

Amice Mary Calverley, 1896-1959 by Barbara S. Lesko

An outstanding archaeological artist, Amice Calverley was born in Chelsea, London, England on April 9, 1896, the daughter of Edmund Leveson Calverley and Sybil Salvin. She spent most of her childhood in England, but when she was ten her family moved to South Africa for a few years. On returning to England, in her early teens, Amice studied art (at the Slade School of Fine Art) and piano (with James Friskin). Then her family moved to Canada, settling near Toronto in Oakville on Lake Ontario. There she continued to study music at the Toronto Conservatory of Music under Dr. Healey Willan. The First World War, saw her working in a munitions factory and a hospital. After the war she traveled to New York City to study dress design and was employed by Wanamaker's Store.

In 1922 Miss Calverley won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music and returned to England. There she studied with Vaughan Williams and set her heart on writing an opera. In 1926, while in Oxford, she met the archaeologist Leonard Woolley who, discovering her artistic talents, encouraged her to pursue archaeological drawing instead of music. She obtained employment as a draughts person for the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, during which time she illustrated a book by the prehistorian V. Gordon Childe and worked in 1927 with Professor A. M. Blackman on photographs of the Temple of Seti I at Abydos for the Egypt Exploration Society, which planned a photographic survey of the entire structure, perhaps the most elegant and one of the best preserved of pharaonic temples (Dynasty 19, circa 1300 B.C.).

As the photographs were considered not satisfactory and "the high quality of her work became evident, a much more ambitious plan for the publication took shape."

Under the direction of the Egyptologist Alan H. Gardiner, Calverley was hired by the Egypt Exploration Society in 1927 to begin work copying by hand the scenes in the huge temple. Thus in January of 1928 she was sent to Abydos to collate drawings (line-plates on the basis of photographs) as well as to supplement the photography by her own drawing. She exhibited "high standards of draughtsmanship" in rendering the sculpture, so the project progressed. Calverley returned to Egypt in the winter of '28/'29 to draw and photograph single-handed. Surely a lesser person would have not accepted such a challenge or would have soon become discouraged by the demands of the task ahead, for the temple of Seti I is immense and well preserved and is located in a relatively remote area. Indeed, Amice Calverley needed to invent new methods to meet the demands of the work in the temple and in running the camp.

Fortunately during this second season of work, the visit of Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (touring Egypt with his wife and his son David) in the company of Professor James H. Breasted of the University of Chicago led to that munificence which completely transformed the enterprise. "Deeply inspired by the beauty of the painted reliefs as well as by the excellence of Miss Calverley's results in reproducing them, Mr. Rockefeller evinced the desire to see included in our volumes as many coloured plates as possible and made it evident that under stated conditions he would be ready to finance the undertaking." The lavish publication which evolved was a joint Egypt Exploration Society and Oriental Institute project. Calverley remained its director. Now ensconced more securely, she received the services of Miss Myrtle F. Broome (q.v.) "whose artistic skill is not inferior even to that of Miss Calverley," and hence two women bore practically the entire effort of the work at the Seti temple. Later Breasted would write: "It is difficult to say too much in praise of the magnificent work which Miss Calverley and her associate Miss Myrtle F. Broome, are doing at Abydos. No better draftsmanship has ever been available in the service of archeology, and in examining plates of the coming publication the writer has been so impressed with the fidelity and the beauty of the

drawing that he finds the question may be fairly raised whether any drawing as good as this has ever before been done in Egypt." Sir Alan Gardiner wrote in the Preface to volume II of the four volume Abydos publication: "the collaborators found many linguistic errors made by the ancient scribes, or by the craftsmen who executed their inscriptions, but scarcely one among the thousands of hieroglyphs which could be attributed to Miss Calverley's copying." In his memoirs written for private circulation Gardiner went still further in his praise: "It is impossible to exaggerate the ability of these two ladies, an ability as great as that of Nina Davies (q.v.) at Thebes."

A Canadian Egyptologist, Winifred Needler (q.v.) joined the team at Abydos during a ten-month leave from her position at the Royal Ontario Museum for the 1947-48 season to copy inscriptions and this was the beginning of a deep friendship between the two women. The expedition also had the services of a talented woman photographer from Vienna and the eminent Egyptologists De Buck, Gardiner, and Junker, all of whom collated for Miss Calverley. Breasted also wrote of the expedition that it was based "in a community usually regarded as turbulent and not wholly safe. The courage and self-sacrifice which the young women of this expedition have shown are beyond all praise. They are to be congratulated on what they have accomplished, and they should receive every encouragement to continue until the task of salvaging the superb works of art in the temple of Seti I at Abydos is complete."

The Abydos epigraphers were plagued by all sorts of difficulties including typhoid. On the other hand, Calverley came to know and love the surrounding country and its people and she became quite close to her neighbors. As she lived at Abydos for many years (the longest place she ever lived in her life) she depended on her five Egyptian male servants and her Syrian lady housekeeper, who led her to have friendly relations with her neighbors, both the villagers and the official class. The Abydos expedition's hospitality became famous. Several times a week, "after about nine hours' work in the temple, Miss Calverley conducted a clinic for the people of the village, who

came to receive sulfa ointment for a baby's sores, bandages for damaged limbs, and simple remedies and advice for scores of ailments. Her relations with her more fortunate neighbors were for the most part exceedingly friendly."

