

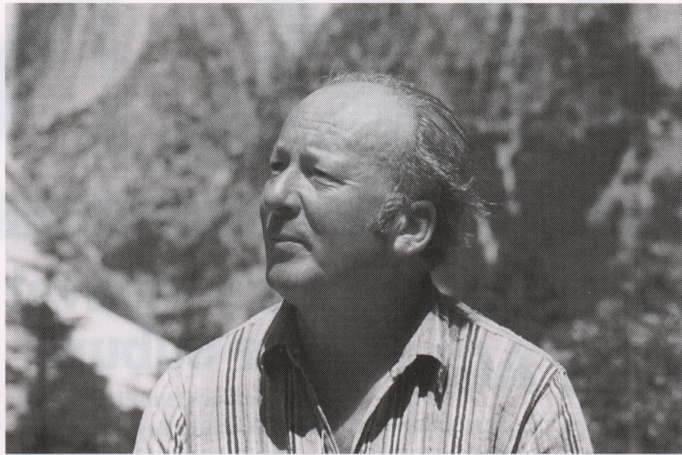
When the Suburb met the Civil Service

As the bells of St Margaret's Westminster pealed in memory of Philip Woodfield the two worlds of the civil service and the Suburb, emerging from the church, mingled in the biting cold of a January morning.

We were there to celebrate the life of an unassuming neighbour and friend and to support his wife Diana and Alice, Emily and Sophie their daughters. The cluster of knights and peers with their ladies, three past Secretaries of State and several ex Permanent Secretaries of Northern Ireland,

the Cabinet Secretary, people from the Home Office, Stormont and MI6 were there to mourn a colleague.

We had heard from his successor as Permanent Secretary at the Northern Ireland Office, Sir John Blesloch, of the range of Philip's service to his country. From war service in Europe and North Africa to the Home Office, where he had met Diana; secondment to newly independent Nigeria; private secretary to three prime ministers, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas Hume, and Harold Wilson



and to Lord Mountbatten on the commissions on Commonwealth immigration, which involved two world tours, and on prison security. He helped to create the Northern Ireland Office when direct rule was imposed in 1972 and eventually became its Permanent Secretary.

After retirement he became better known by the press as 'Ombudsman for Spies'. He also sat on the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice and chaired a commission that produced the Woodfield Report on the Charities Commission which resulted in

the Charities Act and the naming of Woodfield House a Charities Commission office.

One Suburb neighbour said after the service "I had no idea that he had such a distinguished career." Another, both neighbour and civil servant, recalled that, as a somewhat overawed junior colleague who Philip knew slightly on the Suburb, he felt he should perhaps seek advice on how to start a reply to a letter addressed to 'Dear Colin' from Sir Philip Woodfield KCB, CBE.

RICHARD WAKEFIELD

Kathleen 'Kitty' Slack

Kitty and her dear friend, Kate Blagdon, settled at 17 Asmunds Hill in 1972, and remained there until 2000, when they moved together to Eastside Residential Care Home in Temple Fortune – just outside the Suburb. "Don't think we have gone into exile!" I was informed when I saw them just before Christmas – warm and very comfortable, although anxious to maintain all their connections and 'keep going'. Even Kitty's recent stroke did

not dim her spirits and with Kate's help and care she showed typical determination to recover. They had intended to make their home in the Suburb Abbeyfield House when the Asmunds Hill cottage and garden were beyond their energies, but in the event they both needed more care than they had anticipated, hence the further move to Eastside. The inevitable upheaval and departure from the neighbourhood saddened them

both, but they coped, with shared jokes and wry humour.

Kitty's academic career, mostly connected with the Department of Social Science and Administration at the London School of Economics, spanned twenty-five years, three as a student from 1933 and twenty-two as a teacher from 1948. In a piece entitled 'My L.S.E.' written for the L.S.E. Journal in 1985, she presents a crisp and observant résumé of her 'pleasures and benefits' derived from 'the School'. She is as proud of beating her boss, Professor Tom Marshall, at badminton as she is of being catapulted by him into delivering a course of lectures on the welfare of old people. Until then she had been more interested in youth welfare such as the 'London Union of Girls' Clubs', of which she was an assiduous volunteer secretary/organiser. She reflects on the lecturer who announced that 'however one might criticise the capitalist system, at least it worked' - this is the early thirties with the great depression scarcely over. She dared to ask him, "Worked in what sense?" (His response is not recorded!). She continues, almost facetiously, about another lecturer who enlivened his reputation by 'breaking his toe by getting out of bed', and pays fervent tribute to Dame Eileen Younghusband who was her second year tutor. With a Diploma in Sociology and regrets that she did not stay on to take a degree 'which had to wait for many years later', her studies in the days of Professors Laski, Tawney, Robbins, Benham and Power had 'changed her life for ever' as she wrestled with political, social and economic affairs. The practical work in the Stepney slums affected her deeply – 'once you have seen a slum you will never forget it.'

