Oakley, Ann. "High Barn, and the Other Barbara." *A Critical Woman: Barbara Wootton, Social Science and Public Policy in the Twentieth Century*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. 235–248. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849664769.ch-013>>.

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High Barn, and the Other Barbara

Throughout the various lives of Barbara Wootton – classicist manqué, lamenting economist, radical social scientist and policy wisewoman – there runs the thread of a person searching for her rightful home. Barbara’s disciplinary restlessness was matched by the lack of any physical place that could be called a permanent home. After the devastatingly brief marriage to Jack Wootton when she was twenty, she had gone back to live in her mother’s house in Cambridge. Her next two homes were institutions: Girton College in Cambridge and Westfield College in London. After that came a series of cramped rented flats, in Chelsea and St John’s Wood, and then a more congenial, but still impermanent, residence with Leonora Simeon on a hill in Hampstead. The marriage to George Wright in 1935, when she was thirty-eight, took her to west London, to a block of flats in Fulham near the river. If the marriage had maintained the happiness of its early years, perhaps she and George would have stayed in Napier Court. But George’s serial infidelities became in the end too much for Barbara to bear; it was time to move on.

One of Barbara’s most vivid childhood memories was of happy holidays spent with The Pie at the home of Lord Farrer at Abinger Hall in Surrey. An aunt, Jeanie Adam, was governess to the Farrer children, two of whom, Fanny and Kitty, were close to Barbara in age. Abinger Hall was a minor stately home, originally built in 1783 and rebuilt in 1872, with terraces and balustrades, a fountain, glassy slopes for rolling down, a huge kitchen garden and woodlands perfect for childhood games. The whole house was a child’s delight for generations of children, as one of Kitty’s daughters, remembers: ‘an enormous kind of baronial hall, surrounded on the first floor by a gallery, with a swing door to the Nursery quarters, and a long corridor on the second floor where (on wet days) one could play “Rat Trap and Ball” (with the risk of propelling the ball down onto the heads of grown-ups crossing the ground floor hall)’.¹ Lord Farrer was nicknamed ‘Railway Tom’ because of his obsession with railways: he could reputedly tell you from memory the times of trains between any two points in England and Scotland. Farrer was

on the Board of the Midland Railway and the Board of the Underground Electric Railways Company of London, a forerunner of the London Underground. He also displayed a concern with which Barbara Wootton would later empathize, for the preservation of the countryside, and was, for many years, a prominent member of the Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society.

The Farrers and the Adams probably first met in Cambridge. When Lord Farrer's first wife died in 1898, she left three children under six – Fanny and Kitty had an older brother – and their father took them to live for a time with his sister Ida, who was married to Horace Darwin, in Cambridge. The most famous Darwin, Charles, had once used the Abinger Hall site to explore Roman remains; the Roman mosaic floors were apparently an excellent place to observe the work of earthworms. Following Darwin's visit, the first Lord Farrer kept a daily 'Worm Diary' for him, recording the number and weight of each night's worm casts, information that Darwin used for his book on earthworms.² After Railway Tom's second marriage in 1903, the Farrers returned to Abinger Hall, and then Barbara's aunt, Jeanie, was the passport to her niece's holiday memories – or perhaps it was the other way round, and the Farrers' sojourn in Cambridge had introduced them to the Adams, and James Adam had perhaps suggested his sister for the post of governess in rural Surrey. At any rate, Jeanie Adam, known to the Farrer children as 'Miss Addy', was an important source of support for them, especially when their new stepmother was busy with committee work and children of her own.³

The parish of Abinger lies some thirty miles south-west of London in a green commuter belt bounded on the north by chalk downs 700 feet above sea level, the southern part running into the clay of the Weald. There is Hurtwood Forest, an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with its four thousand acres of protected woodland. There is Abinger Hammer, and Sutton Abinger, and Abinger Bottom and Abinger Common, and, most confusingly for this story, a neighbouring village called Wotton. The history of Abinger Common goes back well beyond the Domesday Survey. This is quintessential rural England, much sought after then and now by people who have enough money to buy their way into it. Holmbury Hill, which rises beyond the village of Holmbury St Mary, is reputed to afford the finest view in Surrey,⁴ and Abinger Hammer, so-called because it used to be a centre of the iron industry, was voted by *The Independent* in 2008 one of the best picnic spots in England. It has an extraordinary clock, a gift from Railway Tom's stepmother, who put it there in memory of her husband; on it, Jack the Blacksmith strikes the hour.⁵ The village of Holmbury St Mary is considered by some to be commemorated as 'Summer Street' in E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View*. Forster lived in Abinger Hammer, at first with his mother in a house designed for his

