

ROSEMARY GWENDOLINE MILWARD, 1907–2005

(By TIMOTHY MILWARD and PHILIP RIDEN)

SUMMARY

Rosemary Milward, a member of the council and later a vice-president of the Derbyshire Archaeological Society, and a founder-member of the Derbyshire Record Society committee, died at her home, Barlow Woodseats, on 5 April 2005 in her 98th year. She was the widow of Mr F.J. Milward, for many years consultant surgeon at the Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital. The tributes printed here are edited versions of a eulogy by her son, Timothy Milward, and an address by Philip Riden, secretary and general editor of the Record Society, given at her funeral, held at the parish church of St Lawrence, Great Barlow, on 13 April 2005, at which the other speakers included Mrs Milward's younger daughter Frances.

I

By Timothy Milward

Rosemary was a very modest and private person. She almost never talked to us children about herself, fending off enquiries with 'It's all so boring', or you wouldn't be interested in that'. I thought, therefore, that it would be appropriate to tell you, her friends and relations, a little bit about her life.

Rosemary was born at Rose Cottage, Erdington, near Birmingham, on 25 July 1907. Her father, William Smedley Aston, was an accountant. Her mother, Irene Lewis, was the granddaughter of a Birmingham diamond merchant. She had two younger brothers. The elder, Mike, who died early in 2006 lived with his wife Thora on the Isle of Man. He was a film producer and kept in touch with Mum to the end by Sunday afternoon phone calls. His son Brian has just given the first reading.

Rosemary grew up in a very cultural background in the widest sense. Her parents were part of the Birmingham Arts and Crafts circle and among their friends were artists, illustrators, writers and poets, including Joseph Southall, the Gaskins, Eric Kennington and others. Her father did not devote much time to accountancy. He was a great connoisseur, collecting furniture, china, glass and pictures. He had a wonderful collection of old English glasses. As a young girl Rosemary remembers washing these with her mother twice a year. He would not allow anyone else to touch them. He was also an amateur photographer of enormous talent. I remember a little cabinet full of medals and plaques he had won. Birmingham Art Gallery accepted from Mum a collection of his work which they are planning to display in a special exhibition soon.

This all had an enormous influence on Rosemary's intellectual and artistic tastes and likes (and dislikes). She could never stand anything from the Victorian era.

Rosemary went to Edgbaston High School. The piano was her great love. She was taught by an Austrian called Oskar Fux. She used to tell of a school piano competition where the winner was announced as 'Rosemary Smedley Aston'. The school was

astounded as they did not know she could play, since her piano lessons were not in school. Oskar was obviously an excellent teacher with a talented pupil.

As a sign of the times, in 1917, when she was ten, during the First World War, she told me Oskar was not allowed to travel more than ten miles from his Cotswold home. He was An Enemy Alien.

Rosemary left school in 1923 aged 16 and spent a year 'being finished' in Paris at La Maison Blanche, run by an English clergyman and his wife. She describes this as a wonderful period. They were only allowed to speak English after supper on Sundays. They were immersed in all that Paris could offer culturally: opera, theatre, concerts and art galleries. She was taught to fence and became a very able left-handed fencer, like my daughter Ella. She also had organ lessons from the famous Marcel Depree. Her 30-year-old piano teacher Monsieur Bechet fell in love with her and pursued her back to England. She would have none of him.

Back in England Rosemary worked in Cheyne Walk, London, for Footprints. This was a studio set up by her Aunt Gwen which made beautiful hand-printed silk scarves and blouses. It was there she met the famous T.E. Lawrence who was visiting his illustrator Eric Kennington, for the Seven Pillars of Wisdom. Posterity has not recorded what historic words the great T.E. exchanged with my mother!

After Footprints she taught music at Arden House School in Henley in Arden. This was run by Dr Ernest Nelson. The Smedley Astons, Nelsons and Milwards were great friends and still are. Brian has just read to you, and Jeremy Bennett, Dr Nelson's grandson and my best man, is here today with his wife Tine. In fact the families were so close that I am almost not here today as for a time Mum 'walked out' with Jeremy's uncle, and Dad 'walked out' with Jeremy's mother, until they all changed partners.

