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E. M. CARUS-WILSON

# ELEANORA MARY CARUS-WILSON<sup>1</sup>

1897-1977

ELEANORA MARY CARUS-WILSON, the youngest of the three children of Charles Ashley Carus-Wilson and Mary Petrie, was born on 27 December 1897, in Montreal, where her father was Professor of Electrical Engineering at McGill University. Within a few months the family returned to England to settle in her mother's family home at Hanover Lodge, near Holland Park. This house was to remain her home until the end of her life; apart from a period in the Ministry of Food in Colwyn Bay during the Second World War she was never to be away from it for more than short periods. Although she was to shape her own life with resolution and independence, and achieve distinction in a relatively new branch of academic study, her sense of loyalty was strong, and she drew great strength from family traditions and the early influences that surrounded her.

Her father was the son of the Revd Charles Carus-Wilson, Vicar of Eastry and later of Ramsgate, and grandson of the Revd William Carus-Wilson, who had founded Casterton School. After his return from Canada he practised in Westminster as a consulting engineer, and lectured on engineering and scientific subjects in a number of colleges. Her mother, the elder surviving daughter of

<sup>1</sup> The sources for this Memoir are principally Nora Carus-Wilson's published works and unpublished diaries, and the personal recollections of her family and friends. In particular I would like to record my thanks to her niece, Miss Christine Carus-Wilson, for giving me some early recollections, and to her great-niece, Mrs Alison Du Cane, who allowed me to borrow her diaries; also to Professor Christopher Brooke, Mrs Rosemary Goyder, Dr Diana Greenway, Mrs Lucy Gresford-Jones, Lady Hardman, Mr Negley Harte, Dr John Hatcher, Mrs Dorothy Owen, Miss Mary Ransome, Dr Janet Sondheimer, Dr Bryan Thwaites, and Professor Joyce Youings, who have answered my many questions and given me information. A memoir by N. B. Harte and K. G. Ponting is included in the memorial volume edited by them, *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe* (Pasold Studies in Textile History, 2). This volume also contains a bibliography of her printed works (excluding reviews), compiled by Olive Coleman. I have also made use of the obituary tributes that appeared in *The Times* (7 Feb. 1977), in the *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., xxx (1977) (by Joyce Youings), and in *Hermes* (the News Letter of the Westfield College Association), 1977; and of the address given by Dr Bryan Thwaites at the thanksgiving service in her memory on 28 April 1977.

Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Petrie, came of a military family with strong cultural and religious interests, in which the daughters were encouraged to participate. Mary Petrie enrolled as a student at University College, London, and took a BA in Philosophy with Logic and Classics; with her father, Colonel Petrie, and Miss Constance Maynard she was involved in the discussions that led to the foundation of Westfield College, and for a few years after 1883 she held an appointment there as Visiting Lecturer. Colonel Petrie's younger daughter, Irene, a girl of considerable intellectual and artistic gifts, furthered the education of women in a different sphere; she went to Kashmir under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society and became a zenana missionary, undertaking the daunting task of teaching Muslim women with such resolution and enthusiasm that she was able to learn Urdu and Kashmiri and make some progress in Hindi in the three years she survived the taxing climate and arduous work. She died of typhus during a holiday among the mountains bordering Tibet only a few months before Nora Carus-Wilson was born; her career well illustrates that whatever the Petries took up they did thoroughly. Her niece never knew her; but there can be no doubt that 'Aunt Irene's' memory was kept alive by Mary Petrie, who wrote a full account of her life<sup>1</sup> and read her writings aloud to the family.

Nora and her two brothers grew up in a family where serious reading and music were a part of the way of life, and there was a strong tradition of evangelical Christianity. In addition they shared their father's scientific interests; his astronomical or electrical models were brought home and eagerly studied by children and friends. No doubt this, combined with a practical training in household duties denied to many girls of her generation and class, contributed to Nora's later interest in the detailed techniques of cloth manufacture. She learned something of the art of dyeing in her college days, by dyeing a variety of garments ranging from her brother's socks to a dress and even (once) a hat. Her more formal education began at Norland Place School, where Veronica Wedgwood went later, and was continued at St. Paul's Girls' School: an excellent choice since, in addition to its distinguished academic tradition, music, under the direction of Gustav Holst, was a part of the curriculum. A contemporary at St. Paul's remembered her as 'always utterly determined and strong-minded'. In 1917 she entered Westfield College with a College Scholarship to read history, and went into residence there.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs Ashley Carus-Wilson, *Irene Petrie, missionary to Kashmir* (London, 1900).

