

## THE COMMEMORATION OF BENEFACTORS THE LAST 10 YEARS

The Commemoration of Benefactors is an annual ceremony held in the Chapel to celebrate the wisdom and foresight of our predecessors. Each year we read a list of names to thank those who have supported this College. One person is always profiled to remind us of the vitality of them all.

In this special anniversary year, we offer a glimpse of all ten benefactors featured in the last decade.



2019

## Emily Davies (1830 – 1921)

In 2019 Professor Susan J. Smith, Mistress of Girton College, gives a talk on the life of (Sarah) Emily Davies 1830 - 1921.

Born in Southampton, to a middle class family, Emily Davies had a somewhat itinerant childhood (her father being a Parish priest and writer). She moved to Gateshead when she was nine, and spent much of her early twenties caring for two of her siblings and carrying out family duties. She resented being denied the proper education afforded to her brothers and found life at home quite dull. By the time, in the late 1850s, she met the unconventional, charismatic Barbara Bodichon in Algiers, and like-minded feminists at Langham Place in London, her sister and one brother had died, a second brother following soon after. Her remaining sibling, Llewelyn, lived in London, and in 1862, a year after the death of her father, Emily and her mother, Mary Hopkinson, moved to the capital.

Freed of most family responsibilities,<sup>1</sup> and fired up by the campaigns for women's advancement that her new circle embraced, Emily Davies began to channel her own considerable energies into an unstoppable movement to secure women's participation in public, political and professional life. Key to that, for Emily, was access to excellent inclusive degree level education, and to the examinations and qualifications that go with it.

For years, she lived and breathed that vision, which is set out in her most influential work, *The Higher Education of Women* (1866). Emily's iron will and uncompromising drive soon turned theory into practice, in the shape of Girton College Cambridge, which - as The College for Women - opened its doors 150 years ago, on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1869 in Hitchin. Its distinctive, and at the time unique, feature was that it promised women the same level of instruction and examination in the same subjects as men, with the expectation that, in the end, they would achieve the unthinkable - a full university degree.

In this special ceremony at the close of our Foundation Week, our tribute is to Emily Davies' immeasurable gifts to Girton. However, these are by no means her sole contributions to the advancement, empowerment and education of women as Hazel Mills' and Hannah Westall's associated exhibition shows.

*'The great difficulty is to begin at all'*<sup>2</sup>

Emily's immersion in the foundation of The College for Women was total. She embraced it all, and delegated little. Her first priority was to establish a base, and open the doors - a goal she achieved within three years of alighting on the idea. She thus inspired our first fundraising campaign, convening the first college (executive) committee in 1867 and assembling a cohort of early benefactors whose leadership we recognise today.

Falling well short of an ambitious initial target (of £30k), she forged on undeterred - a familiar trope in this College - writing to Marian Bradley on 1 March 1869 with the words: 'The great difficulty is to begin at all, and we can only



Photograph Archive Ref:  
Emily Davies by Rudolf  
Lehmann, 1880.  
GCPH 11/33/53

<sup>1</sup> Though she cared for her mother for many more years, reporting frequently on her health in letters to friends, and retiring as Mistress in 1875 partly to meet her needs.

<sup>2</sup> Emily Davies to Marian Bradley, 1.3.1869. In Murphy, A. B. and Raftery, D. (eds) Emily Davies. Collected Letters 1861-1875. University of Virginia Press, p. 308

get over that by doing it'. So they went ahead with five students instead of the hoped-for 25 in a rented house in Hitchin while Emily employed all means possible to underwrite loans, secure donations and make a start on the first building at Girton.

In this, Emily may have been spurred on by a letter written in 1867 by Marian Lewes (George Eliot) objecting to a small beginning, and arguing that her Great Scheme demanded no less than A Great Campaign - a truth to which we still subscribe. At any rate, Emily succeeded in building (what we now call) Old Wing by 1873, but it too was just the start. She was determined to create enough student accommodation to open her special door to women's higher education as widely as possible.<sup>3</sup> She oversaw two major phases of work (in 1875-87 and 1899-1902) with the aim of accommodating at least 200 students. What would she think if she knew we were tilting towards five times that total today?

Her drive to add rooms was impressive, and when in 1910 a group of over 1300 individual subscribers and a few key organisations donated money to the 'Emily Davies Jubilee Fund' - organised by a small committee to recognise Emily's service to women over the past 50 years - the thought was that (although Emily was free to dispose of the gift as she wished) it would add to the next round of student accommodation at Girton. Around the time it was presented, a tablet bearing the words 'Emily Davies Court' was placed over the old front door - the original entrance which we have recently returned to more regular use.

There is a slight wrinkle to this story, because initially the College Council proved cautious and Emily was quite put out. But after some wrangling Girton accepted the Jubilee Fund gift of £735 together with £1000 each from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and the Countess of Carlisle, as well as a pledge for the same amount from Emily herself, to provide the nucleus of a building fund for the future.

Central to this story are the scale of Emily's ambition, the determination with which she pursued her vision, and her tenacious passion for an 'East Wing', without which she felt the College could never be complete. This all inspired Girton to go on, in the 1930s, to build another substantial extension, in the shape of New Wing, hyphen and a new Library, thanks to which the College was indeed - for a while - complete.

*'I think we must give more scholarships'<sup>4</sup>*

Emily Davies was determined to place women on an equal footing with men in the world of higher education. She wanted to go beyond 'Lectures for Ladies', and would not compromise on quality - the very thought of that set her teeth on edge. For this vision of inclusive excellence to prevail, Emily knew from the start - as we have known ever since - that many students would need financial support. So she sought to help them meet the cost of College fees. Scholarships were key: Emily was keenly aware of their value, knew they had to come in meaningful numbers and amounts, and went all out to create them.

Two of the first five students (Isabella Townsend and Sarah Woodhead) were supported by scholarships funded by six individual women, and as time went on Emily secured further scholarships from philanthropic individuals and from organisations such as the Clothworkers Company and the Gilchrist Educational Trust. She had a role in establishing (and possibly in resourcing) a Students' Aid Fund in the early 1880s which loaned money to one or two students each year. She also applauded a College that went into debt to extend its scholarship scheme: 'It was an audacious policy and it answered'.<sup>5</sup>

Scholarships were then (as they are now) awarded strictly in order of exam performance. Nevertheless, Emily was inclined to persuade wealthy students with scholarships to pay their own way, releasing funds for other fine

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<sup>3</sup> Delamont, S. (2007) Davies, (Sarah) Emily Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnd/32741>)

<sup>4</sup> Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon, 8. 8. 1881

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Barbara Bodichon 7.7.1870, Collected Letters p. 338, referring to Marlborough College

scholars who might otherwise have to decline. She was also sympathetic to donors - such as Lady Stanley<sup>6</sup> and the Clothworkers company - whose support was effectively means-tested. Finally, she understood that illness could be as much a constraint as poverty, and was clear that neither should stand in the way of a fine education. On the other hand, despite her desperation to grow the College, her thirst for funds never compromised her quest for excellence, and she expressed no regret in turning wealthy applicants away if they failed the entrance requirement.

By way of neat irony, it seems possible that the £1000 that Emily pledged for buildings was in the end fulfilled posthumously by way of a gift from her niece and principal legatee, Margaret Llewellyn Davies. This sum was applied to an entrance scholarship which Margaret thought in accordance with the wishes of her aunt, 'who always desired that as many as possible should have the advantage of residence at Girton'.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps that is why our current bursary fund, established in 1998 with a generous gift to support able students from non-privileged backgrounds was named after Emily Davies, as was the general purpose undergraduate bursary fund established in October 2000.

