

Dr Barbara Sabey ISO

Barbara Sabey's unbroken innings of well over 60 years of road safety research and its advocacy and application was sadly brought to a sudden end in the autumn of 2012 by a severe heart attack and stroke. She died peacefully on 24 February 2013 at the age of 84 in the nursing home in Maidenhead where she was being cared for. Since soon after her graduation, her home had never been far from the lovely reach of the Thames between there and Windsor, but her influence had spread throughout the world and will long outlive her.

At Barbara's funeral, PACTS was represented by Rob Gifford and Chris Lines, and David Lynam gave a tribute to her professional achievements which has helped to inform this tribute. The funeral took place just a stone's throw from the headquarters of TRL Ltd, with whose predecessors the Road Research Laboratory (RRL) and the Transport and Road Research Laboratory (TRRL) Barbara spent what for more ordinary scientists would have been a whole career. She was recruited by the RRL as a physics graduate in the late 1940s to join the Traffic and Safety Division which Reuben Smeed was building up to become a world-leading contributor to what was then a newly emerging field of applied science. By the time she drew her pension and was honoured with membership of the Imperial Service Order in the mid-1980s she had made herself expert in most of the wide range of disciplines that contribute to reducing deaths, injury and damage on our roads. Thereafter she remained active in deepening and sharing her expertise.

Alongside her professional life she had a wide circle of friends and range of interests, and travelled extensively. In particular, her specialist theoretical understanding of tyre-road interaction and professional grasp of what it is to drive safely found application in rally-driving through the Civil Service Motoring Association, of which she rose to be Chairman.

It was research into skidding that began Barbara's career-long work at RRL and then TRRL. She made her name initially through studies of the factors influencing the friction between tyres and road surfaces, particularly under wet road conditions. Her work on skidding accidents widened into more general study of accident investigation techniques and she became the Head of TRRL's Accident Investigation Division, and led the way to a systematic understanding

of the complex pattern of collision occurrence which road safety research and policy need to address.

In the 1970s Barbara played a leading role in the production of the OECD report on Hazardous Road Locations, which was influential in accelerating the development and application in many countries of road safety engineering techniques for reducing substantially the occurrence of collisions at such locations. In Britain this work was promoted strongly through the production by the Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT) in 1980 of guidelines on Accident Investigation and Prevention. Barbara was an important member of the group that produced these guidelines and led their later updating recognised by the prestigious Volvo Award to the IHT in 1987, and continued to contribute to further updates into the 21st century under successive titles that have evolved to become Collision Prevention and Reduction.

She was responsible for the pioneering TRRL multidisciplinary On-The-Spot studies of collisions through which contributory factors associated with the vehicles, the road environment and the road users were identified. These and other findings concerning collision occurrence and the effectiveness of different safety measures contributed strongly to the 1980s Inter-Departmental Road Safety Review which led to the setting in 1987 of the first road casualty reduction target for Great Britain. Another pioneering piece of on-the-road survey work that Barbara achieved was the first of several roadside surveys of the blood alcohol levels of drivers, which have told us so much about the prevalence of driving after drinking.

Understanding of the pattern of collision occurrence also led Barbara in the late 1970s to recognise that in urban areas road safety engineering at hazardous locations needed to be complemented by other engineering measures to reduce the numbers of more scattered accidents. Her response to this need was to devise and lead the Urban Safety Project of the 1980s, a full-scale trial in which low-cost area-wide measures were developed and their effect assessed. This led to IHT guidelines on Urban Safety Management, the subsequent Safer City Project in Gloucester, and many calming measures we see in the residential areas of our towns and cities.

Ability to communicate the practical import of research findings to decision-makers and the media as well as to the many professions which contribute to road safety enabled Barbara to contribute, both during her career at the RRL and TRRL and afterwards, to the work of the predecessors of the Department for Transport and ADEPT, and to that of the Association of Chief Police Officers. Likewise she made profound and lasting contributions to the work of the Royal

Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the Medical Commission for Accident Prevention and the Child Accident Prevention Trust. She helped to develop road safety research in many universities, and the professional skills and practice of road safety officers and road safety audit, and received an Honorary Doctorate from Middlesex University.

For the (now Chartered) Institution of Highways and Transportation, she led the writing of guidelines on Safety Audit and on Rural Safety Management and served on its Road Safety Panel from the formation of the Panel for over 20 years. In 1988 she received the Institution's Award for Professional Excellence.

For 10 years after her time at the TRRL, Barbara was co-ordinator for the research programme of the AA Foundation for Road Safety Research, identifying and seeing through a range of innovative studies on topics neglected by other funding bodies.

Internationally, she was influential through the OECD and especially in road safety in New Zealand and Australia, spending a sabbatical year in New Zealand in 1984 helping to establish a national programme of accident investigation and prevention.

Last but not least, Barbara joined us as a stalwart contributor to the work of PACTS as soon as she became free to do so on leaving the government service: in particular, she chaired our Road Environment Working Party for nearly 20 years and remained a member of it to the last.

There can be few, if any, who have done more to make our roads among the safest in the world.

Richard Allsop on behalf of PACTS

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