At Westfield she came under the influence of two remarkable women. One was the teacher to whom she acknowledged a lifelong debt: Caroline Skeel, who built up an outstanding school of history during the twenty-eight years she lectured there, and trained five winners of the Alexander Prize of the Royal Historical Society. It was Miss Skeel who initiated her as an undergraduate into the Reading Room of the British Museum, and who helped and advised her throughout the difficult years ahead when she was struggling to make her way in historical research. The other was Dame Bertha Philpotts, appointed Principal in 1919. Her influence was less immediately apparent; it can best be seen in Nora Carus-Wilson's own appraisal of her in the jubilee history of Westfield that she edited and partly wrote in 1932: 'Her charm, her sense of humour, her courtesy and grace—these were quickly recognized and approved. It was a pleasure to see her move about College and everyone soon learned to anticipate with delight the unexpected turns of phrase and the delicate humour which characterized her conversation and occasional speeches. Her vitality, too, soon made itself felt. The spirit which she brought with her was of the joy of living, the zest for adventure and above all else courage and a delight in all creative endeavour.' In 1919 Nora Carus-Wilson was a shy girl who even appeared awkward to some; twenty years later these words might have been written about her. They indicate the model at which she already aimed, and the self-discipline by which she ordered her life so as to attain it.

Her college career was unfortunately hampered by ill health. In addition to frequent bouts of influenza and other infections, she had to undergo an operation which kept her away from Westfield for almost the whole of her sixth term. During the summer she discussed with her family a project of completing her degree course in a fourth year at some other college. Ultimately the fourth year was allowed, but she continued at Westfield as a non-resident student, working a good deal in the British Museum. Her health remained uncertain; when she sat her finals in October 1921, her right arm was very painful with neuritis and gave out completely on the third day; she had to finish her papers with the aid of an amanuensis. Not surprisingly, the result when it came was a Second. At a time when academic openings were few, and particularly scarce for women, this effectively ruled out all hope of a studentship that might have opened the way to a Ph.D. and enabled her to take the direct route to a university appointment.

In early October, before sitting her finals, she had discussed future plans with Miss Skeel, who gave her opinion that an MA

might be 'knocked off easily' during school-teaching, given a free term at the end. There seemed to be no prospect of any opening in London which would have allowed her to adopt this plan, and she discussed with her father the possibility of taking organ lessons, or going to France, whilst simultaneously applying for posts elsewhere. The immediate future was settled by an offer of an appointment at St. Elphin's, Darley Dale, beginning in January, followed by an invitation to teach for the few intervening weeks at Sherborne. Teaching at Sherborne proved to be less terrifying than she had anticipated, and her form, as she noted with some surprise, seemed to regret her leaving.

Her two-and-a-half years at St. Elphin's, however, were frustrating and far from happy. The first term was darkened by the illness of her much-loved younger brother, Louis, who had survived the war and was just embarking on a promising career in the Royal Engineers when he went down with tuberculosis. He died at Easter, 1922; the tragedy, which she felt deeply, increased her outward reserve. At no time did school discipline come easily to her, though she enjoyed coaching serious scholars, and the success of a pupil in the Oxford entrance examination brought her keen pleasure. On a visit to Westfield in the following year she recorded somewhat wryly that she and a friend 'made moan about boarding schools as the death of art and life'. By the spring of 1924 she had decided to make a break; in March she was interviewed for a post in Madras Women's College. The Committee seemed anxious to appoint her, but insisted that she must take up duties in July; her father strenuously opposed her sailing in the June heat, and the project fell through. This was the only time when, probably under pressure from her mother, she turned her thoughts towards the mission field as a career. When the appointment went elsewhere she reverted to the earlier plan, far more appropriate for her gifts, of finding a London-based post and embarking on an MA. In July she left St. Elphin's for good.

A temporary post as senior history mistress for the autumn term was found at the LCC School at Putney, and within a fortnight of taking it up she had attended her first palaeography lecture with Hubert Hall and returned to the British Museum to practise reading manuscripts. After Christmas she took up a post as visiting mistress at Hayes Court in Kent, and settled down to a pattern of life that was to last for more than ten years. From Tuesday until Thursday (after the first year until Friday) she taught at Hayes Court, taking history and geography throughout the school. At weekends she returned home for seminars at King's College and

the London School of Economics, and worked at the British Museum or Public Record Office, and in the Institute of Historical Research. Miss Skeel continued to direct her work; but at LSE she made the acquaintance of Eileen Power and fell under the spell of that remarkable woman, who 'combined the industry of the bee with the glamour of the butterfly' and could turn long hours of work in the Public Record Office into an eager adventure. Nora Carus-Wilson discussed plans of research with her, and joined what was for more than a decade the live centre of research in economic history, the now famous Power-Postan seminar.

