



## Olwen Hackett — In Memoriam

To think of Olwen is to think of the pleasure it was to be with her and to work with her — due, of course, to the pleasure that she herself took in so many things. It is not to be supposed that her life was never troubled; but the first thing that we all remember and are so very grateful for, is that pleasure — illustrated by the visible enjoyment that she took in discussion, questioning, searching, discovery; the light in her eyes as she pursued a clue; the dawning smile as she saw the possibility of an answer; the witty comment with which she so tellingly made her points — and/or neatly debunked other people's nonsense. As new perceptions came to her, she shared them with all her friends, and, whether their interests were academic or not, conveyed to them her own excitement, converting some to archaeology, many to give cooperative, if non-professional, help in her enterprises. For all her many talents, she was modest about her work, but quietly indomitable, equable and resourceful in every crisis; and she has, in consequence, a remarkable professional achievement to her name. It is all the more striking for its context in her full family life, which includes many years of care for a professorial husband who was notoriously absent-minded over practicalities, and for her four children, who were heirs to strong personalities and very varied in their pursuits. And then she was so generous with her time as a hostess; and as a friend when she saw a case for her intervention (even going so far as one triumphantly justified conspiracy against inequity). And yet again she had so many other vigorous interests — music, literature, her garden, spring to mind; modern politics sometimes intervened — she had good stories about canvassing for a parliamentary candidate in Oxford; and in Cambridge there were evenings spent in Scottish country dancing. And I am sure that I have not recalled — nor ever knew — more than the half of it. She had great physical strength along with that lively mind and sparkling personality, which enabled her to do so much. And, I suppose, it might be said that she was a little lucky in being born at a time when increasing opportunities were becoming available to a woman; though it is my belief that, even in a very restrictive period, Olwen would have made her mark on those around her. Still, a girl born into a professional family in December 1900 could get a first-rate general education, as she did at Cheltenham Ladies College, with an introduction, if she wanted, to academic standards, and pass on to a University, as she did to the History Department of University College London, and so to an academic career. At UCL the influence of Norman Baines seems to have been significant in arousing her interest in the Roman world, and she also discovered the possibilities of archaeology. For her MA thesis she worked under the supervision of Mortimer Wheeler on the Roman *limes* area in Germany — and his influence is clearly apparent also in her final choice of study in the *limes* area of Tripolitania. It is easy to understand that she responded immediately to Wheeler's own vigour and excitement in archaeological discovery; and so moved into that field of developing enterprise, where women were now taking a full part alongside their masculine colleagues. But when she became an archaeologist she never ceased to think also as an historian. And she always had the thought of the individuals who made and used the artefacts she found very much in her mind.

She held two posts as a lecturer — in Minnesota and in UCL itself — and then, having married the modern historian Denis Brogan in 1931, she moved to Oxford on his appointment there in 1935 and on to Cambridge in 1939. Her career was then carried forward partly by her work as secretary of the Faculty of Archaeology, History and Letters of the British School at Rome, and partly by her participation in several excavations, at first mainly in France. It is characteristic of her ability to communicate enthusiasm and her flair for managing quite complicated manoeuvres with a light-hearted air and success (despite

the many funny stories that may be told about them) that she might take the whole family off for the digging season to Gergovia (the main site of her operations in France), so that one of Denis Brogan's most important books was written precisely there — within reach of Olwen's trenches.

During the war she took up another ploy and became a part-time government servant in the Admiralty. This is, no doubt, an organisation more accustomed to colourful individuals than many government departments, but it would, nevertheless, be most intriguing to know what Establishment made of her! She was, as I've said, unobtrusively efficient. Her arrangement of papers on the piano in her study in Cambridge — some upon the case and others below the pedals — may not seem the most sophisticated of filing systems, but I have it on the authority of John Ward Perkins when he was Director of the School at Rome — a taskmaster not easily hoodwinked — that for the affairs of BSR it was a remarkably efficient one: I do not doubt that she was equally efficient in the Admiralty. After the war she resumed her French connection, and wrote, and published in 1953, an account of Roman Gaul for students and interested travellers — very good indeed, exhibiting her scholarship along with her ability to stimulate. It has been overtaken by many new discoveries; but I know from experience that it can still do its job, better, perhaps, than many subsequent books on the same subject. She did not cease to visit France even when she ceased to work there, kept up to date with its archaeological developments and took a wider interest in its affairs — so that on one occasion, when she was watching a demonstration on the streets of Paris with her usual absorption in the fascination of human behaviour, the police set about clearing her off with the rest — it must have been rather painful at the time but she was wryly funny about it in the telling.

