Margery Spring Rice
Pioneer of Women’s Health in the Early Twentieth Century
1. Cherished daughter (1887–1907)

The writer Naomi Mitchison, in a short biography of the pioneer doctor Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, suggests a steam roller as a symbol for the Garrett family.¹ This is apt, not only because the Garretts had been making agricultural machinery for generations, but also because some individual Garretts — especially the women — possessed the capacity to drive doggedly over obstacles in pursuit of their goals. When the third child of Elizabeth’s brother Sam was born in 1887, a welcome daughter after two sons, Elizabeth arrived to meet the new baby, promptly offered the parents five hundred pounds for her and was astonished to have her offer refused.² The baby was Margery, the subject of this book, and although Elizabeth did not succeed in adopting her, she did become Margery’s godmother. One might imagine the story as a fairy tale in which this steamroller quality is the gift bestowed by the godmother: Margery’s life certainly demonstrated that she too possessed it, and it was a gift that would make her both fierce enemies and loyal friends.

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I only have to add, that she was very happy as a child, but as I only write this when she was the age of 14, I cannot say what her future may be, but she has all prospects of an extremely happy life, in the company of an exceptionally good Father, & an exceptionally good Mother, & exceptionally good brothers, & an exceptionally good home.³

² Ibid., p. 190. This story was also related to the author by Margery herself. At the time of Margery’s birth, Elizabeth was fifty-one, and her own children were ten and thirteen. The children of her sister Louisa (always known as Louie), whom she had cared for after Louie’s premature death from appendicitis in 1867, were adults.
³ The majority of archival material throughout this book is drawn from the private collections of the Garrett Family Papers and the Jones Family Papers, unless otherwise specified.

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These are the final words of the introduction to the diary kept by Margery Garrett over the period 1901–1905, which she had received as a fourteenth birthday present in June, 1901. The diary largely covers her journeys to Italy and Scotland, while her introduction gives us an indication of how she saw her life in 1901, and how she was already beginning to visualise herself as a person with standing in a wider world.

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Margery was born into a comfortably well-off, but by no means conventional, middle class household. Her father Sam, who had studied classics at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, was a solicitor in London (a first-generation professional whose father Newson Garrett came from very humble origins) while her mother Clara had been a teacher before marriage.⁴ We do not know how Sam and Clara had met, but it is likely to have been through their siblings’ links with the women’s suffrage movement, in which three of Sam’s sisters and Clara’s sister, Kate, were deeply involved. It is also possible that Kate, a decorative artist, had an artistic connection with Sam’s sister Agnes and her cousin Rhoda Garrett, who ran an interior design business together. In 1882, Sam and Clara were married in the village of Sullington, Sussex, about twelve miles from Rustington, where Rhoda and Agnes used to take their holidays.

Although their daughter’s name is stated as Margaret Lois on her birth certificate, in her childhood her family addressed their letters to ‘Marjorie’. In fact, it seems that she never liked either of these versions of her name and, over the course of her life, used many other variants and nicknames, most frequently ‘Margery’. She had two older brothers, Douglas (born 1883) and Harry (1885), and two younger ones, Ronald (1888) and Geoffrey (1891). In 1897, they were joined by Clara’s orphaned nephew, Brian, who came between Ronald and Geoffrey in age. The house they lived in during Margery’s childhood⁵ — 13 Nottingham

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⁴ In the 1881 census, before her marriage, Clara is described as a visitor in the family of Arthur and Emmeline Cohen in Kensington; her occupation is given as ‘teacher’, with ‘school’ added in another hand. There were small children in this family, and perhaps she was teaching them? The nickname by which she was known to her nieces and nephews, ‘Da’, is a shortened version of ‘darling’. Margery’s explanation for this was that it was what Clara’s pupils had called her, but it had been shortened to ‘Da’ as ‘darling’ was not thought appropriate.

⁵ The family had previously lived at 59a Abbey Road, Marylebone, where Douglas and Harry had been born.
Place, Marylebone — still stands, a five-storey Victorian end-of-terrace house that provided plenty of room for servants and family. The 1901 census states that they had a cook and five maids. At the time of the previous census, in 1891, Clara was staying in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, in Gower House⁶ with a nurse and three maids, while Sam remained at home in London with two more servants. Sam and Clara spent a good deal of time in Suffolk, where Clara’s passion for gardening had space to flourish⁷ and Sam could indulge his penchant for chopping down and replanting trees. Clara’s sister Grace Mallock, widowed in 1896, spent a lot of time with her sister and brother-in-law and was involved with the upbringing of her niece and nephews.

Fig. 1. 13 Nottingham Place, Marylebone, London. Photograph: the author (2015).

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⁶ There is a mystery here. The census lists the house as ‘5 River View, Station Road’: what is now Park Road (where Gower House is) was originally called Station Road, but I can find no other trace of anything called River View; Gower House is listed in *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Suffolk, 1891–92* (Sheffield: William White Ltd., 1891–1892), p. 101, as being the home of Samuel Garrett.