At Hayes Court she transformed the history teaching; though she never took happily to teaching the junior forms and developed 'a hard outer shell as a necessary defence in a classroom', those who stayed on for advanced work and coaching for Oxford and Cambridge examinations came to appreciate her, and realized that they were in touch with an outstanding mind. One former pupil, who won scholarships to both Oxford and Cambridge under her tuition, wrote, 'As a class-teacher she was a perfectionist—her characteristic handwriting as good on the blackboard as on paper', adding, 'I feel that I learned more from her about sources and checking facts and other basics than I did at Oxford'.

Meanwhile, at weekends and in school holidays, she was beginning to feel her way into the topics in economic history that were to occupy her for the remainder of her life. She had become keenly interested in late fifteenth-century history whilst at Westfield; with the guidance of Eileen Power she began an investigation into 'the circumstances that prompted the Bristol Merchant Venturers at the close of the century to sponsor the voyages of the Cabots'. In 1926 she submitted her thesis on the Bristol merchant adventurers, and was awarded her MA with distinction; Eileen Power added to her delight by telling her that it was very nearly of Ph.D. standard. Her main conclusions were embodied in an essay submitted for the Alexander History Prize; but luck was against her, for she was in competition that year with the essay of W. A. Pantin on the Chapters of the English Black Monks, and failed to win the prize. Instead, a slightly revised version of her essay was read to the Royal Historical Society in the following year, and published in the Society's *Transactions*.

This first published paper of hers shows already some of the characteristics of her mature work. There is a remarkable economy in the use of evidence designed to relate the history of a city and the lives of individual merchants to the general trends of English and international trade. Nothing is redundant; nothing

unsubstantiated speculation. Above all, she had already mastered the art of using evidence of all kinds—local and central records, chronicles, poems, the houses and churches of the city—and using it critically. By careful checking of the figures of William of Worcester wherever this was possible she demonstrated their general reliability in the face of widespread scepticism, just as in her next paper she was to show that the aulnage accounts, then generally respected as sound, could at certain periods be very unreliable indeed, amounting to ‘works of art rather than transcripts of fact’. She was now getting her teeth into the customs accounts in the Public Record Office and effecting an entry into the archives of the various London companies. The spring of 1929 found her working in the Guildhall; next year she was at Mercers’ Hall making ‘interesting finds about the Merchant Venturers’; a little later she was ‘laying siege’ to Ironmongers’ Hall. At this time too she explored archives at King’s Lynn and Norwich; visits which, nearly fifty years later, she was to recall as vividly as if they had happened the day before.

There was talk with Eileen Power about a possible book on the woollen industry, to be published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, the first of several projects for such a book that never came to fruition. Instead, she continued to work in the Power–Postan seminar, reading papers in her turn, and gladly agreeing to collaborate in the book that was to be the product of that seminar. When it was published as *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*, in 1933, it included two papers by her, on the overseas trade of Bristol in the fifteenth century and the Iceland venture. They were among the best in the book, equalled only by the chapters written by the two editors. In the same year the *Economic History Review* published her paper on the origins and early development of the Merchant Adventurers’ organization in London, in which she showed how the London Adventurers came to be dominated by the Mercers’ Company. This was based on her discovery, among the records of the Company, of their minutes in a book deceptively entitled ‘Acts of Court of the Mercers’ Company’. She was already engaged in putting together a collection of documents illustrating the overseas trade of Bristol in the Middle Ages, which was published by the Bristol Record Society in 1937. All this was added to her teaching at Hayes Court, to her preparation of a course of lectures delivered at Westfield College in 1930–1, and to active participation in preparation for the 1932 jubilee at Westfield College, which culminated in her agreeing to edit the history of Westfield and to write a substantial part of it.

It was not until 16 May 1936 that she received the 'momentous letter' offering her a Leverhulme Fellowship. She left Hayes Court at the end of the summer term, and settled down for the first time in her life to two years' full-time research; she was then thirty-eight years old.

From this time the doors of academic advancement were open, though they still needed a hard push from time to time. Her immediate object was a study of the rural cloth industry, following up a subject she had broached at the seminar on 11 February 1935, when, according to her diary, she 'gave a talk on fulling mills which roused discussion and apparent interest'. The seminar continued under the direction of Eileen Power; after Postan took up the chair of Economic History at Cambridge he returned whenever possible to preside jointly over it. To both of them the fact that a scholar of her distinction should have been so long without a university post was little short of scandalous; she was beginning to do some teaching at LSE and had been invited to take over Eileen Power's work during Eileen's anticipated study-leave in 1939-40 when war broke out and all arrangements were cancelled. In 1940 she accepted a post as a temporary civil servant in the Ministry of Food, and joined the staff of the Ministry in Colwyn Bay.

