

LUCY POLLARD



Margery Spring Rice

Pioneer of Women's Health in the
Early Twentieth Century



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Cover image: Margery pushing a young friend along the Crag Path in Aldeburgh, New Year, 1968. Drawing by Christopher Ellis (1968). Photograph: the author (2020).

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

9. Running down (1956–1970)

Life at Shades carried on much as it had done at Iken. The house was not as large, but visitors still found their way there in a constant stream. The garden was smaller too, but Margery built a big shed, named ‘Shambles’, for younger relatives and friends to mess about in, or to use as a bunkroom if the house was full. Of her siblings, her brother Ronald, who lived near Bury St Edmunds and with whom she had an affectionate but combative relationship, was now the only one left — Douglas and Geoffrey both having died in 1949. However, there were members of her extended family in the area. It was still difficult to get domestic help and she was not the easiest of employers — those who got along with her tended to be people who had enough self-confidence to stand up to her.¹ But it was a happy house, and though she missed Iken, Margery loved being so close to the sea and living in a place that was so essentially a part of her family history. For the grandchildren, staying with Margery still offered wonderful opportunities for adventure, sometimes not a roaring success. Cecil’s son, Stephen, remembered —

a disastrous camping expedition [with his younger brother], sailing up to Snape, and camping in the Maltings grounds, while it was still a Maltings, before it was taken over by the festival. The trip was disastrous because that night there were fierce thunderstorms and we got flooded out. A kind caretaker let us bed down in one of the Maltings buildings.²

In 1957, Margery finally stood down from her work at North Kensington, though she was fully engaged in the work up till the last minute; for example, she urged the Family Planning Association (FPA) to press university medical faculties to fill the glaring gap in their curricula by

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- 1 A policeman once delighted her, when she leaned out of her car window and said ‘I want Croydon Airport!’, by replying ‘You can’t have it, madam’: she took pleasure in repeating this story against herself.
 - 2 Stephen Robertson, recollections of Iken, 2014.

taking over the FPA's training role.³ However, in the mid-1950s, there had been changes in the relationship of the clinic to the FPA. In the words of one colleague, Margery had brought the baby into the world,⁴ and it was right that she should see that baby safely married to the FPA, but she felt that she had done her work, many other things were going on in her life and she resigned from the chair of the committee. Apart from personal reasons, she was unhappy with the clinic's relationship to the FPA, on the executive committee of which she also sat. Owing to a shortage of space at FPA headquarters in Sloane Street, three departments were moved to the North Kensington premises in Telford Road, entailing a huge reorganisation; but when, quite soon afterwards, more space was acquired near to headquarters, two of those departments were moved back. Margery was frustrated, feeling that the North Kensington staff had not been properly consulted. Papers in the clinic archives also imply that there was a dispute over the boundaries between the roles of paid staff and those of honorary officers. Certainly, as someone determined to get what she wanted, she cannot always have been easy to work with; but the other side of that coin is that she was prepared to fight tooth and nail for what she thought right. The annual report of the clinic for 1957 paid tribute to Margery's imaginative vision and empathy, describing her as realising —

that it was not only the women overtaxed by excessive child-bearing who needed skilled medical help, but also the couple childless against their will, the husband and wife encountering difficulties in the marriage relationship and the young man and girl engaged but fearful of the future because brought up in sexual ignorance.⁵

After thirty-four years, Margery had seemed a fixture to her colleagues. Their personal tributes to her work were heartfelt. One wrote 'there has always been Mrs Spring Rice to depend on for a progressive attitude'. Another, Isabella Herbert, reported that many of the committee had been 'too near tears to speak' when her resignation was announced:

3 After standing down, she kept in touch through her daughter Cecil, who served on the committee for several years, and through other friends who were active in the field, particularly Nancy Raphael, Marjorie Farrer and Letty Gifford.

