

Helen Waterhouse

Helen Waterhouse was born Helen Thomas, in a family which gave her a strong academic background: her father, F. W. Thomas was Librarian at the India Office and subsequently Professor of Sanskrit and Oriental Languages at the University of Oxford, where he was a Fellow of Balliol. Helen was educated, at first, by a tutor, and then at Roedean, the leading girls' public school, where she was a Scholar and Head of House. It was at school that she first became interested in Greece, and from there it was an obvious progression to read Classics at Cambridge, where she was a Scholar of Girton College. She specialised in Classical Archaeology in Tripos part II, the final examination, in which she obtained an outstanding "starred" first. After this it was a foregone conclusion that, having graduated, she should go to Athens as a student of the British School of Archaeology there.

At that time, 1935, the British School was approaching the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation. Although its archive includes what now seem preposterous fulminations against the presence of women on excavations, and though, at first, in accordance with contemporary views of propriety, women were not allowed to reside in its hostel, from its earliest days the School had admitted and supported women students. By the 1920's, certainly, they were directing their own excavations, while the ban on residing in the hostel had been tacitly dropped during one particular political crisis and never revived. The School provided the real beginning for Helen as an archaeologist. When she went there she was certainly not the only woman student, nor

could properly be included in the resulting volume. In it she gives a useful account, too, of the role played by women students in the achievements of the school, going back to its earliest days, in effect the setting into which she herself had come in the 1930's: to understand Helen's achievement as an archaeologist, her history of the School is itself essential reading.

Her final article was published in BSA 91 for 1996. Entitled From Ithaca to the Odyssey, in many ways it sums up Helen ~~Waterhouse's~~ **achievements and purposes as an archaeologist working in Greece**. It begins with a statement of classical attitudes to the island, preoccupied entirely with its Homeric connection as the homeland of Odysseus, just as Helen herself began as a classicist and, to the end, was a student of Homer. It summarises the various archaeological discoveries made by other members of the British School, as well as Helen herself, and emphasises that in that material also there is evidence for the continuing influence of Odysseus, and the stories about him, into the emerging world of historical Greece.

PUBLICATIONS

The Acropolis Treasure from Mycenae BSA 39 (1938/9) This is the work suggested to her by Prof Wace. Though it was written in 1938, and the volume is that of the subsequent year, because of the outbreak of war it did not appear until 1942.

Bibliography of A J B Wace BSA 46 (1951)

her post-war life she was unable to resume the fieldwork necessary to complete it and bring it up to date with more recent discoveries. Fortunately, in 1960 ~~Birk~~^{Richard} Hope Simpson, also a prehistorian working on Mycenaean Greece, came to Birmingham on a three-year Research Fellowship, and this resulted in a most happy collaboration between Helen and him, leading to the publication in the Annual of the British School for 1960 and 1961 of two long and detailed articles, Prehistoric Laconia I and II, which remain the fundamental study, mapping the distribution of **settlements throughout the region. Other work by Helen included** the publication of the pre-war excavations on Ithaca, with the support of their original director, Sylvia Benton, and various contributions to periodicals, and to the Mycenaean Seminars at the University of London, where she made an interesting attempt to subvert a prevailing definition of prehistoric rulers in Late Bronze Age Crete and Mycenae as "Priest Kings" by suggesting they might well have been "Priest Queens".

During all this time she continued her support and interest in the British School and its members of all generations. When it was decided that the School's centenary, in 1986, should be **celebrated by the publication of a supplementary volume of the Annual devoted to the school's history, she was the obvious** person to be asked to write it. She set about this with great enthusiasm. It brought her back to the School itself, it must have brought her memories of her own student days (the description of the procedures for obtaining Museum and railway passes, and above all the frequent explosions of the primitive water-heating system); and it brought her the recorded memories of other students, not all of which, she said with some regret,

delayed a proper publication". It was not until 1946 that she was able to return to Greece, as Librarian at the British School, where she remained for a year before being appointed Assistant Lecturer in Classics at the University of Manchester, a post she held for another year. At the end of this she married Ellis Waterhouse, the Art Historian; she went with him first to Edinburgh where he was Director of the National Gallery of Scotland, and then to Birmingham, when he became Director of the Barber Institute and Professor at the University there. By this time she had two daughters, to add to the "compelling impediments". All of this was potentially disrupting to her archaeological work (Ellis Waterhouse, it must be admitted, was not impressed by the aesthetic values of fragmentary Greek prehistoric pottery, and her splendid collection of this was banished to the conservatory of their home in Edgbaston).

Her arrival in Birmingham brought her into contact with the departments of Classics and of Ancient History and Archaeology at the University there. Both had a strong interest in Greek prehistory, and Helen was made welcome by them. She became an Honorary Fellow of Ancient History and Archaeology, where she gave specialist classes, and proved to be an outstanding teacher (she was also a most welcome addition to its social side: her summer parties for her students at the Waterhouse residence in Calthorpe Road were splendid occasions). These contacts were maintained even after Ellis retired and they returned to live in Oxford.

Throughout this time she contrived to work at and to publish the results of her research. The programme of work in Laconia, not surprisingly, had been halted at the outbreak of war, and in

dispute between Wace and Evans, was a burning issue. It shows the confidence Wace had in Helen's abilities that he encouraged her to study the prehistory of Laconia. It was a major subject with which he had entrusted her.

