



MARGERY PERHAM

*Walter Bird*

# Margery Freda Perham

## 1895–1982

MARGERY PERHAM was destined to fulfil many roles during her long life—traveller, teacher, broadcaster, government adviser on colonial issues—but, inspired by the novels of her grandmother, Mary Anne Needell, she believed her true vocation was to write.<sup>1</sup> Born in 1895, the youngest of a large, upwardly mobile family, Margery was sent by her father, a wine and spirit merchant, to a Woodard Foundation school which provided the best education for girls obtainable at that time.<sup>2</sup> She took full advantage of that opportunity and went up to St Hugh's College, Oxford, on a history scholarship in 1914, joining her favourite brother, Edgar, who was at that time reading Greats at Queen's College, Oxford. Cecil, her eldest brother, had obtained a first class degree in classics at Christ's College, Cambridge.<sup>3</sup> Her only sister, Ethel, had decided while at Leeds University to abandon reading for a degree in favour of a diploma in education in order to enable her to go out to teach in Kenya.<sup>4</sup>

Although they were not acquainted then, Margery and Vera Brittain overlapped at Oxford.<sup>5</sup> Margery was just as deeply wounded by the First

<sup>1</sup> Between 1853 and 1902 Mary Anne Needell wrote twelve novels said to have been much admired by William Ewart Gladstone.

<sup>2</sup> Records of St Anne's and St Mary's School, Abbots Bromley, Staffordshire.

<sup>3</sup> Records of Christ's College, Cambridge.

<sup>4</sup> Information from the family and from the records of the University of Leeds.

<sup>5</sup> Vera Mary Brittain, *Testament of Youth: an autobiographical study of the years 1900–1925* (1935; repr. 1978).

World War.<sup>6</sup> Edgar's death on the Somme, in the Battle of Delville Wood, affected the rest of her life. In 1917, while still submerged in grief, she was dissuaded by her tutors from joining one of the wartime women's services as a despatch rider, as she wanted to do. They insisted that her duty lay in obtaining the first class degree expected of her and then going to Sheffield University as an assistant history lecturer to teach the servicemen returning from the trenches. Although this advice went very much against the grain she had been brought up to answer the call of duty and so followed their advice.<sup>7</sup>

The years Margery spent teaching in Sheffield were not happy. Most of the students were older than she was, and were catching up on their education after war service. Some taking government sponsored short courses were still in uniform and thus were a constant reminder of the brother she had lost. As the only woman teaching in the History Faculty she was at first treated as inferior by the male lecturers. She missed the intellectual stimulus of Oxford, where one of her tutors had introduced her to more cosmopolitan company to rub off the sharp corners of her Yorkshire childhood. The Anglican faith instilled by family, school, and college had failed her. At Sheffield she escaped from the burden of teaching not into research but into writing poems and short stories as she had done from childhood.<sup>8</sup> For the university drama club she wrote sketches and plays as she had done at St Hugh's, usually producing and playing a leading role.<sup>9</sup> She published no academic papers then, though her colleagues were prolific in their output. Vigorous exercise such as playing hockey, walking on the moors and riding her motor-bike, as well as giving occasional talks to the WEA and helping the volunteers at the university settlement, filled her leisure time but did not dispel the feeling of isolation and depression that she confided to her diary.

At this time of her greatest need there was no family home in which she could take refuge. Marion and Frederick Perham had abandoned their house in Harrogate soon after Margery went up to Oxford. They and Cecil, who had a responsible post in the Admiralty, all lived in hotels. Oliver, their second son, had married and settled in France where he had been sent to learn the wine trade. Leo, who also worked for the Admiralty as a design engineer, had virtually been cast off by his family because they

<sup>6</sup> Papers of Dame Margery Perham, Rhodes House Library, boxes 3 and 4. References to papers in this collection will be shown as e.g. PP 3, with specific files listed as /1–3.

<sup>7</sup> PP 33/2.

<sup>8</sup> PP 3–4.

<sup>9</sup> PP 280.

disapproved of his wife. Wilfrid had volunteered as a naval flier and Edgar was a lieutenant in the West Yorkshire Regiment. Ethel had gone to East Africa in 1910 and married Harry Rayne, a New Zealander with an impressive Boer War record, who shot game and grew cotton in Jubaland until volunteering for service in 1915.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, as an undergraduate Margery's vacations were spent in coastal guest houses with her parents, and making short visits to aunts, her old school and school friends. However, for most of the time she was left to fend for herself in a hotel near the British Museum, with Cecil keeping an irritating, brotherly eye on her. Vacations from Sheffield were filled by lecturing on the origins of the First World War to the troops in France and on Salisbury Plain.<sup>11</sup>

