

Sybil Campbell Collection Monograph Number 9

Personalities, Provenance and Pertinence

A paper by Margaret Roake, SCC Seminar 25th May 2011

This paper recalls some of the many **personalities** who have worked on the collection, illustrated by a pictorial display 'The History of the Federation' which Nancy Edwards prepared for the BFWG centenary at Manchester in 2007. The paper then focuses particularly on Alys Russell's and Ivy Davison's influence on the early **provenance** of the collection. Also, using some of the volumes, I suggest the **pertinence** of several elements of the collection for today's students at Winchester who may be choosing their dissertations or research projects.

I was introduced to the collection at Crosby Hall in Chelsea when my friend, Katharine Bentley Beaman suggested, about 1989, that I might like to join the library committee. There I met May Hermes, Vivienne Rubinstein, Olive Chandler, Miriam Alman and other members of the team. It was soon clear that I must also belong to BFUW (now BFWG) so I joined the London Association then led by Elizabeth Parsons and Evelyn Haselgrove. As a result I have been kept busy as a member of the Federation and have spent many happy hours working on the books in the Sybil Campbell Library together with a host of like-minded friends. It has been a particular pleasure to handle the books, enjoying their associations with scholars and public figures, people who made important contributions to the world in my parents' generation. Since browsing the bookshelves is no longer an option, I have used only the website in preparing this talk, in the same way that a Winchester student today would approach this goldmine of a collection.

Website technology lay in the future while the library was at Crosby Hall, but we realised that a computer catalogue signalled the way forward. The computer-cataloguing systems then available proved to be beyond our financial resources, but with the move to Great James Street, Nan Mackean encouraged us and, on advice from a university librarian, I set up a simple database to keep a record of the stock. Later, we employed an assistant to continue the tedious work of entering every book on to the database. Then Cynthia Richmond took on the task of completing, refining and improving the catalogue. She has worked tirelessly with Sheila Stevens to create a website that offers several ways into the collection. Together they are continuing regularly the updating and improvement of the website, <http://sybilcampbellcollection.org.uk> providing potential readers with advice on access to the material. The most valuable books have now been entered onto the University Library's TalisPrism system.

At Winchester we know that the records of BFWG, IFUW and the WNC have already proved of value for research. Scholars here have taken the Federation to their hearts, appreciating the fact that the Federations of University Women grew to become powerful forces in the years following the first war. Internationally, women worked together for a better world. Many had lost their men-folk in the conflict, so remained unmarried and poured their energies into good works. As Olive Chandler used to remind us, '*It may be love that makes the world go round, but the spinsters oil the wheels.*' In the 1920s the movement for women's education was gaining pace. The dream of establishing an international hostel for women students at Crosby Hall in Chelsea was led by the great and the good. Sybil Campbell was one of the leading lights. They raised funds, organised the building of the hall and secured royal patronage; with the Duchess of York unveiling the door lintel in November 1926 and Queen Mary ceremonially opening the hall in July 1927. When the library began to grow from 1928, many volumes were donated from the bookshelves of the leading scholars and thinkers of the day. For students today, these books provide an entrée into the intellectual climate of the years between the wars.

There were strong transatlantic links too. Virginia Gildersleeve was associated with Vassar College, in New York State, renowned for a pioneering curriculum in education. Eighteen titles are recorded bearing the bookplate from Vassar College, (eg. H.E. Mills, *College Women and the Social Sciences*). The British Empire at that time was still an important force in the world. Many books give contemporary accounts of life in India (53 titles including Heimann, *Indian and Western Philosophy* and R Booth, *Life and work in India*). Africa is represented by 29 titles. It is true that for many years imperial history has been out of fashion, but now, with new empires rising as power forces in the world, there is renewed interest in the old ones. Many students here at Winchester come from abroad; some of them may wish to consider a research topic using these interesting sources

Alys Russell, among the leading lights in the early years of the Federation was born into the Quaker family of Robert and Hannah Pearsall Smith in Pennsylvania in 1867. The family came to England permanently in 1888 settling in a house in Grosvenor Road between Westminster and Chelsea. Alys's brother Logan became a noted essayist. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Fabian founders of the LSE, were near neighbours. The Pearsall Smiths had links with George Bernard Shaw and Bernard Berenson, who later married Alys's sister Mary. Henry James and his secretary Theodora Bosanquet were also part of this circle of literary figures who provided many of the books in the original collection. At the age of 27 Alys became the first wife of Bertrand Russell. At her marriage in 1894, friends were encouraged to give books as wedding presents. Alys wrote to Edith Thomas, an American cousin, suggesting that complete sets of the works of Henry James and Nathaniel Hawthorne, among others, would be welcome. Though we cannot claim any of these actual volumes, the collection holds a good range of American literature (Dewey 810-819).

A friend of Alys and cousin of Sybil Campbell, as well as a colleague of Lady Rhondda (of *Time and Tide*) **Ivy Davison** was undoubtedly the most generous of all donors to the library. Of her bequest of over a thousand books, 662 remain in the collection today, revealing her particular interest in history and literature. She read widely both in English and in French. Of the volumes we have today, 108 are valuable enough to be kept securely, for Ivy collected rare editions that are now great treasures. These include John Rocque's 18th century maps of London, now beautifully rebound and restored by Avis Rosser.

Ivy Davison became the first woman to edit the *Geographical Magazine*. Volumes 10–16, dating from 1939 to 1944 are part of her gift. Religion and Philosophy are strongly represented. You will find the works of Samuel Butler, the poetry and prose of John Donne and Matthew Arnold's *Letters*. There are books too, on natural history and the countryside, including a favourite of mine, Thomas Crofton Croker's *Walk from London to Fulham*, which describes the Thames waterside that Ivy and her Chelsea friends knew well, in 1860, before it was built up. Those interested in the Green movement have material here. Ivy gave us our rich collection on Horace Walpole, which Nancy Edwards loved and used in her seminar about Strawberry Hill. (Monograph No. 3), including a valuable 1810 English edition of correspondence between Voltaire and Horace Walpole and a 1912 edition in French (Du Deffand, *Lettres a Horace Walpole*). You will also find much contemporary biography, including three volumes of Harold Nicholson's diaries and five volumes of Bertrand Russell's autobiography.

There is scope here for a student to attempt a biography of Ivy Davison herself. I cannot quickly find a picture of her but we know that Ivy had many friends in literary circles. Among them was Leonard Hartley, the novelist, with whom she seems to have had a fond relationship. We have twelve of his novels, presented as gifts to Ivy, inscribed with affectionate greetings, beginning in 1947 with *The Shrimp and the Anemone*, the last in 1966 *The Betrayal*. Is there a story there?

This collection can be thought of as a kaleidoscope of early 20th century ideas. Each time you shake, or delve into it, you produce a new pattern. Each newly- created pattern belongs to our own time, yet is built upon the knowledge and wisdom of the past: each generation writes history afresh. This collection is a rare resource. I trust that it will be actively relished and cherished by the students at Winchester and that they will find pleasure and profit in its variety.

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