This book vividly presents the story of Margery Spring Rice, an instrumental figure in the movements of women’s health and family planning in the first half of the twentieth century. Margery Spring Rice, née Garrett, was born into a family of formidable female trailblazers — niece of physician and suffragist Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, and of Millicent Fawcett, a leading suffragist and campaigner for equal rights for women. Margery Spring Rice continued this legacy with her co-founding of the North Kensington birth control clinic in 1924, three years after Marie Stopes founded the first clinic in Britain.

Engaging and accessible, this biography weaves together Spring Rice’s personal and professional lives, adopting a chronological approach which highlights how the one impacted the other. Her life unfolds against the turbulent backdrop of the early twentieth century — a period which sees the entry of women into higher education, and the upheaval and societal upshots of two world wars. Within this context, Spring Rice emerges as a dynamic figure who dedicated her life to social causes, and whose actions time and again bear out her habitual belief that, contrary to the Shakespearean dictum, ‘valour is the better part of discretion’.

This is the first biography of Margery Spring Rice, drawing extensively on letters, diaries and other archival material, and equipping the text with family trees and photographs. It will be of great interest to a range of social historians, especially those researching the birth control movement; female friendships, female philanthropists, and feminist activism in the twentieth century; and the history of medicine and public health.

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Cover Design: Anna Gatti
Family life was not always easy. Margery’s relationship with her children was complicated. She loved them dearly, and wanted the best for them, but she never let their presence interfere with her own activities, in either her private life (which included holidays without them), or her public work. Of course, she was not at all unusual for her time and class in leaving nurses and nannies to bring them up, but she perhaps allowed this to happen to an even greater extent than many of her peers. The situation was also more complex because, from the late twenties, she was in effect a single parent. In contrast to this semi-detached way of parenting, she was, at the same time, deeply emotionally invested in her children and found it extremely hard to let go (particularly of her sons) as they grew into adulthood, or to allow them to make their own decisions about careers and marriages. While this took the form of trying to help in any way she could, it caused some difficulties for them in making independent lives.

Charles and Ronald were both sent away to Rugby School, which offered bursaries for the sons of officers killed in the war. Both boys were unhappy there, though Ronald coped better with school life than Charles. In 1930, following a summer in Germany, Charles went from Rugby to Trinity Hall, Cambridge. However, university life did not suit him any better than school had done. He stayed at university for two years, helped by a girlfriend, Lilli. However, Margery, Muz and other relations regarded her as unsuitable (to some extent at least from class snobbery, and almost certainly also from a degree of anti-Semitism), and arrangements were made for Charles to go to Toronto, where his Jones grandfather had studied, to finish his degree. This choice was

1 Lilli Bronowski, sister of Jacob Bronowski. She graduated from Girton with a first in 1933.
perhaps partly made with the aim of loosening Charles’s ties to Lilli. Douglas confided to his diary that Lilli was:

> a clever, but common, young Polish Jewess [...] we met her at Aldeburgh this summer. She is I believe genuinely in love with Charles (tho’ I doubt whether he is with her), & she is a girl of a good deal of character; but she is quite definitely not ‘out of the top drawer’ and is looked at askance by M.L.S.R., & detested (unfairly) by Mother! We all hope that Charles will have enough gumption to break it off while he is in Canada. Lilli’s father is supposed to know nothing of the affair, & to be capable of turning her out of his home if he did — such are his strict Jewish principles.²

The affair did indeed peter out but Charles hated Canada and came away still without a degree. He had no idea what he wanted to do with his life: in a letter to Margery in 1933, Ronald reported that Charles was thinking of acting (he had done some at Cambridge) or bookselling, and, later, journalism was mentioned.

Charles was struggling to break away from Margery, but a lack of enthusiasm for her children’s choice of partners was to become a pattern over the next few years. However, to her credit, she did recognise the problem herself, writing to a friend that she had agreed with Arthur Ellis that it would be good for Charles to have some distance from her. As well as consulting Ellis, she asked other friends and acquaintances if they could help in terms of finding him work. As he had been an enthusiastic collector of moths and butterflies since childhood, on 25 November 1934, Margery wrote (without success, as it turned out) to the entomologist Karl Jordan of Tring Zoological Museum to ask if there might be a place for him there:

> he has had a very difficult life. His father, my first husband, was killed in the War, when Charles was four, and it made a deep and lasting impression of horror on the child; and my second husband, (from whom I am separated, mostly for this reason) ill-treated him by a subtle and extremely cruel form of bullying. He has consistently thought himself, probably unconsciously for these reasons, less capable and successful than my other children.

