

## BYWAYS IN OXFORD ANTHROPOLOGY

Selections from the Minutes of the  
Oxford University Anthropological Society

### *Members Past and Present: 2. Dr. Audrey Richards*

Proposed by Mrs. Seligman and seconded by Miss Blackwood, Dr. Audrey I. Richards was elected to membership of the Oxford University Anthropological Society, along with seven others, at its 299th meeting on November 1st 1934. She had already addressed the Society in May 1932 on 'The Function of Girls' Initiation Ceremonies among the Babembe', her talk being illustrated with 'very interesting slides'. Marett, Malinowski (whose name rarely appears in the minutes) and Mrs. Seligman took part in the following discussion, and, as always, the President, Miss Blackwood, 'proposed a hearty vote of thanks to Dr. Audrey Richards for her most interesting [this being the commonest adjective] and stimulating [an infrequent word of praise] lecture which was warmly applauded'. One cannot tell from the existing records of the Society how long she remained a member; not living in Oxford she has never held an official position though she gave three more lectures.

On May 2nd 1935 Dr. Richards came, apparently at short notice, to lecture on 'Some Witchfinders in N. Rhodesia'. This lecture was 'illustrated with exhibits of magical implements discarded by the people under the influence of the witchfinders'. There was 'a lively discussion' in which Marett and Mrs. Seligman again took part, as well as Sir Charles Harper, Professor Gilbert Murray and Mr. Balfour. As after her previous talks Dr. Richards was praised for the stimulating nature of her talk.

Seven years later, in May 1942, Dr. Richards gave a lecture entitled 'Death and Re-birth of a South African Tribe'. Dr. Marett again took part in the discussion as did Professor Manning, Miss Butler, Mr. Maynard, and the President, John Layard. At this time the style of the meetings, or perhaps the minuting, had changed and no hearty vote of thanks is recorded, though Dr. Richards was praised by the President for the 'vivid picture' she presented.

Finally Dr. Richards addressed the 431st meeting in February 1947 (a record of which is on the first page of the third and current minute book) with a paper entitled 'Culture Patterns Re-examined'. The minuter for the meeting that year had little truck with Chairmen's words of praise, or perhaps the President, Dr. Weiner, never spoke any. It is, however, recorded that Dr. Weiner, Miss Blackwood, Mrs. Schmidt, Dr. Fortes and Dr. Tanner spoke in the ensuing discussion which focused on the roles of psychology and anthropology in fieldwork and research.

Dr. Richards is the only anthropologist, who had neither been trained in Oxford nor held a position there, who gave as many as four lectures to the Society. Few speakers have the stimulation and vividness of their talks so clearly evidenced in the minutes of the meetings, not only by

the recorded words of Presidents but also by the consistent efforts, in their roles as minuters, of the three Secretaries concerned (Mr. E.S. Thomas at the first two meetings, Mrs Layard and Mr. John Bradford), who give full summaries of Dr. Richards' lectures. For the first two meetings this took the form of a page opposite the official minutes being filled with the Secretary's scrawled notes made, one is surely correct in assuming, during the lecture. For the third and fourth there are full foolscap-page accounts of the meetings - for many others at that time there are no more than a few lines. While such records are not as important as, say, those of the posthumously published lectures of X which would have been lost to posterity had it not been for the note-taking of Y, it will, I trust, be agreed that it is worthwhile to record their existence. Certainly the Bemba people might like to know how their affairs were discussed in Oxford in 1935.

Society Meetings addressed by Dr. Audrey Richards:

275th Meeting, on 26th May 1932. Miss Beatrice Blackwood, President, in the Chair. 'The Function of Girls' Initiation Ceremonies among the Babemba'.

306th Meeting, on 2nd May 1935. Mrs. B.Z. Seligman, President, in the Chair. 'Some Witch-finders in N. Rhodesia'.

389th Meeting, on 28th May 1942. John Layard, President, in the Chair. 'Death and Re-birth of a South African Tribe'.

431st Meeting, on 20th February 1947. Dr. Weiner, President, in the Chair. 'Culture Patterns Re-examined'.

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Secretary, 1980-81  
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