4 Doreen Agnew, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 24 March 1957.

5 Wellcome Collection, SA/FPA/NK/206/33. North Kensington Marriage Welfare Centre, *Thirty-Third Annual Report 1st January–31st December, 1957* ([n.p.]: [n.p.], 1957).

you have been an inspiration to me all my life — from the early days of the Womens [sic] Liberal Federation. I have always thought of you as one of the most outstanding, right-minded, courageous & above all loveable of women that I have ever known — & I want to tell you this now, instead of writing it to Cecil when you die!⁶

For another: ‘The F.P.A. Executive Committee seemed all wrong without you. Very tame without your “combative spirit!”. I do wish you could have heard all the pleasant things which were said about you’. One of her colleagues had expressed the view that Margery had been ‘far in advance of the rest of us & far in advance of [her] time’. The most vivid image came from Helena Wright, with whom Margery had had such a fruitful — if sometimes difficult — relationship for all those years:

I was stunned to hear that you have decided to leave N. Ken. You are one of the people, whom we, your most appreciative fellow-workers think of as going on for ever! [I want to] give you my vivid regrets at your decision, & my most warm thanks for our many years of happy co-operation. I do hope that your disappearance won’t be absolute, but that you will float invisibly in the atmosphere to be appealed to for wisdom whenever events become too stubborn.⁷

The incongruity of the idea of Margery, who though short was very fat, floating in the atmosphere would probably have delighted her sense of humour.

In the spring of 1959, Margery’s granddaughter Rachel, Ronald’s daughter, was diagnosed with a brain tumour. When they seemed to have run through all the possible treatments available in the UK, Stella, Ronald’s wife, managed to discover the names of doctors in the Soviet Union to whom she wrote for help and in whom she placed great faith. She was terribly distressed to receive a letter expressing their sympathy but also their inability to do anything more for her daughter. Rachel died on her seventh birthday, in December of that year. Margery did what she could to support Ronald and Stella and their two other children, both during Rachel’s illness and after her death, while coping with her own grief. In January 1960, she took a trip to Kuwait on board an oil tanker with her brother Ronald and his wife which helped to restore her well-being. At some point after her return, however, she had a car

6 Isabella Herbert, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 8 December 1957.

7 Helena Wright, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 6 March 1958.

accident which set her back a bit: it is not clear what happened, but she fell out of the car (it was in the days before seat belts, and the car had primitive door catches), which rolled back over her leg and bruised it badly. One family comment was 'We have strong bones in our family': Margery somehow managed to take in her stride something that would have devastated a less resilient person. By the autumn of 1960, she had again recovered some of her energy and was planning a trip for the following summer to Saas Fee in Switzerland, where Charles and his family were now living, taking two of Cecil's younger children with the idea of looking after them and Charles's children while Charles and his wife took a break — hardly a rest-cure for herself! But notes of anxiety began to creep into her letters: on 6 October 1960, she was writing to Charles 'I forget things so quickly', and on 12 July the following year she confessed to being tired and anxious after the strains of hosting guests for the Aldeburgh Festival (Ursula Nettleship and her cat — a fairly demanding pair — had stayed for a fortnight), and to finding the running of Shades too much. She also had problems with the car, which needed extensive and expensive repairs. She was thinking of getting something smaller, but did not want to 'offend the grandchildren too seriously', since they loved her Land Rover.

In spite of increasing deafness, Margery remained a faithful member of the Aldeburgh audience, continuing to support Britten and his musical baby to the end of her life. In 1961, she wrote to Charles about that year's festival providing 'some dazzling highlights, particularly Ben and Rostropovich the fabulous Russian cellist. They played a new "Sonata" by B.B. written for Rostro: and the kissing and tears and hand-shaking etc, that went on afterwards, to say nothing of the shouting of the audience, was terrific. We all liked the new work immensely'. To Britten and Pears she wrote, on 11 July 1961:

one likes to think that you have forged a link between Russia & ourselves which cannot be broken by these wretched politicians [...] [the Festival] made me feel more than ever that great art has no frontiers [...] Aldeburgh is indeed blessed, & my own old age deeply privileged.

When, in 1967, Snape Maltings (which of course was for Margery, born a Garrett, a place of great emotional significance) reopened in its new incarnation of a much-needed concert hall — seating more than twice as many as the tiny and unsatisfactory Aldeburgh Jubilee Hall, and

with far better backstage facilities — she was at first doubtful, but soon become a convert. She wrote to Britten and Pears at the end of that year's festival:⁸

I had been sceptical and rather disapproving of the adventure of Snape Maltings; but having been at 10 wonderful concerts there, I am a whole-hearted convert to this bold venture; and the great care taken not to disturb the beauty of the range of old buildings has won universal praise.