Here her administrative skills showed themselves. One of her colleagues in the Ministry writes,

When the Ministry of Food was set up on the outbreak of war in 1939, it was staffed on the commodity side largely from the food trades, with a sprinkling of professional administrators and accountants. Each Division was headed by a Director, chosen for his standing in the particular trade and solely responsible for trading in the particular commodity. The need for co-ordination both within and without the Ministry was realized only slowly. But at the end of 1940 . . . a General Department was brought into existence. Its internal tasks were to explore problems affecting more than one Division and to collate the views of different Divisions on common problems; and it became the channel of communication with other Government Departments as well as with the network of Cabinet Committees responsible for the central direction of the war.

Nora was appointed in 1940 to head the Intelligence Branch in the new Department and served there throughout the war. Her assignment was to break down the isolation of individual Commodity Divisions and to increase the awareness in all of them of activities elsewhere in the Ministry . . . One of her first tasks was to produce what became known as 'The Division of Business Guide'. Nora persuaded over-burdened traders as well as civil servants, many of them temporaries, to write for her an outline of what they believed their particular section's



responsibilities to be and welded the contributions into a reference book for general use throughout the Ministry. Again she established a 'Weekly Intelligence Summary' for senior officers, which reported not only developments in the Ministry and other Ministries but also epitomes of Cabinet Committee minutes, the contents of overseas telegrams etc. that could be significant for the work of the Department. The task assigned to her was not an easy one. The practical men who had run the Ministry for many months tended to regard untrained common sense as sufficient to solve the Ministry's general problems, and to look upon academics as impracticably remote, concerned with contributions to knowledge for its own sake rather than for practical wartime purposes. Busy trade directors had neither the time nor the inclination to instruct inquirers and were cynical about outside theorists. But despite these obstacles Nora in her wartime work made a significant contribution to what might be described as the intellectual unity of food control. It was a sincere tribute to her success that a Ministry public relations expert could say that 'Nora Carus-Wilson knows more about what everybody in the Ministry is doing than anyone else'.<sup>1</sup>

In the little spare time left to her she pursued her two lifelong interests, music and economic history. With Cuthbert Bates she set up the Ministry of Food Music Society, which brought together music-lovers for choral and orchestral performances and some dramatic works such as Milton's 'Comus'. With Enid Whetham she cycled round the neighbouring countryside hunting for medieval Welsh fulling mills. During these arduous years two seminal articles came from her pen and were published in the shrunken wartime issues of the *Economic History Review*. The first, entitled 'An industrial revolution of the thirteenth century', made public for the first time her conclusions on the importance of fulling mills in the development of the rural cloth industry, first broached several years previously in the seminar, and now reinforced with substantial evidence. The second was concerned with the urban cloth industry up to the middle of the thirteenth century, and showed the early development of capitalism in the industry.

After the war Nora Carus-Wilson returned to Hanover Lodge and the London School of Economics. In both there had been changes. Her mother had died in 1935; her father, who had always given great support in her struggle to establish herself as a historian, died in 1942. And Eileen Power, the teacher to whom, after Caroline Skeel, she felt she owed most, died very suddenly in 1940, leaving a vacuum in the teaching of medieval economic history at LSE. Eileen Power's successor in the chair of economic history was

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Lady Hardman.

T. S. Ashton, a modern historian; he offered Nora Carus-Wilson a lectureship with responsibility for the teaching of medieval history, and she succeeded just in time in obtaining release from the Ministry of Food. So in 1946, at the age of forty-eight, she took up her first full-time academic appointment. Two years later she was made a Reader, and in 1953 a personal chair was created for her, which she held until her retirement in 1965. Both Ashton and Eileen Power's former colleague, R. H. Tawney, were already close friends; for Tawney in particular she had the greatest admiration. They made an impressive triumvirate in economic history. One pupil from overseas later referred to 'the great days of LSE, with Ashton, Tawney and Carus-Wilson'.

When she began to work on the records of Bristol, urban history in England was still largely in the hands of constitutional and legal historians, chiefly interested in the publication of charters and the workings of the borough government. Pirenne's work on medieval cities was known to most English students only in a very general way, and was not related constructively to the growth of English towns. Besides this, economic history was only just becoming accepted as a true academic discipline in English universities. Eileen Power had voiced the difficulties in her inaugural lecture at LSE:

Properly defined, social history is . . . a line of approach to historical investigation which requires as rigorous a mental discipline and as scientific a methodology as any of the longer-established branches of history . . . While historians will no doubt continue to meet the charge of writing sociology with the indignation of a Victorian matron defending her virtue, the best of them will increasingly write it under the name of social history . . . Economic history has suffered, just as social history has suffered, from the fact that it has not always known what questions to ask itself;

and she had stressed the need for an integration of the labours of anthropologists, sociologists, economists and historians, based upon a comprehension of each other's objects, capacities, and methods.