*'It has taken all of us to get so far'*<sup>8</sup>

The impression from Emily's correspondence and from other records in our archive is that, for at least four decades, she determinedly and selflessly poured practically every waking moment into the founding and advancement of our College.<sup>9</sup> Inspired and embraced by like-minded women, including members of the Langham Place Group and the Kensington Society, she was never, of course, alone. Visionary men - including Emily's close friend Henry Tomkinson - were also involved. Most critically, Emily had as a touchstone Barbara Bodichon, the principal financial benefactor of the early years of the College who acted as a foil for the myriad ideas inspiring her great scheme.

Emily and Barbara stand together today as the principal founders of Girton College, notwithstanding their own debate over who first had the idea and when.<sup>10</sup> Food for thought, however, is Barbara's own concession that 'I certainly could not have carried out the plan as Miss Davies has done'<sup>11</sup>, and Barbara's biographer, Pam Hirsch's acknowledgement that *only* Emily had 'the patience and tenacity to attend to the minutest nuts and bolts of business, essential in any long and difficult campaign'.<sup>12</sup> Nothing really deterred her: 'I never thought' she wrote to Barbara Bodichon in 1872 'of departing in peace till the college is incorporated in its own buildings and able to pay its way'.<sup>13</sup>

Emily may not have been a leader who inspired by the force of her personality,<sup>14</sup> but without her very particular visionary contribution - her conviction, tenacity, application and determination - it is hard to imagine that Girton College would have become the pioneering, path breaking institution whose 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary we are celebrating today.

That is perhaps why I have always so much enjoyed the line in Jessica Swale's widely-performed play 'Blue Stockings' that says of Girton: 'People like us don't get buffeted by the wind, we change its course'. Those words

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<sup>6</sup> Emily held (and acted on) the view that Lady Stanley's Scholarship was meant 'for one who could not come without it', according to a letter to Barbara Bodichon dated 1.7.1874, Collected Letters p. 430

<sup>7</sup> GCAR 2/6/17/4 pt. Letter from Margaret Llewellyn Davies, 23 February 1922.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Barbara Bodichon 2.7.75, Collected Letters p. 465

<sup>9</sup> She was a driving force in the College from conception in 1866, through a short term as Mistress from 1872-1875, until 1904, when she resigned as honorary secretary - though even then she continued to be a College member and advocate.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara thought the idea stemmed from Emily's visit in August 1867, but Emily writes in a letter dated 1.14.1883 that 'The idea of starting a new College suggested itself to me on October 6<sup>th</sup> 1866, after a meeting of schoolmistresses at Manchester'.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Helen Taylor 1.8.1869, cited in Hirsch, P. (1998), p. 253

<sup>12</sup> Hirsch, Pam (1998) Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. Chatto and Windus, p. 46

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Barbara Bodichon 15.1.72, Collected Letters, p. 365

<sup>14</sup> Hirsch op cit., p. 46

are given to a student but I feel sure they are based on the force that was Emily Davies. I am therefore torn between ending on that note, or another - a comment that captures not only Emily's possibly under-rated warmth and generosity of spirit, but also her wry insistence, undiminished with the passage time, on rallying us to the cause:

*'It has taken all of us to get so far. And it wants us all still'*<sup>15</sup>



The first five students at Hitchin, Michaelmas 1869 (archive reference: GCPH 7/2/1/1)

The Mistress drew on the following sources:

- Murphy, A. B. and Raftery, D. (eds) Emily Davies. *Collected Letters 1861-1875*. University of Virginia Press
- Delamont, S. (2007) *Davies, (Sarah) Emily*. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnd/32741>)
- Girton College Archives
- Hirsch, Pam (1998) *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*. Chatto and Windus

With immeasurable thanks to historian Hazel Mills and archivist Hannah Westall for help with sources and research, and for comments on the text.

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<sup>15</sup> Letter to Barbara Bodichon 2.7.75, *Collected Letters* p. 465

# 2018

## Sybil Campbell (1889 – 1977)

In 2018 Dr Hazel Mills, College Historian, gave a talk on the life of Sybil Campbell - the first woman to be appointed as a stipendiary magistrate in Britain.

“As we all know, this year has witnessed a very significant centenary. In February 1918, the **Representation of the People Act** received Royal Assent, and for the first time some women were granted the vote in British parliamentary elections. Full female suffrage, without an age or property qualification, would only come in 1928, but the 1918 Act was a huge milestone. In this, its anniversary year, it’s fitting that this evening we will be remembering and celebrating some of the many, varied, and passionate contributions made by Girton, and Girtonians, to the long campaign for women’s suffrage. The histories of the College, and of that campaign, are closely intertwined. The right to a university degree; the right to vote – these were connected and powerfully complementary movements.



Photograph Archive Ref:  
GCPH 4/8/1

In this service, we are particularly remembering, and celebrating, the life and generosity of Girton benefactor Sybil Campbell. In a moment I will try to capture something of Sybil’s fascinating story. But Sybil, who was a young suffragist while she was at Girton, can also, I think, stand as a representative of all the Girton suffrage supporters – the famous and the less well known – who campaigned over many decades, and in many diverse ways, to help bring about that great political breakthrough.

Born in 1889, Sybil Campbell was a child in Sri Lanka; a school-girl in Scotland and Paris; and from 1908 to 1912 a student at Girton. She read Natural Sciences, then Economics.

Sybil was an extraordinarily active member of the College. ‘Prime-minister’, then the ‘Leader of the Opposition’ in the Girton Parliament club, she was also President of the Debating Society for not one, but two years, and in her fourth year she was elected by her peers Senior Student – the fore-runner of today’s JCR President.

But, as I’ve already hinted, student Sybil had a further, important political interest. Soon after arriving at College, she joined the **Girton Suffrage Club**, founded the previous year - 1907; by the end of her first year she was one of its 5-. carry this off. In the early years she was sometimes booed as she walked to work, and not infrequently attacked and criticised in newspapers. But carry it off she did, proving the sceptics wrong. She was deeply aware of her role as a pioneer, and very concerned that her performance should not provide reasons to deny appointments to other women. Sadly, successive members of the British political and legal establishment lacked Morrison’s commitment, and a second full-time woman judge was only appointed in 1962. But in the interim, by her tenacity, and her professionalism, Sybil kept that door at least open. Initially seen by some as very strict in her sentencing, in time she acquired a reputation for being tough but fair. She had a notable commitment to ensuring that the needy were given proper legal assistance, something that did not always endear her to her fellow lawyers. Her visits to prisons, borstals and probation houses signalled a strong social conscience. She remained on the bench until she retired, aged 72, in 1961.

But Sybil’s energies were not only directed to her career. She was almost constantly engaged in charity and voluntary work, especially in causes directed to widening women’s access to university and to professional careers. Across her life she supported the work of the British Federation of University Women. One particular focus was on

**Crosby Hall** in London, the international Hall of Residence for university women, both graduate students, and those at work. From 1922 onwards, Sybil did an enormous amount for Crosby Hall, from running its Endowment Committee, which raised the funds needed for it to open; to taking central roles in its government; and leading successive fundraising campaigns for further building, and for scholarships. Here, we see Sybil helping to provide **'rooms of their own'** for young women entering the adult world.

Sybil was also extremely committed to Girton. From immediate active involvement in the Roll, the Alumnae association, in 1928 she became the Organising Secretary of the new College appeal established to raise money for new buildings. In just over a year, with hard work and dedication, her highly-organised campaign raised almost £43,000 (by some calculations over £2.5 million in today's money), which met more than half the costs of ... New Wing. More **Girton rooms of one's own, for able young women**. Following this valuable work, from 1933 to 1942, Sybil was appointed a Governor of the College, and a member of Girton Council. From 1930 to 1939 she was also the part-time first secretary of the Cambridge Women's Appointments' Board.