In 1961, her brother Ronald was widowed, and it appears that the idea of setting up house together crossed both their minds independently, in both cases to be hastily dismissed. Margery expressed the view that she and he could never share a house, not only because his 'material standards' were much higher than hers, but because 'we hardly share one opinion in common'.⁹ They were nevertheless glad to see something of each other, if not to live together, and enjoyed each other's occasional company in a slightly combative way. Margery later told a story about having a meal with Ronald somewhere near Aldeburgh, and falling into a furious argument about who should pay the bill: he said she should pay because she was the host, and she said he should pay because he was so much richer than her. The outcome is lost in the mists of history. On another occasion, her nephew Alasdair, Ronald's son, was going to take her for a sail on the river, but —

Bro: Ronald said he was sure I shouldn't be able to get into the boat from a rubber dinghy, (which was all they had.) I assured him that if he could do so, I could and a 'trial' was arranged; but then it was pelting with rain, so the adventure fell through.¹⁰

A more attractive solution to where to live was the possibility of a self-contained flat in the house that Cecil and Martin were buying in Oxfordshire, as a result of Martin getting a professorship at Oxford. Margery, however, was reluctant to leave Suffolk and the sea. On 14 November 1961, she had written:

We had a terrific gale yesterday. I walked down to the beach at about high tide (I thought the L.R [Land Rover] might be blown over if I took her out!) to look at the sea, which was magnificent; breakers at least ½ mile

8 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Benjamin Britten & Peter Pears, 29 June 1967.

9 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Ronald Garrett Jones, 22 September 1963.

10 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Stephen Robertson, 13 June 1963.

out, — & the din incredible. This morning I drove down to Slaughden to see the damage. The Y.C [Yacht Club] large boat shed is practically gone, roof ripped off; and the whole road is covered deep in shingle, and the shingle bank (protected on the sea-side by the concrete wall) is badly disintegrated. I couldn't walk further than the Town Quay, & only that by wading through deep pools & muddy shingle.¹¹

For the moment, however, she decided to stay put.

In the winter of 1962–1963, Margery and her brother Ronald took off for a holiday in Sicily, which she greatly enjoyed, despite having been desperately anxious beforehand that the heavy snowfalls (in Oxfordshire, where she was staying with Cecil) would not allow her to get away. But her problems had not disappeared: her hearing and her sight were both deteriorating, though she had not lost her zest for a fight. In 1963, a friend in Snape involved her in another footpath campaign. In 1964, to her great delight, she became a great grandmother, when Maurice (unfortunately in Canada) and his wife produced their first child. She created a flat on the top floor of Shades and started to look for a tenant, but in the following year, she finally made the decision to move to Oxfordshire.

Both Cecil and Margery approached the arrangement with the desire to make it work. Margery lived with Cecil and her family for two years, but both of them found it extremely hard. Margery hated feeling dependent, and desperately missed the sea, while Cecil was holding down a demanding teaching job and found it difficult to be patient with Margery's unhappiness. She made visits back to Suffolk, for the 1965 Festival and then to give evidence in the County Court in Ipswich:

about the Iken footpaths [...] I had always understood that our triumph last year, before an officer of the Ministry of [Housing and] Local Government, was final. But it appears it was only final for our side, and that the owner of the land, having lost the case then, could appeal against the Ministry's decision. As my father used to say 'The Law is an Ass'.¹²

She still owned the Land Rover, but reported to her grandson Stephen on 6 March 1966 that it would not go above thirty miles per hour: 'I haven't tried her on a hill, as there are none sufficiently near & sufficiently steep for the purpose'. She was unwell with heart problems

11 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Stephen Robertson, 14 November 1961.

12 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Stephen Robertson, 25 May 1965.

and diabetes, and went into hospital for tests, but found it irritating that, in her view, ‘the patient is the last person to be told what is the matter with him/her’.¹³

In September 1966, Margery returned to Aldeburgh, buying a flat on the seafront and writing in her visitors’ book ‘ALDEBURGH again, and until the END’. To her distress, her memory was worsening, and getting sorted in her flat was a struggle: ‘I still cant [sic] find any object of my own hiding! Such is life at 79+’. Her anxiety levels were high: she worried constantly, though unnecessarily, about money, and when her grandson Stephen got married at the age of twenty-one in 1966, she thought it could not be a good step for someone so young, perhaps forgetting that she had been only a couple of years older at the time of her own happy first marriage. She never stopped wanting or welcoming visitors, even when she was in a muddle about the date. On 5 February 1967, she wrote to Britten:

Wont you come down to have a look at the pearly sea, and the oldest of your Aldeburgh friends [...] I dont want to bother you, — but I would love to see you and give you a humble tea, — and a view of a pinky blue sea at sunset.