⁷ There is a story that she habitually wore a pith helmet for gardening — perhaps a relic from the days of her childhood in India, where she had been born — but in an extant portrait of her by Thomas Dugdale she is wearing an ordinary straw gardening hat.
Though they were very different in temperament, both Sam and Clara had wide cultural and social interests and there were lively discussions on politics, music, art and literature among parents and children. Sam was dearly loved in his wider family for his sweet nature: his sister Millicent Fawcett wrote of him in her memoirs:

His was a remarkable character, for he possessed a wonderful combination of qualities: first-rate brain-power, an absolutely selfless nature, a keen appreciation of public duty, and added to all these a strong sense of humour, which made me save up every amusing incident I met with in order that I might tell him and hear his explosion of hearty laughter.¹⁸

When he died, his obituary in The Law Society’s Gazette recorded that his colleagues found him the kindest of friends, one of whose ‘most pleasant characteristics to those who knew him well was a certain gruffness of manner and speech which was almost ludically contradicted by a benevolent twinkle in his eyes’.²⁹ Clara too had a strong character unlike that of a submissive Victorian wife, and as Margery grew older, there were clashes of will and of opinion between mother and daughter, partly because they were too alike, and partly because Clara was more conservative than Margery. It is clear that from an early age, Margery was unafraid to differ from her parents and brothers in her views and to express herself forcefully. However, it was thanks to Clara that Margery developed her love of literature, music and, later in life, gardening too. Clara was also — as Margery was later — extremely hospitable and loved gathering friends and family around her. From both her parents, Margery inherited a strong social conscience which was to find outlets in varying ways throughout her life.

Both Sam and Clara, along with other members of the Garrett family, especially Sam’s sisters Elizabeth and Millicent, were strong advocates of rights for women. Sam, who rose to be president of the Law Society, was probably among the first to admit women as articled clerks — a big leap towards opening the profession to women. Progress had been painfully slow: in 1859, a law stationers’ business was set up in Lincoln’s Inn, London, to train women in legal copying, but it was not until nearly twenty years later that Janet Wood became the first woman to complete a law degree, at Girton College, Cambridge. Wood did not actually

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²⁹ ‘The Late Mr. Samuel Garrett’, *The Law Society’s Gazette* (May, 1923), 20, p. 108.
receive a degree because women could not do so at that date. In the same year of 1878, however, University College London began to admit women to law degree courses on the same basis as men. In the following year, Eliza Orme applied to take the Law Society’s examinations to become a solicitor, but was refused. In 1913, four women, aspiring to become barristers, took legal action to try to get the Law Society to admit them to its examinations. Although they were also refused, times were beginning to change. At a meeting of the Law Society in August 1918, Sam, in his role as president, said:

I ask every member of the profession to consider this matter seriously, and to ask whether, considering the spirit of the times towards the status of women in the industrial world, considering the work women have done in connection with the war, considering the political rights women have obtained,\(^\text{10}\) it is possible any longer to maintain an opposition to their entrance into a profession in which they are already employed as clerks, and of their fitness to practise which no thoughtful person would venture now to express a doubt.\(^\text{11}\)

In March the following year, at a special general meeting of the Society, Sam moved ‘That in view of the present economic and political position of women, it is in the opinion of this meeting expedient that the existing obstacles to their entry into the legal profession should be removed; and the Council is requested to report this opinion to the Lord Chancellor’.\(^\text{12}\) The motion was passed by fifty votes to thirty-three; at the end of that year, Parliament passed the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act.

Margery had a happy childhood within her close and loving family. As was usual in families of that time and class, the boys were sent to boarding school quite early, first to Horton, a preparatory school near Biggleswade (where some of their cousins also went), and then to Rugby, which sent a large proportion of its students into the army and where (as in many public schools of the time) there was a heavy emphasis on religious and moral education.\(^\text{13}\) Many letters from her brothers to

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\(^\text{10}\) The Representation of the People Act, giving some women the vote, had been passed in February 1918.

\(^\text{11}\) The Law Society Gazette, ‘Memory Lane’, Obiter (6 August 2018), https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/obiter/memory-lane-6-august-2018/5067167.article

\(^\text{12}\) The Law Society Gazette, ‘Memory Lane’, Obiter (30 April 2009), https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/obiter/memory-lane/50540.article

\(^\text{13}\) Sam had also been educated at Rugby. His father, Newson, did not find the written word easy: a couple of letters from him to the headmaster of Rugby about Sam’s
Margery, written from school, survive: they are mostly unremarkable, but convey their closeness to their sister, whom they tease, amuse and, in the case of Douglas and Harry, advise. Throughout his life, Douglas was to remain Margery’s trusted advisor through the most difficult and stressful times, even if his views — always more conventional than hers — sometimes enraged her. Her brothers’ letters are full of their accounts of school life: cycle rides, sporting events (in Harry’s case), lines having to be written for offences that nobody had owned up to, horse-riding, carpentry, going to plays and concerts and agonising about what they were to buy each other for birthday presents. Harry, who was eventually to choose a career as an artist, also wrote a lot about his drawings and discussed with Margery her own aspirations in the artistic line.

