery is there for posterity.

When I left teaching, Peggy recommended me as a magistrate and was delighted when I was appointed to South Westminster..

Although Peggy's paramount love was for Hampstead (she always said that the Heath should be preserved for grand-children) she took great interest in other people's lives. She was a wonderful friend and mentor and a great influence on my life.

I shall miss her enormously. Barney and I were terribly sad that we were in my native Tasmania and missed her splendid farewell at the Parish Church and Burgh House. She would have loved it - but perhaps she was there!

She was a loyal friend to me and my family. I have very happy memories of her coming to stay in Cornwall with Tim and me and visiting some of the places associated with her brother John's secret service work in small cross-channel boats during the war.

She was an appreciative and considerate guest, going to bed early with a good biography, and only requesting with slight embarrassment that we never ate until she had listened to the 7 o'clock edition of *The Archers*.

Peter Gorb *Treasurer 1989-1991 Chairman 1991-1994*

It will never be difficult to remember Peggy. Ruth and I had become friends with her long before we knew about the many causes to which she was committed. It was not until I joined the committee of the Heath and Hampstead Society that I became aware of the strength, vigour and indeed the charm with which she fought for the Society. When I followed her in the chair, it was her

support and advice which made a difficult task that bit easier. But it is at the more intimate occasions which Ruth and I will treasure. Afternoon tea in her flat below Catherine's house, talking about her grand-children, remembering with sharp but friendly humour the Hampstead of her youth, its people, its events and indeed the scandals of those times: these will be my strongest memories of a great lady.

David Christie *Chairman Town Sub-Committee 1989-1994*

It wasn't the best of beginnings. It was the Society's AGM and the Chairman, the formidable Peggy Jay, had ruled that the future of New End Hospital was not up for discussion: it was old and derelict and ripe for redevelopment; the Society had approved the proposed new-build scheme, and that was it. I was told to sit down and keep quiet.

I didn't sit down. I stood my ground, and argued on for a re-think, and from that initial confrontation there grew a deep and lasting friendship. It was her suggestion, not mine, that a cup of tea and a chat in her cosy flat in Well Road might help to resolve our differences, and so they did: with characteristic graciousness she conceded that there might be another approach worth considering, and from that moment we never looked back. Whatever the project - restoration of the College Crescent fountain, replacement of a red telephone box in the High Street, reinstating Hampstead's old cast-iron lamp posts - there was Peggy with her unswerving loyalty and invaluable support.

So much that was achieved was due to her encouragement and active interest. As the years moved on, and old age and failing health made life more difficult and irksome for her, I could begin to repay this kindness - and that is why from time to time I could be seen charging down Gayton Road with her in her wheelchair on the way to Burgh House (or holding on for dear life on the return journey in case she would shoot off on her own down Willow Road and straight into the front entrance of the Royal Free Hospital); or joining her at her flat for a house communion service.

But most often it seemed to be the late afternoon visits that were most appreciated - then the whisky was brought out, and the gas fire put on and the curtains drawn, and the talk turned to things that mattered most: the Heath, and the Society, and the various projects in hand. Happy days and happy memories: thank you, Peggy, for making such a difference to my life and for all you did for Hampstead.

Brian Beaumont-Nesbitt *Heath Sub-Committee Chairman 1989 -1991*

I was Chairman of the Heath Sub-Committee when the City of London took over Hampstead Heath. Instead of lumping the Heath in amongst their other green spaces, they set up a separate Heath Management Committee. Peggy became the Society's representative and it was my job to brief her before each meeting at Guildhall. As soon as the Agenda arrived, Brian Seddon and I worked through all the points that seemed relevant to us, and typed out a briefing paper.

Always the consummate politician, Peggy took our points on board, and presented them so effectively that the Corporation gave us less and less time to brief her before each meeting.

Tony Gbilchik *Heath Sub-Committee Chairman since 2002*

I first met Peggy when I joined her as a Trustee of Burgh House, that Hampstead institution that she played a prominent role in saving and which remained close to her heart. There were stories of the numerous candles on her birthday cake setting off the fire alarms and of even more fiery actions needed earlier to save the House.

By the time I knew her she had mellowed somewhat from what I had been cautioned could be a formidable expression of opinion. I did have a glimpse of it on one occasion when I was on the rough end of her tongue, though I can no longer recall what it was about, but in general she was

Having moved socially and geographically down market to Child's Hill, I saw much less of Peggy but often called in on her in that basement in Gayton Crescent. Sometimes she had difficulty remembering my name, but she was always very welcoming - and unfailingly cheerful and well turned out. On one occasion I sat on the edge of her bed as we talked; on another I helped to adjust her hearing aid, before she told stories about Harold and Jim on The Island.