He almost certainly did not come, but perhaps she was a little consoled when he replied to tell her that he had been at Buckingham Palace at a banquet for the Russian Prime Minister, Kosygin, at which the Duke of Kent had asked to be remembered to her — he had come to Iken in 1950, riding pillion on a motor bike driven by Christopher Ellis, who was his tutor at the time. On 17 March 1967, Margery wrote twice to Stephen, to whose marriage she had quickly become reconciled, to invite him and his wife to visit:

I have one spare room which is capable of sleeping two people (perhaps one of them on the floor, on a mattress) and I should have to ask a little help from Judith, with the cooking [...] you can dive (or fly) from the bay window [...] straight into the sea.

She went to festival events that year, but found it rather ‘bewildering’.¹⁴ Children, grandchildren, other relatives and friends continued to visit: in November 1968, Anthony Gillingham came for a night and recorded

13 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Stephen Robertson, 19 March 1966.

14 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Stephen Robertson, 16 June 1967.

that it was the thirty-second anniversary of their first meeting in his Eton days.



Fig. 26. Margery on top of Orford Castle. Photograph: Sam Garrett-Jones (late 1960s).

In June 1969, a disaster overtook the Festival when, on its first evening, the Maltings concert hall caught fire and was damaged to the extent that it would need almost complete rebuilding. Like many others with an attachment to the festival and the hall, Margery was shocked and upset, writing to Stephen on 16 June:

The Maltings tragedy seems to pervade a large number of visitors and inhabitants of Aldeburgh; and somehow it seems to me that the Festival can never be the same again, in spite of B.B.'s and P.P.'s¹⁵ optimism about the rebuilding. Almost the saddest part about it is the destruction of Ben's beautiful new piano of which he was extremely proud; and now it is dust and ashes.

Astonishingly, and thanks to heroic efforts by many people, the hall was rebuilt in under a year, so that it could accommodate the performances

15 Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears.

of the Festival in 1970 there again. Sadly, Margery did not live to see the phoenix rise from the ashes, though fittingly, one of her grandsons had a Hesse studentship at the Aldeburgh Festival in June that year.

In August 1969, writing to another of her grandchildren,¹⁶ she put at the top of her letter 'Date unknown, but somewhere in August, and on my calendar it says the 29th but I dont [sic] feel very sure of that'. If a visiting family member or friend went out, she worried about where they were and often set off to look for them. Over the next few months, her confusion took over more and more aspects of her life, although she had lucid periods, and with some domestic help was more or less able to look after herself. Her family, while they found it terribly painful to watch her decline, understood that her independence was of fundamental importance to her and that she needed to stay in her own flat. One day in the middle of April, she drank the entire contents of a bottle of morphia that she had probably been saving for about thirty years, just in case. It was so old that it was no longer potent enough to kill her at once and she was found very quickly because her charwoman was in the flat when she took it. Did she really intend to kill herself? Cecil certainly had doubts, writing to her own children on 19 April 'she does not seem to have been altogether whole-hearted about it'. She was taken to Ipswich Hospital in an ambulance, had her stomach pumped, and was sent back to the Cottage Hospital in Aldeburgh. Cecil rushed over to Aldeburgh and spent time sitting with her:

you will easily imagine that the ordinary difficulties of conversing with her [because of her by now severe deafness], combined with the fact that she is ill, that she is sharing a room with a woman who is not deaf, and that all the doors of the Cottage Hospital, if they exist, are left open, do not make confidences easy.

Several friends and acquaintances dropped in to visit, but did not stay long as her longstanding habits as a hostess seemed to make her feel that she was under an obligation to entertain them. She was cared for with great compassion by Dr Nora Acheson, widow of the doctor ('Doctor Robin') who thirty years earlier had looked after the ailments of her war nursery children with humour and kindness, and who had delivered two of her grandchildren. After a day or two in the hospital,

¹⁶ Margery Spring Rice, letter to the author, ?29 August 1969.

she contracted pneumonia, and on 21 April 1970, aged almost eighty-three, she died.

Margery was a person full of contradictions. She made enemies, but she also made many close, long-term friends, young and old. She could be snobbish (she loved to associate with the great and the good), yet her friends came from all walks of life and her practical sympathy for those less fortunate than herself, particularly women, was boundless. Her parenting can be heavily criticised, but she was the best of grandmothers. She was also a combative peacemaker. She was a doer rather than a thinker: when she saw a need, she set about filling it, being prepared to turn her hand to almost anything. In the late 1940s, Cecil and a group of parents in Hammersmith, unable to find the right nursery provision for their children, had set up a little nursery class in the house in St Peter's Square. One day when Margery happened to be staying there, the teacher was ill, so Margery simply stepped in and got on with the job of teaching the class. Friends learnt to live with her ability to ignore the norms of polite behaviour: on one occasion, she visited a couple who were out when she arrived but returned while she was there. They thought there was something a little odd in her manner, as she stood in their garden with her hands behind her back: it turned out that she had unabashedly picked a bunch of flowers from their garden for herself.

