

# Barbara West

Formidable England hockey player who was passionate about the girl guides and helped displaced persons in Europe after the war

There were few things Barbara West would not try: she coached in Jamaica, umpired at Wembley, and once gave a speech to more than 1,000 displaced Norwegians at a campfire — in Norwegian. When it came to her passions, hockey and the girl guides, she was always willing to take on a challenge.

West had been part of the England hockey team that toured New Zealand in 1938 when she and her teammates won all 15 of their matches. Her Kiwi experiences included exchanging clothes for Pitcairn Islanders' walking sticks and being entertained by the New Zealand prime minister and governor general.

She recalled how the players' divided skirts had to be five inches off the ground when they kneeled, and they were also expected to wear long-sleeve blouses, serge three-pleat tunics and woollen stockings even in tropical climates. However, knee-length stockings were allowed with the divided skirt — at last the dreaded suspender belt could be discarded.

Both West and her identical twin sister Bridget travelled with the England team to the US in 1947 alongside the respected forward Mary Russell Vick (obituary, March 12, 2012). The team played 18 matches, scoring 208 goals. In one match, she followed up Bridget's attempt shot to score, only for the goalkeeper to exclaim: "My God, there are two of you!"

On another occasion years later,

## They were so engrossed in the match they forgot to sound the klaxon

When West had moved on to hockey administration, she and Bridget were put in charge of the klaxon at the 1972 Wembley international. The sound of thousands of screeching schoolgirls drowned out the umpires' whistles and the sisters were supposed to sound the klaxon every time the umpires blew. However, they became so engrossed in the match that they frequently forgot to sound the klaxon. Timekeeping fell by the wayside, chaos ensued and some players never forgave them, especially as Scotland won 2-1.

Immensely loyal to Sussex, West represented the county as a player, coach and president for more than 50 years. Even on the sidelines she could always



Barbara West, right, with her twin sister, Bridget, on the left, at the Ballater Golf Club in 1937, and, below, in hockey kit

be distinguished from Bridget by the pink sheepskin coat she insisted on wearing.

To the Chelsea College of Physical Education in Eastbourne — where she was always known as "Bar" — she brought energy and enthusiasm. While serving as the college's head of hockey she nurtured a succession of future internationals. Among her protégées were the England forward Val Robinson and the goalkeeper Hazel Feltwell.

She was kind to junior players, though they often grew exasperated when she drove them to games, doing her utmost to avoid motorways: West was then teetotal, which meant coffee shops on B-roads were the order of the day rather than pubs. She could be strict over kit rules — members of the Chelsea first XI were forbidden from wearing tracksuit tops or bottoms even if it was freezing.

Barbara Winifred West was born in

Rugby in 1913, 20 minutes before Bridget, to Frank and Agatha West. The doctor had to be urgently summoned back into the room — no one knew it was twins. They had two older sisters, Mary and Ruth. Their father was called to the Bar but never practiced; Agatha was one of the first women to attend Newnham College at Cambridge University. She was a Warwickshire county councillor and a senior figure in the Women's Institute. In 1916, while serving as an officer in 243 Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, Frank was killed by a stray shell. Agatha re-married eight years later; with Randall Hosking she had a son, Roger, who was born in 1925.

West and her siblings enjoyed an otherwise idyllic childhood in a large house, Bawnmore, near Rugby. The girls were encouraged to play ball games instead of passing their time with dolls. The family had a grass tennis court and a croquet lawn; aside from

playing with their black cocker spaniel, Satan, the children made mud pies and rode their ponies, Polly and Molly (they travelled to school in a pony and trap). The twins were dressed, respectively, in blue shoes and red shoes so that people could tell them apart — they delighted, of course, in wearing the wrong shoes. From an early age they both loved sport.

After training as a teacher at the Froebel Institute in Roehampton, West joined the staff at Bartram Gables School in Broadstairs before stints at Downs School, Shoreham and Brighton and Hove High School.

On one school trip

when she supervised two junior hockey teams to Hove County School, a German plane flew over and machine-gunned them. "As well-trained youngsters we all went flat on the ground, have never prayed so hard in all my life," she recalled. The only casualty was a player stung by a nettle after diving into a hedge to escape the gunfire.

West's great love of the outdoors stemmed from family holidays in the Lake District, Cornwall and the Alps. She spent a summer living in a tent on the South Downs and, returning one night, she encountered two badger cubs who nuzzled her boots. It was one of her most treasured memories, and encouraged her to become captain of a girl guide company in Brighton. During the war she ran camps to help with forestry work near Scarborough. By 1945 she was helping displaced persons in Europe through the guide international service, later taking rangers and cadets to the Norwegian peace camp to mark the end of hostilities.

After 22 years of teaching at Chelsea College, she retired in 1973. She lived in Alfriston close to Bridget; her other sister Ruth also lived nearby. They formed a formidable trio, throwing themselves into village life, and like their mother

## She returned to her tent to find two badger cubs nuzzling her boots

became active members of the Women's Institute. None of them married. Bridget died in 2005, aged 91, and Ruth the following year, aged 96.

In recent years Bar had been in a care home, where visitors would find her propped up in bed. "I'm being very lazy," she would tell them — as though it was nothing but a momentary lapse of idleness that was stopping her from jumping out of bed, grabbing her hockey stick and charging out for a bully-off.

Barbara West, hockey player, coach and girl guide leader, was born on November 9, 1913. She died on November 4, 2014, aged 100