Holidays were spent either at Gower House (built by Newson Garrett), in Aldeburgh, on the Suffolk coast, where the boys sailed, cycled and built a wigwam in the garden, or with their cousins the Gibb family in Scarborough in Yorkshire. Dorothea Gibb (always known as ‘Aunt Theo’) was Sam’s niece. Though only eleven years younger than him, she was the daughter of his oldest sister Louisa. Theo and her husband had five children roughly similar in age to Sam’s children. One of them was Roger, who remained a lifelong friend of Margery’s. The two families were close, and Aunt Theo was one of Margery’s godmothers (the other being her aunt, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson). Holidays together often involved writing and performing plays: for Christmas 1903, in Scarborough, Clara wrote a play in blank verse for the two families to act. Cycling, in London as well as in Aldeburgh, was enthusiastically enjoyed by parents as well as children. In 1897, Sam wrote to Margery, who was spending three months in Scarborough with the Gibbs, ‘Mother is becoming quite a scorcher & goes quite easily 8 miles an hour now’;¹⁴ he went on to report that she had had a fall from her bicycle, but had suffered nothing more than a bruise. Gwen Raverat, a near contemporary of Margery’s, has given a delightful description of her family’s participation in the ‘cycling craze’ in Cambridge: her mother too suffered some quite

¹⁴ Sam Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 6 June 1897.
severe tumbles from her bicycle.\textsuperscript{15} It is worth remembering that in that same year of 1897, male Cambridge undergraduates hung an effigy of a woman on a bicycle, dressed in ‘rational’ clothing, out of a window in order to ridicule the academic success of Margery’s cousin Philippa Fawcett.\textsuperscript{16} So-called rational dress, worn by women when they rode bicycles, was in itself the subject of ridicule for some: unfortunately, we have no photograph of Clara on a bicycle and it is not known what she wore. On another occasion, Sam wrote that he and Ronald had cycled six times round the inner circle of Regent’s Park. Sam and Clara were not unusual for their time and class in believing in the importance of the outdoors, holidays and exercise, but Clara had a particularly passionate belief in the healthy properties of fresh air.

Every Christmas, the family carried out a ritual of taking presents to the crew of the Shipwash light-ship in the North Sea off Harwich, which Sam, as a keen amateur sailor, must have greatly enjoyed. The year before her death, Margery recalled the event, and the ceremony of it:

I am sitting, on a grey October evening at dusk in my flat in Aldeburgh; looking out onto the Crag Path [the promenade along the sea front], and beyond, to the sea. As always, if one watches carefully the light from the Lightship keeps up its constant flash and my memory jumps back 75 years or so to the time when my father Samuel Garrett and my four brothers packed a large hamper full of Christmas foods and drinks (innocuous!) and more tangible presents for the crew of the ‘Shipwash’[…] on their bank.

It is pitch dark now over the sea already, and indeed over Aldeburgh itself. The welcome which we received when we reached the Shipwash is indescribable for those men stay at their posts in all weathers to keep the trained and untrained mariners guided and safe. It was an annual celebration which we […] never failed to keep. The joy with which we climbed aboard the ship, and the ceremony of unpacking the gifts […] was an adventure which came first in our Christmas celebrations.\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{16} Philippa, daughter of Sam’s sister Millicent, was ranked above the Senior Wrangler (i.e. the student scoring the highest marks in the final mathematics degree exams at Cambridge), but could not be given the title of Senior Wrangler herself because she was a woman.

\textsuperscript{17} Margery Spring Rice, fragmentary memoirs, recorded by Sam Garrett-Jones, October/November 1969, transcribed 12 January 2006 by Sam Garrett-Jones.
Margery’s roots in Aldeburgh and the surrounding area went deep; her Garrett inheritance was a matter of interest and pride to her all her life. There had been Garretts in that part of the world at least since the seventeenth century and possibly the sixteenth, but it was two brothers (Margery’s grandfather Newson and his older brother Richard) in the early nineteenth who wrote their name indelibly on to the Suffolk map. Richard (born 1807, the sixth Richard Garrett in the family) took over the agricultural engineering firm in Leiston that his grandfather had inherited from his father-in-law, and hugely expanded it. He and Newson (born 1812) married sisters, Elizabeth and Louisa Dunnell. The brothers often came into conflict, and though their wives did their utmost to keep the peace, there were long periods of estrangement between their families. One of the many triggers of conflict was the proposal of marriage by Richard’s son Richard to Newson’s daughter Louisa, which she turned down. According to Margery, it was only the losses on the two sides of the family in World War I, more than twenty years after Newson’s death, that finally healed the breach. Newson’s daughter Millicent wrote in her memoirs that her father’s temperament was ‘sanguine, generous, daring, impulsive, and impatient, and I am afraid I must add, quarrelsome’. Apart from his brother, another person Newson regularly quarrelled with was the vicar of Aldeburgh, as a result of which, on some Sundays, his family was to be found worshipping at the dissenting chapel or at the nearby village of Snape instead of in Aldeburgh church. Sam was baptised in Snape church during one of these periods.

