

MARGARET WARD-DYER 1916 - 2012

It is with sadness that we report the death, in June, of Mrs Ward-Dyer aged 96 years. She was born Margaret Elizabeth Hay Hinman, in June 1916, the daughter of Margaret and George Hinman, and came with her parents from Pinner to Cheney Street, Eastcote in 1919. She attended Watford Grammar School for Girls, followed by Edinburgh University, and in 1946 married Francis Ward-Dyer, the year after the Hinmans had moved from Cheney Street. Mrs Ward-Dyer had fond memories of her childhood in Eastcote and set up the Hinman Shield in her mother's memory.

The article below, written in 2003 by the late Sheila Liberty, then chair of the Eastcote Village Conservation Area Advisory Panel, appeared in the winter edition of the Eastcote Residents' Association newsletter, and describes this remarkable family.

In 1978 I was contacted by Mrs Margaret Ward-Dyer, whose mother had recently died at the age of 99. For reasons that will become apparent, she wanted to commemorate her parents' lives by enhancing a corner somewhere in Eastcote. Her proposal was to plant a copse of trees, underplanted with daffodils, at the end of the Long Meadow, very near where the family had lived in Cheney Street. This was done in the spring of 1979 and the copse remains a feature of the Long Meadow today. She also wished to involve Eastcote children in conservation, and to this purpose she presented a shield, to be known as the Hinman Shield, that could be awarded annually to a school, youth club or group such as scouts and guides; even to an individual child.

Behind Mrs Ward-Dyer's bequest lies an inspiring story. Her parents, Margaret and George Hinman, had moved to Eastcote in 1919 and lived in a house called Fyvie [now High Trees] at the lower end of Cheney Street. A little further down Cheney Street is Hornend, a Grade II-listed building, which at that time was the home of a Mr and Mrs Philip. Coincidentally they were also named Margaret and George, and the two families became close friends. The Philip family produced the Philip Atlas that was used extensively throughout the United Kingdom.

Many living in Eastcote in those days were quite poor and worked on the local farms. There being no local school, the children had to walk to Ruislip for their education, a journey that was both long and tiring. Mrs Hinman decided to address this problem by establishing a foundation that would provide a school in Eastcote. She got all the local community involved, and everyone who could paid sixpence a brick to help build a school in Fore Street, at the bottom of the hill. Although the original building has since been demolished – the John Grooms development now stands there – Fore Street still has its school.

The Hinman and Philip families continued to do many other good deeds together. They helped set up the Eastcote Women's Institute and a Men's Institute, with meetings held in a small tin-roof hut next to where the garage is in Eastcote village. The WI ladies were taught the importance of diet to health; there was handicraft and drama. One year they put on A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Mr and Mrs Hinman were both independent councillors in the 1920s and 1930s, and it was during this period that Mrs Hinman saved the Long Meadow from development by Comben and Wakeling, who built the Eastcote Park Estate on the opposite side of the River Pinn. Those who use the Long Meadow regularly won't need reminding just how much they owe to her intervention. She also resisted proposals to build a hotel on 'Pretty Corner' at the junction of Fore Street and Eastcote Road.

Yet, her daughter has asked me to say, Margaret Hinman was simply an ordinary woman who managed to do some extraordinary things. And as the shield named in her honour illustrates time and again, we are all, however ordinary, capable of doing something extraordinary to preserve our environment and the people who live in it.

The Hinman Shield was first awarded in 1980 to local children for their work at Highgrove Nature Reserve. Since then, apart from a gap of a few years in the mid 2000s, it has continued to be awarded annually to local children's groups.

Karen Spink