A respite came when Ethel brought her children home on leave and for a while shared the house Margery rented in Sheffield. The pressures of her work and her unassuaged grief had by then drained Margery's physical and mental stamina to such an extent that in 1920 she was given a year's sabbatical leave on health grounds.<sup>12</sup> Since Edgar's death and the collapse of their plans to live and work together after going down from Oxford she had lost her youthful, soaring ambition. Rejecting her mother's suggestion that she spend her leave in a hotel in the Lake District, she chose to go with her sister and nephews to Hargeisa, where her brother-in-law had been appointed District Commissioner in the Colonial Service.<sup>13</sup> The two sisters thus became the first white women to live in the Somali hinterland. This was Margery's first African adventure.<sup>14</sup>

Now she fell in love with Africa and everything changed. The journey to Hargeisa was itself an adventure. After the long voyage to Aden, the crossing to Berbera in a dirty, crowded steamer, the long wait there for the arrival of Harry Rayne, who had been putting down trouble in his district caused by the Mad Mullah, and the tussle to persuade the Governor not to send them back to England, they eventually set out on the long, intimidating ride along the fair-weather track up onto the plateau bordering on Ethiopia.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Henry A. Rayne, *Sun, Sand and Somals: leaves from the notebook of a district Commissioner in British Somaliland* (1921), *The Ivory Raiders* (1923).

<sup>11</sup> PP 33/3.

<sup>12</sup> Annual Reports of the University of Sheffield, 1920–2.

<sup>13</sup> *Colonial Office List*, 1919–30, HMSO.

<sup>14</sup> PP 34/1–4, PP 352.

<sup>15</sup> Sayyid Mohamed Abdullah Hassan (1864–1920), a religious leader and sheikh who had launched four attacks against the British force between 1899 and 1920 when he died in Ethiopia.

Hargeisa provided all that Margery could possibly desire. It was a complete contrast to the grey, northern university and provincial interests of Sheffield residents, being hot, beset with drought, barren but inhabited by exotic people and wild life. Harry encouraged her to take an interest in his work as a colonial servant and observe him administering justice and caring for the development and welfare of the people in his care. Knowing that her brothers had taught her to handle guns, he took her out shooting for the pot and for sport, thus fulfilling her childhood ambition to become a big-game hunter. As the civil authority in the region he was an honorary member of the Camel Corps and took Margery with it on patrol along the Ethiopian border to round up the Mad Mullah's followers. This romantic life in a British dependency caused her to fall in love with her brother-in-law as well as with Africa. Although she was devoted to her elder sister she still desperately needed to love someone as she had loved her brother Edgar: an older man with the qualities she admired, imagination and vision, who could take the place of both father and brother. In spite of the tact with which Harry handled the situation, Margery suffered deep guilt which was not resolved until some time after she had returned to normal life and realised that she was really in love with the work of a colonial officer.

In Somaliland she took the opportunity to review her teaching programme, dropping her lectures on the historical origins of the recent war in favour of a large section on imperial history in line with the revised Sheffield curriculum.<sup>16</sup> On her return she gave one or two extra-mural lectures on her African adventure and taught a course on imperial history, but no academic papers emerged from her observations. Instead she resumed her fictional writing with the possibly unconscious purpose of working out her personal difficulties on paper as she had always done in her diary. First she revised and produced a play written before her sabbatical leave about the introduction of Christianity to northern England by Paulinus and Queen Aethelburga as chronicled by Bede.<sup>17</sup> Next she wrote a romantic novel about a District Commissioner in Somaliland who tried by his own example and horticultural experiments to encourage in his district sound ecological expansion of agriculture suited to his people's needs.<sup>18</sup> In the play *Aethelburga* Margery on one level had examined the difficulty of clinging to her faith in adverse

<sup>16</sup> Records of the University of Sheffield; PP 226/1–2; PP 227/2.

<sup>17</sup> PP 281.

<sup>18</sup> Margery Perham, *Major Dane's Garden* (Boston and New York, 1926).

circumstances. In the novel, *Major Dane's Garden*, while analysing the work and ideal motivation of a colonial officer, she wrote out of her system her infatuation for Harry. A second novel, *Josie Vine*, dealt with the specially close relationship of a brother and sister, two of a large family, and the devastating effect of the death of that brother in the Great War.<sup>19</sup> In later life Margery tended to conceal her authorship and, when questioned, staunchly denied that these novels were autobiographical; yet it is impossible to study her early life without being struck by the constant parallels in descriptions of emotions, characters, and incidents between her novels and her diaries. The abandoned draft of a third novel dealt with the problems faced by an intelligent young woman forced to support herself and carve her own niche in society.<sup>20</sup>