When Richard, as expected, took over the family engineering works in 1826, Newson left for London and began his career managing a pawnbroker’s shop belonging to John Dunnell, his brother’s and later his own father-in-law, in Whitechapel. In the early 1840s, however, after the death of their father, Newson brought his family back to Aldeburgh

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18 This business now has an afterlife as the Long Shop Museum.
19 In biological terms, this would have been a very unwise marriage as the prospective couple were first cousins twice over.
20 Margery Spring Rice, fragmentary memoirs, recorded 24 November 1968 by Sam Garrett-Jones, transcribed 12 January 2006 by Sam Garrett-Jones.
22 He also worked in the Beehive Inn in Crawford St, Marylebone, owned by John Dunnell; Newson and Louisa were married in St Marylebone parish church in 1834. The Dunnell family, like the Garretts, came from Suffolk.
Fig. 2. Newson Garrett, by John Pettie (1886). Courtesy of Hew Stevenson. Photograph: Hew Stevenson (c. 2015).

and set about building up a business as a merchant, ship-owner and maltster. Having bought a coal and corn warehouse at Snape Bridge from a Mr Fennell, he began to malt barley there for the brewery trade, hugely extending his business over the next few decades. He was responsible for the construction of the beautiful range of buildings that now constitute the Snape Maltings cultural centre and provide the Aldeburgh Festival with its home; he managed ships that sailed up and down the east coast; he founded his own brickworks; and was instrumental in persuading Great Eastern Railway to build a branch railway line from Campsea Ashe to Snape. In Aldeburgh, he built a row of houses for his sons and daughters; converted the town’s reading room into the Jubilee Hall at his own expense (it is still in use as a concert hall and theatre); served as mayor of Aldeburgh four times; and, having converted from Conservatism, was active as a Liberal in local politics. Proud of the town on which he had such a strong influence physically, economically and socially, he was capable of acting with extremely imperiousness. In the 1860s, he decided that he was the only person with the right to take a horse and carriage along the Crag Path and physically prevented at least one visitor from doing so. More benignly, when he was planning to build the Maltings, he marked out its line of frontage in the ground with his stick, but no-one dared to point out to him that there was a slight curve on it — a curve that in fact contributes to its beauty.

Newson and Louisa had eleven children, of whom ten survived to adulthood. His second child, Elizabeth (later Garrett Anderson), was the first woman in England to qualify openly as a doctor. After his initial opposition to her ambitions, Newson became her fiercest advocate and defender; Louisa, having at first been horrified at the idea, later admitted that Newson was right and came to enjoy her daughter’s fame and success. Their seventh child, Agnes, was another

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23 A tiny village, later immortalised by a line in the libretto of Benjamin Britten’s comic opera Albert Herring.

24 When the building was re-opened after renovations in July 1931, Clara Garrett (by then a widow) did the honours (Amanda Davies, ‘A Room Worthy of the Town’: A History of Aldeburgh Jubilee Hall (Leiston: Leiston Press, 2016), p. 18).

25 Then, and until the 1950s, the Crag Path was surfaced with crag and was a distinctive and attractive orange colour. It was tarmacked in the fifties.

26 The first to do so, in the guise of a man, was Margaret Bulkley, alias James Barry. Another Englishwoman, Elizabeth Blackwell, qualified in the US in 1849 and subsequently practised on both sides of the Atlantic. A lecture by Blackwell, and a meeting of the two women, inspired Elizabeth Garrett’s decision to become a doctor.
innovator, who went on to set up an interior design business with her cousin Rhoda Garrett. Their eighth child, Millicent (later Fawcett), spent her life fighting the cause of women’s suffrage. Their ninth child was Margery’s father Sam. The world was changing for women and Margery’s family were instrumental in effecting some of that change.

The legal position of women improved in various ways in the late nineteenth century with the Married Women’s Property Acts (1870 and 1882) and changes in child custody laws, even though, in terms of sexual relationships, women remained subservient to their husbands.

New opportunities in education were slowly opening up and women were beginning to contribute to political life in local government. Elizabeth, amply endowed with the family characteristics of stamina and determination, was prising open the medical profession for women at a time when many other professions were far behind.

In 1887, the year of Margery’s birth, the ownership of the land designated for the building of the Jubilee Hall was put into a trust overseen by a Board of Trustees, among whom were Newson and several other members of the Garrett family. It was stipulated that the Board should always include two women, and Elizabeth was one of the first two. It is likely that Newson and Elizabeth were both instrumental in ensuring that women would always be represented.27

Elizabeth, fourteen years older than Sam, seems to have acted as his third parent. It was she who wrote to the headmaster of Rugby, Dr Temple, about Sam’s admission to the school; in fact, she unashamedly forged Newson’s signature on the letter: ‘I thought it did not matter forging the signature as mine is a hand which might be a man’s’. Although Newson has sometimes been described as being illiterate, he had been to school and could read and write, but his relationship with the written word was an uneasy one and he often used Louisa as his amanuensis. According to Elizabeth, he ‘had always wished to have a scholarly son’ and he thought it important that his daughters should get a decent education — another difference between him and his brother Richard. Elizabeth, demonstrating a remarkable attitude for the time, showed her concern for Sam’s emotional well-being at school by making sure that he had a bedroom of his own: she thought this would allow him to ‘escape the worst chances of harm in public school life’. She had also taken the trouble to consult a cousin, an old boy of Rugby, who told her that there was ‘not much of what is generally called “bullying”’ in the school.