Like the Dame of Sark, I always felt that Peggy was, by birth and achievement, the natural Dame of Hampstead.

considerate, supportive and appreciative of the newcomer.

She insisted on meeting my wife for lunch at Burgh House because she was a fellow North London Collegiate schoolgirl with Peggy's daughters.

I regret so much that I will never again receive the call before a Heath & Hampstead Society meeting (not always for the correct day and time) summoning me to ferry her to it. However early I arrived to collect her, she was always waiting at the top of the outside stairs, resplendent in a trouser suit of royal purple. Meetings are not the same without her.

Helen Marcus *Chairman 1994 - 98, Vice-President 1999 -*

One of the greatest pleasures of my involvement with the Society from the early 1990s was getting to know Peggy. It was with no little trepidation that I joined the Society's Committee. I need not have feared: I was made completely welcome. She was unfailingly generous in her support and encouragement and was always there to help and advise.

To see her in full flow at committee meetings, already then in her eighties, with her astonishing energy,

commitment and immense knowledge over a wide range of subjects, was phenomenal. She steered the Society successfully through one of the most difficult and anxious periods in its history, when the Heath was left in limbo by the abolition of the GLC.

But behind that formidable public image was a warm and compassionate woman with a wonderful sense of humour. She was a fund of amusing stories from her days canvassing as a GLC councillor. We had great fun

together planning a year of events to celebrate the Society's centenary in 1997.

It is characteristic that when retiring from the chairmanship of the Society in 1988, it was she who thanked the committee "with inexpressible gratitude for all the years of hard work and help".

With the Lord Mayor and Peter Rigby, Chairman of the Heath Management Committee, on the opening day of the Society's Centenary celebrations in 1997

From the City of London archive



Jeremy Wright *Heath Sub-Committee Chairman 1998 - 2002*

Perhaps my closest association with Peggy was when she realised that Sir Arthur Crosfield, who was instrumental in saving Kenwood for the nation, had no adequate recognition. She proposed that a plaque be erected at Kenwood, and I joined her at meetings to negotiate this with English Heritage. This proved demanding!

Initially, the journey there in her car was terrifying. I quickly became her chauffeur, which conserved my reserves for the rigours of the meetings. Peggy was determined that Crosfield's contribution be described as "heroic", but English Heritage staff were not so sure. They however cowered and succumbed when Peggy hammered on the table to emphasise her point. The erected plaque contains "heroic"!

On the drive home that day, Peggy, indomitable but always kind and

understanding, lent towards me. "Jeremy dear, tell me, was I too fierce?"

For years Peggy was insistent that "frontiers" be established on Hampstead Heath, to control and monitor the relentless encroachment of scrub into the open grass areas. She was absolutely right, but the task of doing this manually was immense.

She was bemused when I visited her at home in 2003 to tell her that the City was now using geographical information mapping and global positioning systems. However, her delight was unbounded when she realised that these enabled the City to survey one of her 'frontiers', to have this automatically plotted on a map, and a year or two later, to repeat and highlight immediately where encroachment had occurred. As usual, she was ahead of her time.

Martin Humphery *Town Sub-Committee Chairman 1995 - 2004
Chairman 1998 - 2004, Vice President 2004 -*

During my time as Chairman and before that as Town Committee chairman Peggy was still at the height of her very considerable powers. Woe betide you if you had not got your facts in order, especially on the subjects closest to Peggy's heart.

At General Committee meetings she always found a seat directly opposite me and fixed me with that kindly but steely gaze, which seemed to be

saying "Watch it, I've got my eye on you!" But like every other Chairman of recent times, I could always rely on Peggy's warm friendship and support and on the wealth of her experience and phenomenal memory.

In a very real sense, Peggy created the Society as we know it today and we must all continue to see to it that we push the work on, as she would want us to.

Peggy unveiling the plaque to Arthur Crosfield at Kenwood, 2000



Photo: Jeremy Wright

Peggy Jay JP was born on January 28, 1913

She died on January 21, 2008, aged 94

Elected representative on the LCC and GLC 1938-1967

Elected to the Heath & Hampstead Society Committee in 1961

Chairman, 1967 - 1989

President 1993 - 2004

Life President 2004 - 2008

The constant Vigil

From Peggy's Chairman's Report 1973

"It should be emphasised that the battle which Hampstead fought in the 1860s still needs to be fought today. Then it was a question of saving the Heath as a unique open space; today, it is a question of keeping it that way. Looking back at our most recent Annual Reports one is forcefully reminded that attacks on the Heath continue with great regularity. In the name either of public utility or of private profit, schemes are put forward whose result would be, in one way or another, to diminish the qualities for which the Heath is so celebrated."