The novels were published after Margery had returned in 1924 to Oxford, which was much more to her taste than Sheffield. Barbara Gwyer, the new principal of St Hugh's College appointed to reconstruct the teaching staff following a virtual mutiny at the end of Eleanor Jourdain's reign, offered her the post of tutor in Modern History and Modern Greats. Reforms taking place within the university curriculum would allow her to teach those subjects in which she was really interested. With the creation of the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission political scientists were beginning to consider native administration a valid field of study. Oxford, Cambridge, and London universities were collaborating over post-graduate training of probationers for the Colonial Services.<sup>21</sup> Margery's knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of that Service may have been scant, but it was certainly unique within the history faculty. For five years she taught both undergraduates and the young men preparing for colonial administrative posts. In the vacations she observed sessions of the Permanent Mandates Commission in Geneva, helped with summer schools on the work of the League of Nations and embarked on not very rewarding research into the life of Sir William Johnston, an eighteenth-century administrator in New England.<sup>22</sup> Late in 1928 Barbara Gwyer, conscious of her young colleague's yearning for adventurous travel, encouraged her to apply for a Rhodes Trust

<sup>19</sup> Margery Perham, *Josie Vine* (1927).

<sup>20</sup> PP 284/3–4.

<sup>21</sup> Ralph Furse, *Aucuparius: recollections of a recruiting officer* (1962). Robert Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers: the making of the British Colonial Service* (New York, 1963).

<sup>22</sup> PP 78.

travelling fellowship to study native administration in the British Empire and the United States.<sup>23</sup>

The personal influence of the Rhodes Trustees and their friends brought Margery support and assistance from a wide range of men concerned with colonial affairs in the university, in Whitehall and Westminster, in administrations throughout the Empire and from others engaged in humanitarian and educational activities and journalism. Chief among these was the Secretary of the Trust, Philip Kerr, later Lord Lothian.<sup>24</sup> Their letters of introduction opened doors for her wherever she went. She received hospitality from the British Ambassador to the United States, from Governors and district officers in the colonies and she even stayed in native houses in Samoa and Kenya.<sup>25</sup> Files from the colonial secretariats were produced for her to study, territorial reports and copies of other official papers were sent back to St Hugh's for her, and district commissioners were detailed by Governors to take her on trek throughout their territories.<sup>26</sup>

Opportunities for adventure occurred, such as walking alone and unscathed through a rebellion in Western Samoa, attending a riotous meeting of the black Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union in Durban, and in Tanganyika shooting a buffalo on a hunting expedition with the big-game hunter, Baron von Blixen. Thus she came to know the outstanding figures in East African political life, from Sir Donald Cameron, Governor of Tanganyika, who was creating from Lugard's principle of indirect rule as administered in Nigeria a form of government more suited to East Africa, to Lords Delamere and Francis Scott the vocal settlers in Kenya.<sup>27</sup> Their views were forcefully presented and equally strongly challenged by her, because face to face as well as in writing Margery revelled in disputation. In West Africa she seized the opportunity to compare French with British methods of native adminis-

<sup>23</sup> PP 34/6, PP 227–8.

<sup>24</sup> Philip Henry Kerr, 11th Marquess of Lothian (1882–1940), youngest member of the 'Milner Kindergarten'.

<sup>25</sup> Esmé William Howard, 1st Baron Howard of Penrith (1863–1939), ambassador to the United States of America, 1924–30.

<sup>26</sup> PP 9/1–6. From these Margery Perham constructed four books of her travels: *African Apprenticeship: an autobiographical Journey in South Africa 1929* (1974); *East African Journey 1929–30* (1976); *West African Passage 1931–32* (1983); *Pacific Prelude 1929* (1988). A. H. M. Kirk-Greene completed the editorial work on the two published posthumously.

<sup>27</sup> Donald Charles Cameron, KBE, GCMG (1872–1948), Governor of Tanganyika 1925–31. Hugh Cholmondeley, 3rd Baron Delamere (1870–1931), settler in Kenya from 1903. Lord Francis George Montagu-Douglas-Scott (1897–1952), settler in Kenya from 1920.

tration. The liberal university staff of Witwatersrand University linked her on her return home with a group of their friends in England equally concerned about the welfare and development of Africans, the London Group on African Affairs run by Frederick Livie-Noble and Winfred Holtby's Friends of Africa, whose treasurer, Creech Jones, became a close friend.<sup>28</sup> Once more she fell in love with an older man in Basutoland, another district officer who was, unfortunately, married.<sup>29</sup> By dint of official generosity, her own frugality when drawing on her funds and a renewal of her grant by the Trust, she was able to spin out her travels from July 1929 until early 1932. During that time she crossed the United States, visited Samoa, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, East Africa, and part of British Central Africa. Finally, after a period back in England to regain her health while giving evidence to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Closer Union in East Africa, she went to West Africa. Apart from filling numerous shiny black exercise books with notes, and writing full spread articles for *The Times* on colonial rule, Margery sent home vivid diary letters which were typed up and circulated among a select group of friends. The originals were saved for her own later use.<sup>30</sup>