In 1870, when Sam was a twenty-year-old undergraduate, Elizabeth took him and their sister Josephine, who was still a teenager at the time, for a short ‘holiday’ to see the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian War — in the course of which they spent some hours distributing chocolate, tobacco, water and apples to wounded soldiers. This is an extraordinary choice of destination and the adventure must surely have had an influence on Sam when he became a parent himself. It illustrates the level of political consciousness in the Garrett family as well as the character of their patriotism: in Millicent’s memoirs, she recalls walking on Aldeburgh beach as a small child with her father while he tried (unsuccessfully) to persuade local fishermen to enlist to fight in Crimea. When Sebastopol fell in 1855, he strode into the room where his family were having breakfast to issue the command: ‘[h]eads up and shoulders down; Sebastopol is taken’. Towards the end of the Boer War, Millicent,

28 Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, letter to Louisa and Newson Garrett, 5 January 1865.
31 Fawcett, What I Remember, p. 10.
by that time a distinguished public figure although the achievement of women’s suffrage was still years away, was to head a delegation to look into conditions in the concentration camps in South Africa.

Clara came from a military background, socially very different from Sam’s though alike in terms of their broad outlook on the world. She was the daughter of Nathaniel Henry Thornbury (1806–1881), a colonel in the 4th Bombay Native Infantry and secretary to the Bombay Military Board (part of the East India Company’s Bombay Presidency Army), and his third wife, Louisa Jane Kelly. Clara herself was born in India. They were very much a family of the Empire: Clara’s brother, Edward Barton Thornbury, worked as a railway surveyor in South Africa in the 1870s and eventually in Australia. Nathaniel and Louisa are recorded as having lived in Kent at the time of the 1871 census, as was Nathaniel in 1881 after Louisa’s death in 1879. Another of Nathaniel’s sons, Frank, also worked in South Africa — in the mines and, at various times, as a ship’s mate. In 1881, Nathaniel sailed for Sydney with Edward Barton’s family but died en route, so Margery never knew either of her maternal grandparents. Clara’s sister Grace, a nurse, played a significant part in Sam’s family; in her forties, she had married a much older man (a retired captain from the Madras Native Infantry) but was widowed in 1896 after only four years of marriage. Her sister Kate was active in both the suffrage and the arts and crafts movements, which linked her in multiple ways with Margery’s Garrett aunts. Clara’s brother Bruce and his wife Helen both died in Aldeburgh in the 1890s, leaving their young son, Brian, to be cared for by Sam and Clara.

Margery did know her paternal grandparents. Although Newson died shortly before her sixth birthday, he was nevertheless a towering figure in her life, both in terms of the influence of his personality on his family and also because of the fundamental role he played in making the Aldeburgh of her childhood the place that it was.

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32 His diaries are in the State Library of New South Wales.
34 Louisa died ten years later.
Aldeburgh was a town of a few thousand people (which had lost its MP in 1832), sited on a low coastal strip on the eastern side of England and on the hill behind. The river Alde flows down from its source in the north of Suffolk, through Snape to Aldeburgh, and then makes a right-angle turn south to run parallel to the sea for several miles more, past Orford, to its mouth at Shingle Street — thus creating a long shingle spit. The distance between the sea and the river at Slaughden, the southern-end of the town of Aldeburgh, is only a matter of yards and one of Newson’s many projects — one that was never carried out, though it has resurfaced from time to time since Newson’s day — was the cutting of a channel between river and sea to enhance the port of Aldeburgh. The number of pilots vastly increased under his influence and the coastguard and lifeboat services were expanded and improved. Newson himself was a man of great bravery, who, for example, joined the human chain bringing ashore crew members from a Swedish ship after a terrible storm in November 1855 which left seventeen ships wrecked off Aldeburgh. He obtained a long lease on thirty-five acres of land belonging to Aldeburgh Corporation and built a row of houses on Park Road on the western side of the town, of which Gower House (now called Garrett House) is one. He was also a moving force behind the renovation of the disused Elizabethan Moot Hall. In addition to his service as mayor of Aldeburgh, in 1889, he was the first Aldeburgh representative on the County Council. It has been said that the changes that took place in the town between 1840 and 1855 are ‘intelligible only in terms of Garrett’s impulsive energy’. This is not to say that Aldeburgh was a place without culture: Millicent’s memoirs record how a shipbuilder from the Tyne, Percy Metcalf, who came to build ships for Newson at Snape, brought his passion for music to the town (especially Bach, Handel and, above all, Mozart), ‘open[ing] a new world of music’ for Newson’s family.