Even all this did not, however, signal the limit of Sybil's legacy to future generations of Girtonians. From the 1940s to the 1970s she gave a series of gifts to Girton, which effectively founded the Sybil Campbell Fund. Characteristically, she first asked for her generosity to be anonymous. At her request this fund was directed to assisting graduating students with the costs of subsequent professional training. Grants are still made from the Sybil Campbell Fund today.

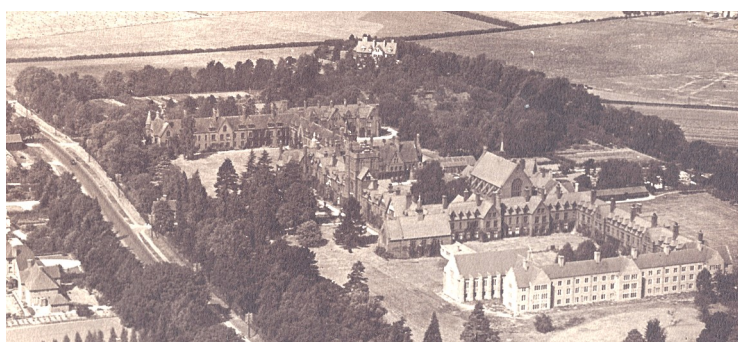
What about the person? Sybil was immensely liked and admired by those who worked with her, and by a wide circle of friends. People remembered her caustic wit, her fund of uproarious stories, and her exacting thoroughness. She loved to garden; to walk in the countryside; to entertain her friends.

**'Intellectual freedom depends on material things'**. Sybil would certainly have agreed with those words of Virginia Woolf that we have just heard. Her legacy to us all includes her remarkable professional achievements, the example they set to future generations, the barriers she helped dismantle. But it goes far beyond this. Through her generosity, not least of her time, and her passion, Sybil helped ensure that many, many young women who followed her, and who shared her aspirations for a university education and a career, had rooms in which to live and study, and grants to ease their path. Efforts and lives like those of Sybil Campbell, as well as of the countless Girton suffragists of the decades leading up to 1918, have genuinely changed our culture, and created new possibilities for women, and for others previously excluded from politics, careers, and opportunity.

We commemorate them all, and particularly Sybil Campbell, tonight."

Dr Mills drew on the following sources:

- Girton College Archive sources, including pamphlet produced by Crosby Hall: Katharine Bentley Beaman, *Sybil Campbell*, 1987 [Archive reference: GCPP MV Wallace 2]
- Website biography: [First100years.org.uk/sybil-campbell](http://First100years.org.uk/sybil-campbell)
- Patrick Polden, 'The lady of Tower Bridge: Sybil Campbell, England's first woman judge', in *Women's History Review*, vol 8.3, 1999, pp.505-526



Aerial view of the College, 1933 | Photograph Archive Ref: GCPH3-18-5pt

# 2017

## Lady Bertha Jeffreys (1903 - 1999)

In 2017 Dr John Davies, Life Fellow, gave a talk on the life of Lady Bertha Jeffreys.

When I was asked to speak about Bertha Swirles - 'Lady J' - I knew immediately that I must begin by saying that she was a mathematician. I once introduced her to a College visitor as a 'past Vice Mistress of Girton' and she immediately corrected me, using a voice that all who knew her would recognise: first and foremost she explained, she was a mathematician and I must introduce her as such. Not wanting to make that mistake again I shall begin by talking about her mathematics ...

Bertha Swirles entered Girton in 1921 to read Mathematics, graduating with 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours. As a research student in the 1920's she worked with many of the leading figures in the then new and exciting field of quantum mechanics, people including Max Born and Werner Heisenberg. After appointments in Manchester, Bristol and Imperial College London, she returned to Girton in 1938 to an Official Fellowship and Lectureship in Mathematics. Her association with Girton spanned more than 70 years and she held many different College Offices during that time including Director of Studies in Mathematics from 1949 to 1969 and Vice Mistress from 1966 to 1969. When she retired she possessed an enormous extended family based on her former pupils and she had an amazing memory for details of their lives. In Lady J's obituary, Ruth Williams summed her up perfectly when she wrote:

*'Not suffering fools gladly made Bertha Jeffreys seem a little formidable to some. She set the highest standards for herself and expected others to do the same. Her advice was never stereotyped, she approached each problem with an open mind and an enormous amount of common sense'.*

The textbook 'Methods of Mathematical Physics' which Lady J wrote with her husband Sir Harold Jeffreys (whom she married in 1940) is a genuine classic. First published by CUP in 1946, nicknamed "J<sup>2</sup>" by generations of students, it is still in print.

A review in the British Journal of Applied Physics described it as 'the single most important book on the applied mathematician's or theoretical physicist's bookshelf' and another in Nature as 'a fine product of British Mathematical Scholarship'. It covers a huge amount of material where every symbol and punctuation mark seems perfectly placed for maximum clarity. Lady J was a real stickler and Ruth tells us that supervision students who fell a little short in the grammar area would be referred firmly to Fowler's 'Use of English'. I can certify personally that splitting an infinitive in her presence was certainly not a good idea. The 'Reciprocal lattice' of my own subject (X-ray Crystallography) – often the subject of whole chapters in many crystallographic text books – is covered in just a few perfectly constructed paragraphs. Unusually for a mathematical textbook, most chapters begin with a small quotation designed mostly (I think) to cheer up the reader, giving them confidence that behind the text there are two real people with a sense of humour, rather than a couple of mathematical robots. Chapter 24 for example (Legendre Functions and Associated Functions), begins with this quotation from Lewis Carroll ...

*You boil it in sawdust; you salt it in glue;  
 You condense it with locusts and tape;  
 Still keeping one principal object in view,  
 To preserve its symmetrical shape.*

... and my own personal favourite is the quotation at the beginning of Chapter 8 (Physical Applications of the



Photograph Ref: Lady Jeffreys by Dr John Davies



Operational Method) which reads simply ...

*“Cut the cackle and come to the hosses”.*

... which in just eight words sums up Lady J’s no-nonsense unstuffy approach to everything.

The Jeffreys’ residence on the Huntingdon Road (which Lady J left to Girton after she died) had an orchard of huge apple trees and the apple picking party in early October was a major annual event, students and friends being roped in to help no matter the weather, Sir Harold sitting on the floor in shorts doing The Times crossword and Lady J providing a magnificent afternoon tea in her kitchen with homemade cakes and flapjack. When Lady J discovered, soon after I joined Girton as a Research Fellow in 1977, that I used to pick fruit professionally during my undergraduate vacations in Australia, I was promoted immediately to Chief Apple Picker. This office, which I held for more than twenty consecutive years, gave me some of my best memories of her. I still miss those apple pickings.

One year, as we sat down to the usual sumptuous spread of afternoon tea, she delivered a warning about the cake. Her Kenwood mixer had ‘exploded’ during production and it was just possible that she had failed to extract all the little bitty bits of broken gearwheels that had fallen into the mixture. After being told that this mixture was far too good to throw out – she had, after all, endured rationing in two world wars – we all sat there, nibbling our cake rather cautiously, but without incident. Nobody broke a tooth and, as usual, Lady J’s decision was correct: she was usually right.

At another apple picking, in a happy accident, I snapped a photograph of Lady J and Sir Harold that Karsh himself would have been proud of - and Lady J loved this photo. Indeed she treasured it, used it immediately for Christmas cards etc. and when Sir Harold died and when newspapers and mathematical journals requested a photo for obituaries and news of his death, she always supplied this same photo.