Around this time, my parents started going out together, the doctor and the music teacher. Dad used to come up from London and they would go riding together at the weekends. Dad proposed to my mother on horseback. It was so unexpected that she told me she almost fell off the horse. (and practically never rode again!). She was not sure, but Dad gave her an ultimatum, 'If you don't accept me I shan't ask you again'. Luckily for all of us she accepted.

As was the custom then, a couple did not get married until the man could keep his fiancée in the manner to which she might wish to become accustomed. In Dad's case this was when he was appointed consultant surgeon in Chesterfield. On 26 September 1931, after a two-year engagement, they were married at The Orchards, Great Missenden. After a short honeymoon touring the West Country in Dad's Red Label Bentley (surgeons were expected to cut a dash in those days and dress in black jacket, pinstripe trousers and spats) they moved into a suite in the Station Hotel, Chesterfield, complete with Honey the spaniel, and had a very comfortable life for two years while looking for a house.

That house was Somersall Hall. It was a wonderful house, especially for children. It had a big garden with a stream running through it and a farm next door with the lovely Buckley family. My parents only ever rented it, at a peppercorn rent, for the 30 years they were there. When I was a medical student in London sharing a bedsit at the back of Victoria Station, I remember being amazed that my rent was the same as theirs — £120 a year.

It was a pleasant life pre-war. Mum was a lady of leisure with a nanny to look after me and a resident cook and maid, as was the norm for a doctor's family.

The war was an austere time, with rationing, the black out, cars with their headlights shaded, going down into the cellar when the air raid siren sounded. No bombs landed on Somersall, but as some of you may know Barlow Woodseats had the roof blown off by a German landmine. Mum and Dad tried to be as self-sufficient as possible with hens and two pigs, which were killed (humanely of course) and butchered in the garage. Mum never ceased to surprise us. This genteel lady could be seen going to the garage with her Kenwood Chef mixing bowl to collect the fresh pig's blood to make the most delicious black pudding. The flitches of bacon hanging in the kitchen were not half so tasty: they were so salty they put me off bacon for years.

After the war the social structure of Britain changed dramatically — I think for the better. No longer were there armies of domestic staff. My parents always viewed this as a great liberation not only for the staff but for them. They were free to eat whenever they wished, or to ask friends to dinner at short notice, without upsetting cook. Mum had to learn cooking from scratch. Genteel ladies just were not taught cooking pre-war. And what a wonderful cook she became.

When the war ended in 1945, Vanessa and Frances arrived and Mum had her work cut out bringing us all up. It was after the war that Mum's great interest in local history developed. It all started with an evening class: where it ended we will hear shortly.

When my parents were given six months' notice to leave Somersall after 30 years they rented Aston End in Coal Aston for a brief period before the story of Barlow Woodseats began. They came to an amazing agreement with Eric Furness. He was our family dentist, when not hunting his pack of bloodhounds. He wanted the land from the Barlow Woodseats Estate, but not the dilapidated Hall. On the understanding that my parents would build a house for Jack and Polly Botham, the farmers, Eric gave my parents the Hall. It was a house they had always loved but never imagined they would own. The two places that mum loved the most were Carna, the island in Scotland where she had holidayed since the 1930s, and Barlow Woodseats, which she, Dad, Vanessa and Frances did up so lovingly. John and Julia Botham took over the farm when Jack died and have been the most wonderful friends and supporters to my parents as they got older and more frail. After Dad's death in 1997, Mum amazed friends and family alike by living in and running on her own this big house without any fuss. Mum didn't do fuss. She did do big family Christmases, kept an ever open door to family and friends, and produced wonderful meals without any apparent effort, just superb planning.

Rosemary's mind remained clear to the end. She kept her active interest in local history and family history. She knew more about the Milwards and Newtons than Dad did. Last Tuesday, on Dad's 102nd birthday, Mum died in her sleep, surrounded by her children, not in pain, in her own bed and in her own much loved house. She had been so wonderfully supported by the doctors and nurses from the Barlow practice, especially in the last few months. A long and special life reached its conclusion in a very kind and gentle way. We have lost such a very special person, a much loved, loving mother and grandmother. It is a loss that we shall all have to cope with as best we can. Today, however, let us remember her with love for the wonderful person she was.

