



# Cicely Mary Barker

1895 – 1973

CROYDON'S  
SECRET CELEBRITY ARTIST



Information pack by  
The Friends of Park Hill Park & Recreation Ground  
[parkhillpark.org](http://parkhillpark.org)

# Cicely Mary Barker Information Pack

- Introduction - Cicely Mary Barker; Croydon's secret celebrity artist
- The early years in Croydon
- The Flower Fairies are born
- Real Croydon Children: Past, present & future
- Park Hill Park's Flower Fairies Garden



A real Croydon child as the Bluebell Fairy  
1923



A real Croydon child in the Flower Fairies Garden  
2015

© The Estate of Cicely Mary Barker 1923, 1990  
Reproduced by kind permission of Frederick Warne & Co.

# Introduction

## Cicely Mary Barker; Croydon's secret celebrity

The delightful drawings and poems of the Flower Fairies, that you may remember from your childhood, are world famous, and their creator Cicely Mary Barker is one of Croydon's best kept secrets. Where as in other towns such world famous celebrities are proclaimed from the roof tops with statues and events that tourists flock to, few people from Croydon know Cicely Mary Barker is a real Croydon celebrity.

In 2015 it was the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cicely Mary Barker's birth, and to raise her profile locals from across Croydon's communities celebrated her life at the Flower Fairies Festival, an event created by volunteers from the Friends of Park Hill Park & Recreation Ground, with support from Penguin Books, and was made part of the larger Croydon Heritage Festival of that year.

The Flower Fairies Festival was an open initiation to every Croydon community to celebrate and promote to visitors and participants an understanding of not only the historic legacy of Cicely Mary Barker's Flower Fairies, which feature real Croydon children of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but also of the diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Croydon and the similarities they enjoy with each other and past generations.

As you will see in this brief information project pack that Cicely Mary Barker's works are not just pretty drawings from a bygone age, the Flower Fairies, her most famous works, can be used in literary, artistic and scientific education, with children of all ages, by bringing together dance, art, fantasy, nature and even an understanding of flight.



A real Croydon Child as the Primrose Fairy 1923



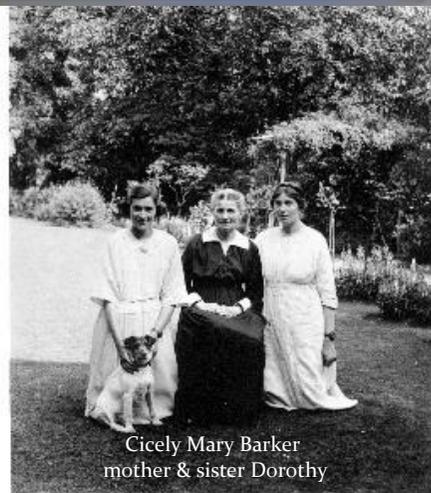
©Vipul Sangoi, 2013

© The Estate of Cicely Mary Barker 1926, 1990 Reproduced by kind permission of Frederick Warne & Co.



# Cicely Mary Barker

## The early years



Cicely Mary Barker was born in Waddon Road, Croydon on the 28th June 1895. From 1924, Cicely lived in The Waldron's, an area of central Croydon next to Duppas Hill.

The house in the Waldron's is still a family home, although sadly Cicely's artist studio, which once stood in the garden, is no longer there. The house is easily found as it has a historic Green Plaque on the front in her honour.

Cicely suffered from epilepsy and, as was normal at the time, was home schooled by her family; firstly by her mother then her sister Dorothy.

It was at home in The Waldron's that Cicely first took an interest in drawing and painting, taking a correspondence course in art. She also started evening classes at Croydon School of Art at aged only 13, carrying on attending classes until she finally became a teacher at the art school.

With her keen interest in plants and flowers, one might have expected Barker to have resented the destruction of her local countryside to make way for the Waddon housing estate. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, she embraced this change, seeing it as an opportunity. Her painting, entitled *The Great Supper*, featured local Croydon people and is an illustration of one of the Christian parables.

# Cecily Mary Barker

## The Flower Fairies are born



© The Estate of Cicely Mary Barker 1925, 1990  
Reproduced by kind permission of Frederick Warne & Co.

Cicely Mary Barker is best known for her Flower Fairies, some of which she first sold as early as 1911, when she was aged only 16.

These charming paintings celebrate the flowers and trees of southern England. Botanically exact, Cicely depicted the plants with a fairy-child, based on real Croydon children, and coupled this with a verse of her own composition; Cicely was also a poet publishing her first poems at only 17.