When the latest edition of  $J^2$  was published just before her death, this photograph appeared on the back cover and it appeared again, much later, in her own obituary. There was one difficult moment though, when she showed me the latest journal with my photo accompanying yet another obituary of Sir Harold. “I had to compose the caption myself”, she said, “what do you think of it?” it certainly started conventionally, “Sir Harold and Lady Jeffreys at the apple picking on such and such a date etc.”. Then a full stop, perfectly placed. Then a final line that said “Lady Jeffreys on the left”. As if there could be any doubt about it. My problem was that I couldn’t decide whether this was a joke or mathematical precision. I needed a split second decision, chose mathematical precision and stifled the laugh but I’ve often wondered if I failed the test.

Before she died, in December 1999 aged 96, Lady J left some instructions for her funeral. She asked that it be simple and that there should NOT be an address. She also quoted the five lines carved into Thomas Huxley’s tombstone which Lady J said expressed her own views - and she asked that they be read at her funeral ceremony.

Like the little quotations at the beginning of each chapter of  $J^2$ , I believe Lady J chose these five lines to cheer up those left behind, those about to begin another chapter of their own lives: a chapter without her presence.

These five lines form the text of our 1<sup>st</sup> lesson.

‘And if there be no meeting past the grave; If all is darkness, silence, yet tis rest. Be not afraid ye waiting hearts that weep, For God still giveth His beloved sleep, and if an endless sleep He wills, so best ‘

# 2016

## Jean Sybil Dannatt (1922 - 2010)

For Joanna Dannatt, as for so many of her generation, the Second World War changed everything, and whilst it brought danger, it also brought extraordinary opportunity and the chance to develop gifts that might otherwise have lain dormant. By the time she came up to read MML at Girton in 1947 she had already lived an extraordinarily adventurous life.

She had left Swansea School for Girls and gone up to study German and Italian at Bedford College when her Linguistic skills were noticed and she was asked to join the Intelligence Corps as a Second Subaltern, rising eventually to the rank of Junior Commander. She was posted to Bletchley Park where she was vital in decoding and translating signals from German U-boats in the Atlantic, thus saving many lives. Whilst at Bletchley she made great friends in the Air Force and developed a love of aeroplanes that led her eventually to train as a glider pilot. After Bletchley she was posted to the Middle East, to Egypt and Palestine, and once more found herself in the thick of the action, this time helping to organise the evacuations following the bomb blast at the King David hotel in Jerusalem.

On demobilisation she decided to add French to her repertoire, completing the 'Cours de Civilisation Française' at the Sorbonne, before finally coming up to read Modern and Medieval Languages at Girton in 1947.

It is remarkable to reflect on the breadth of experience and maturity that the undergraduates of that period brought to their studies and to their community life at Girton.

She acquired Russian and Italian whilst at college, and also, in the true Girtonian spirit, a desire to ensure that less privileged people might have the opportunity she had been given for a good education. Accordingly she spent three years working for the Workers Educational Association, and after a time teaching Russian to British and American Airmen, and a spell in Industry, she took up the role of Warden and Controller of William Goodenough House, which was a hall for female graduate students, and sometimes for their families too, from the Commonwealth countries and the States, coming to study in the UK.

When we celebrated her life in the commemoration service of 2016 our speaker was Stuart Davies, our Jean Sybil Dannatt Fellow, who shared with us something of the wide range of teaching and research in MML that her generous gifts had made possible, and it was clear that this was very much a continuation of the life and spirit that had brought her to Girton.

She was a woman of great vivacity and enthusiasm for life, and amongst those enthusiasms were gliding and a love of fast cars. Indeed she said that, but for the war, she would have been a competitive racing driver. That might have been a loss to the racing circuits of the world but the post-war career she did in fact choose was in every way a great gain for Girton.



Dannatt Bookcase in Girton  
College Library

2015

## Sarah Woodhead (1851 - 1908)

Sarah Woodhead is perhaps one of the most famous names in Girton's collective memory, not least because, as one of the three 'Girton Pioneers' we sing that name out in chorus every year at our college feast. She was a great pioneer in every sense and an emblem of what it means to speak of inclusion. In an era when higher education was not only the exclusive preserve of men, but more exclusively still, of those men whose birth and family background had brought with it the privilege of wealth, social status and an education in one of the great Public Schools, Sarah, the daughter of a Manchester grocer was to pioneer a path not only for women, but for all social classes and regions of the country. Her family were Quakers, members of the Society of Friends. Happily that Society, in advance of its times in so many respects, was willing to educate its daughters as well as its sons and Sarah was able to go to a Quaker school in Yorkshire where she excelled. Then, in 1869, the year of our foundation, she took the daring, and from many people's perspective, risky step of enrolling in the new college for women that Emily Davis had established at Benslow House in Hitchin, for Girton college itself had not yet been built. Supported by a scholarship - both a reward for excellence and a source of funding of the kind Girton has always prioritised - she read for the mathematics tripos, and in 1873 became the first woman ever to sit and pass a tripos examination at Cambridge University. And not just to pass, for she was classed as Senior Optime. Her pioneering efforts had decisively made the case that women were as capable as men in the field of higher education, and particularly in those 'hard' subjects like science and mathematics which were seen as such an exclusively male domain. And yet it was not until 36 years after the death of this great pioneer that Cambridge finally acknowledged its mistakes and granted women degrees.



Photograph Archive Ref:  
The College Five taken by  
George Avery, 1869. (Back,  
L to R): Sarah Woodhead;  
Anna Lloyd; Louisa  
Lumsden. (Seated, L to R):  
Emily Caroline Gibson;  
Isabella Townshend.  
GCPH 7/2/1/2a

When we remembered Sarah Woodhead in the commemoration service of 2015, I chose a passage from Tennyson's poem *The Princess*, published the year before Sarah Woodhead was born, because it seemed to me to contain something of the vision which Sarah Woodhead's courage and brilliance helped to fulfil, and I wondered if she might have resonated and identified with Tennyson's character Lilia as she speaks in this passage:

"Quick answered Lilia 'There are thousands now  
Such women, but convention beats them down:  
It is but bringing up; no more than that:  
You men have done it: how I hate you all!  
Ah, were I something great! I wish I were  
Some mighty poetess, I would shame you then,  
That love to keep us children!  
O I wish, That I were some great princess,  
I would build Far off from men a college like a man's,  
And I would teach them all that men are taught;  
We are twice as quick!' And here she shook aside  
The hand that played the patron with her curls."

As we remembered her on that occasion I reflected on the fact that for all her pioneering and example, there is still work to do. There are still, alas, some 'hands that seek to play the patron' and it continues to be the vocation of this college to hake those hands aside.

2014

## Rosamond Chambers (1901 - 1990)

Rosamond Chambers studied both English Literature and Modern and Medieval Languages at Girton, but it was with her creative writing, rather than her scholarship, that she made her name. Publishing as Rosamond Lehmann she was a highly successful and critically acclaimed novelist from the twenties through to the fifties and continued writing into her old age, including a memoir *The Swan In The Evening*: fragments of an inner life published in 1967. She was friends with many in the Bloomsbury Group including Leonard and Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey, and shared with them a penchant for pushing boundaries. Indeed her first, and most popular novel 'A Dusty Answer' was something of a *succès de scandale*, introducing gay, lesbian, and bisexual characters in what was, for the twenties, a very open way and portraying those characters with sympathy and insight.

There was a certain autobiographical element in the novel and the protagonist, Judith Earle, like Rosamond herself, is educated at home and then comes up to Girton where she has a brief romantic involvement with a fellow student Jennifer. Whilst this scandalised some contemporary readers others welcomed her fresh approach and indeed the overall quality of the novel of which Alfred Noyes wrote in the Sunday times that it was 'the sort of novel that Keats would have written'. This, and several other of her novels have found a new lease of life in new editions by Penguin, Flamingo, and Virago and the Guardian went on to describe A Dusty Answer as 'a landmark book of the interwar period. She took a prominent role in the literary and political life of her day, contributing to *New Writing*, the literary magazine that was also an anti-fascist rallying point and indeed she spoke at Anti-Fascist meetings in both Paris and London in the late thirties.