Of course, Aldeburgh was a small-town society but it is possible that, for this very reason, Margery may have met a wider social range there than she did in London — the fishermen on the beach, for example.

35 The lifeboatman who relieved Newson in the chain that night, George Cable, was drowned there; Louisa regarded him as having saved Newson’s life.
37 Fawcett, *What I Remember*, p. 27.
Besides, she had another wider perspective on the world through the activities and careers of her aunts: Elizabeth had been qualified as a doctor for more than twenty years when Margery was born, and Agnes and Rhoda Garrett had launched their decorating business in the mid-1870s. For Millicent, who was to devote her life single-mindedly to the cause of women’s suffrage (strictly as a suffragist, never endorsing the violent methods of the suffragettes), there were still three decades of fighting before any women were to get the vote. From her earliest years, Margery was conscious of what women could do, what needed to be done and what her extended family might expect of her.

For both Sam and Clara, the education as well as the schooling of their daughter was as important a matter as that of their sons. Clara, who had been a teacher before her marriage, was a well-educated and cultured woman, who passed on her love of literature and theatre in particular to her daughter. We know that Margery saw Shakespeare, but it would be interesting to know whether she also saw Shaw — many of whose

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38 Several of Margery’s grandchildren remember having the difference between suffragists and suffragettes impressed on them from an early age. However, Millicent, at the end of her career, recognised that the suffragette movement had played its part in achieving the aim.
plays were first performed in the first decade of the twentieth century. Nor do we know anything about what she read: Hardy perhaps? H. G. Wells? Arnold Bennett? Titles by all of these were certainly on her bookshelves later in her life. For her formal education, Margery was sent first to a nursery in Baker Street, following which she did her lessons in a small private class taught by two women — Constance Crommelin, who later married the poet John Masefield, and Isabel Fry, who came from one of the big Quaker families and was a sister of the artist and critic Roger Fry. Among Margery’s papers is the manuscript of a sonnet (whether by herself or one of her fellow students is unclear) addressed to Miss Crommelin, beginning: ‘O sleepy one! O thou great drowsy one!’ and carrying on in the same vein, which hardly suggests an energetic teacher. Though it was clearly not serious, one would like to know whether Miss Crommelin was allowed to see it! Later in life, Margery referred to both Fry and Crommelin as remarkable women. Isabel Fry was an innovative and admired teacher who went on to found the progressive Farmhouse School at Mayortorne near Wendover, Buckinghamshire, in 1917. In around 1902, Margery was sent to a girls’ school in Stratford run by a Mrs Stuart, which gave her the opportunity of regularly seeing plays performed there. Music, too, was a very important part of her education: she became a competent pianist and began to learn the violin at some stage, though she struggled with this and did not continue into adulthood. As a young woman, she also took singing lessons and even considered, at one point in time, a professional career as a singer.

At a period when the economic centre of British life was shifting from the northern industrial cities to London, from manufacturing towards financial services, the Garrett family in Nottingham Place took full advantage of the cultural hub that London was becoming. It was easier than ever to get around the city as well as to get out into the country — the construction of the underground had begun with the Metropolitan Line in the 1860s and, by 1890, all the rail termini had been built. Although horse-drawn buses continued in service up until World War I, there were cars and petrol-engine cabs and buses running from the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{39}

As Margery entered her teenage years, the Victorian age was coming to an end: when Victoria died in 1901, the thirteen-year-old Margery watched the funeral procession;\textsuperscript{40} she also had permission from Mrs Stuart to visit her family in London for the coronation of Edward VII. Sam had acquired tickets for himself and his son Ronald to watch the celebratory naval review at Portsmouth from a boat belonging to the ship-owner Donald Currie; however, there is no evidence as to whether they actually went since the coronation and accompanying celebrations were postponed, owing to the king’s ill-health. It was at this time, on 9 June 1902, that Sam wrote to Margery:

My dear little girl / Alas I shall not be able so to call you much longer. To think that you are 15 tomorrow & that in 2 or 3 years you will be in long frocks & considering yourself a young lady & expecting to be treated as such! […] I hope my dear daughter that as you get older you will feel your life fuller & more full of interest & occupation & therefore happier, happy though your childhood I hope & believe, has been.