aunt. He produced *Abinger Harvest*, a book of essays and other memorabilia, its title taken from an account of a pageant performed in 1934 to raise money for the local church. The music for the pageant was written by Vaughan Williams, and it included a choral setting, *O How Amiable*, dedicated to Fanny Farrer, who would later, like Barbara Wootton, be 'elevated' to an honour, in her case a damehood acquired through a lifelong service as 'the Queen bee' of the Women's Institutes.⁶

All this history was one reason why Barbara Wootton started her search for a house in the area. There were two other reasons. First, there was her lifelong dislike of cities. 'Towns are ugly,' she wrote in 1946; they are places of 'aesthetic starvation', where one inevitably spends far too much time entangled in the 'machinery of living', for example simply getting from one place to another. In the country, life is simpler, and when you lift your eyes from whatever it is that you are doing they are bound to fall on a pleasing view.⁷ Barbara's attachment to the countryside would later translate into a role as the first Chair of the Countryside Commission. In that capacity, she was well aware of the paradox of town-dwellers like herself seeking the peace and aesthetic delights of the country and thereby threatening to alter it.⁸ A second reason why Barbara was searching for a new home in Surrey was that a friend of hers owned a cottage in Holmbury St Mary, and she and George regularly went there at weekends to help with the garden. Moves to the country by long-established town-dwellers are often motivated initially by fantasy, and Barbara's was no exception. Several houses were nearly bought, but fear of commitment prevented the purchase going through. Then, in November 1953, she spotted an advertisement in *The Times* for an old barn that could be converted into a home. She motored down to view an almost derelict building overgrown with nettles and brambles, essentially just a stable for horses and bats and bees, with one cold water tap and two naked rooms, and a large open space in the middle for waggons to be driven through. It was the rashest decision she had ever taken in her life.⁹ 'High Barn', as she called it, became a major renovation project, and then eventually for more than thirty years exactly the home she wanted. One sign of how much she loved it is that, of the ten photographs reproduced in her autobiography, four are before-and-after shots of High Barn, and two are of the donkeys that came to live with her there.

She could not have done it without her architect, Henry Dalton Clifford. He was an erratic man of ideas who specialized in house conversions, and had very definite views about architecture, and especially home decoration: the ornate fussiness of a late Victorian house, overloaded with awnings, lanterns and the like, resembled, he declared, 'a scarlet woman'.¹⁰ Clifford wrote a number of books – *The Country Life Book of Houses for Today* (1963), *Home Decoration* (1955), and the apposite *New Homes from Old Buildings* (1954). In his *New Houses for Moderate Means*

(1957), he was honest about the risk and tedium involved in building a new house, which was more or less what had to be done with High Barn. However, shortly after agreeing to work on the project, he slipped a disc and gave it all up to run a hotel and become an antique-dealer in Cornwall, much to Barbara's annoyance. He passed the project to his friend 'Philip', who in turn passed it to his friend 'David', but the original Clifford plans were adhered to, more or less.¹¹ The work took two years. Getting planning permission was not a speedy process, but at least she did get it, whereas other plans to build a house from scratch on a site a mile or two away had been refused, on the grounds that it would spoil the countryside. Barbara quoted this example approvingly in a talk she gave years later called 'More Equality, Less Freedom?' which argued that people must put up with such frustrations in the interests of the principle of planning regulation, which is a matter of ensuring a safe and pleasant environment for everyone, not of restricting individual freedom.¹² What could and could not be done in the parish of Abinger was also determined by an almost medieval system of property ownership: when Barbara's friend Francis Williams built a house in Holmbury St Mary in the 1930s, a large part of the village was still owned by one old lady who made rounds of visits in an open landau, expecting the village children to curtsy as she passed, and whenever a young man in the village wanted to get married, she would refuse him a cottage if she thought he should stay at home and look after his mother instead.¹³

