

Obituary of Barbara Dainton

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Barbara Dainton, who has died aged 96, was one of the last surviving passengers from the Titanic, though her family were brought up never to mention it. She was well into her 80s before she spoke in public about the tragedy.

Barbara's parents, Edwy and Ada West, both from the Truro area, travelled on the Titanic as second-class passengers with their children, Miriam, aged four, and Barbara, then 10 months old. They were emigrating to Florida. When the order came to abandon ship, Ada and the children found places in a lifeboat. Family anecdote has it that Edwy, desperate to hand his wife a flask of milk, was ordered away from the boat at gunpoint. He died in the disaster (and is commemorated on a memorial in Truro Cathedral, where he had once been a chorister) but Ada and the girls were rescued and taken to New York. Eventually, the family returned to Truro, where Ada took in lodgers to make ends meet.

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Barbara's education up to the age of 12 was sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Drapers and she attended their boarding school in Purley, Surrey. She went on to Truro girls' high school and St Luke's College, Exeter, where she took a teacher training course in physical education and geography. She then became a governess to a Cornish family, and moved with them to Spain, an experience that sparked a lifelong love of the country.

At the outbreak of the Spanish civil war in 1936, Barbara returned to England, and a teaching post at Guildford high school, Surrey. A colleague from those days recalled a madcap idea to cycle from Guildford to Plymouth - an eminently believable story, as Barbara was always game for an adventure. She also met, and in 1938 married, Stanley Winder, a rugby-playing Mancunian. The marriage lasted for 13 years before Stan died from a heart attack, but his love of rugby remained with Barbara. She and her second husband William, known to all as Dee, were regular visitors to Twickenham.

Returning to Cornwall in the early 1950s, Barbara taught at her old school in Truro, later becoming deputy head of physical education at Plymstock school for 20 years. A dedicated and kind schoolmistress, with a liking for bright lipstick, she encouraged an interest in grooming among her pupils. Her hockey team travelled to local tournaments in an assortment of cars, including the vintage Rovers, known as "Stella" and "Vanessa", the pride and joy of Barbara and Dee.

After retirement from Plymstock school in 1972, Barbara moved back to Cornwall. Dee died in 1990. She regularly attended morning prayers at Truro Cathedral (often acting as a guide). Her love of the English language remained to the end. She was delightfully intolerant of sloppy speech, spelling or grammar, and remained a feisty and spirited interlocutor well into her 90s.

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