

# Winifred Lamb

Aegean Prehistorian and Museum Curator

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## Archaeological Lives

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# Contents

<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1. The Lamb Family and Early Years</b> .....	<b>4</b>
The Lamb family .....	4
Edmund Lamb.....	7
The Winkworth family .....	9
Borden Wood .....	12
<b>Chapter 2. Cambridge and Classics</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Life at Newnham .....	20
Archaeological fieldwork.....	23
The wider university .....	26
Glimpses of the war .....	28
Cambridge and Part 2 of the Tripos .....	31
<b>Chapter 3. The Hope Vases and Naval Intelligence</b> .....	<b>34</b>
The Hope Vases .....	34
Room 40.....	38
Postwar life .....	46
Classical Archaeology and the Fitzwilliam Museum.....	47
The Ricketts and Shannon Collection.....	52
Honorary Keeper at the Fitzwilliam Museum .....	53
First visit to Greece.....	55
Life in England.....	60
<b>Chapter 4. The First Year in Athens (1920–21)</b> .....	<b>62</b>
The British School at Athens reopens .....	63
Arrival in Athens.....	64
First excursion: Delphi .....	68
Athens: City of mourning and political change .....	70
Walking Tours in Attica .....	72
Museum studies .....	75
Life at the School .....	78
Crete.....	80
Peloponnese.....	81
Mycenae .....	83
<b>Chapter 5. Prehistory and the Fitzwilliam Museum</b> .....	<b>87</b>
The forming of the classical collections.....	87
The Cockerell era .....	89

The Prehistoric Gallery .....	90
Cyprus .....	97
Winifred Lamb's visits to Cambridge .....	98
The Fitzwilliam Goddess .....	101
<b>Chapter 6. Mycenae, Sparta and Macedonia .....</b>	<b>104</b>
Mycenae .....	105
Greece and Turkey .....	113
Sparta .....	115
Macedonia .....	123
Thermon, Gulf of Corinth .....	128
Aitolia and Epirus .....	129
<b>Chapter 7. The Fitzwilliam Museum: Developing the Classical Collections .....</b>	<b>136</b>
Greek and Roman Bronzes .....	136
Greek pottery .....	141
Classical Gems and Jewellery .....	151
Etruscan and Italian antiquities .....	153
Other acquisitions and loans .....	154
<b>Chapter 8. The Eastern Aegean: Lesbos and Chios .....</b>	<b>158</b>
Methymna .....	159
Thermi .....	161
Antissa .....	170
Lesbos and beyond .....	174
Chios .....	175
Jubilee Celebrations of the British School at Athens .....	179
<b>Chapter 9. Anatolia and Kusura .....</b>	<b>181</b>
Early visits to Anatolia .....	181
Excavating Kusura .....	187
Research on Anatolian Archaeology .....	191
<b>Chapter 10. The War Years .....</b>	<b>193</b>
Britain at War .....	193
The fall of Greece and Crete .....	199
Turkey and the BBC .....	201
Injury and the end of the war .....	210
<b>Chapter 11. The British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara .....</b>	<b>214</b>
Anatolian Archaeology .....	214
The Fitzwilliam Museum .....	220
Lamb as benefactor .....	226
The Midhurst Church .....	229
Final years .....	230

Lamb's Legacy.....	231
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>Index .....</b>	<b>266</b>

## Abbreviations

AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AnatSt	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
AntJ	<i>Antiquaries Journal</i>
BCH	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
BSA	British School at Athens
BSA	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
BIAA	British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara
CR	<i>Classical Review</i>
CVA	<i>Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum</i>
FMAR	<i>Fitzwilliam Museum Annual Report</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); additional material online.
PBSR	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>

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Winifred's first year in Athens is recorded in the extensive diaries kept by her contemporary May Herford. I am grateful to Rachel Hood for arranging for me to read the typescript material. Anne Thomson assisted with queries about Winifred's time at Newnham. Natalia Vogeikoff allowed me to study relevant records in the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

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Parts of this biography have appeared elsewhere and draw on earlier research. Two overviews of her life appear in 2004: 'Winifred Lamb (1894–1963)', in *Breaking Ground: Pioneering women archaeologists*, edited by G. Cohen and M. S. Joukowsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 425–81; 'Lamb, Winifred (1894–1963)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 32 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 285–87. Other themes have appeared as follows:

Chapter 4: 'Winifred Lamb: her first year as a student at the British School at Athens', in *Archaeology and women: ancient and modern issues*, edited by S. Hamilton, R. D. Whitehouse, and K. I. Wright (Walnut Creek (CA): Left Coast Press, 2007), 55–75.