The structure of High Barn had been moved to Abinger from Effingham in Sussex to accompany an Arts and Crafts house built by Edwin Lutyens in 1898–1900. One likes to think that Barbara Wootton knew the purpose of this building, which was to provide 'a Home of Rest to which ladies of small means might repair for holiday'.¹⁴ Goddards, as the Lutyens house was called, was bought in 1953 by Bill and Noeline Hall, who made their money from a haulage business, and who became, along with their two children, friends of Barbara's.¹⁵ Since Goddards and High Barn shared a drive, Barbara had to pay the Halls the token annual rent of a rose on a summer's day.¹⁶ A local builder, Mr Sherlock of Peaslake, had re-erected the barn when it first came from Sussex, and he was still around, so Barbara hired him for her renovations. It must have been a busy time for Mr Sherlock, and his son Denis, since they were enlisted by Francis Williams for *his* building project in Abinger around the same time.¹⁷

High Barn is set back from the road and backs onto protected woodland. Today it hides behind tall hedges at the back and tall gates at the front, giving it the impression of jealously guarded privacy. The lanes around are lush with vegetation and discrete wealth. In the conversion undertaken by Mr Sherlock, High Barn was not a large house: there was a semi-basement with a large room and its own kitchen

and bathroom and a separate entrance; a good-sized high-ceilinged and beamed living space; the usual amenities; a study for Barbara and her bedroom; and then a small guest room with its own bathroom. Visitors who came to interview Barbara in the house called it 'small',¹⁸ and 'charming without quaintness, not large, but comfortable and secluded'.¹⁹ They admired its situation: 'The approach over the west side of Leith Hill is amazing,' observed a journalist from *The Scotsman*, 'a steep climb between high sandy banks with few passing places for cars. The sun winks beguilingly through tall groves of beech, birch, pine, oak and holly. If this is the gin and jaguar belt, there is nothing much wrong with it.'²⁰ Photographs show a simply furnished house with wooden floors, rugs, plain wooden furniture, not much in the way of decoration or adornment. As one friend of Barbara's noted, 'It was very frugal ... There was no comfort there. No armchairs'.²¹ And it was clear, as the journalist from the *Horley Advertiser* remarked, that Lady Wootton took much pleasure in 'having created her own home to her own requirements'.²² A photograph in her archives shows Barbara's bed, a high white bed positioned at exactly the same height as the bottom of a window, the window casements thrown open wide onto a glowing summer garden. The outside of High Barn was much bigger than the inside, and it needed a great deal of work. At the back was a buttercup meadow, and this was home to the two creatures who would afford Barbara much companionship as she grew older: the donkeys, Miranda and Francesca. Miranda, so named because she was delivered in a tempest, had an 'establishment' nature; Francesca, named after Barbara (whose middle name was 'Frances') was the hippy.²³ Miranda arrived first in 1959, Francesca three years later. They kept the grass in the meadow under control and had peaceable natures, except that Francesca brayed loudly when things were not to her liking, as when her food was delayed by the arrival of a man from the BBC to record an interview with Barbara.²⁴

The donkeys inhabited a land of lords and ladies. Abinger gained a Baroness when Barbara Wootton took the title 'Wootton of Abinger' on becoming a life peer in 1958. It acquired a Baron, when Francis Williams joined Barbara as Baron Francis-Williams of Abinger in 1962. Lord Wolfenden, who chaired the 1957 Committee leading to the recommendation that homosexuality should be partially decriminalized, lived in nearby Westcott, and absorbed that village into his title when he added a life peerage to his knighthood in 1974. The banker Lord Catto, from whom Barbara borrowed robes for her initiation in the House of Lords, had a house in Holmbury St Mary. In addition, there was a fair diversity of characters: the pianist William Murdoch had lived and made music in Holmbury St Mary until his death in 1942; his wife, Flossie, was a sister of Ernest Simon, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, Chairman of the BBC when Barbara joined as a

Governor. Other inhabitants were the journalist and writer Cecil Sprigge; the early Everest mountaineer Frank Smythe; Barbara's relative Sir John Ford, who lived in nearby Guildford; and her old school friend, the neuropathologist Dorothy Russell, who had a little modern house in Westcott. The district could even be considered a minor outpost of the Bloomsberries, with the Forster connection and Beatrice Webb House, just down the hill from High Barn, a large Victorian building, bought in 1947 by the Webb Memorial Trust, suitably with a mortgage from the Transport and General Workers' Union. Beatrice Webb House was run as a meeting place for the 'advancement of education and learning with respect to the history and problems of government and social policy'.²⁵