II

By Philip Riden

In giving this tribute to Rosemary's work I should like to begin by saying that I speak on behalf of all those in the world of local history in Derbyshire who knew and admired her, any of whom could have spoken equally well, and in some cases more knowledgeably than I, about her contribution to its study. I know that all would wish to be associated with what I am going to say.

I also wish to echo all that has been said about Rosemary by the two members of her family who have already spoken, since all the qualities which they have mentioned — the modesty, self-effacement, consideration for others, the unspoken assumption of an obligation to public service with no thought of self-advancement, as well as her wide cultural interests and great intellectual qualities — were ones which shone very clearly through her involvement in local history and were immediately and lastingly apparent to those who worked with her.

It is typical of her modesty that the scale and importance of Rosemary's contribution to local history are not immediately obvious from the formal record. Rosemary published four articles based on her own research, two derived from her interest in the economic history of Tudor and Stuart Chesterfield and two concerned with the lives of those who built the two fine seventeenth-century houses in which she and her family lived in Derbyshire, Somersall Hall and Barlow Woodseats. All are based on thorough and painstaking research and are of permanent value, but all four, characteristically, appeared in *Derbyshire Miscellany*, the Derbyshire Archaeological Society's local history magazine intended mainly for amateur contributions, rather than the more august *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, to which they were perfectly well suited.

Similarly, although Rosemary was associated for many years with both the Archaeological Society and the county's other principal historical society, the Derbyshire Record Society, her appearance merely on a list of council or committee members, rather than as an officer, understates her real contribution.

Rosemary was a founder-member of the Record Society committee in 1977 and attended virtually every meeting until she retired, whereupon she was elected a vice-president of the society. Not only did she subscribe to every publication, to within a few weeks of her death, but she also gave considerable support to my mother as the society's treasurer during a period in which my mother's health was beginning to fail.

For the Archaeological Society, which is a statutory consultee under the Planning Acts, Rosemary, for many years the only member of the society's council resident in the Chesterfield area, did a huge amount of work preparing reports on planning applications relating to listed buildings or conservation areas made to the three north-eastern local authorities. Such work is not only time-consuming and calls for a good knowledge of the buildings and communities concerned, but also requires tact and common sense. To be effective, representations by heritage organisations have to balance an enthusiasm for preserving links with the past with a realistic grasp of what can be saved and what will be acceptable to those to whom the reports are addressed, otherwise they cease to have any influence. Rosemary had all the necessary qualities for such work in abundance and was thus a much valued member of the Derbyshire Archaeological Society's council from 1966 until she retired in 1986, when she was elected a vice-president of the society.

Perhaps Rosemary's greatest contribution to local studies in Derbyshire, in particular in the Chesterfield area, and again one where the full extent of her work was apparent only to a few, was her work with the circle of local historians associated with the late John Bestall, who was for many years until his untimely death in 1973 deputy director of the Department of Extramural Studies at the University of Sheffield and one of the outstanding figures of his generation in the promotion of local history through adult education.

In 1957 John Bestall began a series of local history evening classes in Chesterfield, of which Rosemary was a member from the start. The classes developed into one of the earliest, most enduring and most successful local history research groups of its sort, and deservedly achieved national recognition for its work. Such was the enthusiasm of members that they continued to meet for several years after John's death. Apart from John's leadership, much of the group's success must be attributed to the hard work of a handful of regular members, amongst whom Rosemary was a leading figure.

The group concentrated on exploiting two of the core sources for the history of any town in the Tudor and Stuart period, the parish register, which for Chesterfield is well preserved from 1558, and the wills and inventories proved and exhibited in the diocesan court, which for Lichfield survive from the 1520s. All this material, which for a town the size of Chesterfield is voluminous, was carefully transcribed and indexed, and thus made available to others. Anyone who, like me, has used the transcripts and indexes created by the class soon learns to recognise Rosemary's typewriting and her handwritten annotations and corrections. Rosemary clearly undertook the lion's share of the more difficult work on the earliest wills and inventories of the sixteenth century, where a good deal of practice is needed to read the handwriting confidently, and where the support of an able student is invaluable for a tutor leading a group such as John Bestall's.

