

Phyllis Hartnoll (Modern Languages, 1926)

1906-1997

Phyllis Hartnoll was born in 1906 and spent her early childhood in Egypt, where her father was stationed as an officer in the Royal Engineers. When she contracted typhoid as a child, she was sent to recuperate with family and to continue her education in the UK. At the age of 16 she moved to Lyon to give private English tuition, and she undertook BA equivalent studies first at Lyon and then in Algiers.

She came up to St Hugh's as a Scholar in 1926 to read Modern Languages. During her time at St Hugh's, she got involved with many different aspects of University life, from participating as cox in a rowing competition between women's colleges in the 1928/9 academic year, to performing in productions of *If I were King* and *The Frogs* and singing in the College choir.

In 1929 she became the first woman to be awarded the University's Newdigate Prize for English Verse for her poem 'The Sands of Egypt'. She went on to receive the University's prize for a poem on a sacred subject in 1947 and 1964, and the Poetry Society's gold medal. Her first volume of poems was published in 1931.

In 1934 Phyllis joined the staff of publishing firm Macmillan, where she worked as a reader, translator and editor until her retirement in 1969. While at Macmillan, she worked as sub-editor on Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

She is best known for being the editor of the pioneering work *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, which helped to establish the study of theatre history as an academic field. The *Companion* was first published by Oxford University Press in 1951, with a second edition in 1957 and a third in 1967. Phyllis herself contributed the articles on French theatre.

Her other works included *A Concise History of the Theatre* (1968), *A Concise Companion to the Theatre* (1979); and *Plays and Players* (1984). She also produced a novel, *The Grecian Enchanted* (1952), alongside several plays and her collections of poetry *The Maid's Song* (1938) and *Quiet War* (1940).

Along with many of the eminent contributors to her *Companion*, she became a founder member of the Society for Theatre Research in 1948, later becoming Vice-Chairperson in 1951. She was also a founder member of the International Federation for Theatre Research, and edited its journal, *Recherches Théâtrales*, for several years. She also lectured on theatre history in the 1950s at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

Phyllis was a keen and proficient linguist, speaking French, German, Italian, Swedish, Hebrew and Arabic.

She died in Lyme Regis in 1997.

Sources

Griffin, Penny, ed. *St Hugh's: One Hundred Years of Women's Education in Oxford* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1986)

Griffin, Penny, Obituary 'Phyllis Hartnoll', *St Hugh's College Chronicle 1996-97*, no.70, pp.96-99

Reading, Jack, 'Obituary: Phyllis Hartnoll', *The Independent*, 23 October 2011

Soutter, Ann, and Mary Clapinson, eds, *St Hugh's College Register 1886-1959* (Oxford: St Hugh's College, 2011)

Obituary for Phyllis Hartnoll in *PASS 1997*, the magazine of the Mastermind Club

Papers relating to Phyllis Hartnoll in the College Archive