

PAULINE AGIUS
APRIL 15th 1925 –JANUARY 22nd 2001
A personal appreciation



It is with great sadness that the Society has been informed of the death of one of its oldest and most steadfast supporters.

Pauline Agius is well known to members of the furniture history world for her consistent and varied research and publications in the field over many years. She knew, probably better than anyone, the furniture of the colleges and libraries in her home town of Oxford, where she had made a detailed study of College inventories, and where she made good use of her contacts at the University when she organised a lively and diverse exhibition of chairs and stools, entitled '101 Chairs,' at the Divinity School, Oxford in March 1968. This exhibition was totally eclectic, including 17th. century joined chairs from University sources, Windsor chairs from the Parker Knoll Collection and the Victoria and Albert Museum, fashionable upholstered chairs from the 18th. 19th. and 20th centuries, as well as contemporary chairs by Gordon Russell, and even cellular plastic chairs. This occurred at a time when I had published my first article on regional chair design, and Pauline immediately responded with an attack on its central assertion; that if we recorded enough evidence of the different regional patterns of vernacular chairs, then they may be decoded into regional groups.

It was her response which forced me to articulate my thoughts on this more rigorously, and following a frank discussion with her, we became enduring friends, sharing our common interests in furniture over many years, during which time she constantly challenged my research in ways which were totally constructive. She followed up on the idea of plotting regional workshops later, in her article published in Furniture History Vol. IX, 1976, entitled 'English Chairmakers listed in General and Trade Directories 1790–1851', in which she carried forward the belief which we both held, that 'systematic research of this kind, combined with the search for

marked chairs, could lead to a general regional map of chairmakers being developed'.

Pauline was a founder member of the Furniture History Society, and although not a founder member of the Regional Furniture Society, she was amongst the first to join us. She served on the RFS Council for a number of years, and was a prime organiser with Susan Bourne and myself of the first day course in Oxford for would-be researchers in Regional Furniture History; a course which, to our great satisfaction, was to inspire members who have contributed to Regional Furniture and our Newsletters. She was, too, one of a circle of furniture historians who thirty years ago formed the Furniture History Society and readily shared their knowledge and research, including Peter Thornton, Helena Hayward, Geoffrey Beard, and the late Christopher Gilbert, amongst others.

She produced important works in furniture history, including 'British Furniture 1880 - 1915' which was published in 1978 which relied on her original research into the extensive archives at Shoreditch Library and the Guildhall Library. This was followed by an analysis of Ackermann's Regency Furniture and Interiors in 1984.

However, Pauline's work was not confined to furniture history. She was a tireless and talented worker for various charities, including Shelter, Cruse, (for whom she compiled the best-selling Cruse Cookery Book in 1985), and Amnesty International. She was, too, on the Council of Oxfam, and instigated a major project for this organisation in the form of the Oxfam Bookshop on St Giles, Oxford. She had the insight to write to University Libraries asking them to send redundant books to her, and having recruited a team of 'sorters' working in the basement of the shop, she created what was a most spectacular outlet, one which became one of Oxfam's most profitable concerns in this country, and which remains as a tribute to her indefatigable hard work and vision.

She worked, too, on behalf of educational institutions; and she and I served on the Professional and Technical Advisory Committee of a college for which we both had the greatest affection; Rycotewood College, Thame, Oxon., where I saw at first hand the characteristic intelligence and determination to improve facilities and courses, qualities which were the hallmark of her involvement in all the organisations which she joined. She brought to these tasks great warmth and companionability on one hand, and yet she was outspoken and impatient with those she regarded as bogus or incompetent; attributes which endeared her to many, but not all.

Pauline was born in Clitheroe, Lancashire on April 15th 1925, and passed away after a long illness, bravely borne, on January 22nd 2001. She was educated at Clitheroe Grammar School before studying Architecture at Bartlett College, Cambridge. She then went on to read history at University College, London. During the war, she served as a Wren; and she also

taught English and History at various schools, including the City of London Girls School. After her marriage to Peter, she spent most of her married life in Oxford with him and their three children.

Pauline is survived by her husband, Peter, and daughters Carolyn and Clare, her son Martin, as well as seven much loved grandchildren, to whom we offer our condolences.

B.D. Cotton