Nora Carus-Wilson stepped into this tradition, and carried it on, adding archaeology and philology to the relevant disciplines, and making accessible evidence from voluminous unpublished (often unread and undusted) manuscripts in the Public Record Office and local archives. She once wrote, after quoting the saying of a certain eminent historian that history was tending to become a mixture of statistics and gossip, that we should at least have 'statistics that are enlightening and gossip that is pertinent and

circumstantial'. Always ready to move with the times, she was nevertheless alive to some of the dangers in new trends: 'The new sociological history, with its tabulation and analysis of quantitative data and its determination of normal family cycles and cultural patterns has much to give. But there is a danger . . . that the pursuit of the *genus mercator* may result either in an unreal abstraction or in no clear concept but a series of confused images.'<sup>1</sup> No one could accuse her of falling into either error; she kept individual accounts of merchant families with their multiple interests in balance with carefully chosen trade statistics. In her studies of towns she viewed the inhabitants in their setting (not anecdotally) as occupiers and builders of houses and shops, suitors at the borough court, parishioners and founders of chantries. H. van Werveke partly summed up her achievement when he wrote in 1956 of the studies she had published in *Medieval Merchant Venturers*, 'They are amongst the most important contributions to English economic history in the last twenty-five years', adding that they had shown the relevance of Pirenne's thesis on the importance of merchants in long-distance trade in connection with the rise of towns for the development of some English towns, and concluding that she 'has not only considerably enriched our knowledge of English history, but has also provided a more solid foundation for our understanding of the economic history of continental Europe'.<sup>2</sup> He might have added that she was also pioneering the study of the relation between rural and urban industry in medieval England.

During her years at LSE she made a major contribution to the teaching of economic history at every level. As a lecturer 'she had the gift of lucid and authoritative exposition and of holding the attention of her audience, lay as well as academic'.<sup>3</sup> She laid the foundations for independent study in her lectures. In her seminars and supervision she led her pupils on to make discoveries for themselves by keen questioning; never telling them what they ought to find, she guided them to the sources that might support or correct what they had written. As one pupil wrote, 'She always emphasized the scrupulous use of evidence; she had the ability to establish firm and seemingly indisputable lines beyond which the evidence would not carry the eager researcher or would-be

<sup>1</sup> Review of Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (*Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., ii (1949), 208-10).

<sup>2</sup> *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., viii (1956), 445-7.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Joyce Youings, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., xxx (1977), pp. iv-v.

model-builder'. For many years she was the outstanding London medievalist on the social and economic side; in addition to her teaching at LSE she revived and directed a seminar in medieval economic history at the Institute of Historical Research. This became an active centre for the direction of research and exchange of ideas, as the Power-Postan seminar had been in the 1930s; generations of students from Elspeth Veale, Margery James, and A. R. Bridbury to Ian Blanchard and John Hatcher paid tribute to the stimulus they had received there. Besides this, her influence extended far beyond her personal circle. To anyone teaching economic history during and after the war, as I know from my own experience in Aberdeen and Cambridge, her published essays were indispensable; beautifully written and supported by relevant statistics, they asked the right questions and opened the way for further investigation. The most substantial of them were brought together in *Medieval Merchant Venturers*, published in 1954. At this time much of the best work in English economic history was appearing in various journals, notably in the *Economic History Review*, and was not always easily accessible to students. She recognized the practical needs of libraries and readers; during the years from 1951 to 1967 when she chaired the publications committee of the Economic History Society she brought together and edited three volumes of *Essays in Economic History*, which made widely available some seminal and many stimulating essays by various authors on topics in all periods, from the early middle ages to the twentieth century.

During these years her own research continued steadily, on international, national, and regional subjects. As soon as international conferences recommenced after the war she attended the Anglo-French historical conference in Paris and gave a paper on the wine trade with Gascony. This was followed at Bordeaux in 1952 by another paper on the import of woad from France, in particular Picardy, into England. She used with effect figures from English public records to show the extent to which regional specialization was developed on an international scale, in a time of free trade, to sustain the woollen industry, and the importance of England's participation in it. One general chapter on the medieval European woollen industry, a definitive study written with force and clarity, was completed for the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, and later revised in preparation for a second edition, still awaiting publication. Her major work on national trade, carried out in collaboration with Olive Coleman and published in 1963, was a comprehensive study of the documents

yielding figures for England's export trade from 1275 to 1546; their book made available a remarkable collection of continuous statistics for wool and cloth exports.