When we celebrated her life and her benefaction in the commemoration of benefactors service in 2014 our speaker was the Rosamond Chambers Research Fellow Dr Hope Wolf, an expert on literary modernism, and Rosamond would have been glad to see that although she left scholarship to write original literary works her benefaction and the fellowship named in her honour was encouraging just that scholarship which would make the writings of her own generation in the inter-war years all the more accessible. She would I think also have been delighted that the college in which she had begun tentatively to explore the interplay of gender, identity and orientation, has become, in our day, such an affirmative place for the LGBTQ+ community.



Photograph Archive Ref:  
(Rosamond Lehmann: Third row, five in from  
the left)

1919 First year photograph by Mason & Co  
GCPH 11/4a/36/60a

# 2013

## Barbara Bodichon (1827 - 1891)

In 2017 Frances Gandy, Life Fellow, gave a talk on the Legacies of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon.

All members of Girton will be familiar with the name of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, and everyone will also be familiar with various portraits of her hanging in College, especially the one behind High Table in Hall. She is regarded by many as the co-founder of Girton, with Emily Davies, but if that assertion is a step too far for some, it is undoubtedly true that without her support Davies's vision would not have been realised. So who was Barbara Bodichon?. She said about herself:

"I am one of the cracked people of the world, and I like to herd with the cracked such as A.M.H. [Anna Mary Howitt] and B.R.P. [Bessie Rayner Parkes], queer Americans, democrats, socialists, artists, poor devils or angels; and am never happy in an English genteel family life. I try to do it like other people but I always long to be off on some wild adventure, or long to lecture on a tub in St Giles, or go to see the Mormons, or ride off into the interior on horseback alone and leave the world for a month....I want to see what sort of world this God's world is."

(Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, letter to Dorothy Longden, 1857).

It's true to say that she managed to do all these things, and she was also a successful artist, a social reformer, a journalist, first cousin to Florence Nightingale and close friend of George Eliot. She was flamboyant, passionate, and generous to friends and to the causes which she espoused. The Pre-Raphaelite painter Anna Howitt painted her as Boadicea, George Eliot used her as the physical model for her heroine *Romola*.

"The hair was of a reddish gold colour, enriched by an unbroken small ripple such as may be seen in the sunset clouds on grandest autumnal evenings... There was the same refinement of brow and nostril...counterbalanced by a full though firm mouth and a powerful chin, which gave an expression of proud tenacity and latent impetuosity."

Dante Gabriel Rossetti exclaimed to his sister Christina

"Ah! If you were only like Miss Barbara Smith! a young lady... blessed with large rations of tin, fat, enthusiasm, and golden hair, who thinks nothing of climbing up a mountain in breeches, or wading through a stream in none, in the sacred name of pigment."

(Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti ed. O. Doughty and J.R. Wahl, 4 vols (Oxford, 1965-7) I, 163).

Born in 1827, Barbara was the daughter of Benjamin Leigh Smith, radical Unitarian and MP for Norwich. Her mother was Annie Longden, a milliner. Benjamin and Annie had five children, but never married. Barbara received a liberal education, and at her majority her father settled on her an annual income of £300 and the title deeds of Westminster School. The money gave her the life-long independence to speak her mind and make her own way. The school was to form the basis for Portman Hall, her first educational venture. Based on Owenite principles it was secularist and co-educational. Her father's radical lifestyle and the illegitimacy of the children meant that they were not recognised by the Smiths and Nightingales. George Eliot referred to them as the 'tabooed family'. Far from disadvantaging her, this position, on the margin of respectable society, combined with the belief in liberty and justice provided by her upbringing, was the spur to Barbara's life.

She wrote at an early age "Philosophers and Reformers have generally been afraid to say anything about the



Photograph Archive Ref:  
 Barbara Bodichon by  
 Samuel Laurence.  
 GCPH 7/2/1/2a

unjust laws both of society and country which crush women. There never was a tyranny so deeply felt yet borne so silently, that is the worst of it. But now I hope there are some who will brave ridicule for the sake of common justice to half the world."

(‘Abstract of Mill, Bodichon papers in Girton College Archive GCPP Bodichon 4/2).

In 1855 her work ***A brief summary of the most important laws concerning women*** formed the basis of the petition in support of the Married Women’s Property Bill. 26,000 signatures were collected, including those of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Harriet Martineau, Jane Carlyle and George Eliot. She financed and wrote for *The Englishwoman’s Journal*, edited by her friend Bessie Rayner Parkes. She helped to establish the Kensington Society which campaigned for women’s suffrage. She was the leading light of the Langham Place Group.

By 1867 she had joined with Emily Davies (also a member of the Langham Place Group) in the project which was to consume her energies until the end of her life, the foundation of Girton College. The combination of the unorthodox Barbara Leigh Smith and the more conventional, single-minded Davies was sometimes uneasy, but their complementarity may be regarded as the clue to their success. Davies felt that campaigning for the suffrage would detract from the struggle for education, and would attract criticism. Consequently she took the decision to detach herself, at least for the time being, from active campaigning, whilst Bodichon continued to keep in touch and encourage the movement. Davies’s single-minded battle for women’s higher education enabled her to gain the vital foothold in Cambridge. Barbara’s contacts with the higher echelons of society, particularly with radical politicians, academics and artists, brought in a wide and influential body of support. Their differing views and tactics shaped the final design. In that same year (1867) Barbara gave £1000 towards the foundation of the college, by far the largest individual contribution.

Emily Davies’s vision of Girton was to found a college that was equal in every way to those of the men, and to give the women the same education, with no compromise or concession to their sex. This idea, radical in its aspiration for women, actually depended on a belief in and an adherence to traditional educational values and structures. Barbara, much more radical in her views on education, nevertheless accepted Davies's strategies with good grace and political shrewdness. She wrote self-deprecatingly to Helen Taylor in 1869:

“Of course you understand that I do not approve of the Cambridge education as much as Miss Davies does but I think we are likely to get something really good in time if we attach ourselves to Cambridge and Cambridge to us, and such good workers as Miss Davies ought to be helped and not to be hampered with criticism.”

She was concerned to bring on the next generation and so very supportive of the early students. Sometimes called in on matters of discipline, she was not always appreciative that any misdemeanour had been committed. Davies’s somewhat autocratic manner resulted in several clashes, particularly since the pioneers – the first five - were, of necessity, women of some spirit and independence Barbara would invite them to her Sussex home, Scalands Gate, and they found her free lifestyle and easy-going manner delightful. Barbara was involved in the appointment of the Mistress, served on both the Executive and Building Committees and was herself acting Mistress in 1872.

Barbara’s marriage in 1857 to Eugene Bodichon, an anthropologist and physician, had also been considered rash and unorthodox by many. They set up home in Algiers and Barbara spent six months of the year there and six months in England. They had no children, but Barbara took under her wing an up-and-coming scholar, Sarah Marks, better known now as Hertha Ayrton, and she regarded her as her spiritual daughter. Barbara championed Hertha as a candidate for Girton, and sponsored her through her education. Hertha was to go on to make her reputation as a distinguished physicist, and in 1898 she was elected to the Institution of Electrical Engineers, where she was the only woman member. Her book *The Electric Arc* (1902) was dedicated to Bodichon with the following inscription:

“to Madame Bodichon, whose clear-sighted enthusiasm for the freedom and enlightenment of women enabled her to strike away so many barriers from their path; whose great intellect, large tolerance and noble presence were an inspiration to all who knew her; to her whose friendship changed and beautified my whole life, I dedicate this book.”