At some point in the early thirties, to some extent no doubt as a way of escaping his upper-middle class origins, Charles joined the Communist

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² Douglas Garrett, Diary, 1, p. 127.
Party, of which he was to remain a staunch member until the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. On his return from Canada, he met a young Swiss woman, Paula Reinhardt, with whom he set up house; they were married in April 1935, and Paula gave birth to their first child, Susan, in early 1936. According to Douglas, they lived in Battersea on a tiny income, Charles having cut himself off from family and friends in an attempt to sever all bourgeois ties, while he devoted his energies to working for the Communist Party. While this was true, the family did need support of all kinds — financial, practical and emotional — and Paula at least sometimes felt she had to ask for it, writing, after Susan’s birth, ‘Margie would you please help Charles to get a job? A paid job!’³ Margery did continue to try to help as best she could, and if her interventions seemed very heavy-handed to the young couple, it is hard to see how she could have got it right. Gil (Lilian) and Hilda Jones, Charles’s unmarried aunts, who always felt a big responsibility for their nephews, did their best to keep lines of communication open. Gil, feeling that ‘the damned inferiority business’ was behind Charles’s troubles, wrote to Margery that it would be better to hold back rather than creating hostility by probing.⁴ Margery’s friend Rhoda Power (Eileen’s sister), who spent a period around this time staying with and looking after Clara, also kept in touch with Charles and Paula and attempted to mediate between them when she could.

Ronald’s path was easier, since he had not suffered nearly so badly from Dominick’s bullying or from the miseries of public school, and he knew that he wanted to work in gardening or agriculture. With a very different temperament from Charles’s, he was able to tease Margery: ‘Excuse the two holes in the paper, if you do I’ll excuse your short letter’; ‘Are you taking up politics in despair of finding any land for your flats,’⁵ or is it merely that you can’t bear to see the Liberal Party falling to pieces for lack of your support?’⁶ He charted her imagined rise as a politician and suggested that after the 1931 general election she ought to become Minister of Transport. From his letters, it looks as if Margery was constantly inventing new projects, presumably as a way of dealing with

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³ Paula Garrett Jones, letter to Margery Spring Rice, undated.
⁴ Lilian Jones, letter to Margery Spring Rice, undated.
⁵ What this refers to is not clear.
⁶ Ronald Garrett Jones, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 30 November 1924.
her personal unhappiness: at one point she thought about applying for a job at the International Labour Organization, at another, she thought of running a guest house near Dartington in Devon.

When Ronald left Rugby, he went to work as a farming apprentice in Essex and then to Denmark for a few months to extend his knowledge. After a period at the East London College, he enrolled at Wye College in Kent and subsequently at Cambridge for a diploma course. By the time he went to Wye, he too, like Charles and for some of the same reasons, had joined the Communist Party, the beginning of a lifetime allegiance (though not slavish or dogmatic). It is possible that the adherence to Communism of both Margery’s Garrett Jones sons was a contributory cause to the coolness between her and her brother Geoffrey, certainly after the outbreak of war in 1939 if not before. On 11 January 1940, Geoffrey wrote to Margery expressing his strong objections to the Communist Party of Great Britain, on the grounds that it slavishly followed instructions from Russia. He could allow for people holding their own views, he said, ‘but I am not willing to tolerate people who act against the vital interests of the country at this time’. According to Douglas’s diary, Geoffrey refused to meet either Charles or Ronald, though for how long this lasted is unclear.8

Stephen seems to have dealt reasonably well with his traumatic childhood, although his relations with Dominick were not without incident: on 31 January 1932, Ronald wrote to his aunt Hilda Jones from Rugby, ‘I suppose you have heard that Stephen ran away from Dominick’. Cecil found it much harder than her brother, perhaps because Dominick was enormously proud of his son but had wished that Cecil too had been a boy: it may be that her name reflects this.9 In the spring of 1933, Cecil was expected to spend the allotted time on her own with her father (because Stephen was away somewhere else) but she hated the idea, writing to Margery from school: ‘Father says that he is going to take Stephen to France for Easter and then have me afterwards, but I’m not going to him by myself so what is going to happen?’10 She was afraid