\textsuperscript{40} The author remembers as a child reading Margery’s account of this, but it is not among the extant papers.
Part of the transition from girlhood to young womanhood involved travel — regarded by Sam and Clara as both enjoyable and educational. On Clara’s part, this may have stemmed partly from the fact that she had been born in India; moreover, several members of the Garrett and Thornbury families lived and worked in Australia and South Africa. Margery used the diary given to her for her fourteenth birthday to record trips to Italy in the autumns of 1902 and 1903, and one to Scotland in 1905. The journeys were largely made by train, for which the tea basket, refilled wherever possible, was their most indispensable piece of luggage. While Margery was thrilled by the art and scenery of Italy, she also comments on more down-to-earth aspects of their trips. In Venice (which they were lucky enough to see in the period when St Mark’s square had no campanile),41 a Miss Percy attached herself to them and they were torn between accepting that she was lonely and being irritated by her.42 They watched glassblowing and mosaic-making, took a steamer across to the Lido and walked for a mile or so along the seashore; one evening, they heard a band in the Piazza playing Beethoven and Wagner. As well as sightseeing, they were reading John Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice* and George Eliot’s *Romola*, presumably aloud to one another. In Siena, the Belle Arti gallery was closed, ‘but [they] got the man to let [them] in’. In Verona, Sam lost his wallet and went through the necessary bureaucratic procedures at the police station, to no avail. In November that year, back at school, Margery received a letter from her father thanking her for a pocket book she had sent him as a replacement for ‘the one which is now reposing in the pocket of some thief at Milan [sic]’.43

In September 1903, Margery wrote in the diary: ‘You didn’t think that I should use you again this year […] for the same purpose as last, did you?’ This time they visited different Italian cities, including Assisi and Rome. In Assisi, Clara and Sam were particularly intrigued by some of the plants growing in old walls and collected some seeds to take home. However, the splendours of Rome were too much for Margery’s powers of description and, after a few entries, the account of this trip ends in mid-sentence: ‘In the afternoon we’.

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41 It fell down in 1902 and was not rebuilt until 1912.
42 Had they been a few years later, they might have thought of Miss Lavish in E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View* (first published 1908) and wondered whether she was putting them in a novel.
43 Sam Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 20 November 1902.
In 1905, she resumed: ‘What a long time it seems since I have written in this dear old diary. But out it comes again, when Father, Mother & I go touring’. The year before, Clara and Sam had gone to Greece but Margery had not shared that trip with them. This year, they went first to Glenbuchat in Aberdeenshire, as guests of their friends Mr and Mrs Barclay; Margery enjoyed herself with energetic activities — walking, horse-riding and dancing (sustained by whisky toddy and sandwiches). On one walk, Mr Barclay had to carry Margery across the Water of Buchat: ‘Poor man, I shd think he regretted the undertaking’. Leaving the Barclays’ estate, they went on to Braemar. Sam and Margery set off for a walk along the Dee (she gives the impression that Clara was a less keen walker, though she was a fresh air enthusiast) and typically ignored a ‘strictly private’ sign. When an old man warned them to turn back, Sam dismissed him, and they kept going even when the old man tried to physically stop them, fording a burn when he blocked their path across a bridge. Eventually they met someone else who explained that the road they were on led into the Duke of Fife’s deer forests and they must retrace their steps. Perhaps this experience was the genesis of Margery’s fierce fight to protect public footpaths in East Suffolk later in her life.

In the autumn of 1903, returning from Italy, her parents left Margery with a Madame Dussan in Paris for a few months. There were several English girls there so it was difficult to practise speaking French as Clara urged her to do: the latter thought it a disgrace to travel without trying to express oneself in the language of the country and went as far as to write parts of her own letters to Margery in French. Margery must have learnt some French, as she achieved the ‘brevet supérieur’ of the Alliance française but, in any case, Madame wrote to Clara that her daughter was working hard. Margery also enjoyed musical opportunities, such as

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44 Another echo of A Room with a View, where the Miss Alans daringly take off for Greece. The country was probably of particular interest to Sam, who had studied Classics.

45 Margery was very overweight in later life, but photographs of her as a young woman show a slimmer girl.

46 On 10 June 1903, when Clara had a bad cold, Sam wrote to Margery that her mother was ‘a bad patient & insists on sitting & sleeping in the same draughts in wh. she delights when in health’. Margery inherited this attitude of Clara’s.

47 The term ‘brevet supérieure’ (higher certificate’) covers a multitude of sins, and it is impossible to be certain of the standard required in this case.
seeing Richard Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* and visiting the sights of the city, particularly the Père Lachaise cemetery. ‘This hankering after sarcophagi seems in your blood as well as fathers’, wrote Clara, who hated both Père Lachaise and the Protestant cemetery in Rome, only prepared to like monuments that deserved to be regarded as works of art in their own right.  

As Easter 1904 approached, Margery was still in Paris and Geoffrey had joined her there. Clara wrote that she might come out for a visit: ‘I don’t think that will be much of an interruption to your Frenchification’.  

However, the visit did not happen as Clara caught the flu and was ill enough to cause her family serious anxiety. Aunt Grace went to Aldeburgh to look after her, and Sam (having consulted his sister Elizabeth) rushed from London to Aldeburgh to be with her. However, Clara had a strong constitution and recovered, even though it evidently took her some weeks before she was fully herself again.

In politics, the family was liberal and Margery became a committed and active Liberal Party member in her early adult life. But while she was still living at home, she seems to have enjoyed politically standing up to the rest of her family. In November 1907, her brother Ronald wrote to her: ‘I am really very sorry to hear that you have turned socialist; my only consolation is that the chances are 10 to 1 that you don’t know what you are talking about’.  