She named her own daughter after Barbara. Barbara Bodichon Ayrton campaigned with the suffrage movement,

and was elected as a Labour MP in 1945. *The Girton Review* stated (Michaelmas Term 1923):

‘It may be counted as one of Madame Bodichon’s many benefactions to the College that she made it possible for Miss Marks to become a student...Her own political activities and those of her daughter, Barabara Bodichon Ayrton, were a living testimony to Barbara’s beliefs.’

It is salutary to read the adverse reactions to Barbara, because of her illegitimacy, her unconventional upbringing, her radical views and her chosen lifestyle. Back in 1860 Mrs Gaskell had written:

“She is – I think – in consequence of her birth, a strong fighter against the established opinions of the world, - which always goes against my – what shall I call it? – taste, ...but I can’t help admiring her noble bravery, and respecting – while I don’t personally like her.”

(Mrs Gaskell, letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 5 April 1860).

As recently as 1990 Daphne Bennett, in her book *Emily Davies and the liberation of women*, is scathing in her depiction of Bodichon. She declares her to have been

“incoherent in thought and devoid of practical sense”... “There is not the slightest evidence that she had ever done anything to put the idea [of Girton] into practice.”

(Daphne Bennett, *Emily Davies and the Liberation of Women (1830-1921)*, Andre Deutsch, 1990, p.75.)

And yet Davies herself states in a letter to Henry Tomkinson in 1873:

“Clear and firm, and, at the same time, winning and bright...her influence is about the most useful we can have.”

(quoted in Barbara Stephen, *Emily Davies and Girton College*, (London, 1927) p.280.

It is clear that Bodichon’s contribution to the foundation of the College was a great one and that her legacy in terms of both practical support and ethos was huge. When she died in 1891 she bequeathed £10,000, the greater part of her savings, to Girton. Coming at a very difficult time for the College financially, Bodichon’s legacy made all the difference. The money was largely derived from the sale of her paintings over the years, since she had, of course, been an accomplished and successful painter, exhibiting 250 pictures over 30 years with several solo exhibitions, and she also left many paintings to the college, where they hang to this day. Bodichon’s **public** legacy was a great one - the increased emancipation of women in marriage, in work and in education.

So how do we here at Girton benefit **now** from the legacy of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon? First of all are the practical tangible things – the fabric of the College in which we stand enabled by her money; her collection of paintings, which hang all over College; a significant portion of her personal Library – in our Special collections. More intangible but no less key, we inherit her beliefs in equal opportunities and inclusion in every aspect of life and especially in education. We also, I would suggest, inherit her appreciation of life slightly on the margins, as we at Girton undoubtedly continue to experience it. We enjoy the edginess of that and we appreciate the opportunities it gives us for radical thinking or at least for thinking outside the box.

Bodichon once asserted that she wished she

“had three immortal lives. I would spend one only with my Eugene, and the other two for art and social life.”

(Letter to Elizabeth Whitehead Malleson shortly after her marriage, quoted in Barbara Stephen’s *Emily Davies and Girton College*, London, 1927 p. 38-39).

Painting mattered to her hugely. How much she would have enjoyed the People’s Portraits collection, depicting as it does – and quite uniquely as a collection - ordinary people from all walks of life. She would have seen immediately how it chimed with the ethos of Girton. Her influence attracted gifts and donations of books and works of art to Girton from her contemporaries, such as Ruskin, Eliot and the Darwins. This is a tradition that has continued throughout College’s 114 years and which has inspired the gift of many other fine pieces and indeed collections. You encounter works of art wherever you go in Girton –from the exquisite Vannuccio diptych; the Stanley Spencer Cookham paintings, the Winifred Nicholsons – these latter part of an initiative in the 1950s by a group that included Kathleen Raine, to acquire work of promising young artists for College; the fine collection of Russian icons donated by Diana Lorch, the Sentinel sculpture in Woodlands commissioned from Christine Fox in

memory of Alison Fairlie; the Girton Column recently commissioned from Paul de Monchaux as the public art associated with the new Ash Court building. There are many more examples, and they indicate a strong tradition of engagement with the arts here in Girton. We have hosted the Kettles Yard resident Fellow in Art here on at least two occasions and now in 2013 we welcome our own Girton College Artist in Residence, a post enabled (once again) by the generosity of benefactors past and present. Bodichon would have been delighted to see two of her 'immortal lives' brought together in the place she helped to establish.



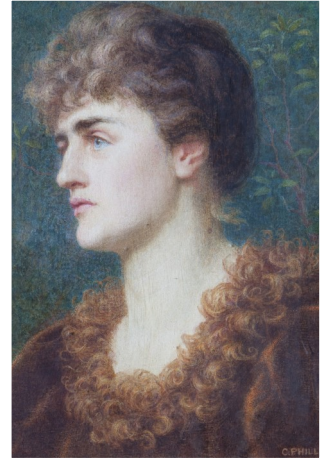


2012

## Eugenie Strong (1860 - 1943)

Born in London, baptised in Paris, educated in Spain, France, England and Scotland, and buried in Rome, Eugenie strong represents the wide classical and European reach of the culture which flourished in her days at Girton, and still flourishes today.

Eugenie came up to read classics at Girton in 1870 and went on to teach classics at St. Leonard's school in St. Andrews whilst beginning major academic work on classical architecture and sculpture and was awarded an honorary degree by St. Andrews University for her first published work long before Cambridge got around to admitting women to degrees. She came back to Girton and became our very first research fellow in 1920, eventually becoming a life fellow of the college. By this time she had already published a major work on Roman Sculpture from Augustus to Constantine and had served as an assistant director of the British School in Rome. She was made Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1927 for her contributions to classical scholarship and was also awarded the British Academy's prestigious Serena medal for Italian Studies. It must have been an extraordinary and empowering experience for the Girton undergraduates to be taught in their own college by an internationally renowned scholar at a time when Cambridge University was scarcely acknowledging their existence!



Photograph Archive Ref:  
Eugenie Strong by C Phillott,  
1890. GCPH 11/33/33

When we celebrated her memory in the Commemoration service of 2012 we also heard from Jacob Paskins, the holder of the Eugenie Strong Research Fellowship in Architectural History about his work on European architecture of the twentieth century, with a particular interest in the design of the hoverports on both sides of the channel, during that brief period when hovercraft seemed to be the emblem of the future. Eugenie would certainly have been interested in such novel modes of transport, given that she spent so much time criss-crossing Europe by rather more sedate if less efficient means.

Back in 2012 few of us had any inkling of the paroxysms that would seize this country as it has wrestled afresh in these last few years, with its role in Europe. But we had no doubt then, as we have no doubt now, of the essentially European dimension to our history and civilization, a dimension that Eugenie did so much both to explore and to embody. Whatever the final political and economic settlement that ensues from these uncertain times, Eugenie's own contribution, and the extraordinary work of all those scholars who have held her fellowship will ensure that Girton's engagement with Europe and its many links with continental scholarship will flourish and deepen. At that service in 2012 we listened to music by from across the ages and across the span of Europe, music by Victoria, Brahms and Faure, and we reflected on the poetry of TS Eliot as Eliot himself drew on the poetry of Dante.

I am sure that Eugenie, from her resting place in Rome, would have found that more than fitting and would be pleased to know that the scholarship she began is still pursued with gusto in her Alma Mater.