Like Beatrice Webb House, Barbara Wootton was politically not at all representative of the tone of the area. But, as Francis Williams commented, 'even the strong Conservatives who predominated among our neighbours did their best in a neighbourly way to forgive us our socialism'.²⁶ His son John Melville Williams, who later negotiated the planning regulations to build a house with sweeping views over Holmbury Hill, recalls having a different relationship with Barbara from those with other neighbours: in conversation with her, one could let one's hair down and make comments about what was really happening in the world. He found it quite interesting that she had relationships with people who were rather different from her – comfortably off, middle-class women who lived in the neighbourhood and who were very good neighbours to Barbara, despite not necessarily sharing her political affiliation.²⁷ One, Audrey Bradley, remembers being a guest at one of her dinner parties: 'Barbara had been up in the House of Lords ... and she'd asked everybody what they'd been doing all day with a slightly naughty look in her eye because she got round to me and I said I'd been playing golf'.²⁸ (The politics of golf, the House of Lords and British political party affiliations were by no means straightforward.) In Barbara's later years when her health declined, these Surrey neighbours were an important source of support and help, and essential in a rural area without much in the way of public transport. In the early 1950s when Barbara found High Barn, a steam train ambled in the morning and back in the evening between Gomshall and London Bridge stations on a line through the chalk hills of the North Downs, and there were also convenient fast trains from Dorking to London. But in the 1960s, a new line removed the convenience of the fast trains.

It was a complicated and quite secretive transition, this one from being George Wright's wife in Fulham to being a Lady of Abinger. By far the most secretive aspect of it was that Barbara was not only moving house and leaving George, but she was also moving a new companion into her life. The cottage in Holmbury St Mary that had provided the base for house-hunting belonged to a woman called Barbara

Ruth Fuessli Kyle. When Barbara Wootton moved into High Barn, Barbara Kyle moved up the hill, to a cottage opposite, and then she moved into High Barn itself. She was known as 'Barbara' Kyle professionally, and to her family as 'Ruth', and sometimes she published under the name 'Ruth Archibald' ('Archibald' was one of her father's forenames). Barbara Wootton called her 'Fuessli' ('my friend Fuessli Kyle'²⁹) because having two Barbaras would be too confusing. The Pie, whom Barbara Kyle was taken to meet, and who referred to her affectionately and often in her letters to Barbara Wootton, called her simply 'the Other Barbara'.

Barbara Kyle started out as a librarian. She worked in libraries from the age of sixteen, beginning with the Paddington Public Library in 1929, graduating to public libraries in Fulham (in 1935) and Islington, and then to a senior post in the Library of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in 1945. She stayed at Chatham House for ten years, creating a classification scheme for the library and reorganizing it so it became one of the main collections in its field.³⁰ The two Barbaras may have first met in Fulham, when Barbara Wootton was living there, and Barbara Kyle was working in the library: the Preface to *Freedom Under Planning* acknowledges Barbara Wootton's 'perpetual debt' to the staff of Fulham Public Library, as well as to Barbara Kyle for providing criticism and checking details. They may also have encountered each other in the context of Chatham House. In the late 1930s, Barbara Wootton had worked with Lionel Curtis, the founder of Chatham House, at the beginning of the Federal Union movement; she had also been secretary of a Study Group on Reconstruction there, and the Trades Union Congress representative on the Chatham House Council in 1940–1. At any rate, Barbara Wootton and Barbara Kyle knew each other by 1942. In that year, Barbara Wootton acknowledged Barbara Kyle's help with the survey of the social services she had undertaken with one of her university tutorial classes.³¹ The Other Barbara's meticulous librarian's eye was also called into service for the texts of *Testament for Social Science* (1950) and *Social Science and Social Pathology* (1959).

Barbara Kyle was twelve years younger than Barbara Wootton. She was a handsome woman with sparkling eyes and a wide smile, and is always smiling in the photographs, whether lounging on the terrace of High Barn, ministering to the donkeys, or at a dinner table with a glass of wine. Her professional colleagues knew her as energetic, loyal, warm-hearted, strong-minded, forthright and passionate.³² She was born in Richmond, on the western edge of London, in 1909, to a family that was relatively well-off, but afflicted with an unusual amount of premature death. Her grandmother was left with eight dependent children when her husband died early, and Barbara Kyle's own father died when she and her sister Elspeth were young, forcing their mother to take responsibility for their

