

Report of Cover-up in Contentious Probate Litigation

Following the death of Graham Sheppard on 24th August 2005, at the age of 62, Margaret Sheppard (née Barling), who Graham had married in April 2004, blatantly lied to Graham's sons (by a previous marriage), Ian and Richard Sheppard, then aged 35 and 34 respectively. Graham had no children with Margaret.

Margaret admitted that Graham's will of 2nd August 2005 was invalid, as she had taken it to her parents' house in Teignmouth to 'witness' it when Graham was unconscious in hospital on the evening of 23rd August 2005 (Graham was on morphine and did not regain consciousness).

Margaret then told Ian and Richard that there was a will from 2002 which was "definitely valid". But she seemed sheepish about something else, which was hard to make out, but clearly decided to keep it to herself. Ian knew that Graham had drafted another will, in 2004, but she had balked at admitting it too was invalid – as Ian was to realise later when he checked the date on that will - 12th October 2004.

Ian asserts that Margaret, on receiving legal advice that Graham's 2002 will was not valid due to their marriage of April 2004, made up a story about the October 2004 will. As soon as she instructed Richard Walford, a solicitor in Exeter, with her brother Chris Barling, Ian received an e-mail saying Margaret had never believed Graham died intestate. This was a year after Graham died, and a clear change in tone.

She did this because Ian had by then realised the truth they had deemed not to volunteer, and dared to say there was no valid will, and that Graham had died intestate. Ian had suggested they should talk, and that perhaps he and Richard should share Hunters Way with the Centre of Alternative Technology (CAT), the organisation Graham's last will left the house to. There were no ideas coming the other way, just a refusal to talk and an e-mail from Margaret saying: "The truth is relative," before the e-mail denying the intestacy. Then a witness statement with a fake story, with faked diary pages, followed.

12th October 2004: The Truth Exposed

On the date of that earlier will, 12th October 2004, Ian met with Graham around 3pm at his Uncle Norrie's in Hersham (Norrie died in 2006). He had three witnesses that were able to attest to this. Margaret was on her way up the A303 from their home in Teignmouth with the will, having taken it to her parents to be signed.

However, Margaret produced a fake diary in an attempt to show Graham was with her. This was 'self-made evidence'. At the time, Graham was having double vision (medical records confirm) and Ian remembers Margaret wouldn't allow him to drive her. Yet the supposed diary says Graham drove for half an hour up the A303 while Margaret "nodded off". This is not a true account; Graham wasn't there.

Ian recalls Graham saying, during Ian's visit to Uncle Norrie's, that he'd been to their former family home, Hunters Way in Inkpen, the day before (11th October 2004) to cut the grass with a hired tractor-mower from A4 Hire in Hungerford. He also said it had been uncomfortable and he was finding sitting down on the chair at Norrie's uncomfortable, given he had had operations related to his illness fairly recently. Graham also said he'd been to the Harry Edwards Sanctuary in Shere that morning with Norrie, to see his healer Dawn Redwood, who has refused to discuss this.

When Ian obtained the mower hire records from A4 Hire the relevant entry had been changed from 11/10/2004 to 10/11/2004. Then Ian established that Graham and Margaret had flown to Dublin on Monday 8th November 2004 and been there all week at the Drury Hotel. Margaret tried to lie and create a fake invoice, claiming the hire had been on the weekend of 6-7th November. But this was not possible as the code on the records was for the date of hire. Ian believes this proves it was changed. A4 Hire's Paul Folland and Denise Gaines tried to say the records couldn't be altered but Ian established with the software vendor Advatech that dates in the version of the Hiremate software used by A4 Hire at the time could be amended without there being a trace. The mowing definitely *did not* take place in November! Yet the judge ignored all this – see below.

Not a Fair Trial

When it came to trial, Judge Nicholas Warren QC (Warren J) ignored Ian's evidence and sided with Margaret, and also with a witness Margaret claimed was at her parents' house on 12th October 2004. Originally, she had said that this family friend, Margaret Bacon, "recalls my parents saying we would be coming for that purpose [to have the will witnessed]". From this wording, Margaret Bacon had clearly left by the time Margaret (on her own) arrived on the morning of 12th October, Graham having decided to head off to Inkpen as they'd originally planned while Margaret waited for their BA tickets to Rome, which had not yet arrived. The tickets arrived the next morning, the 12th (this was admitted) before Margaret headed to Norrie's at Hersham via her parents' house.

On the evening after the trial Ian looked up the judge, Sir Nicholas Warren, online and realised that he was on the Competition Appeal Tribunal with chairman and fellow judge Sir Gerald Barling QC. Ian discovered they knew each other far better than this, from Oxford University to having been called to the Bar on the same day, and so on.

Gerald Barling was linked to Margaret Barling as he had for several years been helping Margaret research the Barling family tree – Ian recalls Margaret discussing this at least twice and he remembers Margaret saying there was a link to Uncle Norrie's family in Gerald Barling's part of the family tree. This is true and can be seen online (Ian has copies of this in case anyone removes it!) and is something one would tend to remember.