# 2011

## Katharine Jex-Blake (1860 - 1951)

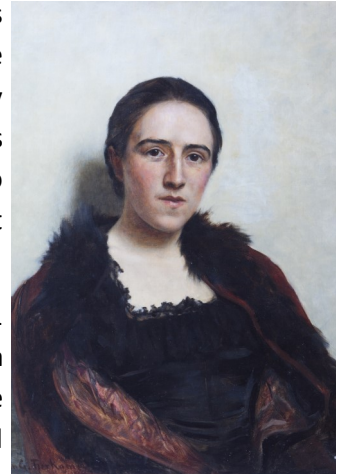
Katherine Jex-Blake was a key figure in the history of Girton, not only in her own time as a student, and later director of studies in classics, and eventually Mistress of the college but also in terms of her long term influence and legacy. That legacy took the very tangible form of the Katherine Jex-Blake fellowship which she endowed, but was reflected also in her work to win for the college the legal status which allowed it to develop a constitution and statutes, to obtain a Royal Charter and to be able to appoint its own fellows.

When we celebrated her memory at the commemoration of benefactors service in 2011 our speaker was the then holder of the Katherine Jex-Blake Fellowship, Kate Kennedy, a research fellow in Music and English. Kate's presentation was about her remarkable research on and biography of Ivor Gurney, who, like so many of his generation suffered the extreme trauma of the first world war, out of which emerged his first book of poetry *Severn and the Somme*. It was especially fitting to hear about Gurney in the context of our commemoration of Katherine Jex-Blake for she was mistress of the college during the years of the great war, serving from 1916-22 including the time of the Somme. It was she who helped the college become self-sufficient in the face of rationing, introducing the custom of keeping pigs and raising vegetables which was to serve the college again in the lean years of the second world war and the rationing that followed.

Jex-Blake would have loved to know that the holder of her fellowship was working to preserve and re-interpret the work of one of the young soldiers for whom she and the whole college felt such empathy, and did so much to help during those war years. A woman of deep and wide culture, her love of classical antiquity and scholarship in the field gave her a full appreciation of both poetry and history.

Our acts of commemoration have always been as much concerned with the legacy of our benefactors as with their achievements in their own lifetime, and here Jex-Blake's legacy in the field of education was exceptional.

As the daughter of a headmaster at Rugby School, she and her sisters received at home the first class education which was officially denied to so many women in the male-only public schools and in adult life she set about vigorously to right that wrong. She was active throughout her life in working for the Girls Public Day School Trust, of which she eventually became vice president, and was herself a teacher in one of their schools before returning to Girton as Classics tutor. Thus she ensured that Girls could receive in secondary school the kind of education that would equip them to come to Girton. In due course her classics students at Girton themselves went on not only to teach in secondary schools but to be leading academics and teachers in the new higher education colleges for women which were opening up following Girton's example. So it was that her Girton Students went on to be amongst the first lecturers in Royal Holloway, Newnham, Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall. By the time she died in 1951 she had the satisfaction of knowing that the Higher Education of women was established and flourishing throughout Great Britain and more widely in the world and that Cambridge University had at last done women the justice of granting them their degrees.



Photograph Archive Ref:  
Katharine Jex-Blake by  
Herman G Herkomer, not  
dated. GCPH 11/33/63

# 2010

## Hertha Ayrton (1854 - 1923)

Hertha Ayrton, whom we commemorated in 2010, was one of the great heroes, not only of Girton, but of Science itself and of mathematics. Educated by her aunts who ran a school in northwest London, at Girton, supported by the generosity of Barbara Bodichon she studied mathematics and was coached by physicist Richard Glazebrook.

During her time at Cambridge, Ayrton constructed a sphygmomanometer (blood pressure meter), led the choral society, founded the Girton fire brigade, and, together with Charlotte Scott, formed a mathematical club.

Though the University did not grant her a degree, as it failed to do with almost all the women commemorated here, Hertha went on to demonstrate that a woman was capable of excelling most of the men in her chosen fields, in spite of the institutionalised prejudice that tried to hold her back. She excelled not only as a scientist and mathematician but also as an inventor. By the time she died in 1923 she had patented no fewer than 26 new inventions. When we commemorated her nine years ago in chapel, reflecting on the generosity of her friend Ottilie Hancock (d. 1929) who later endowed the Hertha Ayrton Science Fellowship, we focused on Hertha's work

in the field of gas and fluid flows and how that issued in the practical design of fans to help disperse poisonous gasses in the First World War. We also remembered how she was the first woman to have a paper presented at the Royal Society, but was prevented from reading it herself because, as a married woman, she was deemed legally not to be a person! That paper, on "The Origin and Growth of Ripple Marks" has, more recently, been an inspiration for our artist in Residence Yelena Popova, who has made a beautiful tapestry, which references Hertha's work on both ripple-radiance and on electric arcs. That tapestry was unveiled in the Eddington Community centre this September. Yelena herself commissioned a poem from me to go with the tapestry, in which I was inspired as much by the beautiful prose of Hertha's famous paper as I was by Yelena's work and I include it here as a summary of all we remember her for:

### Ripple-Marked Radiance

*That a single ripple, existing alone, in otherwise smooth sand, initiates a ripple on either side of it, that each of these ripples produces another on its farther side-these in turn originate on their farther sides, and so on, till the whole sand is ripple-marked.'* - Hertha Ayrton, The Origin and Growth of Ripple-mark, 1904

They tried to make her think she was alone,  
 A bright mind on the wrong side of the gap,  
 But she knew otherwise, and turned the flow  
 And current of her time to a new light.  
 Her energy was gathered at an edge,  
 Potential energy held back awhile,  
 By the dark gap that prejudice engendered;  
 Her radiant mind would not be held apart,  
 But arced across that gap, a sudden blaze  
 Of genius, invention, and ideas,  
 Whose ripples still run free in all of us.



Photograph Archive Ref:  
 Hertha Ayrton by Helena  
 Darmesteter, 1906. GCPH  
 11/33/13

Now Hertha Ayrton has herself become  
That 'single ripple which initiates  
A ripple either side'. Those ripples still  
Originate yet further ripples, till  
The whole is ripple-marked and radiant.  
And we, who gather here remembering her,  
Are woven with her in one tapestry,  
No longer lone or lonely, but renewed,  
Enlarged, and centred in community.



2009

## Rosalind, Lady Carlisle (1845 - 1921)

In 2009 Dr Ben Griffin, Official Fellow, gave a talk on the life of Rosalind, Lady Carlisle.

When I arrived at Girton in 2003 it was as the Rosalind, Lady Carlisle Research Fellow. For that reason I have been asked to say a few words about Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle and her contribution to the life of the College.

Let me begin with a failure to commemorate: a disconcerting silence. She was 21 in 1865 when she gave birth to her first child, and on that day the bells of her home town in Cheshire failed to ring. This was no accident. The local villagers had known the young aristocrat all her life and were fond of her, so upon hearing of the birth of a child they ran to the church tower to ring the bells. But when they heard that the baby was a girl they abandoned their plan, apparently muttering 'It's nowt but a lass.' Looking back on the event 25 years later the hurt that this slight had caused was still obvious. Lady Carlisle said that the bell ringers had been wrong. Her daughter, she said, 'grew up wise and good, and fair of soul, and her earliest hours should have been ushered in by every peal of bells in the neighbourhood. But it is different now. England has learned to value her daughters ... Even as she values her sons.'<sup>1</sup>



Photograph Archive Ref: GCPH 4/1/6 Rosalind, Lady Carlisle (seated) with her daughter Lady Mary Howard



Photograph Archive Ref: GCPH 4/1/4 Lady Stanley (seated), with Rosalind, Countess of Carlisle (kneeling) and Lady Mary Howard

Girton College was both a cause and an effect of the process by which England reassessed the value of her daughters, so it is no surprise that Lady Carlisle was one of its most dedicated supporters. An institution which sought to expand the opportunities open to women was always likely to appeal to her, but in her case there was also a strong family connection with the College.

