



Obituary for Dr. Margaret Colquhoun

10. May 1947 – 3. August 2017

A year after her serious illness was first diagnosed, Margaret Colquhoun crossed the threshold peacefully in her home, as she had wished, at 2.20pm on Thursday 3rd August 2017. Her final months had generally been comfortable and she received wonderful help and support from close friends, neighbours, the NHS, and some private care. A Christian Community funeral service and burial took place on Sunday 13th August in the walled garden adjoining her home in Craigie Lodge. – For decades Margaret worked closely with the science section and as part of the section collegium. So we would like our readers to know a little bit about her life and her work.

Biographical aspects

Margaret Colquhoun was born nee Kelsey on 10th May 1947 in Ripon, North Yorkshire. There she received her lower school education, showing considerable academic ability. She attended Edinburgh University in 1965, with agricultural science, zoology and population genetics as her main undergraduate studies. This department was under the leadership of Professor Conrad Waddington – one of the late Professor Brian Goodwin’s teachers – who pioneered approaches in genetics that were radical in his time; the term “epigenetics” was first coined by Waddington. After graduating in 1969, Margaret continued as a research associate in the Department of

Zoology for two years, subsequently becoming a post-graduate student, and gaining a doctorate in evolutionary biology in 1978.

Through her active interest in climbing, Margaret met many world-class mountaineers during her university days – including (later Sir) Chris Bonington, Mike Galbraith, Doug Scott and David Bathgate – trekking with them up to Everest base camps and often engaging in challenging climbing herself. She joined the British expedition to Mount Everest in 1972, collecting specimens for the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh. David Bathgate and Margaret were married in 1970 and set up home together, but never had children. They divorced in 1978, subsequently remaining firm friends. Much later, David became professionally engaged with highly specialised construction work for the new buildings in Pishwanton Wood. Margaret never re-married and following her divorce, she assumed a new family-related surname, Colquhoun. The following year was spent working in Liebenfels, a pioneering Camphill Village Community in Austria, which kindled her deep empathy for individuals with learning disabilities. Later this commitment found expression in providing day-care activities for individuals with special needs in Pishwanton Wood, as well as in her striving to build community in the Wood. This Camphill experience also furthered Margaret's interest in anthroposophy and after returning to Scotland she soon became involved in initiating anthroposophically related outreach activities in Edinburgh, e.g., Helios Fountain in the Grass Market. Between 1980 and 1982, she also initiated and ran several social enterprises in the Edinburgh area, based on the sale and distribution to retail outlets of biodynamic produce, crafts and books.

However, a head injury in 1982 was to become the most decisive turning point in Margaret's professional life and destiny. It led her to seek help from Park Attwood Clinic, Worcestershire, and, following a protracted stay there and a subsequent conversation with her friend Reverend Pearl Goodwin (also a former student of embryology under Professor Waddington), she decided to temporarily relocate to Southern Germany to study Goethean Science. Starting in 1984, she spent three years at the Carl Gustav Carus Institute in Öschelbronn, studying under its director Thomas Göbel, and later transferred to the Section for Natural Science at the Goetheanum under its director Dr. Jochen Bockemühl.

She returned to Scotland in 1988, initially to her former small and somewhat isolated but romantic stone-built cottage in the tiny village of Humbie, situated about eight miles from her project Pishwanton Wood. A decade or so later, she moved closer to the Wood, to a much larger modern bungalow in Gifford, which also served as the main administrative centre for the rapidly expanding activities of the Pishwanton Project, remaining there for the next decade.