upkeep.³³ Among the family's accomplishments was the founding of Grindlays Bank, a major British overseas bank which began life in 1828 as a business providing travel and financial services for British travellers to India.³⁴ The bank's founder, Barbara Kyle's grandfather, Captain Robert Melville Grindlay, was also a gifted amateur painter. Painting ran in the family. Her third name, 'Fuessli', the one that Barbara Wootton used, came from a distant relationship through her father with the Swiss painter Henry Fuseli. (Originally Füssli or Fuessli in English, he changed his name to Fuseli when he lived in Italy in the 1770s, because it sounded more Italian.³⁵) Henry Füssli's art is intensely Gothic: violent, troubling, supernatural, some would say frankly pornographic. His most famous painting, 'The Nightmare', purportedly hung alongside Rembrandt's 'The Anatomy Lesson' in Freud's Viennese consulting room.³⁶ It is a frightening painting showing a sleeping girl clothed in virginal white with a brown incubus squatting on her belly, and a horse peering out between theatrical dark red curtains. Füssli himself was a short, somewhat ugly man with prematurely whitened hair and trembling hands, whose views about women would hardly have recommended him to any feminist. This makes his short affair with the English feminist and author of the powerful *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft, all the more extraordinary.³⁷

By comparison, Barbara Kyle's life was, at least on the surface, much more rooted in the ordinary. She wrote a bestseller about librarianship in the yellow-and-black-covered 'Teach Yourself' series, a text awash with 'quick, clean prose' and 'much humour', which is still relevant today.³⁸ She was for a time Assistant Director of the National Book League, in which capacity she had the foresight to support the then embryonic scheme for a public lending right through which authors would be able to benefit financially from public library borrowings of their works.³⁹ She played a major role in the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux (ASLIB), being elected to the ASLIB Council in 1949, serving on many of its committees, and becoming its Research Librarian in 1962 and editor in 1962 of its journal, *The Journal of Documentation*. ASLIB was formed in 1924 by a small group of people working in industry and science who were concerned with the scientific rationalization of society and with problems of disseminating information and securing equality of access to it.⁴⁰ These were topics that were attracting increasing attention at the time. Barbara Kyle was also a leading figure in a network called the Classification Research Group which was set up in 1952 by major figures in library and information science in the UK, following an initiative sponsored by the Royal Society and led by scientist J.D. Bernal.⁴¹ Bernal, a molecular physicist based in Cambridge, was a major figure in the scientific community of the 1930s, and an inspired proponent of the social uses of science and technology. He remembered as a young scientist going to ask the

curator of the Natural History Museum mineralogy collection for a very, very small crystal to examine, and being told, 'No, I am in charge of this museum. My duty is to preserve the specimens in it. You cannot have it.' Bernal asked what the curator was preserving them for, and was told, 'Some time they may be of use to science'.⁴²

Barbara Kyle's own interests went far beyond the parochial stewardship of particular library collections. Librarianship – the art of looking after books – in the modern era is really the science of knowledge management, a discipline which merges with epistemology.⁴³ Barbara Kyle's work in the 1950s and 1960s influenced the development of library and information science during a period of great technical and intellectual change. Her writings are distinguished for their focus on the theory and practice of classification, on information science and professionalism, and on the public's right to information in what she called the 'intellectual welfare state'. Her paper on 'Privilege and Public Provision in the Intellectual Welfare State', recently republished,⁴⁴ and with strong resonances in the twenty-first century,⁴⁵ presents a strongly argued case for people's rights to 'adequate intellectual fare', rights which parallel the right to material welfare. Just as is the case for the social services in the material welfare state, library services – both public and private – need to co-operate in clearly identifying and meeting these needs. The efficient and easy retrieval of information is especially important, as Barbara Kyle herself noted, in order to avoid potentially biased dependence on who knows whom and who has heard of what.⁴⁶ Among Barbara Kyle's international connections was her membership of the UNESCO International Advisory Committee for Bibliography, Documentation, and Terminology, and her Vice-Presidency of the International Federation for Documentation; she was also a member of the International Committee for Social Sciences Documentation (ICSSD), and represented that body at various European meetings. Unfortunately, her status as a 'pioneering woman'⁴⁷ was partly obscured by her early death, which left her work on social science classification unfinished. When she died prematurely of cancer in 1966, ASLIB dedicated a special issue of its journal to her. The topics of the various chapters illustrate the range of the debates to which she contributed: 'Documentation Services and Library Co-operation in the Social Sciences', 'Problems in Analysis and Terminology for Information Retrieval', and 'The Library as an Agency of Social Communication'. There was an annotated bibliography of all her work, a total of fifty-three publications, ranging from the technical ('Merits and Demerits of Various Classification Schemes for the Social Sciences') to the general ('Books for the Holidays'), and even a poem about the Indian librarian S.R. Ranganathan, with whom she participated in a long-drawn out but highly civilized argument about the specialist technical topics of zone analysis and colon classification.⁴⁸