Her mother, Lady Stanley of Alderley, had been one of Girton's founders and also one of its most generous benefactors, paying for the Stanley Library, a new laboratory and a lodge for the head groundsman; she even served as Mistress for a short time. In turn Lady Carlisle grew up to be a generous benefactor, making large donations to help pay for the building of the rooms along Chapel and Woodlands corridors, and bequeathing £20,000 to the College to endow the scholarships that bear her name. The scale of her generosity was

recognised by the College in the 1920s when one of two new fellowships was named after her.

If we are to understand Lady Carlisle's support for Girton we have to understand that it was just one aspect of her involvement in the wider women's movement. She was a tireless supporter of women's suffrage, and this in turn followed naturally from her passionate interest in Liberal politics. Here we should linger to appreciate the full extent of her achievement. She has a claim to have been the most influential female politician of her time, mobilising, campaigning and cajoling at a time when women's participation in political life was regarded with considerable suspicion if not active hostility. Her daughter records that in one campaign alone 100,000 leaflets were sent out from Lady Carlisle's sitting-room, with her family and servants roped into stuffing envelopes and licking stamps.<sup>2</sup> Unable to vote or stand for election herself she focused her efforts on running the most powerful pressure groups and auxiliary organisations open to her. Pre-eminent among these was the Women's Liberal Federation, which she served as President for 17 years. This was a very important body indeed. In 1912 the number

of women in the WLF was twice as large as the present-day total of men and women combined who are members of the Liberal Democrats. That means that the Women's Liberal Federation was three-quarters as big as the modern Labour Party in an age when the electorate was only a fraction of its present size and women could not vote at all. Lady Carlisle was responsible for swinging this body firmly behind the cause of women's suffrage. In 1892 she publicly rebuked the Liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone for reiterating his opposition to women's suffrage. She persuaded the Executive Committee of the Federation to oppose the party leader, and successfully plotted to oust the sitting President of the Federation, Gladstone's wife Catherine, who had to resign. Now the dominant figure in the organisation, Lady Carlisle became President two years later, with the organisation firmly committed to women's suffrage. In 1902 she oversaw the adoption of what became known as the Cambridge Resolution, whereby the Federation would refuse to provide assistance to Liberal candidates who opposed women's suffrage. This was a powerful threat, and it is small wonder that the majority of Liberal MPs returned in general election of 1906 were publicly committed to supporting the suffrage movement. Although in 1918 Representation of the People Act enfranchised only a fraction of the female population, there can be little doubt that it would have been even more restrictive had it not been for Lady Carlisle.<sup>3</sup>

Liberal politics was just one of a large number of public causes in which she was involved. She was also a devoted temperance campaigner, promoting abstinence from alcohol at a time when this was a cause attracting widespread popular support. As President of the National British Women's Temperance Association she saw the membership of that group grow to over 100,000. To all of the causes she supported she brought a firm conviction that she was a general in a war against the enemies of progress. This did not make her an easy person to deal with. The depth of her convictions and her single-mindedness made her intolerant of those who disagreed with her: they were enemies who had to be defeated, even if they were her own children. Five of her six sons predeceased her, and she had been on speaking terms with scarcely any of them, either because she disapproved of their wives, or their lifestyles, or their politics. Similarly, her marriage broke down in part because her husband chose what was in her view the wrong side when the Liberal Party split in 1886 over the question of giving home rule to Ireland. Her obituarist in *The Times* wrote that a woman in her position 'would usually have tried, by some sacrifice of principle, or at least some change of activity, to soften the difference between herself and her husband. But that was not her way. Public causes were to her a religion; and she would face, and impose, any ordeal rather than compromise what she regarded as sacred duty.'<sup>4</sup>

After the disappointment her sons had given her, she increasingly pinned her hopes for the future on her daughter Dorothy. But how best to prepare a woman for a life of good works, a life of struggle against the forces of reaction? Obviously, she sent her to Girton to study history.

These days radical Countess of Carlisle is little remembered, indeed the process of forgetting started before she was even in the ground, because in a bizarre fit of absent-mindedness her son Geoffrey, on his way to her funeral, somehow managed to leave her body on the train.<sup>5</sup> But she deserves to be remembered, and it is my privilege today to remember her contribution to the cause of women's education, and to the College's aims of promoting learning and research. The Carlisle scholarships have enabled generations of undergraduates to pursue their degrees, and generations of graduate students have pushed back the frontiers of knowledge with the assistance of Lady Carlisle's generosity. For example, Muriel Bradbrook, a former Mistress of the College and the first female professor in the English Faculty, began her pioneering research on Elizabeth theatre as a Carlisle scholar. Among the current Fellows of the College both John Davies and I have benefited from the opportunities presented by the Carlisle Research Fellowship, and the value of that fellowship to my own career path cannot be overstated. A PhD thesis is necessarily a narrowly focused piece of work: but a research fellowship is an opportunity, indeed an invitation, to



Photograph Archive Ref, College Picture Collection: Portrait of Lady Dorothy Howard by George Howard, 9th Earl of Carlisle, 1902

attempt something much more ambitious. To have three years for research without the burdens of teaching gives ideas time to mature; it gives one time to look beyond one's own disciplinary horizons to explore ideas from scholars working in different fields; it gives one time to try out new ideas; and it gives one time to undertake new research projects that would never have been possible otherwise. For those opportunities I am deeply grateful, and I am not alone: scholars from a bewildering variety of disciplines - including geologists, theoretical physicists, biophysicists and literary critics - have all benefited from the Carlisle Fellowship. By helping these people the fellowship established in Lady Carlisle's name has made a significant contribution to scholarship.

One of the few sons-in-law that she would talk to wrote that he was concerned that Rosalind Howard would be quickly forgotten. 'She was not', he said, 'a great figure like a Prime Minister or great General whose name is copied down in each successive history book.' Yet her influence was extraordinary. She may have been, in his words, 'too ferocious and masterful', but she deserves to be remembered as a pioneer who fought successfully to open politics to women, and as a figure who inspired others. Her son-in-law wrote that 'Her genius was to live intensely and to make her neighbours feel the intensity of her living.'<sup>6</sup> Here at Girton we know that her influence was not as transient as this suggests. The intensity of her commitment to equal opportunities and the intensity of her conviction that education should be available to all continue to inspire us, and every day her generosity helps us to put those ideals into practice. It is here in Girton above all that many of her ideals found their fullest expression, so it is particularly fitting that today, as we remember the many benefactors who have contributed to the life of our College, we should particularly remember the life of a woman who fought with such passion for the things that we as a College believe in: Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle.

Dr Griffin drew on the following sources:

- 1 Charles Roberts, *The Radical Countess* (Carlisle 1962), p. 115
- 2 Dorothy Henley, *Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle* (London, 1958), p.93
- 3 Linda Walker, 'Gender, Suffrage and Party: Liberal Women's Organisations 1880-1914' in Myriam Boussahba-Bravard, ed., *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Britain 1880-1914* (London, 2007), *The Times*, 13 August 1921, p.11
- 4 David M. Fahey, 'Howard, Rosalind Frances, Countess of Carlisle (1845-1921)', *Oxford*
- 5 *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004)
- 6 Dorothy Henley, *Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle* (London, 1958), p.145

## Girton College.

### FELLOWSHIP.

(1916-1919.)

1. A Lady Carlisle Fellowship of the value of £150 a year, tenable for three years, shall be awarded by the Council on the recommendation of a Board of Electors, provided that in the opinion of the Board a candidate of sufficient merit present herself.

Archive Ref. GCAR 2/5/5/39pt: Advertisement detailing the terms of the Lady Carlisle Fellowship, 1916

Those that were unattributed were written by Revd Dr Malcolm Guite.