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7 Now Queen Mary University.
8 Geoffrey died in 1949.
9 It may also have been after Dominick’s diplomat uncle Cecil Spring Rice, ambassador to Washington during World War I and author of the hymn ‘I vow to thee my country’.
10 Cecil Spring Rice, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 26 March 1933.
of him and until, as an adult, she read Margery’s statement to the court, she thought that she hated him. Stephen, though only just over a year older, was her protector against him. On 3 October 1934, Stephen (aged fourteen) wrote to Douglas from Eton to ask whether their stays with Dominick could be limited to no more than ten days at a time: ‘it would save him trouble and expense, and would give us more pleasure. Cecil does not want to go to him at all, but she agreed in the end that the idea was all right’. Douglas’s reply, dated the following day, is a model of clarity and kindness, and he ends by saying that he regards their correspondence as being between solicitor and client, and therefore, not to be shown to Dominick without Stephen’s permission.

In 1934, Stephen had followed in his father’s footsteps to Eton as a King’s scholar. Although he was clever, academic work was never his priority and he cheerfully refused to revere his teachers, or, in various aspects of school life, to comply with what was expected of him. He did not believe in compulsory chapel and declined to be confirmed: ‘I’m not being confirmed [nor] am I joining the corps. What a shock for Jeeves [nickname of his house master, Wilkes]! “you must do one or the other” he says’.¹¹ Having already built a small sailing dinghy at Aldeburgh, he spent a great deal of his Eton time building a sailing boat in the workshop, not an easy thing to do when, as a scholar, he was expected to behave as part of the academic aristocracy:

The boat is getting on very well. All the parts that I thought were going to be boring, such as sawing, drilling holes for nails etc. are quite fun here because of the marvellous tools, mechanical saws, drills, lathes. I can bore at least 15 holes for rivets through 1” oak per minute, whereas with a hand drill it takes more than ½ minute to do one.¹³

It says something for the comparative freedom of the school, as well as his own character, that he was able to evade some of the demands of school life in this way. Other than boats and sailing, his great interest was music, and he had a good tenor voice. He made two great friends at Eton, both also keen musicians, each with a wild streak to match

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¹² A Sharpie, a small international racing dinghy. The river Alde demanded a good deal of skill from its sailors: Margery was very distressed by the drowning of three non-swimmers whose boat capsized in a squall in 1954.
¹³ Stephen Spring Rice, letter to Margery Spring Rice, undated (postmarked 20 October 1935).
his own. One was Christopher Ellis, who (according to an obituary in the *Bucks Free Press*), at the age of sixteen, single-handedly sailed his father’s yacht through the English Channel without permission; and the other was Anthony Gillingham. From the point of view of a schoolboy, Margery might easily have been an embarrassment to her son and his friends but Stephen seemed not to be worried by her eccentricities and Anthony positively loved them.

Anthony, two years older than Stephen, the son of an Anglican priest, was already something of a rebel when Stephen arrived. Under the influence of his godfather, Dick Sheppard, he was turning to pacifism but was finding that difficulties were put in his way when he tried to resign from the Officers’ Training Corps.

Then I met Margery Spring Rice, mother of my friend Stephen. She was short and round like Mrs Tiggywinkle, but certainly no domestic drudge. She came down to Eton in a battered old Riley amid the Rolls and Bentleys, in an old overcoat done up with string as a belt [...] In my first meeting with her at Eton she said in a very loud voice ‘I hear you are trying to resign from the OTC. Congratulations: I hope you succeed.’ I loved her from that moment; she was my first adult ally [...] But her support did me little good at Eton. They thought her a wicked woman because of her advocacy of birth control, and because she was trying to divorce her husband, an Old Etonian and brother of the writer of ‘I vow to thee my country’ and who had turned Catholic in order to thwart the divorce. The MIC [Master in College] even wrote to my father, warning of her influence over me, with dark hints of subversion, atheism and sexual perversion. She threatened to sue him, but as it was only a private letter and not published she was dissuaded by her lawyers: a pity, for it could have made a great cause celebre. [Friendships between boys in different year groups were frowned upon, but] of course, the only effect of such a threat was to make my friendship with Stephen more intense. It was now spiked with danger and romance. We had to arrange secret meetings in the churchyard or in cafes down town. It created a love between us which, however, remained entirely platonic. I went to stay with him and his mother every holidays where we indulged in sailing, boat maintenance and singing. He taught me sailing. I crewed for him in the schoolboy championships at Burnham, where he won two out of

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14 *Bucks Free Press*, 28 February 1998, [n.p.].
15 In fact, Dominick was the nephew of Sir Cecil Spring Rice.
16 This is probably not true, though it may have been a threat used by Dominick as a weapon.
three races […] Margy Spring-Rice put the fire back in my belly and I fought the good fight against the OTC with renewed vigour.\textsuperscript{17}