Barbara Wootton was not open about her personal life, so the story of her relationship with Barbara Kyle is hazy. It is clear that the transition from a friendship to a domestic partnership was not a sudden one. When they first met, Barbara Kyle was living with her mother, and Barbara was living with George. But, by 1950, the Kyles had moved to Napier Court, into the block where Barbara and George had their flat: the Kyles lived at number 80, the Wrights at number 84. Around the same time, Barbara Kyle preceded Barbara Wootton to Surrey, acquiring the Holmbury St Mary cottage. In Barbara Wootton's autobiography, her eventual break with George is explained as the wearing out of a relationship between two people, neither of whom is very suited to monogamy: he because of his polygamous nature, she because of her preoccupation with her own affairs and way of life.⁴⁹ However, George was obviously shocked to discover that Barbara's intention was to leave him behind in the move to High Barn. He sent several imploring letters to her office at Bedford College, and stayed in the Napier Court flat on a camp bed until she managed to persuade him to leave.⁵⁰ She did not find it easy to abandon George, and she did not tell people she had done it. The Pie was certainly kept in the dark. Writing in response to Barbara's news about the finding of High Barn, she warned, 'It will cost some money and take a long time to build and do as you like it. But it will be very nice to have a place and garden for George and yourself of your own'.⁵¹ Writing to her friend William Haley in the summer of 1957, and inviting him and his wife Susan to stay with her at High Barn, Barbara told them: 'To save future embarrassment, I fear I should now say that since I have been living here – over a year now – George and I have not been living together. Perhaps you have heard rumours; perhaps not; but, if you have, they are well-founded, though there have not been any [divorce] proceedings, and we meet occasionally.'⁵² She complained that, 'When other people do these things, it all seems very straightforward and matter of fact; but in one's case it is not so at all, as doubtless everybody finds who gets into this situation. However, no doubt daylight, and perhaps even sunshine will appear in time. If only one could manage not to feel guilty.'⁵³

By this time, the two Barbaras were living in High Barn together. 'They were very close,' said Barbara Kyle's cousin, Ann Monie.⁵⁴ 'They were extremely close,' said Vera Seal, Barbara's colleague and friend, who experienced Barbara Kyle's jealousy when she accompanied Barbara Wootton home to tea after one of their sessions in the Chelsea Juvenile Court.⁵⁵ The two Barbaras sometimes wore the same clothes; that was a feature of Barbara Wootton's close relationships with people, she wanted to wear the same. For example, they owned two traditional blue-and-white Norwegian jerseys, purchased on one of their holidays in Norway. The consensus of opinion among those who knew Barbara Wootton well in these years was

that she and the Other Barbara had a close and loving, but probably not sexual, relationship. Barbara Kyle was 'mannish' in appearance and Barbara Wootton liked mannish women, but she also liked mannish men.⁵⁶ Her Surrey neighbours noted with amusement Barbara's interest in *their* men. Most of Barbara Wootton's London friends were never introduced to Barbara Kyle. According to Frank Field, Barbara Wootton 'deliberately kept her as a mystery and kept her in a sense away from any other life'.⁵⁷ Life after the move to High Barn probably did become rather compartmentalized: work in London, domesticity in Surrey. But those who were allowed to meet the Other Barbara recognized her strength and intelligence, and important place in Barbara Wootton's life. Thus, Vera Seal said of her: 'I could quite admire her. I could see why Barbara needed her ... I just remember one incident. I was at High Barn and we were having a meal, and Barbara suddenly wanted some butter and she went like this [gesture] ... and immediately Ruth Kyle passed it to her ... I think she was very good to, and for, Barbara. I think she probably did quite a lot for Barbara ... She was an attractive woman, she was very intelligent, I think. You could have a laugh with her. I would have said in a sense that she ran Barbara, but I think that Barbara was glad to be run.'⁵⁸