At the local level she investigated regions of special importance in the cloth industry. Ever since her college days, when she had spent family holidays cycling round villages with her father and elder brother, admiring churches and medieval houses, examining sculptures and merchants' marks, her study of medieval history had been enhanced by an intimate knowledge of the towns and villages whose growth and decline were bound up with the fortunes of trade and industry. As early as 1929 she had become interested in Castle Combe as an industrial manor; thirty years later she published an account of the expansion of the woollen industry both there and along Stroudwater in the later Middle Ages. Her regional study of the industry in Wiltshire appeared in the *Victoria County History*.

She was working towards a comprehensive study of the medieval English cloth industry when the invitation to give the Ford Lectures at Oxford offered an incentive to assemble her voluminous material and put it into definitive form. The lectures were delivered in the Hilary Term, 1965, with a clarity and elegance that recalled the earlier set of Ford Lectures on the Wool Trade given by her teacher, Eileen Power, a quarter of a century earlier. Those who knew and admired her work must regret that they proved to be no more than an interim report on a great enterprise that was never to be completed. Although both Methuens and the Oxford University Press approached her to discuss publication, the long-awaited book never appeared. As one of her pupils said, 'she was a 110 per cent perfectionist'. The task she had undertaken was very different from the work that Olive Coleman and she had just completed on the statistics for England's export trade, for which the material, though daunting in its quantity, had been capable of collection and analysis. It had been possible for her to write individual chapters on the cloth industry, to compile information on fulling mills, or industrial development in a particular region, or some aspects of consumer demand. Yet every chapter opened up new questions. She had been the first to see, and to say, that the fulling mills, though important in furthering the movement of cloth manufacture into rural areas, were not the sole cause of the decline of some urban manufacture. Yet to take the subject further would have involved a detailed examination of the history of many individual towns, in itself more than a life's work, for which the groundwork had not

yet been done. And that was only one aspect of the subject. By this time, too, a number of other scholars were working in the field that owed so much to her pioneering efforts; some were already putting forward alternative interpretations which, however attractive, were based on evidence too slender for her own exacting standards. To produce a book that would have satisfied her rigorous scholarship would have involved more than was humanly possible, even for her. She began to revise and correct the first lectures; her diaries record notes of 'working on the Ford Lecture book' from time to time until the early months of 1968. Thereafter they are silent on the subject; it seems that she no longer seriously contemplated publication. However much those who heard the lectures, or read them in manuscript, may regret the decision, there can be no doubt that it must be respected as her own.

Her time was still more than fully occupied. Further recognition of her achievement had begun to come even before her retirement from her chair in 1965. In 1961 she was made an Associate Member of the Royal Flemish Academy; and in 1963 the British Academy elected her a Fellow. A little later, in 1968, she received an Honorary LL D from Smith College, and paid the only visit of her life to the USA. Her response to invitations to lecture to all kinds of organizations continued to be generous; she travelled all over England to speak to various local meetings, student societies, branches of the Historical Association, and even schools. Besides this, administrative duties multiplied; as Tawney once wrote of Eileen Power, 'She bore her fair share of the burdens which fall to a woman with a head for business';<sup>1</sup> and the share of such a woman after formal retirement may be very large indeed. For many years she had been a member of the Council of the Economic History Society, of which, as she took pleasure in pointing out, Caroline Skeel had been a founding member. From 1966-9 she held the office of President of the Society. In the same years she also presided over the Society for Medieval Archaeology, to which she had been naturally drawn at its foundation by her interest in medieval archaeology and topography. She 'seemed to collect committees', and rose almost automatically to chair many of them. A colleague on the Westfield College Council, on which she served as Vice-Chairman from 1967-74, wrote: 'She had the scholar's insistence on precise information which served her well on the many occasions she acted as Chairman. Well-prepared, always in control of a meeting, she would pin-point the basic issues

<sup>1</sup> Article on 'Eileen Edna Le Poer Postan', *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1931-40, pp. 718-19.

among conflicting opinions and sum them up with clarity, conciseness and good humour.' Work for her old college of Westfield became one of the pleasures of her retirement, and she gave her time unstintingly to both the Council and the old students' association. Always an active member of the Historical Association, she became President of the Central London Branch, and frequently took the chair for speakers. The list of her administrative activities might be extended; it ranges from the Ladbroke Association (her local residents' association) to the King's Lynn Archaeological Society Advisory Committee and the Department of Environment's Area Archaeological Committee for Norfolk and Suffolk, all of which she chaired. She also served as a member on the Cassel Trust, the Council of the Madras Christian College, and the Salisbury Diocesan Training College, and continued to take an active interest in both her old schools. In particular, work connected with the publications of the British Academy absorbed more and more of her interest.

