

Trees of Reflection



BARBARA ELLIS

Handkerchief Tree (*Davidia Involucrata*) planted 2017

1965–2017

Barbara was a volunteer at The Cart Shed in lieu of being a participant. The photo below and the following article were taken from *Gloucestershire Live*, subsequent to the inquest into Barbara's death.



Grieving Widow Who Led a Safety Campaign Killed Herself After Anniversary of Husband's Death.

She had been denied care because of living near the border of two councils.

25th Jan 2018, by John Hawkins.

Grieving widow Barbara Ellis - who campaigned for lorries to be fitted with rear view cameras after her husband was killed by a reversing truck - committed suicide shortly after the fifth anniversary of his death, a coroner ruled today.

Businesswoman Mrs Ellis, 52, of Bromsberrow Heath, near Ledbury, had 'struggled massively' to cope with the loss of husband Michael on April 2, 2012 and each anniversary was a 'trigger point' for her, the Gloucester inquest was told. Her family and the mental health services were well aware of how low she became at that time. On April 3 last year she saw her church minister and her GP, followed by her community support worker the next day.

She spoke to support worker, Amanda Rees, about the gardening she had been doing, her battle with moles in the garden and her future plans for the year. Ms Rees left her home following an hour visit on the evening of April 4 and Mrs Ellis then spoke to her daughter on the phone. She did not give either her daughter or Ms Rees any clue of her suicidal state of mind, the inquest was told.

However, soon afterwards she went to a bridge over the M50 with the intention to commit suicide, the inquest was told. The mum of three was found by two highways workers, Michael Worsford and David Flowers. She was still alive but with multiple injuries from when she fell from the bridge. An ambulance rushed her to Southmead Hospital, Bristol, where she was found to have unsurvivable injuries. She was formally certified dead on April 6 2017.

Gloucestershire coroner Katie Skerrett said a note found in Mrs Ellis' pocket and other documentation at her home showed she had clearly planned to take her life. She recorded a conclusion of suicide. "Barbara gave no clues as to what was tragically going to unfold," said the coroner. "But there was very clear planning and detailed letters. She also chose to go where she was not expecting to be observed."

Cross border situation

The coroner heard that Mrs Ellis received full support and care from the 2Gether NHS Mental Health Trust which covers both Gloucestershire and Herefordshire – but she was not able to access other 'add-on' services in Herefordshire because of cross-border financial issues. She would have been funded for them if she had lived in Herefordshire, but Gloucestershire County Council decided not to support her.

The inquest was told that although living in Gloucestershire her GP was in Hereford and she was recommended to attend a 'recovery college' and the Cartshed rural skills centre in Little Dewchurch. (sic)

On finding that she paid council tax in Gloucestershire, however, Hereford Council declined funding and passed her case over to Gloucestershire County Council - who refused to support her.

Psychiatrist Dr Amjad Uppal told the inquest the cross-border situation was 'really unfortunate.' She had been allowed to work as a volunteer at Cartshed (sic) but the beneficial effects of that were 'far from what could have happened,' he said.

"I think Herefordshire Council thought Cartshed (sic) would be appropriate for her and they triggered a budget for her to go there. But when they discovered she was paying council tax in Gloucestershire they passed it to Gloucestershire County Council, who did their own assessment, as a result of which she was not allowed to attend," he explained.

"We have raised this issue with the two Care Commissioning Groups in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire for them to take it up with the local authorities. We all need to be aware of the potential pitfalls.

"Mrs Ellis functioned at a high level. She was managing director of her own company. She was a highly intelligent person who would have benefited significantly from those services."

Although her care would have been enhanced by the add-on services, he did not think it was compromised by the lack of them, he added.

Something needs to be done

The coroner said she did not believe that being able to receive those services would have prevented Mrs Ellis from taking her life. But she did consider that something needs to be done to change the system and she will be issuing a 'Preventing Further Deaths' report on the cross-border funding issue, she said.

Giving her suicide conclusion the coroner said: "She was struggling massively to try to cope with her bereavement and the loss of her husband. April was a very difficult time for her, obviously. She had been receiving help from the mental health services since January 2014 and she was trying to get on top of her difficulties. But she had made multiple attempts to end her life. Everyone was well aware that April was her trigger point and her care had been increased accordingly at that time."