For such freedom there was, of course, a price to pay. Barbara Gwyer could not hold open her teaching post beyond September 1930 and so Margery had no fixed occupation or source of income apart from freelance journalism on her return to England.<sup>31</sup> Fortunately, her connection with the university was maintained by making her a non-stipendiary research fellow of St Hugh's.<sup>32</sup> Through the auspices of Lord Lugard and J. H. Oldham she was granted a studentship by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures for a short course in anthropology under Professor Malinowski at the London School of Economics, the same course that Jomo Kenyatta attended<sup>33</sup>. While Margery was struggling to support herself by freelance journalism the IIALC extended her studentship to a Rockefeller travelling fellowship to

<sup>28</sup> Papers of the London Group on African Affairs, Rhodes House Library, MSS Afr. s. 1427; Papers of Arthur Creech Jones, RHL, MSS Brit. Emp. s. 332.

<sup>29</sup> PP 7/1–2; PP 9/3; PP 382/4; PP 605/3.

<sup>30</sup> PP 35–40.

<sup>31</sup> PP 324; PP 346; See Margery Perham, *Colonial Sequence 1930–49*, vol. I, and *1949–69*, vol. II (1967 and 1970). See also the bibliography in Patricia Pugh, *Papers of Dame Margery Perham, 1895–1982: a catalogue* (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> PP 8/1.

<sup>33</sup> PP 10/1–2.

study the work of the political service in the Sudan which was already preparing for the country's eventual independence.<sup>34</sup>

To create a family home on Harry's retirement from the Colonial Service, Ethel, Harry, and Margery bought Ponds Farm, near Shere in Surrey. There in a converted barn she wrote up the conclusions from her field studies in West Africa into *Native Administration in Nigeria*, edited a book of essays by *Ten Africans*, and with Lionel Curtis reshaped into book form their respective articles in *The Times* on the South African Protectorates.<sup>35</sup> Lugard, whose house Little Parkhurst was an easy cross-country ride away, took an increasingly paternal interest in her and sedulously introduced her to colonial officials and people who might promote her work and reputation as an expert observer of colonial rule. It had been through his recommendation and that of Oldham and Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of *The Times*, that Margery had been invited to give evidence to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Closer Union in East Africa, and to act as that paper's observer of its sessions.

Margery resumed her official Oxford career as University Research Lecturer in Colonial Administration in 1935. This was a new post created as a result of several years of pressure by General Smuts, the Rhodes Trustees, the Raleigh Club, Professor Coupland, and other academics who wanted to establish Oxford as the leading university in teaching the art of colonial government, with a role for Rhodes House as the centre of research.<sup>36</sup> Rumours of such a scheme had reached to Margery while she was in Africa and, ambition renewed, she longed to play some part in the new discipline. The world recession prevented full realisation of the grandiose plans drawn up by Coupland and his friends. Some colonial governors had hoped to contribute towards such research because of expected benefits to their territories, but drastic cuts in their budgets in the mid 1930s made that impossible. Nevertheless, Margery's appointment was the first step in directing colonial studies away from the strictly historical observation of facts towards the examination and application of the duties and principles of colonial rule. Her lectures were the more convincing because, unlike her listeners, she now knew what would be required of a district officer. Health problems and ever-increasing demands on her time from teaching and extramural responsibilities now impeded completion of the books on the Sudan and East Africa, though

<sup>34</sup> PP 8/2; Papers of John Houldsworth Oldham, RHL MSS Brit. Emp. s. 1829.

<sup>35</sup> Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (1937); *Ten Africans* (1936); with Lionel Curtis, *The Protectorates of South Africa* (1935).

<sup>36</sup> PP 8/3, 254/1; Richard Symonds, *Empire and Oxford* (1986).

she worked on them for years.<sup>37</sup> An additional responsibility, although she had been rejected for the main task of compiling *An African Survey*, was to act as a consultant and supply Lord Hailey with notes and other relevant material.<sup>38</sup>

Although Rhodes House was not destined to become a school of government, other innovations in Oxford were introduced at this time. Lord Nuffield decided to endow a new college for post-graduate work within the social sciences.<sup>39</sup> Margery was involved in planning the new college and, although building was necessarily delayed until after the Second World War, she was appointed the first official fellow in 1939, retaining her university lectureship.<sup>40</sup> She supervised the students' research into imperial constitutions, government and economics, while the deputy warden of Nuffield College, G. D. H. Cole, directed a parallel social survey of Britain.<sup>41</sup> Partly funded by Government grants their work was expected to be of value for the post-war rehabilitation of Britain and the Commonwealth. The Ministries to which Cole was answerable grew very disillusioned with his project.<sup>42</sup> The Colonial Office, on the other hand, increasingly drew upon Margery's specialised knowledge. Malcolm MacDonald, impressed by her writings on Africa and her evidence to the Parliamentary Committee, had included her in his private conference of 1939 on the principles of colonial government to be adopted in the next few years.<sup>43</sup> On Lugard's recommendation she was appointed that year to the Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies.<sup>44</sup> That led to her serving on the Asquith Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies and the Irvine Commission, which investigated on the spot the possibility of creating a university in the West Indies.<sup>45</sup> When the committee of Vice-Chancellors of Oxford, Cambridge, and London Universities was set up to advise the Colonial Office on reconstruction of the Colonial Service Courses to prepare officers for the wider demands of the post-war Empire, Margery was required to write the briefs for the Oxford representatives.<sup>46</sup> The resulting

<sup>37</sup> PP 120–85.

