Saving Selsdon Wood – part 4 (printed in The Selsdon Gazette July 2022)

The core group of 5 called the 'Selsdon Wood Preservation Society' were Mr Lawrence Chubb, Miss AM Bonus, Mr MG Sharpe, Mr EA Earl and Miss WM Hudson.

In this final part of the series we hear of Miss WM Hudson and her extraordinary family.

Miss Winifred Mary Hudson (26/04/1878-19/05/1973) was in her late forties when she became one of the founding members of the campaign to save **Selsdon Wood**. She was highly educated and independently wealthy. Her family (three of whom are still recognised online as brilliant minds) came to Birdhurst road, South Croydon c.1911. As a young woman she studied at Newnham College Cambridge. Winifred's younger sister Edith Linsley Hudson studied at Royal Holloway College at that time. Both of these Colleges were the first few places in the UK that women could/were allowed to study at a high academic level though it should be noted they were not allowed to get a formal degree title.   At Cambridge whilst only the men were ranked in the Maths Tripos Examination women who took the examination were made aware of their place by being told they were placed between the nth and $(n+1)$st man or equal to the nth man. In the 1900 exam Winifred was bracketed with the '8th Wrangler' meaning that she had come 8th equal among the First Class students. (https://mathshistory.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/Hudson/)

Winifred's sister shares her name with an Edith Hudson, Scottish Suffragette and former nurse who in 1912 was held in Holloway prison and subject to inhumane treatment including force feeding and close surveillance. I can find no evidence online that Winifred or her sisters were involved in 'the cause' for equality however given that Millicent Fawcett, (president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies) was one of the founders of Newnham College and there was a strong connection between Holloway College and the Women's suffrage movement it is likely they were sympathetic.*)

Her older brother was Ronald William Henry Turnbull Hudson (16/07/1876 – 20/09/1904) considered in his day to be the most gifted geometer (mathematics) in all of Cambridge. (see Wikipedia). He died in a mountaineering accident at the age of 28, but his posthumously published book 'Kummer's Quartic Surface' allows access to his work. His obituary in the 'Mathematical Gazette' at the time stated *"The heartfelt sympathy of his large circle of friends goes out to the sorrowing family, to his father, aunt and sisters, who have followed along the same path of knowledge as their brother with no less determination and success".*

Her father was Mr William Henry Hoar Hudson a Lecturer in Mathematics at St John's College, Cambridge and later a Professor of Mathematics at both Kings College, London and Queen's College, London. He was also an Editor of the St John's College periodical magazine 'The Eagle'. Whilst unusual for the era, it was not so unexpected that William allowed his daughters the chance to study as his wife, Mary Watson Turnbull had also studied maths at Cambridge. Sadly she died in 1882 a few months after the birth of their youngest child and his sister helped bring up the children. He died on 21/09/1915. (He shares his name with another famous person so should not be confused with WH Hudson Naturalist and supporter of the RSPB.)

Her younger sister <u>Hilda Phoebe Hudson</u> (11/06/1881 – 26/11/1965) was likewise a gifted mathematician, also educated at Newnham College, Cambridge 1900 – 1903. She sat the Maths Tripos and went one place better than Winifred coming 7th equal among the First Class students but, as was still the custom, her achievement was still not officially classed. She then worked as a Lecturer and Research Fellow. She published vitally important work with Nobel Prize winner <u>Ronald Ross</u> on epidemiology and the measurement of infectious disease spread (1916-1917). She joined an Air Ministry subdivision undertaking aeronautical engineering research in 1917, where she did pioneering work on the application of mathematical modelling to aircraft design thereby being instrumental in the success of World War 1 aircraft. She was ultimately awarded an OBE in 1919 and is heralded as a leading light in the mathematical field despite the barriers placed in the way of women at the time. (Information and photo of Hilda from Wikipedia and (https://mathshistory.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/Hudson/)

Janet Sharp

*Addendum July 2022.

Since writing this article (and my guess that Winifred was part of the suffrage movement) I have found that in addition to her work with the Selsdon Wood Preservation Society Winifred was also, from 1926 (for four years), the Treasurer of the Croydon branch of the 'National Council of Women of Great Britain'. At this time a larger number of women across the country felt empowered to call for improvements in welfare and equality. This ground breaking group worked to pull together different interest groups or unions run by women to create shared contacts and strength in numbers. The Croydon branch had the largest membership of all the groups across the country. The group was involved in the "Equal Franchise/Political Rights" Demonstration in Hyde Park on 3rd July 1926, to ask for votes for women on the same terms as for men (over 40 different women's groups took part.) Some other examples of their stance in 1925/26:

They campaigned for married women to be able to continue to work in the Public sector, increase women in the Police, protections and rights for factory workers, to get women doctors on the staff of mental asylums, slum clearance, rights for playing fields and open spaces, humane slaughter of animals, removal of sex disqualification in all branches of the political, social and economic (professional and industrial) life, official recognition of Ministry of Women in the churches.

See the London School of Economics Women's library online to find out more for historical documents and for up to date information on what the group is doing now see https://ncwgb.org/