By 1969 she had persuaded the Academy to revive the series of *Records of Social and Economic History* that had lapsed in 1935, and had agreed to act as chairman of the relevant committee. Although I had first met her in Eileen Power's seminar in 1939, and subsequently at various historical conferences, this was the side of her activities which I personally knew best. As a general editor she excelled. She laid down clearly the principles of editing. The series was to provide documents for further research; the primary need in the introduction was to help the reader to use the documents intelligently and to point their value for social and economic history, and its length was to be strictly limited. To write a monograph under guise of an introduction, with the documents merely providing supporting evidence, was to be avoided at all costs. She was firm, but patient, in trying to keep contributors to their promised dates of completion, writing on one occasion of a tardy collaborator, 'I, like you, can sympathize with him over his aged parent problem, for much of my own work has been done while coping with that as well as earning my keep', but adding the hope that the delay would not be too long. All the volumes passing through her hands were carefully and constructively examined.

She herself was particularly closely involved in one which was part of a wider project: the volume of records illustrating the history of King's Lynn, planned as the third volume in a complete archaeological and historical survey of the town. She saw this as a pioneer effort, 'the first survey to attempt a thorough co-ordination of archaeological with architectural and documentary

evidence, so as to build up as complete a picture as possible of a medieval English town'. The first two volumes were to be architectural and topographical; the third was to consist of documents. These were intended to be 'of interest not only in relation to Lynn itself, but to students researching into the social and economic history of any English town'. She believed that it might 'set out clearly for the first time what records a student should hope for, and look for, outside as well as inside the particular town being studied'. It was an ambitious undertaking; the problem of holding together collaborators of different outlook working in so many fields taxed all her skills. But persistence triumphed; two volumes were published in her lifetime, and the volume of documents which she had helped to plan had at least been mapped out at the time of her death; the task of editing was taken up by Dorothy Owen, who had collaborated from the early days of the project.

Her publications during these years consisted almost entirely of contributions to the volumes of essays published in honour of M. Postan and E. Perroy, and papers read at conferences. Her presidential address to the Society for Medieval Archaeology on "'Haberget"—a medieval textile conundrum' brought together documentary, philological, and archaeological evidence to explain the exact meaning of a technical term loosely described in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'a kind of cloth', and at the same time showed how changes in the type of loom used to produce its peculiar weave were related to the whole pattern of English international trade. For this she made use of some material from her Ford Lectures. Other lectures were delivered at conferences in Prato, Bordeaux, and elsewhere; in 1966 she went on a lecture tour to Brussels, Ghent, and Louvain, and in 1973 she spoke on the Hanse and England at the *Hanse in Europe* exhibition in Cologne. Her last paper, on 'The German Hanse in the Economy of Medieval England', was read at the inauguration of the German Historical Institute in London on 4 November 1976. Of these, only the Cologne lecture was published. Her last publication, like her first, was concerned with Bristol; she assisted Mrs Lobel in the preparation of the second volume on *Historic Towns*, produced under the auspices of the Historic Towns Trust, and wrote the medieval section on Bristol. It was a masterly survey of the development of Bristol's topography and the resources behind its buildings, shown against a background of the varying patterns of the city's foreign trade, the growth and movements of local manufacture, and the



changing structure of society. In a sense it was an epitome of her best work.

Few scholars have been so single-minded in their research and writing. 'It seemed odd to us', wrote one of her pupils from her school-teaching days, 'that she was so deeply interested in *wool*.' The cloth industry remained the central scholarly interest of her life; after her retirement she became involved in the work of the Pasold Research Fund on behalf of textile history, and regularly attended its conferences, where her well-tuned interventions were memorable for their style and content. It was specially fitting that a *Festschrift* on *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe* should have been planned as one of the publications of the Pasold Fund. On 22 December 1976, less than six weeks before her sudden death, her former pupil, Negley Harte, and Kenneth Ponting took her out to lunch and revealed the well-kept secret to her, and the news gave her intense pleasure. The volume, originally planned for presentation at the International Economic History Conference in 1978, was delayed and finally completed for publication in 1983 as a memorial volume, to which scholars from ten European countries and North America contributed essays 'to mark their deep gratitude to her and to her work'. In half a century of research and writing almost all her publications, including the reviews she wrote, were focused on her chosen theme of medieval trade and industry, especially the textile industry, in all its ramifications. The one exception was her jubilee history of Westfield College in 1932, the product of a special loyalty. Another loyalty—to family traditions—led her to speak on the early history of Casterton School in 1973, on the 150th anniversary of its foundation by her great-grandfather, William Carus-Wilson, but this was not published.