<sup>38</sup> William Malcolm Hailey, 1st baron, *An African Survey: a study of problems arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (1938).

<sup>39</sup> *Oxford University Gazette*, 1938–9.

<sup>40</sup> PP 8/3–4.

<sup>41</sup> PP 254; Nuffield College Annual Reports.

<sup>42</sup> Papers of G. D. H. Cole and of the Social Survey of Great Britain, Nuffield College, Oxford.

<sup>43</sup> PP 685/2.

<sup>44</sup> PP 718.

<sup>45</sup> PP 636.

<sup>46</sup> Oxford University Archive. Col. 1–4.

Devonshire Courses thus embodied many of her recommendations, in particular the refresher courses for serving officers.

Relations with the Foreign Office and War Office were not as genial in those years. Ever since the Italian invasion Margery had been deeply concerned about the fate of Ethiopia.<sup>47</sup> When the Foreign Research and Press Service of Chatham House was evacuated to Balliol College, Oxford, Margery collaborated with Drs Lucy Mair and Audrey Richardson to produce a paper predicting Ethiopia's rehabilitation problems.<sup>48</sup> Both ministries then asked Margery to produce an historical account of that country's administration to guide the British Military Administration appointed to assist the Emperor in reconstructing his government. It was very difficult to write because she had never been into Ethiopia and Foreign Office staff were obstructive when she requested the same access to official papers that the Colonial Office had allowed her. To a considerable extent she had to rely on information supplied by Frank de Halpert, a former advisor to the Ethiopian Minister of the Interior, who was allowed access to the papers.<sup>49</sup> The book also had to be written very hurriedly. In July 1942, the Foreign Office rejected it because she had not covered the period of the Italian administration, for which there was no documentation except enemy propaganda. Eventually *The Government of Ethiopia* was published in 1948 and used as a handbook by civil servants for a couple of decades, when a revised and extended edition was issued.<sup>50</sup>

The publication of other books during the war years caused her less anxiety, although *Africans and British Rule*, written in basic English for local use, was not approved in some African territories.<sup>51</sup> *African Discovery: an anthology of African Exploration*, in collaboration with Jack Simmonds, was an enjoyable compilation of her favourite reading at a time while the war prevented her travelling.<sup>52</sup> *Race and Politics in Kenya*, which evolved from a choreographed discussion with Elspeth Huxley in the pages of *The*

<sup>47</sup> PP599; *The Times*, 26 and 27 Nov. 1941.

<sup>48</sup> *Some Problems in Ethiopia*, Foreign Research and Press Service Paper No. 3, Royal Institute of International Affairs. PP 599–604. Papers of the RIIA.

<sup>49</sup> PP 7/3; PP 600; De Halpert Papers, Hampshire County Record Office, Winchester, passim; Lugard Papers, RHL, 100/4.

<sup>50</sup> PP 292; *The Government of Ethiopia* (1948); second edition with an additional chapter by Christopher Clapham (1968).

<sup>51</sup> Margery Perham, *Africans and British Rule* (1941).

<sup>52</sup> Margery Perham and Jack Simmonds, *African Discovery: an anthology of African exploration* (1946 and 1949, 2nd edn. 1957 and 1963, Penguin 1948).

*Times*, provided Margery with the exhilaration of a considered academic disputation on very contentious issues.<sup>53</sup>

The war years gave Margery a brief interlude for personal reconstruction.<sup>54</sup> It was a time of family grief over the death in action in North Africa of her nephew, Wilfred Rayne, and of family anxiety while his brother, Robert, was a prisoner of war in Europe and their sister, Margery Mumford, was serving in the Ministry of Information in Eritrea, a potentially dangerous part of Africa.<sup>55</sup> She took a holiday in the Cotswolds to review the political and moral condition of Europe and Britain in particular, her own feelings and intellectual position in regard to the war, her achievements up to that point, and the direction in which her life was moving. One evening while on holiday she heard, by chance, an instalment of Dorothy Sayers's radio play *The Man Born to be King*. Its straightforward, vernacular treatment of the Christian story initiated the revival of Margery's faith. This grew so strong and practical that Margery eventually became President of the Universities Mission to Central Africa at the time it merged with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel for which her uncle had been a missionary in Borneo.<sup>56</sup>