Cecil struggled more than Stephen in her childhood. Although as a child she thought she hated Dominick, the better side of his character does come out in an incident that she later recounted to her own children. It was her birthday, and Dominick took Stephen and her out but said nothing to indicate that he remembered what day it was. They walked past a shop and Dominick, remarking that he thought they might be hungry, went in and emerged with a box or tin of biscuits that he gave to Cecil to open. When she did so, she found that in between the biscuits, all the way through, there were sixpences. More commonly, though, Dominick would take the two children out, disappear into a pub and leave Stephen to find their way home. They were largely brought up by their nanny — the diminutive, stern and much-loved Edith Best — who had a serious episode of mental illness in 1928 (probably not helped by the tensions in the household) and was admitted to Hanwell Asylum. Cecil, herself, was seriously ill with whooping cough in 1927 and also suffered from severe hay fever, undergoing various treatments, some of which she found more distressing than the allergy itself. Like Stephen, she was sent away to boarding school quite early. While she loved her preparatory school, St David’s at Englefield Green southwest of London, she loathed Wycombe Abbey, where she won a scholarship in 1934. As she remembered it in adulthood, the aspect that most irked her was the lack of privacy. Her anxiety about Dominick was never far from the surface.

For all four children, their grandparents’ house in Aldeburgh, Gower House, remained a haven for holidays — with its paradise of a garden, including ponds, an orchard and woodland, as well as a paddock complete with Brenda the horse. When Ronald was about eleven, a play shed was built for the children. Charles and Ronald also spent time with their Jones relations, while Stephen and Cecil had occasional holidays in the Lake District with Dominic’s uncle Cecil Spring Rice and his wife Florence, or in Limerick with other Spring Rice relations. Besides these, there were family holidays shared with the Mitchisons at Varengeville.

\textsuperscript{17} Anthony Gillingham, \textit{Young Rebel: Memoirs 1917–39} ([n.p.]: privately printed, 2007), p. 50.
in France. But for none of them was it a happy or secure childhood, and the disastrous state of Margery’s marriage to Dominick must have been a constant source of anxiety, the impact of which on them Margery was never really prepared to acknowledge.

However, parent-child relationships are frequently complex: when Ronald, in his old age, came to set down his memories, he wrote that Margery ‘was unfailingly supportive of her children and their spouses & families, for which I and my siblings were immensely grateful even if our demonstration of this sometimes lacked’.18

Through the early thirties, Margery continued to devote time and energy to supporting the North Kensington clinic. She negotiated some difficult issues with the local authority, as well as trying to open as many lines of communication as possible: in 1933, for example, she tried to involve the Kensington Fathers’ Councils.19 As was the case for much of her work for women’s health, her belief that fathers mattered too was ahead of its time. One of the obstacles to the work of the clinic was the lack of any contraception element in the curriculum for doctors in training and the lack of interest in providing it by many of those responsible for teaching medical students. After the First World War, doctors were more inclined to accept the use of condoms by patients because of their role in preventing venereal disease,20 but Margery understood that much more needed to be done to educate the medical profession, and one initiative of North Kensington was to set up conferences for doctors.21 Another pioneer, Dr William Nixon, teaching at St Mary’s in 1934–1935, wrote to Helena Wright asking if he could bring some of his students to the North Kensington clinic for some training, but when he did so, he felt it necessary to arrive under cover of darkness! It was not until 1936 that the first lectures on contraception were given in medical school,22 and even after the war when Nixon established a family planning clinic at University College

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19 The first Fathers’ Council had been set up in Kensington by James Fenton, medical officer of health, in 1921, in the belief that fathers as well as mothers should be involved in decisions about children.
Hospital, it was known by the euphemism ‘the clinic in the Records department’, and was unique among the London hospitals. Nixon wanted his students to attend, but the medical school’s ruling council would only agree on the basis that the clinic took place on a Wednesday afternoon, which was traditionally the students’ free time for sports. In 1966, things had barely changed: Nixon reported that his students were clamouring for education in contraception, but that he was fighting against uninterested or sometimes antagonistic colleagues.23

