

AGNES MURGOCI

1874 – 1929

Agnes Kelly was born in South Australia on 28 March 1874, but returned to Scotland with her mother at the age of 2. She was educated at Dollar Academy and then at Bedford College, London, studying zoology. Agnes attended Munich University, where she and Marie Stopes became the first women to gain the award Ph.D. (1900). She and Stopes collaborated in designing the Ph.D. robes for women.

Agnes met the Romanian professor George Munteanu Murgoci (pronounced MOOR-GOTCH) in Munich. They married on 24 November 1904, and after a brief spell in California, they settled in Bucharest, Romania, where their children – Helen Beveridge (1905) and Radu Maxwell (1907) – were born. Agnes developed an interest in Romanian folklore, and from 1909 sent articles to the journal 'Folklore' in London. During the First World War, she and the children fled Romania, travelling through pre-revolutionary Russia to Norway, and then to England, settling in Bristol. Agnes continued her studies of Romanian folklore for the rest of her life. She spoke on Romanian folklore on many occasions, and put forward the Romanian point of view on political questions, in Britain. Her large collection of Romanian peasant costumes and rugs were donated by her daughter to the Scottish National Museum where they are kept as the Murgoci Collection.

George Murgoci was a distinguished mineralogist and geologist, who did much of the basic work on Romanian geology. His map of Romania was familiar to several generations of school children. George died aged 53 on 5 March 1925. His bust stands outside the Geological Institute in Bucharest. In 1964 his portrait was illustrated on a Romanian postage stamp. George was also Chief Scout of Romania and the recently built Romanian Scout headquarters has been named Murgoci House.

Agnes Murgoci was seriously injured in a road accident on the Isle of Wight in 1929. She died in hospital on 7 May. A simple stone marks her grave in Ryde Cemetery. The grave is 2 rows in from the Pelhurst Road entrance. The stone is small, rectangular-shaped with a pitched top, and overhung by a deciduous tree.

Her daughter Helen married an Anglican priest, Hugh Herklots. They have four children – John (1931), Silvia (1933), Jennifer (1935) – all born in Canada – and Stephen (1940) born in Flixton, near Manchester. There are 11 great grandchildren and 17 great great grandchildren.

Hugh died in 1971 and Helen in 1980. Their daughter Silvia died in 1988. Agnes's son Radu, a promising physicist, died of TB in Switzerland in 1937.

Agnes's folkloric writings have been republished in English and Romanian: English Pages on Romanian Folklore, published by Virgiliu Florea, Bucharest, Vitorul Romanesc 2005. ISBN 973-623-094-5

Also published is a book of her correspondence with M. Gaster: Advocates in Britain of Romanian Popular Culture. Virgiliu Florea, Cluj-Napoca 2003. ISBN 973-8254-56-6

John Herklots, Lee on Solent, January 2015