Margery's two most admired friends died in 1945, Lord Lugard and Sir Douglas Newbold. For more than a decade, as he revised *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*, Lugard had discussed with her the principles of indirect rule whenever she rode over from Ponds Farm to his house Little Parkhurst.<sup>57</sup> On pre-war visits to the Sudan Margery had always stayed for part of the time with the Civil Secretary, Newbold, talking into the early hours about his desire to devote all his moral and intellectual power to benefit its people.<sup>58</sup> She saw him as the ideal district commissioner (almost an incarnation of Major Dane) carrying 'civilizing qualities' with him into the heart of Sudanese administration. While the war prevented travel to the Sudan they had exchanged stimulating letters on the way each wanted the political development of the dependent

<sup>53</sup> PP 290; Margery Perham and Elspeth Huxley, with a foreword by Lord Lugard, *Race and Politics in Kenya* (1944, revised edition 1956). Lugard Papers, LP 141.

<sup>54</sup> Family information.

<sup>55</sup> PP 33/4.

<sup>56</sup> PP 15. Records of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, RHL, annual reports from John Perham.

<sup>57</sup> Frederick D. Lugard, Baron Lugard of Abinger, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922). Margery Perham edited and wrote a preface to the 5th edn. in 1965.

<sup>58</sup> PP 536–7. Douglas Newbold, KBE, (1894–1945), Civil Secretary to the Sudan Government 1939–45. Correspondence with Governors of the Sudan can be found here and in the Sudan Archive, University of Durham.

peoples to proceed. The letters from Newbold were later presented to K. D. D. Henderson for publication in *The Making of the Modern Sudan*.<sup>59</sup>

Margery's tribute to Lugard and his work was more direct. Some years before his death he and his brother, Major Edward Lugard, had chosen her to write his official biography.<sup>60</sup> For fifteen years she toiled at this immense literary work with the major assiduously offering monitored information and inquiring about her progress. Despite such pressure the quality of her writing scintillated. In the mean time, with the collaboration of Mary Bull, she edited four volumes of his East African and Nigerian diaries and prepared for publication and wrote a preface to the fifth edition of his main work, *The Dual Mandate*.<sup>61</sup> Although in many ways a labour of love, the Lugard books became her albatross; it was with great relief that she saw the second volume of the life through publication in 1960.

Three years into that work Margery had realised that she needed to scale down her commitments if she was ever to do anything properly. She therefore resigned her Directorship of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies which had evolved from the work she had been doing in the early 1940s, using her flat in the High Street as her base.<sup>62</sup> She also relinquished the University Readership in Colonial Administration in favour of a less demanding Fellowship in Imperial Administration at Nuffield College.<sup>63</sup> In theory this allowed her to dispose of her annual teaching responsibilities in two terms and devote the rest of the year to writing and research, including travel. Instead, following the award of the CBE in 1948, a load of prestigious, extramural service fell on her shoulders. Her friend, Arthur Creech Jones, then Secretary of State in the Labour Government, appointed her to two more Colonial Office Committees to investigate the political significance of colonial students in the United Kingdom and the constitutional development of the smaller colonial territories.<sup>64</sup> The question whether the smaller colonies could ever attain sufficient economic viability to allow them political independence on a level with the larger ones was of great concern at this time. As an execu-

<sup>59</sup> K. D. D. Henderson, *The Making of the Modern Sudan* (1953), supervised and prefaced by Margery Perham.

<sup>60</sup> PP 293–316; MSS Lugard 3/10. Margery Perham, *Lugard: the Years of Adventure 1858–1898*, vol. 1 (1956); *Lugard: the Years of Authority 1898–1945*, vol. 2 (1960).

<sup>61</sup> Margery Perham (ed.), *The Diaries of Lord Lugard, East Africa*, vols 1–3, (1959); with Mary Bull, *Nigeria*, vol. 4 (1960). Lugard, op. cit.

<sup>62</sup> PP 8/3.

<sup>63</sup> PP 8/4.

<sup>64</sup> PP 725; PP662–3.

tive committee member of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies, one with a particular knowledge of the Sudan political service, Margery was asked to draw up the curriculum for the School of Administration attached to the University of Khartoum, created to train Sudanese graduates to take over the duties of expatriate officers. She was appointed to represent the Council on the governing body of Makerere College (later university) in Uganda which would also be training men and women for public administration.<sup>65</sup> To carry out this duty conscientiously, linking Makerere as closely as she could with Oxford, she timed her visits to coincide with its annual meetings and corresponded regularly with its principals. At home she was appointed to the Colonial Social Science Research Council, which vetted the subjects proposed for research to benefit the colonies and controlled the allocation of grants. Gradually Margery became an *éminence grise*, the friend and confidante of one Secretary of State for the Colonies after another.<sup>66</sup>