Students at the School were always encouraged to take part in the excavations directed or sponsored by it. While she was a student there, Helen joined the Homeric excavations on the island of Ithaca, directed by Sylvia Benton, and was herself put in charge of part of them, at Stavros, though in the event these **produced little prehistoric material, most of the finds belonging** instead to the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. Even so, from these excavations began Helen's great attachment to the Island of Odysseus, and it was to Ithaca that she returned, in the 1990's, for what she knew would be her last visit to Greece.

All this made a most promising beginning to her archaeological career, only for it to be completely disrupted by the outbreak of war in 1939. Her war service was detailed, along with that of other members of the School, in the first post-war volume of its annual, BSA 42:- Cypherer in H.M. Legation, Athens, 1939 - 41; Junior Civil Assistant, War office, 1941 - 43; ~~Political Intelligence Centre~~ Political Intelligence Centre ~~City~~ Middle East, Cairo, 1943 - 44; **Temporary Assistant Principal, War office, 1945; Temporary Administrative Officer, Research Department, Foreign Office, 1945 - 6.** Her obituary in the "Independent" newspaper says that she never spoke much of those days. They were, of course, a complete gap as far as archeological work was concerned. In the first article she published outlining her work in Laconia (BSA 51, 1956) she points out that her research had been carried out in the years 1936 - 1939 "but compelling impediments had hitherto

originally found in 1877 during Schliemann's excavations in the area by the Grave Circle, and wrote a paper on them. Gaining experience, he moved to his major field of research, the Prehistory of Laconia, the territory controlled in the Classical Period by the city-state of Sparta, and which in the Homeric poems constituted the Kingdom of Menelaus, the most important of the Greek leaders of the siege of Troy after his brother Agamemnon of Mycenae.

Sparta had been the focus of British School activity in the first part of the 20th century. Wace had taken part in this before the first world war, and excavation had continued at Sparta itself after the war. Besides uncovering remains of the Classical city, going back to its earliest days, these excavations had investigated, on the hills above the river Eurotas and east of the Classical settlement, the shrine known as the Sanctuary of Menelaus, which looked as though it ought to cover a Mycenaean tholos or chamber tomb but which in fact turned out to be a natural hillock, together with an adjacent, fairly substantial Late Bronze Age dwelling. This might have been where Menelaus had his palace, but it was not on the scale of the great palaces of the Mycenaean world, at Tiryns or at Mycenae itself. For prehistorians who had been brought up, so to speak, on the Homeric poems, as Helen herself had been, this provided an intriguing problem: was this indeed Menelaus' palace, or was that situated elsewhere; and what was the actual evidence for the prehistoric period in Menelaus' Laconia. Laconia was obviously an important area for study, given also that it was the region of mainland Greece closest to Crete, and the question of the relationship between Crete and the mainland, reflected in the

the only one to make her mark. Professor A. J. B. Wace, who had been Director in the years before the First World War, was strongly supportive of the women students coming to the School in the 1930's, including Helen.

In some ways, these were still the heroic days of the School. It was desperately short of funds - the 1930's were a particular crisis in this respect - and in later years, when she wrote the history of the first hundred years of the School, she could recall vividly the distinctly primitive conditions which still **existed there, along with the later improvements. This was paralleled, in general, in Greece itself, where travel was difficult, roads in poor condition, hotels simple (and often bug-ridden), and where the conventions, though overwhelmingly hospitable to strangers, made it almost impossible for a woman to travel alone, certainly into the remoter areas which were of particular archaeological interest. She does not describe these as her own personal experiences, but the heartfelt way in which she writes about them makes it clear enough that this was what she herself went through, and her archaeological achievements in those years are all the more remarkable because of the conditions under which they were made**

At that time, British archaeology in Greece was still dominated in many ways by Sir Arthur Evans' work at Knossos, and this was the great area for prehistoric studies. However, Professor Wace had famously challenged Sir Arthur Evans' Cretan - dominated theories of Late Bronze Age Prehistory in the Aegean in favour of the mainland - Mycenaean, rather than Minoan, so, under Wace's guidance Helen turned rather to mainland prehistory. She studied first a group of gold objects from Mycenae,

Excavations at Stavros, Ithaca, in 1937 BSA 47 (1952)
"Conducted under the aegis of Miss Benton, to whose advice I have
been constantly indebted during and since the research, and to
whose generosity I owe the opportunity of publishing the
results". This was the part of the excavations which Helen
directed herself.

Lands and Peoples in Homer in A J B Wace and F H Stubbings
A Companion to Homer London Macmillan 1962. Published under her
~~guiden name~~, this had been commissioned and partly written before
the war, though it was updated.

Prehistoric Laconia A note BSA 51 (1956)

(with R Hope Simpson) Prehistoric Laconia I BSA 55 (1960)

Prehistoric Laconia II BSA 56 (1961)

(with Sylvia Benton) Excavations in Ithaca, Tris Langadas BSA
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Priest Kings at Knossos? BICS 21 (1974)

The British School at Athens: the First 100 Years. London. The
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The Knossos "Town Mosaic" Cretan Studies 4 (1994)

From Ithaca to the Odyssey BSA 91 (1996)

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