

OBITUARIES

MARY SOUTHGATE

1896 - 1985

An Address given by Peter Pool at the Memorial Service

Like nearly all of us here present, I knew Mary only for the latter part of her life, when she lived in Penzance. But I am going to speak also of her earlier years, and try to show how she became the forthright and lovable person whose loss we now mourn, and to give thanks for whose life we have come together to-day.

Mary was born in 1896 at Deddington, a village in rural Oxfordshire; she was the eldest of the three children of William Long Franklin, whose old-established family business specialised in building churches, mansions and colleges, and the restoration and furnishing of churches. Her mother was Nina Turner, daughter of the village Doctor. Mary spent her childhood in Deddington, and then went to Oxford High School; she was academically gifted,

and hoped to go on to the University, but instead she returned home to help her father in his business, which had been very badly affected by the calling up of his employees and staff for war service. Then, in 1917, her Father gave up the business, moved the family to Taunton, and soon afterwards died. Her Mother's health soon failed, and Mary had to take over much responsibility for her younger brother and sister, the twins Bob and Ruth, to whom she gave loving care. At the age of 21 Mary started work in an Accountant's Office in Taunton; her employer was secretary to the Bath and Wells Diocesan Board of Finance, and for many years she devoted her working life to the administration of Church finances. By way of recreation, she acquired a motor-cycle (an unusual possession for a woman in those days) and brought it down to Cornwall, spending several holidays in Marazion. When her employer retired, she was offered his position as Secretary to the Board of Finance, but declined it, as she had decided to marry.

This step came rather late in life; she was 49 when she married Tom Southgate, an electrical engineer whom she had met when on holiday in Italy; the marriage was a most happy one, but one does wish that they had met earlier, since she would have made such a splendid Mother and Grandmother.

Mary and Tom lived in Hendon, but she was not a person to be content with the duties of a suburban housewife; at about this time Dr. Wand, who had known her when he was Bishop of Bath and Wells, moved to become Bishop of London, and Mary became his Secretary, and afterwards Secretary to successive Bishops of Willesden.

When Tom retired, they decided to come to Cornwall; they chose the house in Newlyn together, but, most sadly, Tom died before they could move into it, and it was as an energetic widow of sixty that Mary came to live among us, in 1957. She was not a person to sit around and mope, and she decided to seek an active role with one of the Societies in Penzance. Most happily, she found this in the Old Cornwall Society, where in 1960 she succeeded Winifred Saundry as Secretary, and for more than twenty years she held office in the Society, being at different times President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. For much of the 1960s I was President and she was Secretary, and despite the great difference in our ages we worked most harmoniously together, with never a cross word. She was the best Society Secretary I have ever known, totally competent and reliable. We were agreed on how the Society ought to be run, and we each knew that once we had decided what needed to be done, and which of us should do it, then it **would** be done. We explored remote areas of Cornwall together by car, reconnoitering the Society Pilgrimages, and checking on such mundane but vital facts as where the coach could turn, where the Church key was kept, and how our members could reach the stone circle or holy well without becoming impaled on barbed wire, or sunk in a bog. Together we planned, and with our colleagues carried through, such complex and memorable events as the Federation Winter Festival here in Penzance in 1962,

and the Zennor Gorsedd in the following year.

Mary's services were not limited to this Society. She was for some years Minutes Secretary to the Old Cornwall Federation, and an active member of the Morrab Library, and gave much help with several Celtic Congresses. Her work for Cornwall was recognised by her election as a Bard of the Gorsedd in 1962, taking as a Bardic name her own family name of Franklin.

Mary thus had a long, very active, very useful, and very happy old age. From 1968 onwards she had the happiness of sharing her home with her sister, Ruth Franklin, who soon found herself encouraged and coached into Office as Secretary of the Penzance Old Cornwall Society, and even into becoming General Secretary of the Federation, perhaps the most thankless task ever devised in Cornwall since the legendary labours of Tregeagle! As Mary grew older, she was happy for her sister to take the limelight, but she herself remained actively involved, and was a highly efficient Society Treasurer when in her middle eighties.

But inevitably old age brought problems; Mary could no longer get around as she wished, and found this very frustrating, but she remained cheerful and seldom complained, her chief worry being that she might become a burden to her sister. Over her last few months her health failed rapidly, and her end was mercifully swift and free from pain. She would **not** have wished to linger as an invalid.

We all extend our deepest sympathy to Ruth, who cared for Mary so devotedly, and our thanks to the kind neighbours and friends who helped them both. For them, and for all of us, this is a sad occasion; a familiar and well-loved figure has gone. But let us remember that our prime purpose to-day is to give thanks for a long, happy and useful life; few of us live as long as Mary Southgate, or work so effectively for their communities, or are so widely held in affection. She had much to be thankful for in her life, and would be the first to say that; so let us reflect on the kind of person she was, and what she achieved, so that we may try ourselves to be more cheerful, more efficient, more helpful, more appreciative of life's good things, and more disposed to accept its inevitable setbacks. **That** is the kind of person Mary Southgate was.