The Second World War brought a break from study with youth work, as a temporary civil servant in the Department of Education and then in the Housing Department dealing with rehousing of the homeless. After the war she became a tutor to mature students at the Institute of Almoners, until she returned to the L.S.E. as a lecturer in the Social Administration Department, where she taught many hundreds of students, served diligently on many committees, both inside and outside the School, and produced many publications including 'Social Administration and the Citizen', 'Voluntary Effort' (published in 'Trends in Social Welfare') and 'Old People and London Government' (occasional paper). Her wide range of welfare interests, from infants to pensioners, was enhanced by her experience and her constant humanity and

commitment to improving the lot of the disadvantaged and those fallen on hard times; her writings are flavoured by the zeal of a truly practical 'social worker'.

It is hard to imagine how one rather small lady could have accomplished so much in her working life, never mind what she did in her 'spare' time. When it came to retirement, she acknowledges the L.S.E.'s role in helping her to 'prepare for and get the best out of' her change of scene, which she describes herself as enjoying 'without reservation'.

And so to the Suburb, where she quickly became immersed in what she might have called 'pleasures and benefits' as she described what she found at the L.S.E. The Fellowship House was just nearby and there she quickly became active in the Club and the Committee, being Secretary and then Chairman, carefully maintaining traditions as well as introducing innovations - not forgetting the motorised hedge cutters to lend to those who could be persuaded to cut their neighbours' hedges! There was always time for dog-walking with Kate in the Big Wood, time for both to create a garden fit for a Queen – or rather Her Mother – who visited in 1979, time for collecting 'memorabilia' (for garden and other embellishments) from various rubbish sites, time for seeing members of her large and interesting family, time for keeping in touch with former students, even occasionally time for a holiday.

Her major Suburb publication was, of course, about the Dame: 'Henrietta's Dream' now in its third and revised edition. This is without doubt a fully-packed scholarly work, enlivened by comments as drily witty or sharp as her own manner of conversation and as dedicated to her subject as her own vision of what needed to be done. This book is, like its author, modest in size and far-reaching in content, an accurate reference source and a mine of entertaining quotations.

Kitty no sooner finished the first edition of 'Henrietta's Dream' than she began research on famous people who had lived in the Suburb, and a collection of obituaries (kept up-to-date by her own eagle eye on the current press) are housed in an expandable folder in the Suburb Archive. Both these works should be available to a wider audience, and certainly the 'Dream' should be familiar to all Suburb residents. (Available at the Suburb Gallery at Temple Fortune end of Hampstead Way.) The Archive also has a collection of tape-recordings made by Kitty during interviews

with residents of long-standing – it would be a useful teaching aid in schools and could be updated from time to time. Kitty took over the work of Brigid Grafton Green as Archivist when Brigid fell ill and continued after Brigid died, until Harry Cobb was appointed. She was a trustee of the Archives for almost 20 years.

Kitty was born in Yorkshire in a Methodist family which included missionaries to the South Pacific – it is not too hard to see where some of Kitty's energies and dogged devotion to her causes came from. She herself became a member of the Society of Friends as a young woman during the early part of the Second World War, and the long established Meeting here was one of the attractions of the Suburb for her retirement home. It was also soon a field of endeavour, much of which in Quaker fashion modest and

unsung, from being Clerk and Elder to writing a detailed history of the Suburb Friends and the Meeting House in the 'Dream'.

The Memorial Meeting held in the Meeting House on 20 January was attended by a very wide representation of family, friends and Friends, presided over by Bryan Richards with great respect for Kitty's contribution to the Meeting and her many other activities. His humorous touches brought hearty laughter which Kitty herself would have enjoyed. There were several other speakers from Kitty's family and former colleagues and neighbours, each with something particular to remember, with special words of sympathy for Kate. There will be many memories of Kitty for those of us who knew her and it is to be hoped that many others will come to know her through our memories.

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