Sometimes her plans did not work out: at some point in the 1950s, she decided that she would like to adopt a Jewish child, and was hurt and disappointed when her family united in opposition, pointing out that it was hardly sensible or practical for a single woman in her sixties to undertake such a task. But above all, she was immensely generous, making her house a haven not only for her nearest and dearest but also for all kinds of people in all sorts of trouble. Her generosity as a host is evidenced by the number of times her friends came to visit: Ursula Nettleship, for example, stayed at Iken at least nineteen times between 1944 and 1949,¹⁷ which is astonishing given the number of ongoing projects Margery was pursuing during that period. In her public life, Margery was a pioneer, whose vision for women's health and family

17 She went on visiting until 1964, but less frequently than before.

planning services was always ahead of public opinion. It is fitting that she lived to see the passing of the Health Service (Family Planning) Act of 1967, as well as the liberal reforms piloted into law by Roy Jenkins as Home Secretary on abortion and homosexuality, and the abolition of the death penalty.

Margery was not much given to self-reflection or self-doubt and she generally had such a positive attitude to life that it is all the more striking and poignant to find her writing to Charles on 30 March 1952 that about twenty years before, when Stephen and Cecil would still have been minors, she had thought about killing herself:

I thought that nothing was any good, least of all myself, and that it would be best for everyone, most of all myself, that I should vacate my seat for another potential occupant.

For Charles, her words struck a note that had thus far been missing in their relationship:

you did administer the right medicine this time! To reveal your own experiences, instead of hiding them as you can do so successfully under heroic strength of character, is the most helpful thing for anyone who is having similar experiences.¹⁸

It is to her credit that for once she was able to appear vulnerable. In her turn, on 16 April, she replied that one's forties are —

the time of the severest self-criticisms, the purging, the discarding of certain youthful ambitions, the always painful adjustments between what one has wanted to do and what time, nurture, nature, and opportunity are going to allow one to fulfil [...] Idealists are the salt of the earth.

The day after her death, Benjamin Britten wrote to Cecil:

I hadn't quite realised how unhappy Margie was, because whenever we met her she was so lively & cheerful — but one should have known, because for a person of her enormous energy & intelligence it must have been unendurably frustrating to become more and more incapacitated [...] I shall always think of her with the greatest love & admiration, & gratitude that we were privileged [sic] to know her. She was a brave woman, of highest integrity & intelligence — what a marvellous and important generation of thinker, hers was — & she was one of the best!

¹⁸ Charles Garrett Jones, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 8 April 1952.

And her warmth & affection was something very special, & we'll never forget her. You will all miss her greatly, & so shall we — she helped us in so many ways.

After her cremation, Cecil collected her ashes and took them to scatter on to the river Alde at Iken. Unfortunately, there was an onshore wind, and Cecil had to wade into the river to do it: all she could think of was how Margery would have laughed at this scene. There is a legend among Arab peoples that places mourn for the people who have loved them, and if this is so, then both Iken and Aldeburgh must mourn for Margery. But Iken cliff and beach are no longer what they were, since the cliff has been defended against erosion by hideous concrete blocks and old car tyres, the ancient oak trees are coming one by one to the ends of their lives, and what was once bracken-covered heath is now farmland, firmly fenced off from public access. Perhaps it is better to remember her in Aldeburgh, where she was so glad to return for the last years of her life. Six months before her death, she spoke of sitting in her flat at dusk on a grey October evening, 'looking out onto the Crag Path, and beyond, to the sea. As always, if one watches carefully the light from the Lightship keeps up its constant flash', a sight that took her back to her childhood Christmas visits to the lightship. I like to think of her sitting there, emulating the ship's figurehead who kept a lookout at her front door in Iken.¹⁹

Suffolk was in her blood, but she retained her national and international interests until the end of her life. She admired those who got on with life, and got things done. During her time in Oxfordshire, she had had the opportunity to read — with great pleasure — the page proofs of Jo Manton's biography of her aunt and godmother, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson:

I find it enthralling, and am for the 1000th time lost in admiration for Aunt E. and for her mid-Victorian evangelical father, (Newson Garrett my grandfather[...]) who supported her struggles, both financially and academically s[o] to speak. He was ready in every emergency, and they were frequent, to rush up to London (from Aldeburgh) or Edinburgh or Paris to support her cause [...] And at the end of her life (she died in 1917) came the Suffrage campaign.²⁰

19 Margery Spring Rice, fragmentary memoirs, recorded by Sam Garrett-Jones, October/November 1969, transcribed 12 January 2006 by Sam Garrett-Jones.