An aspect of their relationship that may not have been fully appreciated by those who knew them was that the partnership of the two Barbaras was intellectual as well as domestic. They shared a passion for the democratic and socially useful organization of knowledge. Barbara Kyle's concern was with how to define and classify literature so as render it retrievable and useful; Barbara Wootton's was with the chaotic terminology of social science. Without an exact vocabulary of agreed terms, the social sciences were unlikely to get themselves out of their backward state. Their joint paper 'Terminology in the Social Sciences', published in the *International Social Science Bulletin* in 1950, reflects Barbara Wootton's particular irritation with social scientists' sloppy use of language: terms such as 'democracy', 'social class', 'power' and even 'society' varied in meaning according to the intentions of the user, which made genuine communication impossible. One of her illustrations was taken from an economics book by Professor L.M. Fraser, who had given her *Lament for Economics* an unfortunate review some years earlier: Fraser showed that economists were not at all agreed about the definition of key terms such as 'value' or 'capital'. The sociologists were no better, being totally unable to agree what that rather fundamental term 'society' meant, with one esteemed sociologist calling it 'every willed relationship of man to man', a formula so comprehensive that love, hate, robbery, banking, posting letters, and performing a surgical operation would all be covered. Arnold Toynbee, whose monumental *A Study of History* had originally been a model for Barbara Wootton's Nuffield Foundation project, was

guilty of extremely imprecise references to manifestations such as 'Hellenic' or 'Islamic' or 'Far Eastern' or even 'Nomadic' society. 'What would happen to, say, genetics, if chromosomes were as elusive as this?' inquired Barbara.⁵⁹

Both Barbara Kyle and Barbara Wootton are mentioned in the records of a group of intellectuals led by Julian Huxley from around 1950 devoted to the search for a unified world-view. The 'Idea-Systems Group' pursued Huxley's vision of evolutionary humanism – his insistence that a new synthesis of knowledge was needed to transcend traditional disciplines and subject boundaries.⁶⁰ On a less visionary but nonetheless important level, Barbara Wootton joined Barbara Kyle in her work for ASLIB. She chaired a meeting of ASLIB's London branch in 1951, and was elected President of ASLIB in 1953; after a second term as President, she served on the ASLIB Council. At the Paris meeting of the ICSSD in 1957, the Committee elected Barbara Wootton as one of four new corresponding members. At an ASLIB 'luncheon' at the Trocadero restaurant in Piccadilly in the summer of 1955, William Haley was enlisted as the special guest, Barbara Kyle was there, and Barbara Wootton presided.⁶¹ In the record of the 1954 ASLIB conference held in Church House, Westminster, there is a charming photograph of the two Barbaras during a coffee break, with ASLIB's chairman, Mr B. Agard Evans, standing between them.⁶² It can hardly have been an accident that the first International Conference on Classification for Information Retrieval convened in May 1957, with forty participants from seven countries, took place at Beatrice Webb House just down the road from High Barn. Barbara expanded on her irritation with social science terminology in the two keynote addresses she gave to ASLIB's annual conferences in 1953 and 1954 on problems of communication.⁶³ The sub-title of the second of these was 'The Language of the Social Sciences', and in this paper she made the point that controversies about the meanings of words are often screens for power battles.

The two Barbaras undoubtedly had fun in their various ASLIB activities. Barbara Kyle had a legendary capacity for living, 'a sparkling personality that caught every ear and eye',⁶⁴ and it must have infected Barbara Wootton, who, if only in terms of the sheer amount of work she accomplished in her lifetime, appears as an unremittingly serious person; she attributed her inability to play games – with the notable exception of Scrabble – to the fact that work absorbed all her intellectual powers.⁶⁵ Barbara Wootton and Barbara Kyle would go to the Proms in London, with free tickets provided through Barbara Wootton's connection to the BBC; they would invite Vera and her friend Eric Glithero, and order glasses of beer in the interval, which they would then leave half-empty balanced in precarious positions. They behaved like 'a couple of minxes', cajoling and provoking others with their own brand of insider humour.⁶⁶