Ian asserts that it is clear that Sir Gerald Barling arranged Sir Nicholas Warren to be the judge at the trial, and that Warren J was aware of this and deliberately sided with Margaret Sheppard and Chris Barling, who were also fully aware of this situation.

Ian tried to get permission to appeal but, again, the lead judge at the hearing had been chosen by Barling, it appears. The only thing this judge said in refusing permission to appeal was that Judge Warren had been entitled to rely on the witness statement of Margaret Bacon – which was ridiculous and shows that he was far from independent.

Ian was neutral on Graham's last will, and that it meant Inkpen would not be left to him and his brother Richard despite a long-held family intention to do this. He was suspicious that Margaret had prompted Graham to favour leaving the house to the Centre for Alternative Technology, as it meant Ian and Richard wouldn't get it. In fact, the last will says Margaret could have Hunters Way 'as long as she wanted it', before passing it on to CAT. Being a hand-written will, this failed anyway in law but could have been a life-interest trust if constructed properly.

However, this was not the main issue. The main issue was that Ian took exception to the lying about Graham's will of 12th October 2004 and spent over two years trying to fight lies and fake evidence. It was difficult against a lawyer, Richard Walford, who constantly tried to persuade people to lie and to use Data Protection to stop information being released to Ian.

Sometimes this worked. Ian's aunt Carol Eden admitted this pressure, while sending Ian a letter warning him of "powers you can't even imagine" that were helping Margaret. Ian later took this to be a reference to Sir Gerald Barling QC, who was clearly a close life-long friend and contemporary of Sir Nicholas Warren.

Meanwhile, Mark Billingham, who Ian recalls was tiling Graham and Margaret's kitchen in Teignmouth on 10-12th October 2004, also admitted to being put under huge pressure. At first Mark Billingham refused to lie, then later he did lie in an e-mail for them. Ian remembers Graham saying Billingham had eaten with Margaret on the evening of 11th October 2004, when he had gone to Inkpen, then on to Hershams (both by train, as he often did at that time).

In addition, Mike Kersey, a builder who Graham said he had met on 11th October 2004 to talk about a pyramid he wanted to build in the field at Inkpen, came under huge pressure not to talk to Ian and was very awkward when he did, saying he "didn't want to upset anyone."

Reflecting after the November 2008 hearing, Ian realised that the trial at the Royal Courts of Justice had been 'staged' by Margaret, her lawyers, the judge, and Margaret's brother Chris, with Margaret Bacon (since deceased) agreeing to lie under oath.

Since failing to obtain permission to appeal Ian left all the paperwork in a filing cabinet. In October 2024, 20 years after the date in question (12th October 2004), Ian scanned the key documents and placed them in an account online:

www.firstaerospace.co.uk/secrets

Please read this if you want to see how this case went from a preliminary hearing at the RCJ before Master Bowles, a Chancery Judge, to trial in November 2008 and then a hearing where permission to appeal was refused, in early 2009.

At that preliminary/directions hearing, Margaret & Chris's barrister admitted the 2005 will was invalid – this was inadvertent and shocked them, showing that they'd even been prepared to lie about that, or at least conceal the truth despite admitting it to Ian and Richard after Graham died. They intended initially to force Ian to prove that this will was invalid – showing their lying mindset, and that of their solicitor.

After permission to appeal was refused, the Land Registry restriction on selling Hunters Way was removed and Margaret sold the house, and the proceeds went to the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) – she declined to hold on to it herself. Ian and Richard were left £150,000 each under the 2005 will.

The truth has now been laid bare as Ian kept all the e-mails and documents and believes no reasonable judge would not have found other than an intestacy, despite the burden of proof being on Ian.

With the Order of the Court approving the 2004 Will, in place of the 2005 one, Ian was set to have to pay £70,000 back (it left him and Richard £80,000 each) and pay significant costs but he'd already started to make noises about Judge Barling. Ian believes this is the reason they never pursued costs – and that they were concerned he would try to prove they lied.

Ian does not, however, understand how the 2005 will was left in place despite the Court Order. Margaret and Chris Barling had already obtained Probate and paid out legacies (their own choice to do so), so perhaps didn't want to replace it with the 2004 will unless forced – and it was one step closer to the intestacy that represented the truth, and under which Ian and Richard would have received Hunters Way with the rest of Graham's estate paying the Inheritance Tax. Margaret already had more than half their joint estate, so was very well off.

Ian has nevertheless spent the years since scared that the other side would suddenly ask for the return of £70,000 and their own costs, as unjust as that would be given the truth of the matter. The other side never told Ian that the 2005 will had been left in place, he ultimately discovered it himself.

For further information please contact Ian Sheppard, tel. 07759 455770 or e-mail iansheppard@yahoo.co.uk

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