Chapters 5 and 7: 'Winifred Lamb and the Fitzwilliam Museum', in *Classics in 19th and 20th century Cambridge: curriculum, culture and community*, edited by C. A. Stray (Cambridge Philological Society suppl. vol. 24; Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1999), 135–56.

Chapter 6: 'Winifred Lamb: searching for prehistory in Greece', in *Travellers to Greece*, edited by C. A. Stray (London: Classical Association, 2006), 33–53.

Chapter 9: "'A rich and promising site": Winifred Lamb (1894–1963), Kusura and Anatolian archaeology', *Anatolian Studies* 50 (2000), 1–10.



## Introduction

In late May 1924 Winifred Lamb, aged 29, was sitting on a train as it wound its way through the mountains of the Peloponnese in Greece. She had just spent the last month excavating with members of the British School at Athens at the classical site of Sparta. She had worked on the investigation of the acropolis and had been able to study some of the small bronzes that had become her passion. She took out her pen and started to share her feelings with her mother, Mabel. Winifred was at a dilemma in her life. She had not enjoyed aspects of the Sparta excavation, but she then declared, 'Archaeology is a wonderful life'.

The spring of 1924 was to be a turning point in her life. She resolved not to work with Arthur M. Woodward, the Director of the British School at Athens, again. She had found his approach to archaeology rather restrained, and she wanted to pursue her primary interest in Aegean prehistory. Then in January 1925 her father, Edmund, died after a long period of illness. Winifred, an only child, now had the private means to pursue an independent 'life' in archaeology.

Why does Winifred's life deserve a biography? First, she had a long and distinguished academic career. More accurately, Winifred had two unsalaried parallel careers: she served as a field archaeologist and as a museum curator. She had excavated at Mycenae with Alan J.B. Wace, and at Sparta with Arthur M. Woodward. She achieved fame for her fieldwork on the island of Lesbos, in particular for her role at the excavation of the Bronze Age site of Thermi. Her pioneering work at Kusura in western Anatolia marked the renewed British involvement in a region transformed by Kemal Atatürk. Yet her main achievement was to develop the classical holdings at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. She was invited to be the Honorary Keeper by the Director, Sir Sydney Cockerell, whom she had met in the London salerooms during the final stages of the First World War. She created a new prehistoric gallery to display the finds from British work in the Aegean and on Cyprus. The highlight of this new room was a marble 'Minoan' goddess purchased with the support of Sir Arthur Evans. Winifred also developed a strong interest in classical bronzes that resulted in the publication of one of the key works on the topic. Her commitment to the collections at the Fitzwilliam was reflected in the acquisition of Athenian figure-decorated 'vases' and the publication of two definitive fascicules of the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*.

Second, she was closely involved with the formal development of British archaeological initiatives abroad. She worked through the British School at Athens and served on its committee during the difficult and financially challenging inter-

war years. After the Second World War she contributed to the establishment of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara.

Third, her career intersected with some of the more well-known European and North American names in classical archaeology. Some of this was connected to wartime activities with intelligence gathering. The starting point for Winifred's friendship with Sir John Beazley, as well as her association with Cockerell, was her employment by Room 40, the code-breaking unit in the Admiralty, during the First World War (and the fore-runner of the better known Bletchley Park that operated in the Second World War). Equally remarkable was her involvement with the Turkish language section of the BBC during the Second World War, a role introduced by Sir Leonard Woolley. At the BBC she was responsible for the preparation of extensive digests relating to the monitoring of German, Russian and Turkish radio transmissions.