20 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Stephen Robertson, 14 February 1965.

Margery came by her determination — obstinacy, even — honestly.

There had been a time in her early adulthood when Margery might have been set for the life of a salon hostess, doubtless one with wide cultural and social interests, but probably not someone to leave an important legacy. In the short-lived diary that she kept in 1910–1911, the entry for 18 November describes, among other social events, celebrating her father's birthday, but does not even mention the big suffrage demonstration that took place on that day ('Black Friday'). However, it was partly Margery's own character that prevented such a future: she could never have been satisfied with salon life. In the end, also, she could not — nor did she want to — escape the heritage of a family in which women were expected to take equal responsibility with men for the world into which they were born. She was greatly influenced in this attitude by two of her redoubtable aunts, though in personality she was much more like Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. Millicent Fawcett, while still possessing her share of determination, was both quieter and more tactful than either her sister or her niece. Margery also owed much to her father — Ray Strachey, in her biography of Fawcett, records that Millicent wrote of Sam after his death: "'He was a most dear brother and friend, and such a staunch supporter of all we have ever worked for for women'".²¹ Besides her family, three other factors were crucial in setting Margery on the path — or paths — she eventually followed: first, the way in which her own life and others were drastically changed by World War I; second, the turning upside down, again, of her personal life by the miseries of her second marriage; and finally, the conditions she encountered on the poorer side of the London borough of Kensington. Once she had found a cause to excite and absorb her, and one that demanded the range of skills she could offer, she did not look back but whole-heartedly enjoyed the challenges. She described herself as a 'promoter of lost causes':²² although she would have been saddened by the huge social gap that still exists today in the London borough of Kensington, the cause of contraception in the UK (which she fought for there so determinedly and for so long) has been triumphantly won.

One of the obituaries of Margery was written by Letty Gifford, her colleague in the family planning movement, but also her close friend

21 Ray Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (London: John Murray, 1931), p. 355.

22 Evans, *Freedom to Choose*, p. 133.

Isabella, Slyboots Leigh.

The Figure head from "Slyboots" wrecked near the Martello Tower, in 1903.

Slyboots was a sailing vessel of about 100 tons; before she was wrecked, she had grounded on the Shipwreck sands, and her crew had deserted her and had been picked up by a passing ship (or by the lightship crew).

She was an old ship, and had been engaged in the grain trade; and later carried coal from the Tyne to London. She was returning to Newcastle empty, when she was wrecked.

Classed as wrecked, she was broken up on the beach at Slaughtden, by Aldborough men; much pillaged; but some fittings in chiselling the lonely figurehead were sold by auction. The figure-head was bought by Mr Comyns-Dewer, and stood in the porch of "Longcroft" until Mr Dewer's death.

I bought her at the auction which followed the death of Mr Comyns Dewer, 1948. She had been painted in some colour by Mr C. L. and I repainted her in her original colours, as described to me by an old fisherman who had seen the wreck, and had attended the auction. I gave her to Dr John Stevens when I left Aldborough in 1964. M.L.S.P.R.

Fig. 27. Margery's handwriting, which retained its characteristic vigour into her old age. 'Isabella' is likely a slip of memory for 'Annabel'. Photograph: the author (2017).

and fellow Aldeburgh resident. Paying tribute to Margery's North Kensington work, Letty recalled how Margery 'bullied and charmed until schemes were started and her nervous Treasurer had somehow complied with her imperious command to "find more money"'. In Suffolk, Margery had always enjoyed pointing out Yarn Hill, which overlooks the river Alde between Iken and Aldeburgh, as the site on which Boudica had supposedly stood ready for action as she watched the Roman legions advancing on the territory of her Iceni tribe, so Gifford's final, more personal image is an apt one:

Pursuing [Margery] in her Land Rover down a sandy track, with half a dozen ecstatic children bouncing dangerously in the trailer behind[,] was to have an inkling of what Boadicea might have looked like in her chariot.