These Flower Fairies were originally published in palm-sized hard-back books with titles such as 'Flower Fairies of the Wayside', 'Flower Fairies of the Trees', 'Flower Fairies of the Spring' and other seasons. There are over 170 different Flower Fairies.

The books have never been out of print. Although their popularity may have waned slightly in recent years in the UK they and other Flower Fairy-linked products are enormously popular around the world, proving especially in Italy and Japan. A small percentage of the royalties from the books still find their way to help children at St Matthews Church, Croydon.

## Cecily Mary Barker – Real Croydon Children: Past, present & future

The Flower Fairies illustrations and poems embody a child-like innocence from an age gone by. They have none of the rich ethnic and religious heritage which now characterises the British people, nor the cultural diversity of Croydon in the 21st Century. This is not surprising as Cecily Mary Barker was painting in the first half of the 20th century, before men and women, from the former Empire and Commonwealth, were encouraged to migrate to the British Isles, in the aftermath of the Second World War.

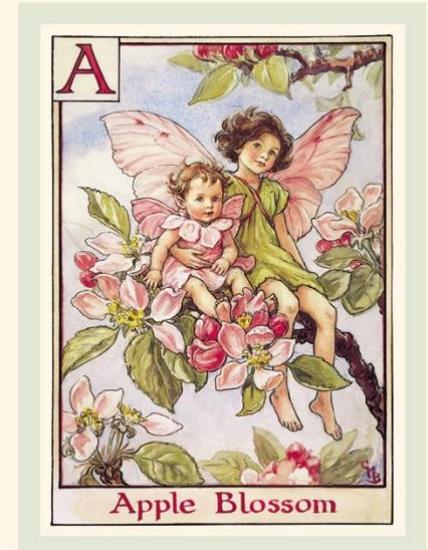
Had Cecily Mary Barker been painting now, however, one would suppose that her Flower Fairies would have been as ethnically diverse as the children of Croydon. This is because she simply used, as her subjects, ordinary children from local Croydon families. Many of these children attended her sister's kindergarten. Others were children whom she saw at church. Others were drawn from the children she saw in the back streets of Croydon, often in ragged clothing or playing in the dirt.

Cecily Mary Barker was not interested in privilege or class; she was interested in children. By turning them into her Flower Fairies, she did something transformational making ordinary children become extraordinary. This is her way of recognising that childhood is precious. And therefore the Flower Fairies pull at that deep-rooted nostalgia which we all have buried somewhere within us.

However, despite their age The Flower Fairies concept uniquely encourages children of the 21st Century to learn about a combination of literature, art, gardening, eco-systems and the science of flight. The various festivals created by the friends group at Park Hill Park have aimed to present children with an exploration of similar stories, dance and arts from other cultures, promoting in them an understanding of not only the different cultural and ethnic backgrounds of 21st century Croydon but also about the similarities between them.

To prolong this legacy the Friends of Park Hill Park also renovated and still maintain the commemorative Flower Fairies Garden, located inside the Walled Garden at Park Hill Park and have regular events for children and their families.

© The Estate of Cicely Mary Barker 1934, 1990  
Reproduced by kind permission of Frederick Warne & Co.



Real Croydon Children as the  
Apple Blossom Fairies 1934



Real Croydon Children in the  
Flower Fairies Garden 2015

## Park Hill Park's Flower Fairies Garden

In 2015 volunteers from the Friends of Park Hill Park & Recreation Ground renovated the garden dedicated to the memory of Cecily Mary Barker and the Flower Fairies. It was officially opened by members of the Barker family to speeches from 2 of the original children depicted in the flower fairies as well a civic dignitaries.

This lovely pocket garden is one of the 6 garden rooms located in the historic Walled Garden of Park Hill Park in central Croydon, from where Cicely Mary Barker's former home at Duppas Hill can almost be seen .

The Flower fairies garden was created with love by local adults and children and celebrates the memories of the real Croydon children Cecily-Mary Barker immortalised in her illustrations.

Love for the garden continues to this day and care has been taken by the volunteers that the design only uses those plants, flowers & trees that were used by the author in her many books. However, with almost 200 plants and flowers to choose from in the books, this small oasis has garden interest throughout the year.

Visitors are always welcome to join in events in the Walled Garden. For more information why not visit the Friends website [parkhillpark.org](http://parkhillpark.org)

