

OBITUARY

SARAH FLORENCE DIGGORY (1883–1972)

Florence Diggory was the last of the “Lady Associates” of the old Plymouth Institution (now the Athenaeum). Her parents came from Shrewsbury but were living at Corwen, North Wales, when she was born. Her father, a railway inspector, came to Plymouth with his wife and four children in 1895, and here she lived for some sixty-five years, later moving to guest-houses in various parts of Devon.

Trained at Oxford Street Primary School as teacher, with first-class diplomas, she was for many years Headmistress of the old “High Street, Stonehouse”, where she handled with understanding, but with firm discipline, young children whom she loved, but sadly described at the end of her career as “the third generation of unemployed and unemployables”. Only one pupil rewarded her with distinction, and this future professor of philosophy was only at the school because his mother had been widowed.

She left one-twelfth (over £2,000) of the residue of her estate to the officers of the Plymouth Athenaeum, to be known as the “Diggory Trust”, to be invested and the interest spent on buying books for the library of the Society. This specializes in works connected with Devon and Cornwall, and so the money is certain to be fittingly spent on some of her interests, particularly local history and natural history and archaeology, and most of all Dartmoor in all its aspects. The latter she knew thoroughly after many holidays and marathon expeditions with people of the standing of Hansford Worth and C. E. Bracken.-

She was a keen member of the Athenaeum and helped in the work of the Ladies’ Committee before the last war. For many years she was the Hon. Treasurer of the Plymouth and District Field Club; she was a past chairman of the local branch of the Devonshire Association and took part in its Annual Meetings, as well as those of the Cambrian Society and the South West Naturalists’ Union. She was a member of the (Plymouth) Guildhall Working League (she was a good craftswoman).

Florence Diggory had a keen intellect and was a stimulating conversationalist; she had strongly held opinions (never would she have considered surrendering her independence to any man or trade union).

It was sad that wars, heavy family commitments and various disabilities, all accepted without complaint, prevented her in later years from enjoying the travel to which she had looked forward in retirement; removal from Plymouth also cut her off from her many friends.

At our last meeting at Great Torrington we found her in the winter of 1972, sitting with the wind blowing through open windows and door, so that she got something of the feeling of the fresh air outside; she was still animatedly discussing current affairs, recent books and mutual friends. A former President of the Athenaeum, Miss Mildred Raymond, used to tell her pupils that they should never let their minds grow old; Florence Diggory in her ninetieth year fully exemplified this admirable precept.

Alison Wilson