In 1955, Barbara Kyle gave up her Chatham House job, and joined Barbara Wootton as the recipient of a Nuffield Foundation grant. Her application to the Nuffield Foundation argued the need to bring the social sciences into line with the other sciences, which all had efficient indexing and abstracting systems. The social sciences presented special problems of information management, due to the enormous variety and scatter of the literature, and social scientists' insistence on using imprecise and inconsistent terminology. Existing classification systems would not work well on account of their rigid notations and underlying assumption that all types of writing can be analysed in the same way – an assumption that falls down when the terms used vary semantically from one user to another.⁶⁷ Barbara Kyle had made a detailed study of the existing standard systems – Dewey, Universal Decimal Classification, Bliss and Library of Congress – but all these had been invented to organize large libraries dealing with the whole field of knowledge, and each suffered to some extent from nationally biased terminology. The plan was to start again and devise a framework for classifying social science literature – not, she stressed, actually to *write* abstracts and bibliographies, but to 'prepare a series of consistent schemes or recipes'. She also planned to carry out a survey of research and library facilities for social scientists. For all this she requested funds for herself and secretarial help over a three- to five-year period, the funds to be administered by the National Book League, which would provide accommodation for the project.⁶⁸ In 1955, the Nuffield Foundation Trustees agreed to provide £2,500 a year for three years.⁶⁹ This was supplemented by an extension until 1959. By then, Barbara Kyle had successfully drafted an appropriate scheme, and had had some encouraging preliminary reactions: the ICSSD had accepted her draft classification in principle; the Librarian of the British Library of Political and Economic Science had endorsed it; and the editor of the leading information science journal in the USA, *American Documentation*, had offered to publish the final draft.⁷⁰

These were, of course, the days before computers – the possibility of globally accessible internet-based electronic systems for storing and retrieving huge amounts of information was only just beginning to be entertained.⁷¹ Kyle's work was undertaken jointly with the ICSSD, which had identified the need for a new approach appropriate to the social sciences. The ICSSD published annual bibliographies of new work in sociology, economics, political science and social anthropology, but the same article would probably be inconsistently indexed in the different bibliographies and even in the same bibliography from year to year. Kyle and her assistants did much painstaking work classifying and indexing some 14,000 entries in the 1957 versions of the four ICSSD bibliographies according to a new scheme based on an approach called 'facet analysis'. This was a technique

for classifying literature which enabled concepts and topics treated in different disciplines (for example, economics and sociology) to be linked together through a complex notational system. The result was claimed to be knowledge maps that provided much more efficient entries into available literature.⁷² Kyle and her co-workers went on to choose samples of studies to test whether the new system retrieved relevant titles more effectively than the old, and it did.⁷³

What Barbara Kyle had produced became known as the Kyle Classification for social science literature. The Kyle Classification was developed in the same period as Barbara Wootton worked on her disturbing critique of one branch of social science literature, *Social Science and Social Pathology*. Social science *qua* science received an important boost as a result of the two Barbaras' initiatives, although recognition of both accomplishments is sadly almost non-existent today. Both were fertilized by the soil of High Barn and paid for by the Nuffield Foundation. It was a productive and happy period for the two women. One imagines them labouring away in their respective London offices during the day and then repairing to the green sanctuary of Abinger in the evenings, and enjoying a drink on the terrace and perhaps a Kyle-cooked meal with friends. Barbara Kyle did most of the cooking in High Barn, and Barbara Wootton most of the housework; she only dusted the bedrooms, maintaining that nothing else got dusty, and she kept a Hoover on each floor. She had two of everything – vacuum cleaners, fridges, cars – in case one of them broke down. One of the cars, unfortunately known as 'Little Black Sambo', was generously lent to a friend in the village twice a year so he could get himself to and from the local dramatic performances, which he helped to manage in Westcott.⁷⁴

By the time Barbara Wootton's autobiography was published in 1967, Kingsley Martin could title his review of it 'Abinger Harvest'.⁷⁵ As William Haley remarked in a letter to Barbara in 1978, 'You must now be Abinger's doyenne, much more entitled to its harvest than ever Forster was'.⁷⁶ Abinger and the countryside had been kind to her. If Barbara Wootton ever read the original Forster version of *Abinger Harvest*, she might have noted some of the Woodman's remarks in Forster's account of the local pageant:

Lords and ladies, warriors and priests will pass, but this is not their home, they will pass like the leaves in autumn but the trees remain ... Houses, houses, houses! You came from them and you must go back to them. Houses and bungalows, hotels, restaurants and flats, arterial roads, by-passes, petrol pumps, and pylons – are these going to be England? Are these man's final triumph? Or is there another England, green and eternal, which will outlast them ... You can make a town, you can make a desert, you can even make a garden; but you can never, never make the country, because it was made by Time.⁷⁷