Fourth, she was a pioneer for women in archaeology. Prior to the First World War British women had not been heavily engaged with field archaeology. A handful of women were admitted as students to the British School at Athens. Among them was Eugénie Sellers Strong (1860–1943) who was an influential student of Roman material culture and became Assistant Director of the British School at Rome (1909–25). Dorothy Lamb (1887–1967) (no relation) took part in the excavations at Phylakopi on Melos, and this led to the public discussion of the merits of 'mixed' dig teams by John P. Droop (1882–1963) in his handbook *Archaeological Excavation* (1915) published by Cambridge University Press. One of the role models for fieldwork in the Aegean was the American Harriet Boyd Hawes (1871–1945) who excavated a number of sites in eastern Crete prior to the First World War. In the post-war period Sylvia Benton (1887–1985), Lamb's senior in age, was not admitted to the British School at Athens until 1927/28. However she was involved with the major archaeological project on Ithaca in the 1930s. Lamb's near contemporary was Tessa Verney Wheeler (1893–1936) who studied at University College London. Verney Wheeler accompanied her husband, Mortimer (1890–1976), on his excavations at the Roman sites of Segontium (Caernarfon), Brecon Y Gaer, Caerleon, Lydney Park and Verulamium as well as the major hillfort of Maiden Castle.

Women had played an active role in Egyptological fieldwork since the nineteenth century. Amelia Edwards (1831–92) was one of the key influences on the formation of modern British Egyptology through the foundation of the chair in London that bears her name. Mary Brodrick (1858–1933) studied in Paris and subsequently worked in Egypt under Gaston Camille Charles Maspero (1846–1916), the director-general of Egyptian antiquities. She also lectured in London and prepared the translations of key Egyptological text-books from German. Margaret Benson (sister of the novelist Edward F. Benson, who had been a student at the British School at Athens) excavated with Janet Agnes Gourlay (1863–1912) at the

temple of Mut, Thebes. Hilda Petrie (1871–1957) was a tireless worker alongside her husband, Flinders (1853–1942), but did not always receive the recognition that she deserved. Margaret A. Murray (1863–1963) trained under Flinders Petrie, and became a major influence on the development of Egyptology in London.

Winifred also broke new ground through her long-standing association with the Fitzwilliam Museum. Few women had held such a curatorial position in British museums. A north American model in this role was Gisela M.A. Richter (1882–1972), a distinguished curator of Greek and Roman art at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1906 until her retirement in 1948. Richter had been educated at Girton College, Cambridge, and was then admitted as a student of the British School at Athens. She became an American citizen in 1917.

The origins of this study lie in my own curatorial experience at the Fitzwilliam. The Greek and Roman collection served as a biography for the recent history of the university, starting with Dr John Disney, founder of the Disney chair of archaeology, and Colonel William Leake, the great topographer of Greek lands. Students travelling in the Aegean, college fellows, and friends of Cockerell helped to develop the collection. However the core of the Greek collection, and in particular the classical bronzes, was derived from Winifred’s donations over several decades particularly during the inter-war years.

The archive of Winifred’s papers is extensive. During the 1960s Richard W. Hutchinson and Mildred Lamb, Winifred’s cousin, collated some of the correspondence from Greece in the hope that it would be published. This formed the basis of the typescript preserved in the British School at Athens and among the papers of Lady Waterhouse. Winifred kept a regular diary. During the First World War and during her early years in Greece the notes were detailed and wide-ranging. However from the mid-1920s she reverted to pocket diaries and their value as a source changed. Brief comments about completion of reports during the Second World War allowed the identification of detailed anonymous briefing papers in the BBC archives.

When Winifred Lamb died in September 1963 her *Times* obituary, subtitled ‘Notable Classical Archaeologist’, remembered her as ‘a figure of distinction’. Winifred’s life deserves to be celebrated and remembered for her significant contribution to British archaeology in the Aegean and Anatolia between the two world wars, as well as for her development of the classical collections in Cambridge that continue to be enjoyed and appreciated by the public.