But increasingly the concerns of the British School were directing her attention to the Mediterranean, whose charms are hard to resist, especially for one who revelled in and thrived upon the sun as she did. She had already made one prewar visit to North Africa with her husband, combining his interest in its relationship to France with her own in its archaeology. Now the School involved her in its undertakings in Tripolitania, first at Sabratha (where she worked with a verve which communicated itself to us all to excavate a house immediately known as the Casa Brogan) and then at Lepcis Magna; while David Oates, one of the School's early post war scholars, lured her briefly to Iraq. On a number of occasions she led parties of visitors to see African and Near Eastern monuments — so that she soon acquired a very real knowledge and understanding of the whole area. But she was particularly impressed by the need for work in Libya, and particularly interested in the possibilities of exploring the frontier areas of Tripolitania, to follow up and add detail to the basic work of R. G. Goodchild and J. B. Ward Perkins. For the next 30 odd years she made almost annual visits to Tripolitania for this purpose, financed on a series of shoe-strings. She included in her surveys areas of ancient Tripolitania outside the bounds of modern Libya, and extended her understanding of desert frontier zones by visits to Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. She was alertly observant of the character of the country and the ways of life of its modern inhabitants, called on the aid and expertise of geologists, geographers, agriculturalists and any others whose special knowledge and facilities could help — in due course, naturally, on 'oil-men' too; and so she built up a data base (without a computer) from which she could offer really illuminating interpretations of the monuments she found.

Above all of the monuments she found in the survey conducted with David Smith on the site of Ghirza, a kind of town in the frontier zone, inhabited by men and women who were certainly Libyan in origin but influenced by the traditions both of Punic Carthage and of Rome. It is characteristic of her work that, while the great gusur and tombs of Ghirza had been seen and reported superficially on a number of occasions, she took them as serious subjects of study — and, in addition, observed, plotted and interpreted what earlier visitors

had missed, in the traces of ordinary families living under the shadow of the great men of the site. She sought always for as much detail as she could find about the ancient way of life in these zones — the farmer ploughing with his camel, the reaper with his sickle, the huntsman in pursuit of his quarry — and on this last aspect so impressed the modern tribesmen of Ghirza that their sheikh presented her with the skin of the last panther shot in that neighbourhood. She worked hard when in the desert — her visits were not holidays — but she also loved being there, loved the sun, the wide expanses that reach to the horizon all around, the swift dusk in whose depth come the flickering of other camp fires, the evening *cuscus*, the night sky, in the morning the watering of the animals, the pail of goats' milk to drink from. She also loved to join in the assemblies of women when that was possible — and I must here recall the delighted applause that greeted her solo dance at a wedding party in Shahat — an impromptu mixture of the local movements with others from those Scottish reels. She made friends wherever she went in Libya, in the Department of Antiquities, and in the distant wadis alike, and acquired the sobriquet of 'mother of Ghirza'; back home she welcomed and helped Libyan visitors to Britain, was a founder member and first secretary, later Vice President of the Society for Libyan Studies, and well earned the OBE given for her services to Anglo–Libyan cultural relations.

After the death of Denis Brogan she stepped up her archaeological activity and later, marrying Charles Hackett, went to live in Libya for a time. There she carried on, with his help, well into her eighties, a life of energetic exploration on a scale that might have daunted many teenagers.

One could I think go on — thinking of points missed, of stories one could tell in this very brief attempt at evocation. But I shall end with the last occasion on which we spoke together. She was in hospital and very ill, and I did not think that she recognised me — though she talked with me as a hostess should. When I rose to go she sensed the presence of someone with whom she was accustomed to work, and, in well remembered tones and familiar terms she urged that we get down to the job. She was visibly disappointed when I said that I must go and teach — and I am absolutely clear what she wanted was an assurance that the landrover would be coming at 6 a.m. next morning to take us off to a gasr or two. And that I hope will show us the way to a continuing expression of our gratitude for her life in plans executed to further her undertakings — with new techniques and methods surely, but that she would have found as exciting as she did the making of her own discoveries.

*Joyce Reynolds*