Meanwhile, by returning to Africa as often as possible she was keeping her observation of colonial administration up to date so that she could, with authority and understanding, address the Colonial/Commonwealth service courses and summer schools at Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>67</sup> On her home ground she was editing the two Nuffield series of books on colonial constitutions and economies.<sup>68</sup> They were partly financed from the fund allocated for research under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1941. With the help of research assistants, she was still trying to write the intended book on the Sudan and collecting material for the book she most wanted to write on the history of East Africa at the time that closer union was under discussion. Those books were constantly on her mind but everything in her life conspired to distract her from the actual writing. She did manage to produce a very fine introduction to the second volume of the *History of East Africa*.<sup>69</sup> Whenever colonial servants were in England they visited 'Miss Perham'; they were invariably welcome, but very time-consuming. Letters to *The Times* had to be written each time an issue of imperial importance arose, such as the federation of Central Africa or the impending grant of

<sup>65</sup> PP 583/3; PP 515–18; PP 719–21.

<sup>66</sup> PP 685/1

<sup>67</sup> PP 540–2; PP332–43

<sup>68</sup> PP 250–2. Nuffield College Series of publications supervised, edited, and prefaced by Margery Perham *Studies in Colonial Legislatures; Studies in the Economics of Tropical Dependencies; Colonial and Comparative studies* (1946–59).

<sup>69</sup> PP 540–2; PP 332–43. *History of East Africa*, vol. II, edited by Vincent Harlow and E. M. Chilver, assisted by Alison Smith (1966).

independence to the Sudan, because those involved in the events always searched its pages for her authoritative, thought-provoking views.<sup>70</sup>

By nature a humble person, Margery nevertheless was well aware that she had considerable personal influence and did not hesitate to use it to help Africans and the people who served them. For instance, she exploited her friendship with Tshekedi Khama to help the Reverend Michael Scott and David Astor bring him and his nephew Seretse Khama together secretly at Sutton Courtney in 1950, so that they might resolve their differences.<sup>71</sup> This action helped persuade the British Government to rescind their exile. She was instrumental in obtaining grants and places at Oxford University for African students who were likely to become leaders in their newly independent countries.<sup>72</sup> While Tom Mboya was a student at Ruskin College she befriended him, wrote an introduction to the pamphlet he produced for the Fabian Society and suggested that on his return to Kenya they should embark on a formal correspondence containing his observations on the political and economic situation and her comments.<sup>73</sup> The book, to have been entitled 'Dear Mr Mboya', was eventually abandoned as he became too immersed in practical politics to maintain the correspondence. This was unfortunate because with *The Protectorates of South Africa* and *Race and Politics in Kenya* it would have formed the third in a trilogy of books on African political evolution.

As time for retirement approached she was invited to give the Reith Lectures on the 'End of Empire', and produce an expanded version for publication as *The Colonial Reckoning*.<sup>74</sup> Preparation of the lectures required much retrospection, not only of events but also of her thoughts about them as they had taken place. Having for this purpose assembled into a significant series her journalistic work, in print and on the radio, together with her shorter scholarly writings, she was persuaded to republish a selection. The resulting two volumes, entitled *Colonial Sequence*, present a picture of the evolution of colonies into independent countries over a period of forty years, the development of her own colonial policy

<sup>70</sup> For a selection of these see Margery Perham, *Colonial Sequence*, vols I & II (1967–70). For a more complete bibliography see my catalogue of the Perham Papers published by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, 1989.

<sup>71</sup> PP 378–80; Papers of the Africa Bureau, RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1681, Boxes 225–6.

<sup>72</sup> e.g. Mekki Abbas, Kofi Busia, Tom Mboya.

<sup>73</sup> PP 343. Tom Mboya, *The Kenya Question: an African Answer*, Fabian Colonial Bureau Tract No. 302 (1956).

<sup>74</sup> Margery Perham, *The Colonial Reckoning: the end of imperial rule in Africa in the light of British experience* (1963).

with its occasional inconsistencies, and a reflection of the uncertainties and vacillations of public opinion.<sup>75</sup>

Retrospection of a rather different kind was encouraged by the BBC, which asked her in 1970 to give an hour long broadcast talk in the series by well-known people called 'The Time of My Life'.<sup>76</sup> Margery chose to talk about her sojourn in Somaliland. This was such a success that the following year she gave four more talks entitled 'Travelling on Trust', recounting her experiences as a Rhodes travelling fellow.<sup>77</sup> She was thus further encouraged to fulfil her original intention of editing her own travel diaries for publication. The resulting four volumes are thought-provoking as well as entertaining.<sup>78</sup>