In 1933, a group of eleven voluntary bodies set up the Women’s Health Enquiry Committee to investigate the health of married working-class women: Margery was the representative of the North Kensington clinic, and wrote Working-Class Wives, the report that was the outcome of their study.24 The committee’s findings were based on a survey of 1,250 responses to a questionnaire — this had two parts, the first, factual, the second, designed to elicit women’s own feelings and perceptions of their lives, and in particular of their health. Although the committee had hoped to use control samples of unmarried women and those of a higher social class, too few replies were received from these groups to make this worth-while. The administration of the questionnaires was carried out mainly by health visitors, who were often familiar to the respondents, which helped to encourage the addition of supplementary information. There was no suggestion that the sample was chosen in any scientific way, but the final publication, which includes many quotations from the women’s responses, gives a vivid and moving picture of some very bleak lives. Many of the women in the sample displayed cheerfulness and fortitude in appalling circumstances, and were upbeat about their health, in spite of the fact that ‘For many of them, good health is any interval between illnesses, or at best the absence of any incapacitating ailment’.25

Under the Health Insurance Act of 1911, manual workers — and those earning less than £160 per annum — paid contributions that gave

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23 Nixon was ahead of his time in many ways: he was, for example, ‘an early advocate of the doctrine that women should govern the destinies of their own bodies’. Geoffrey Chamberlain, Special Delivery: The Life of the Celebrated British Obstetrician William Nixon (London: Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 2004), pp. ix, 55. See also Wellcome Collection SA/FPA/SR5.


25 Ibid., p. 72.
them access to unemployment and sickness benefits, and to the services of ‘panel’ doctors. Although this did not extend to their dependents, there was a maternity grant. Between the wars, legislation was gradually introduced to give local authorities more responsibility for maternal and child health and welfare, but it was discretionary rather than mandatory, and contraceptive advice was minimal. As Margery’s daughter wrote in the introduction to the 1981 reprint of *Working-Class Wives*:

> It would seem [...] that when respondents in this book quote a doctor or nurse as advising less child-bearing, for at least three-quarters of them — if they heeded the advice at all — what was on offer was abstinence or coitus interruptus, either of which demanded maximum co-operation on the part of husbands.26

Time and again it came up in the completed questionnaires that women were being given advice about health that they were either unable or unwilling to follow. They tended to be extremely mistrustful of hospitals, which were in any case often too far away for them to get to; they frequently did not have the money, the skills or the cooking facilities to eat a better diet; the ‘rest’ that doctors often suggested was an impossible dream. Sometimes the advice was not advice at all — one woman with severe backache was told by a doctor ‘“all women get backache round about 40, so why worry”’.27

The impact of *Working-Class Wives* is due, on one hand, to the mass of anecdotal evidence it includes (the picture that women paint in their own words of the details of their lives) and, on the other, to Margery’s larger vision. She understood that, alongside relieving poverty and ignorance, much more could be done:

> so to lighten [these women’s] work that they would have time [...] to make contacts with the outer world, and to enjoy some at least of the cultural and recreative pursuits which would release them spiritually as well as physically from their present slavery.28

The survey demonstrated that the start of a woman’s ill-health often coincided with the birth of her first child, because perinatal care was not good enough, and that the degree of ill-health often correlated with the

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26 Ibid., p. xi.
27 Ibid., p. 45.
28 Ibid., p. 106.
number of pregnancies (including miscarriages, stillbirths and perinatal deaths), because women became worn out with constant child-bearing and -rearing.\textsuperscript{29} The experience of working on the book reinforced Margery’s view of the importance of contraceptive and childcare advice, preferably given in local, multi-functional clinics staffed by women:

parents should be in a position to decide how many children they can have. That such knowledge should not be available to women in the circumstances of the 1,250 under review is a serious indictment of the care given by the State to the mothers and children of the present generation.\textsuperscript{30}

The unequivocal message of the book was that the problems endured by the women in the survey were due, above all, to poverty and were not of their own making.

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In 1936 (the same year in which Wallis Simpson incurred opprobrium for divorcing in order to marry the king), Margery and Dominick were divorced because he wanted to remarry.\textsuperscript{31} The year before, on 30 June, Stephen had written to Cecil from Eton with some glee:

