

OBITUARY

CICELY BAKER 1900–1980. Miss Cicely Baker, Vice-President and Honorary Member of the Society died on 10 September 1980, a month after her eightieth birthday. At the memorial service at St. James, Bierton on 17 September the President gave the following address:

It is not easy to speak on occasions like this; friends say afterwards “You didn’t mention this” or “I never knew that”. This is because so many people have facets of character or of interests which they manage to keep in separate compartments. But to-day when we, her friends, are gathered here to remember Cicely Baker, and to bid farewell, no such difficulty arises. For if anyone was all of a piece it was Cicely. She was the same to all – direct, witty, out-spoken, opinionated perhaps, but with massive commonsense. Her more outrageous sallies – and they could be outrageous – were always tempered by her sense of humour and of the ridiculous. She could certainly upset the thin-skinned or the conventional, but those who disagreed with her – and who at times did not? – never doubted her absolute honesty. Her mind was sharp and quick; her use of English exact. Driving with her on some outing in the ‘fifties, she said, “I cannot understand it – that’s the second village we’ve passed called ‘Labby’ – I explained that it was a new-fangled roadside parking place called a ‘lay-by’. “How ridiculous”, she said, “and in any case it ought to be ‘lie-by’ and she was, of course, correct.

If her life had developed differently she might well have been a great explorer in the mould of Freya Stark; as it was, she loved travel even if she had reservations about foreigners. She told me once that she was going to Russia and, because I had just been there, asked for advice. I suggested that she did not contradict Intourist guides too violently and refrain from arguing with anyone in uniform. “Well” she said rather ominously, “I’m going to take my *heaviest* walking stick”. I had visions of our Ambassador having to bail her out of the Lubianka prison but happily no international incident occurred.

Buckinghamshire, and Aylesbury in particular, were her life. Her Father, Doctor Baker, moved from Surrey where Cicely was born, to Ceely House in Church Street when she was two years old. It was only six years later that the Bucks Archaeological Society purchased the old Grammar School

buildings for their museum next door; thus her connection with the Society lasted for 72 years.

She read history at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, at a time when it was still quite unusual for a girl to go to a University. At this time she was a keen horsewoman, which may explain why she never entirely mastered the motor car! I found her once wedged in the Museum entrance in a brand new car. "The foot brake and the accelerator look exactly alike," she complained. She acquired her childhood name of 'Johnny Head-in-Air' from the number of times she collided with obstacles and she was always prone to physical mishaps.

At Oxford she acquired mildly radical views which she did not hesitate to air; it is strange to remember that in the sheltered, provincial Aylesbury of the 'twenties this caused her to be classed as a dangerous 'Red'. But Oxford gave her that enthusiasm for archives and records that were her lifelong interest. She was a founder member of the Society of Archivists, of the Museums Association and of the British Records Society, seldom missing meetings and conferences; in 1947 she was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. She was always deeply involved with the Bucks Archaeological Society; during the war she kept it going almost single-handed as resident Curator and Librarian. Not her least service was her sale of Ceely House, on most generous terms, to the Society in 1944, thus providing a much-needed expansion of the Museum. She was the Society's Archivist from 1946-74, a Vice-President and the only person to be made an Honorary Member. She was a founder member of the Bucks Record Society in 1946 and barely missed a meeting right up to last June.

But it is strange, and rather sad, that despite her great learning, her powerful memory and so many years of research, she never succeeded, as far as I can trace, in writing and publishing more than the briefest article. It has been suggested to me that this was perhaps because her interests and enthusiasms were too wide, too diverse, to allow her to concentrate on one given piece of research. This may well be true but she had it in her to produce valuable work and we can only regret now that she never did so.

She was extraordinarily well-read, she kept up with current literature and was the star of a small literary group that used to meet in Aylesbury in recent years. That she was a scholar, with a scholar's high standards, is not in doubt but this could lead her into comic situations. In 1951, as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations, Aylesbury put on an historical pageant in the Prebendal garden. Cicely was an enthusiastic member of the organising committee and wrote some of the dialogue for the ten episodes of which the first was to be the British Queen Boadicea in her chariot in a battle with the invading Romans. And Cicely was to play Boadicea, a rather pleasing prospect. But the scholar in her made her insist that the name was really Boudicca; it was pointed out that the latter would mean nothing to the audience but she was adamant; she was to be addressed as Boudicca or not at all. So sadly we never saw Cicely as Boadicea, a part I always thought she was singularly well equipped to play.

She will, I am sure, be remembered with affection, as one who, behind that superficial gruffness, was essentially a generous and outgoing person, always interested in others and ready to help in their troubles, who always maintained the highest standards of honesty and integrity and who was, in her character and her life, a true Christian.

E.V.

MISS MAXWELL FRASER died on Christmas Day aged 78 at her home in Slough. She wrote a *History of Slough*, and many travel books including *Companion into Buckinghamshire* in 1950. After her marriage to Edgar Phillips, Archdruid of Wales, she devoted herself to Welsh history.

E.V.

Other deaths recorded in 1980 were Mrs. Olive Paterson, O.B.E., who was Mayor of Aylesbury throughout the second world war, Miss Betty Hazell, F. A. Hewson, Miss Iverna Robinson and J. V. Thomas.