In Margery Perham courage in expressing and defending her views was linked to an equally courageous honesty in admitting when she found that they had been wrong. At the age of 73 she embarked on her last African adventure. General Gowon invited her to visit Nigeria during the Biafran War to see the situation for herself, because he considered her publicly stated views on the war there, based on the very persuasive Biafran propaganda, to be mistaken and damaging to his cause.<sup>79</sup> Many eminent friends from the former Colonial Service also criticised her for holding such views. While there she carried out a formidable programme of interviews with members of the government, the army, the press, and other powerful people, including the Biafran leader Colonel Ojukwu. After visiting the battle lines she strove to bring the conflict to an end by making an appeal over the radio to both sides to cease fighting for the people's sake. On her return to Britain, though exhausted, she recanted her former, published views even more publicly in special television and radio broadcasts and, as always, in a letter to *The Times*.<sup>80</sup>

From 1939, when she was awarded the silver medal of the Royal African Society, Margery received a number of prestigious medals, honorary fellowships and honorary degrees from several universities, though she steadfastly refused to be nominated for election to the principalship of any college in Oxford or Cambridge.<sup>81</sup> Her major literary

<sup>75</sup> See above, n. 70.

<sup>76</sup> PP 352.

<sup>77</sup> PP 353.

<sup>78</sup> See the works cited at n. 26 above.

<sup>79</sup> PP 412–25.

<sup>80</sup> PP 412–13. Margery Perham, 'Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War, *International Affairs*, 26, No. 2 (1970).

<sup>81</sup> For details see the chronology of Margery Perham's life prefacing the catalogue of her papers.

work, the biography of Lugard, combined with the growth of colonial studies in the English speaking universities which she had helped inspire, had given rise to increasing appreciation of her in academic circles. As a consequence she was elected to a fellowship of the British Academy in 1961. Just before she retired in 1963, her colleagues in Nuffield College encouraged her to supplicate for the degree of D.Litt. from her own university. Though she was always surprised and delighted to be awarded a medal or an honorary degree by another university, this distinction was the one that pleased her most because she felt that over long years of service she had earned it. She had hardly become accustomed to being addressed as Dr Perham when, in 1965, her title changed on being appointed by the Queen a Dame Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George, thus joining so many of her gubernatorial friends.

Honours of course brought duties. Margery was very much in demand to speak to and take the chair at all kinds of meetings, including acting as first president of the African Studies Association in the United Kingdom. One duty she embraced and enjoyed was presiding over the amalgamation of the Universities Mission to Central Africa with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, of which her uncle had been a missionary among the Sea Dyaks.<sup>82</sup>

Such extramural activities, as well as her teaching of young colonial probationers, had an immediate impact, but the enduring value of Margery Perham's work lies in her writings. They provide not only an analysis of the development of thought on British colonial policy but also help us share a contemporary understanding of the historical events that shaped it. In them she invariably took the moral approach to the responsibilities of British colonial rule. From the mid-1930s she maintained that the administrative services should be merely 'the temporary scaffolding round the growing structure of native self-government'.<sup>83</sup> The administration's duty was not to impose an African version of itself as its successor but, until full independence was achieved, to help that structure develop in a way that was natural and acceptable to the indigenous peoples. Even then she foresaw 'unexpected developments and . . . an unexpected rate of development'. Over the next three decades her views were honed by every major colonial event, from the fall of Singapore to the independence celebrations in Nigeria, Somaliland, and Kenya at which she was an official guest. Whenever she felt she had something

<sup>82</sup> See his annual reports from 1870 to the Society, RHL USPG E26–30 *passim*.

<sup>83</sup> *Native Administration in Nigeria* (1937), pp. 361–2.

based on her own experience to contribute to a debate she went into print, knowing that she would not always be right but enjoying the stimulus of a good argument. However, in her last years, when newly independent nations began to run into trouble, she grieved that there had never been enough time to reach the stage when the scaffolding could be removed with unassailable safety.

Ever since the mid 1940s Ethel had lived with Margery and managed her domestic affairs in Oxford and at her country retreat on the Berkshire Downs. When Ethel began to lose her memory her younger sister had to take care of her instead, while her own health deteriorated. Working on her East African history became increasingly difficult and so it was eventually relinquished, together with her membership of committees and honorary positions in learned bodies. Even the chairmanship of the Colonial Records Project which she had instigated had to be relinquished. It had been very dear to her because its search and conservation programme made primary sources available to wave after wave of investigators of colonial affairs. Some time after Ethel moved into a nursing-home near Wantage Margery's memory, too, became confused and she entered a residential home at Burcot, not far from Oxford. There she died on 19 February, 1982, and was honoured by memorial services on 1 March in Nuffield College and on 1 May in the University Church, St Mary's. In 1985 the Bishop of Oxford dedicated a plaque to her memory placed on the wall of Nuffield College Chapel which she had helped design and in which she had regularly worshipped.

PATRICIA PUGH

*(Formerly) Oxford Colonial Records Project*