But again the scale of Rosemary's contribution is hidden by her own modesty. She probably never imagined, as she laboriously checked the work of others and typed out cards to make an index to the parish register from its inception down to 1812, that that index, now on open access in Chesterfield Local Studies Library, would be in constant daily use by family historians visiting the library, by staff answering enquiries from all over the world, and by those interested in the history of the town in the early modern period, who, thanks to the index, can get much closer to the everyday lives of its people than would otherwise be possible.

Rosemary's work also made an important contribution to several books on Chesterfield, none of which has her name on the title page. In 1962 John Bestall persuaded the former Chesterfield Corporation to undertake the publication of a multi-volume academic history of the town, on a scale matched by few if any other local authorities of similar size in England. Sadly John died before even the first of these books appeared in 1974, but the work of his class underpinned the project, and especially Volume 2 Part 1, on Tudor and Stuart Chesterfield, which I contributed to the series in 1984. I simply could not have written this book without being able to draw on the work of Rosemary and others on the probate records and the parish register, and I remember with much gratitude and affection her keen interest in the book as it progressed and her perceptive and valuable comments on the chapters which relied most heavily on the work of John Bestall's class. Rosemary also helped in preparing material which appeared in

Volume 5, a collection of borough records and related documents, which John Blair and I edited for the series in 1980.

It was always John Bestall's hope that the full texts of the probate inventories, with abstracts of the accompanying wills, could be published in book form, and indeed it was largely through his efforts that the Derbyshire Archaeological Society established a record series in the 1960s, which sadly did not long survive his death. When a separate Derbyshire Record Society was set up in 1977, of which I have since been secretary and general editor, its first publication made available the Chesterfield probate documents from their commencement in 1523 to the end of the sixteenth century. More recently a second volume has continued their publication as far as the suspension of Church probate jurisdiction in 1653, and the remaining material down to 1700 has been prepared for inclusion in the Record Society's programme at a later date.

The first of these volumes included, as had become customary in editions of probate inventories, a glossary of archaic terms found in the documents. This glossary was entirely Rosemary's work and involved a great deal of research in a wide range of specialist dictionaries as well as the technical literature of farming and the variety of trades and crafts found in Chesterfield in the sixteenth century, as well as noting the terms from the documents and rationalising the variety of spellings used by contemporaries. On the spur of the moment we decided to publish the glossary separately as a booklet which we thought might be useful to those working on inventories in other parts of the country who would not want to buy a lengthy volume of transcripts of the Chesterfield material.

The booklet was an immediate success, and many readers wrote saying how useful they found it or suggesting new forms of some of the terms or new definitions not apparent from the Chesterfield material. In 1981 Rosemary compiled an extended second edition to include terms from all the inventories down to 1700, not merely the ones which appeared in the original Record Society volume. In its enlarged form, with a more eye-catching cover but still only a modestly priced paperback, Rosemary's Glossary of Household, Farming and Trade Terms from Probate Inventories has become a worldwide bestseller for the Record Society, especially among family historians. No one has produced a rival publication because there would be no point. We sell hundreds of copies of Rosemary's booklet every year wholesale to the Federation of Family History Societies: through their distribution network it reaches the sales stand of every local family history society and has probably been on sale at every family history fair held in Britain in the last twenty years. It is also widely sold abroad throughout the English-speaking world. I know that Rosemary received many letters from users of the Glossary seeking help on particular terms, offering new definitions, or simply thanking her for such a useful publication. Others have written to me as secretary of the Record Society, including on one occasion, when sadly Rosemary was too elderly to take up the invitation, asking her to speak at a conference on the subject.

The Record Society's Glossary will remain Rosemary's most visible contribution to the study of local history. But as I hope I have shown here, there were many other ways in which she helped, often by supporting the work of others without seeking the slightest recognition for herself. Rosemary was in the very best sense of the word an outstanding amateur in the field of local history, which remains one of the branches of historical scholarship in which the well informed part-time enthusiast can make an

important mark, not least because so few university historians specialise in the field. I have met many such enthusiasts, both in Derbyshire and elsewhere, in the forty years in which I have been involved in local history. Few, I feel, have made such a large contribution, and in such a modest and charming way, as Rosemary Milward did, and all local historians in Derbyshire, especially those interested in the north-east of the county, will remain deeply grateful that Rosemary chose to devote part of a busy life to the study of the past around her.