He’s taken a flat with Peggy Ritchie! The rest is left to the imagination……..! He’s done it quite openly, so that Margee should hear of it. She has, and two days ago filed a divorce petition, which is exactly what Father wants. If Margee doesn’t withdraw her petition, (she may have to, because I think the court knows about Dick etc. in which case her petition would not be valid) the decree nisi (a sort of provisional divorce for 6 months) will be given in November and the decree absolute in May. Father told me all this quite proudly yesterday; there are other complications, but I’ll leave Margee the fun of telling you these; I’ve had my go.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 49.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 56.
\textsuperscript{31} It is possible that Dominick’s mother Julia disapproved of his separation from Margery or of his new relationship: we know very little about how he got on with her, but she was a formidable woman, and may have cast quite a long shadow. When she remarried in 1935 and returned to Ireland, where her family came from, the dynamic between her and Dominick may have changed, possibly allowing him to feel freer to divorce and remarry. Julia’s religious views are unknown, but her own mother came from a Catholic family. One of her ten siblings was baptised in the Church of Ireland. Julia died on 9 May 1936, between the decree nisi and the decree absolute.
Douglas recorded that at the divorce hearing:

M. made the most wonderful witness — Ernest Bird, her solicitor, told me in court that he had never seen a better witness in his whole experience — in spite of having a difficult and painful story to tell [...] [The judge said] that he had seldom had a witness before him whose complete candour and honesty carried such conviction to his mind, and he had no hesitation in granting the decree.32

Divorce at that date was far more unusual than it is today and carried much more of a social stigma. Until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923, proof of adultery or violence was required, and, in the case of adultery, only a husband could petition. Even after that Act, which allowed a wife to petition, there was a heavy burden of proof. It was not until 1937, the year after Margery’s divorce, that a broader range of grounds (including drunkenness) was allowed. The big change in numbers came at the end of World War II: in 1936, there were just over 5,000 divorces compared to 60,000 in 1947.33

On 12 March, the day after the divorce was granted, Clara Garrett (Margery’s widowed mother) died in Aldeburgh, aged eighty-nine. Margery had been with her earlier but had had to go back to London because of the court case; Douglas’s wife, Frieda, and Clara’s youngest son, Geoffrey, were present. The last time Douglas saw her, she had told him that she had been for a walk in the garden but when she had gone only a few steps, her heart—

‘began to jump about and give [me] pain [...] So I stopped, and I said to my heart “Now then, I have had no exercise yet, and I need exercise. Get on, damn you, get on!” And it went on.’34

According to Anthony Gillingham, Clara ‘was a tough old atheist. On her death-bed she was asked if she wanted a priest: “Priest be damned” she said, “Give me a cigarette” and died quite serenely half an hour later’.35

33 The high 1947 rate reflects the fact that many wartime marriages ended when couples were reunited. The rate dropped again after that (to about 23,000 in 1958), and then rose sharply.
34 Douglas Garrett, Diary, 2, p. 43.
35 Gillingham, Young Rebel, p. 50. I have not seen any other evidence that Clara smoked.
Dominick’s new wife was a doctor, Margaret Ritchie, known as Peggy, who came from an Indian army family and was a descendent of William Thackeray. Her medical partner, Eric Strauss, probably moved in the Mitchison circle, and this may have been how they met (Margery and Strauss had been in contact over Ena Mitranay). Peggy was a supportive step-mother to Stephen and Cecil. Stephen particularly spent a good deal of time with Peggy, playing chamber music and singing. In 1940, Dominick died of heart failure and nephritis. On his death certificate, his age is given as fifty-one even though he was, in fact, forty-nine. Of course, he cannot be held responsible for the mistake, but it seems entirely characteristic of him to have continued beyond the grave to lie about his age. In 1957, Peggy married Hugh Meredith, an academic economist known to his friends as ‘Hom’, who also moved in the Mitchison circle. In an ironic twist, there is a faint suggestion that there had once been a tendresse, if nothing more, between Hom and Margery.

Another sad loss had occurred a couple of years before Clara’s: early in 1934, Margery received a letter from Stella Benson’s husband, Shaemus Anderson, from China, giving her the news of Stella’s untimely death at the age of forty-one.\(^{36}\) Although Margery had not seen much of Stella, on account of her living in China much of the time, and although Stella was quite critical of Margery, Margery certainly regarded her as a close friend. Shaemus wrote:

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\text{I was with her for a day and a night before she died [...] I think she died in her sleep. She suffered of course, but not more than she often did with a bronchial chill. The day before she died she promised me most resolutely not to die. And she all but came through. It was her heart that failed. You never saw such courage. I wish I had a little of it.}^{37}\]

Since 1932 or earlier, Margery had been thinking about leaving London to return to Suffolk and had been looking fruitlessly for a suitable house. The opportunity came in 1936, just after her divorce and Clara’s death, an appropriate moment in that Gower House would no longer be available to her as it had been previously.

\(^{36}\) Muz also died in 1936, a few months after Clara.