From her mud house (built under John Garstang's direction in 1899), Amice Calverley entertained many visitors including royalty, but also took a sincere interest in the life of the local villagers who reciprocated by inviting her and her staff to all their festivities. "She was lavishly entertained by local officials, landlords and businessmen and more simply but no less delightfully by the village dignitaries."

Amice Calverley exhibited tireless energy and was described as the life and soul of the work by Gardiner the editor of its publication, who said, in his introduction to Volume One, that she made him nearly superfluous. Photos were taken on site. Some were projected from a negative onto a drawing board so that the outline could be traced. Other photos were enlarged to scale in England, traced over by hand and the tracings were taken to Egypt where the drawings were finished in front of the originals and collated by the experts. Such work did not allow for freedom of expression but was tedious and demanded intense concentration. Not all artists would have possessed the requisite temperament to do such work, particularly under primitive conditions and high temperatures which made pencils smudgy and ink dry. Nevertheless the publication resulting was four outstanding folio volumes with many color plates, produced jointly by the Egypt Exploration Society and the Oriental Institute of Chicago appearing from 1933 to 1959. As Sir Alan Gardiner, the editor, stated "the carrying through of such a task demanded an organizing power and a restless energy such as would hardly have been found in any other single individual."

When she was not in Egypt, Amice Calverley resumed her music as when, in the summer of 1933 in Austria, she wrote a Quartet in F Minor, which was subsequently performed in Vienna, London, and Canada. She took up flying in the mid '30's as well. In Egypt she had a little two-cylinder auto which she drove between Cairo and Abydos.

At the end of the season it was packed on board the ship she took to Greece, for use throughout Europe. She eventually explored Rumania and other Balkan states, filming peasant life. In 1938 she made in Egypt a series of "exquisite color films showing folk-dancing and funeral and fertility rituals." With the coming of the to Cairo to work with Freya Stark on propaganda for the British Embassy. Next Second World War in 1939 she became a driver for the Invalid Children's Aid Association, helping to evacuate children from England's cities. In 1941 the Ministry of Information sent her she was commissioned by the Royal Air Force: "After the inevitable service as A.C.W. and cadet, she was sent to Medmenham where, underground, she was put to figures, not drawing" as she had hoped. When off duty in London she was able to work on her unfinished drawings at the British Museum which had stored them in the dismantled Board Room. In 1944 she became a Civilian Relief worker with the UNRA in the Balkans.

America's Great Depression had put a stop to Rockefeller's support for Breasted's Oriental Institute, but immediately after World War II he again came to the aid of the Abydos Temple project with a further give of \$17,000, which enabled Calverley and her new assistant, Miss Collis, to return to Abydos to continue the recording of the temple's reliefs and inscriptions. Upon arrival there in 1947, they were greeted by an outbreak of cholera, so Calverley obtained vaccine from Chicago and got busy inoculating, not only her villagers, but some 750 British and Americans in Upper Egypt. Breasted had predicted that the publication of the temple, to be complete, would require eight folio volumes plus a series of smaller format books containing the texts of the inscriptions, but in the autumn of 1948 the work at Abydos could not resume. Partly this was due to the war between Egypt and the new state of Israel, which made for difficult relations with the British and discouraged their expeditions from coming to Egypt. Thus Calverley went instead to Crete to film peasant life, as she had done previously in Egypt, where, traveling sometimes on foot and sometimes in an ex-Canadian-army truck "she filmed village weavers, potters and brick makers, women grinding grain in their homes, old men

spinning on the streets, fishermen casting their nets in the acacia bordered canals."

However, on Crete she also began a film documenting the war effort against the communists who held much of Greece at that time. Not only did she take films, but she nursed the wounded and afterward was given the badge of a Greek Commando, which she treasured. The suffering she witnessed in Greece made her a vigorous champion of Greek relief both in Europe and America, where she tried to raise funds for care of the Greek disabled war veterans. She even donated marrow from her breast-bone to a wounded 14-year old Greek.

Her cousin later described Calverley as always "making the usual ruthless demands on her staying power." "Health and energy she expended recklessly, lavishing her resources on often thankless causes...her powers of deep affections and faithfulness, her absolute integrity, and almost overwhelming generosity will not be forgotten by those who knew her well."

After the War, Amice Calverley wrote in the introduction to Volume IV of the Abydos series: "It was indeed fortunate that all the material survived unharmed; both it and those who prepared it were usually within range of bombing action...when resumption again became possible the political situation in Egypt made things far from easy; in addition there was the anxiety of the cholera epidemic. It is with great relief and thankfulness that I have completed the present section of my task--to take up a further responsibility in the publication of Volume V made possible by the continued generosity of Mr. Rockefeller."

When she returned to Canada she bought and remodeled a lake-side estate in Oakville, that included several buildings. Her own home, in a converted coach house, became famous in Toronto music circles as *the* place for chamber music concerts. It was here, surrounded by her decorative collections from all her travels, that she worked on Volumes V and VI of the Abydos Temple publication, (still unpublished as of this writing) working up to a month before her sudden death on April 10, 1959. According to

Sir Alan Gardiner, she had driven herself too hard and succumbed to two successive heart attacks. He added that he was proud "to have been associated with her in an undertaking which must be regarded as one of the greatest that Egyptology has to show." In her obituary for the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Sir Alan described Amice Calverley as "among the most remarkable women of her time."

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