In her early days at Westfield College she began keeping a regular diary modelled on her mother's daily diary, and she continued the practice until two days before her death. Entries were rarely more than four or five lines long, recording events outside routine work: special seminars and lectures, society meetings, committees, church services (regularly attended wherever she happened to be), concerts and theatres attended, letters written, visits from and to family and friends, holidays, archives consulted. The entries for the most part record facts briefly. Yet she had brought such skill to the art of concise writing that every word, or underlining, or exclamation mark, is expressive; cumulatively they show her deep devotion to her family, and her intense delight in music, in gardening, and in mountain

holidays. Even at seventy-eight she could outwalk younger friends in the Alps, and she relaxed on Sunday afternoons by working in her pretty back garden at Hanover Lodge; she records planting out bulbs ready for the spring display only a few weeks before her death. The diaries are a record, too, of her friendships, which were many. She followed the careers of her pupils with interest, delighting in their successes and in their families; children were instantly at ease with her. Her brother Martin and his children, especially his daughter Christine, were regular visitors; the career of her nephew, Louis Carus, was charted from the occasion when, at the age of eight, he played Bach chorales on his violin for the guests at a large party until his appointment as Director of the School of Music at Birmingham in 1975. It was a particular pleasure for her when his daughter, Alison, took a degree at Westfield College.

Some found her formidable, and she could be exacting; but only in her criticism of those she knew to be capable of better work. A very few adverse criticisms appear in her early diaries; she found one speaker on the damage to Rheims cathedral shortly after 1918 guilty of 'too many hymns of hate'. Later she departed from the impersonal tone only to express approval of such events as an outstanding opera performance at Glyndebourne, or a particularly good lecture. She was unwilling to review a book unless she could speak well of it. A friend and great admirer of R. H. Tawney, she truly embodied the same Christian socialism; one visitor who called during the power-cuts in December 1970 found her at work 'with oil heater and candles, filled with warmth for the cause of the power workers who were on strike'. Those who penetrated the reserve she had built up as a defence in her classroom days, particularly those who shared her love of tradition and fine scholarship, of music and mountain walking, found a warmth of welcome and fine perception not immediately apparent to those who knew her only slightly. She had a keen sense of humour; in the words of her niece, Miss Christine Carus-Wilson, 'you never felt, despite her learning and eminence in her field, that she took herself too seriously, and you were conscious that she had a balanced interest in such things as pretty clothes, good food, the décor of a new flat, and the development of one's own youthful friendships'. She delighted in entertaining friends, and inviting them to performances of opera. Christopher Brooke writes of visits to Glyndebourne, 'these are very happy memories, for she enjoyed being a hostess almost as much as we enjoyed being her guests, and her appreciation of opera brought out the widest range of her

qualities—the acute mind, deep musical appreciation and the romantic streak not so often apparent'. To young scholars she was readily accessible, applauding their achievements and sharing their pleasures. A sentence in a letter to one much younger colleague brings out vividly two of her own loyalties: 'To have a book accepted for publication by the British Academy, and move into a flat on Campden Hill *in the same year*—how fortunate you are!'

Her work continued with undiminished vigour; clear-thinking, elegant, and poised, she showed no sign of having passed her seventy-eighth birthday. 'I suppose', one fellow member of a committee said with some surprise, 'that Professor Carus-Wilson will be getting to the retiring age before long.' The diary records a slight warning; on 7 January 1977 'Dr. Hill called and prescribed a strict régime for a week because of an overworked heart!' The strict régime was dutifully observed for the required week; on 18 January she was back at work on a paper about the Hanse for the German Historical Institute; on 24 January she took the chair at a committee of the Ladbroke Association; the next day she went to Westfield for a committee. On 1 February she was to preside over a meeting of the Governing Body of Westfield College; she worked all morning at the Council papers, and spent three-quarters of an hour discussing business on the telephone with the Principal, Dr Bryan Thwaites. She was on her way to the meeting when she collapsed and died. It was a coincidence that her sudden death was almost exactly like that of her admired teacher, Eileen Power, many years before. But it was no coincidence that, after learning so much from Eileen, she had followed her both to a chair at the London School of Economics and to an Oxford lecture-room as Ford lecturer. Much in their interests was different; but a memoir concerned with Nora Carus-Wilson's achievements as historian and teacher can justly conclude by emphasizing the way in which, with 'her instinct for all that is best in a tradition, for holding to what was well tried, for building on what had gone before',<sup>1</sup> she built on the foundations of medieval economic history so firmly laid at Westfield by Caroline Skeel, and at LSE by Eileen Power.

MARJORIE CHIBNALL

<sup>1</sup> Memorial address by Dr Bryan Thwaites.