

PHYLLIS ELIZABETH GOODLIFF (1897-1993)

by Lesley James

Miss Phyllis Goodliff died on 3rd May 1993 at the age of 95. She had been a member of the Huntingdonshire Local History Society for 30 years and it was a great compliment to the Society when the announcement was made at the Annual General Meeting earlier this year that Phyllis had bequeathed to the Society her house at 4 The Walks North, its contents and the balance of two trust funds. At the AGM the process began whereby the Society will decide how the funds accruing from this magnificent bequest will be used to further local history in Huntingdonshire, with which the Goodliff family has been associated for many generations, in a way of which Phyllis would have approved and which may be a fitting memorial to her.



Phyllis Goodliff — "a true Huntingdonian".

Phyllis was a true Huntingdonian. She was born in the town at the Brewery House (68 High Street), the eldest daughter of Richard and Florence Goodliff. The house in which she was born and spent her early years formed part of the Falcon Brewery, a business directed by her father and his younger brother Frank. The Goodliff family's association

with the brewery trade can be traced back to Phyllis' grandfather John Goodliff. John, who was born at Woodwalton in 1834, had been a farmer at Conington before moving to Huntingdon c1872 to take over the tenancy of the George Hotel from his father-in-law John Jenkins. An article on the George Hotel by Alexandra Cox (*Records of Huntingdonshire* Vol. 2 No. 4 1984) includes a study of the George under the tenancies of the two men. It was John Jenkins who in 1849 bought the brewery and was joined in the business by his grandsons Richard and Frank. The brewery dominated the northern end of the High Street, though today, besides Falcon House, only the gate-office remains as an Indian restaurant, with the falcon statue (now sadly headless) perched on its gable end.

Phyllis and her younger sister Dorothy were initially educated at home by a governess and later boarded at Lyonsdown School, New Barnet and the Anglican St. Anne's School, Abbots Bromley, Staffordshire, where in 1914, as a precursor of later interests, Phyllis was awarded the gardening prize. On leaving school, suppressing a secret ambition to become a gardener, she took a secretarial course at the Triangle College, North London. Her time in London coincided with the outbreak of the First World War and on her visits home to Huntingdon she would help at the Voluntary Aid Detachment hospital established at Walden House. At the hospital she was required to clean windows and sweep floors, something, by her own admission, she had never done before.

Phyllis had already joined the local branch of the Red Cross before the war and on completion of her course in London used her secretarial skills to work at the headquarters office, helping to place volunteers who offered to help with the war effort. She soon applied for a move to France and as a V.A.D. was posted to the Department of Wounded and Missing Persons in Boulogne where she typed reports from information supplied by 'searchers'. Letters written from France home to her family have been deposited at the Imperial War Museum, and copies are now available at the County Record Office. They reveal Phyllis' total commitment to her work and to helping with the war effort. When her home leave was cancelled because of staff shortages due to the influenza epidemic her letter expresses no resentment. Florence Goodliff evidently intended to submit for publication in the *Hunts Post* one of her daughter's letters describing how news of the Armistice was received in France; a return letter from Phyllis to her mother forbids her, but the letter was published last year in *The Times* as part of a feature marking the 75th anniversary of Armistice Day.

In March 1919 Phyllis was transferred to the Red Cross Convalescent

Home for Officers in Cannes as secretary to the commandant. She returned home to Huntingdon in June.

It was while Phyllis was in France that her family moved from the Brewery House to Gazeley House, Princes Street. Phyllis lived at 'Gazeley' until her father's death in 1930 when the house was sold to Huntingdonshire County Council; Florence Goodliff had died just three months before her husband.

Phyllis and her brother John moved into a house on the Walks East (she later moved to the Walks North). Phyllis continued her voluntary work with the Red Cross and pursued her many interests. Her long association with All Saints Church, which had begun with her baptism there, continued in her work for the committee of the Parochial Church Council; she became a local leader commandant of the Girl Guides; travelled extensively throughout Europe, and had a keen interest in sport, playing tennis and hockey.

By the outbreak of the Second World War Phyllis was a travelling Red Cross Officer trained in anti-gas measures. She toured the villages on behalf of Air Raid Precaution, giving instruction and helping with examinations. At the outbreak of war she was immediately called-up as a mobile V.A.D. to serve as a nurse in London. She spent four years of the war in charge of a Red Cross home in Epping Forest for those made homeless by bomb damage. The home itself suffered a number of attacks, including one in which Phyllis narrowly escaped injury and it too was eventually evacuated.

Phyllis's other abiding passion was for the Huntingdonshire countryside. She was a keen member of the Hunts. Flora and Fauna Society and contributor to its records; but it was local history, evidently, which meant the most to her. Indeed she had been a member of the Society's predecessor, the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Archaeological Society and thus provides a link to a previous generation of local historians. It was amusing to find amongst her possessions bequeathed to the Society a box of Romano-British Castor-Ware fragments with a letter from Dr Garrood of Alconbury, the last secretary of the CHAS, chiding her for having excavated them without making proper notes of location, etc., 'so be a little more amenable and not so eager to do your ironing', he writes. Can Phyllis really have been eager to do ironing?

SOURCES

Copies of Phyllis Goodliff's Wartime Reminiscences (two cassette tapes) and her wartime letters have been copied from originals at the Imperial War Museum and are available at the Huntingdon Record Office.