His view was that the possibility of implementing socialism depended on the unlikely condition that humans learnt to solve disputes without fighting: although Margery’s socialism did not last long, a commitment to solving disputes without violence was to play an important part in her life.

It is difficult to gauge Sam and Clara’s attitude to religion. Sam’s mother Louisa was deeply, evangelically religious and Newson went along with the outward observances of the Anglican church. However, according to Newson’s daughter, Millicent, he was apt to deliberately turn over two pages at a time during family prayers so as to shorten the whole business. Their children and grandchildren varied in their enthusiasm. Millicent married a free-thinker, Henry Fawcett, but remained a devout Christian herself — as demonstrated by her accounts of her journeys to Palestine in the 1920s. Elizabeth’s letters include many references

48 Clara Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 11 November 1903.  
49 Clara Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 22 March 1904.  
50 Ronald Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 5 November 1907.
to sermons she had heard, while the Scottish medical missionary Jane Waterston’s description of her as ‘hard and godless’ may say as much about the writer as about Elizabeth. Margery’s other godmother, Theo, was also devout, though later in life she leaned away from Anglicanism towards Quakerism. Clara makes conventional references to religion in her letters (and her paternal grandfather and his father were both clergyman), but there is no sense that it was a particularly important part of family life. For example, no reference is made to family prayers in her letters or any other surviving family correspondence. On the other hand, Margery, as a teenager, clearly went through a phase of passionate conviction: a series of letters from a clergyman called Robert Laffan is extant, written to her between 1904 and 1907. He was, at this date, Rector of St Stephen’s, Walbrook, in the City of London, having previously been head of King Edward VI School in Stratford-upon-Avon and of Cheltenham College. Perhaps she had met him in Stratford in 1902; he almost certainly prepared her for her confirmation in 1905. He and his wife were supporters of women’s suffrage, which may well have endeared him to Margery. Her side of the correspondence is lost, but his consists of long and encouraging answers to the theological questions she was posing him: he never loses patience with her although one has the impression that she was a demanding student. Margery lost her faith as an adult, perhaps at Cambridge, but she was married in St Stephen’s in 1911, when Laffan was still rector there, which suggests that the friendship endured for several years.

Margery’s brothers were, of course, growing up alongside her. In December 1901, Douglas, whose career plan was to join Sam as a solicitor in his office in the city, had won a scholarship to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he started in the autumn of 1902. His letters to Margery from Cambridge are full of anecdotes about university life. When Margery was in Paris, he wrote to her about the dinner party he was giving for the May Ball, suggesting that next year she might perhaps ‘condescend to live in England, & […] even if she be not yet “out”, will just have to put her hair up & come all the same’.  

52 He was also instrumental in the establishment of the modern Olympic games.  
Harry — bright, sporty and a talented artist, but perhaps more mercurial in character than Douglas — found it hard to settle on what to do, causing his parents a good deal of anxiety as well as expense. At one stage, he intended to be an architect, but agonised about whether to go to university first, noting that many of his father’s friendships were formed in his university days. In the summer of 1903, when he was seventeen, he tried unsuccessfully to persuade Sam to let him leave Rugby. Another possibility was joining the civil service — likely his parents’ choice rather than his own. In the autumn of 1904, he won a place at Pembroke College, Cambridge, but suffered some kind of breakdown when he came to sit, and subsequently fail, his final exams — perhaps because his heart was not really in academic work. Some years later, when Margery too was facing her final exams, Harry wrote to her: ‘My own disappointment at the time of my unfortunate collapse was very great, on Father’s behalf. But for myself it was nothing to the regret which I feel now. I want you to profit from this experience of mine. I thought that in a year or two I shouldn’t care. I was wrong’. After Cambridge, Harry travelled in Italy and then trained as an artist at the Slade School of Fine Art, London. He and Margery, who shared both his artistic interests and his tendency to regard locked gates as an invitation to enter, were close until his early death.

Between 1904 and 1907, Margery studied at Bedford College, London, which may have been chosen because Aunt Theo’s daughter, Lesley, had been there and because Margery could live at home as the college was, at that time, situated in York Place, near Baker Street. On 20 September 1904, Aunt Theo wrote to her: ‘You too like some others of us, begin a new stage this term — Go on as you are going my Beloved God-daughter — & the gentleness of all the gods go with thee’. At this point, there is a gap in the sequence of family letters and we know very little about her life at Bedford, except that she studied a matriculation course in mathematics in her first year and English in the two subsequent years. It is likely, also, that the college was seen as preparation for Cambridge, though we have no idea when that idea germinated: all we know is that Margery begged her parents to let her try for a place at Cambridge and that, in the autumn of 1907, she went up to Girton College to read Moral Sciences. This was another and more significant new stage for

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54 Harry Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 13 February 1910.
her, an experience that deeply affected the course of her personal life and helped shape her into the adult she became. Harry was right that one of the most important aspects of university was the formation of friendships.