

# FERNHURST

**HANNAH WHITALL SMITH** née Whitall (1832–1911) evangelical preacher and author.

She and her husband Robert Pearsall Smith were born in Philadelphia, USA, and had two daughters and a son (four others died young). During the 1870s they addressed large religious meetings in various towns in England, Switzerland and Germany, and she co-founded the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In 1875 both spoke at a ten-day Christian Convention at the Pavilion and Dome in Brighton, where Mrs Smith was described as the 'special feature'. One day she addressed two all-female audiences each numbering over two thousand; among them was Lizzie Baxter [169]. Owing to a sex scandal involving her husband they cut short their visit and returned to the USA. In 1887 they returned to England and moved into the fourteen-bedroom Friday's Hill House, Fernhurst, home of their daughter Mary Costelloe, the mother of Ray Strachey [below]. (Mary remarried, becoming Mrs Berenson, and wrote three travel books.) Their other daughter Alys, a close friend of Helen Boyle [155], married the philosopher Bertrand Russell, whom she had met at the house. Mrs Smith was still at Friday's Hill House in 1891 and is assumed to have lived there at least a decade. Widowed in 1898 and wheelchair-bound in her later years, she died in her son's house at Oxford, her home since 1906.

She wrote at least a dozen popular books on religious matters. *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (1875) went into over a hundred editions and is still in print today. Collections of her writings and letters have been published since her death, some of them edited by her granddaughter [below].

Further reading: Parker, R. A. (1959) *The Transatlantic Smiths*; Strachey, R. (1914) *A Quaker Grandmother*. [Related image p109.]

**RAY STRACHEY** née Rachel Costelloe (1887–1940) writer.

The granddaughter of Hannah Whitall Smith [above], she was born in London and raised at Friday's Hill House. After studying mathematics at Cambridge and

electrical engineering at Oxford, in 1911 she married civil servant Oliver Strachey, with whom she wrote *Keigwin's Rebellion* (1916). Her sister Karin married Adrian Stephen, brother of Vanessa Bell [214] and Virginia Woolf [243].

She founded the Society of Women Welders, was parliamentary secretary of the NUWSS, chairman of the wartime Women's Service Employment Committee and head of the Women's Employment Federation. After working as political secretary to Nancy Astor, the first female MP, she stood unsuccessfully in three general elections. She wrote biographies of eminent women, memoirs, novels and history. Her most famous work was *The Cause* (1928, reprinted 1988), a valuable overview of the women's rights movement since 1792. She broadcast on BBC radio on 'Women and Work' and 'Building a House'.

Friday's Hill House was given up by her family in 1904, so when she returned to Fernhurst in 1921 she bought nine acres of land and built a house of pisé de terre (rammed earth). She named it Copsé Cottage but it is known to this day as the Mud House. She installed an 80ft x 30ft pool (where she swam in the nude), and acquired WLA clothing — corduroy breeches, boots and a straw hat — to wear around her estate., where Virginia Woolf was a frequent visitor. She died in London from complications arising from a minor operation. Lady Astor heard of her death during an official luncheon with, among others, Caroline Haslett, [87] and all those present stood for a one-minute silence. [Related plate 30; image p109.]

**MARGARET, LADY MOIR OBE** née Pennycook (1864–1942) amateur engineer and philanthropist.

Nothing is known of her early life in Scotland until 1887, when she married (later, Sir) Ernest Moir, a colleague of Weetman Pearson [see Lady Cowdray, 88]. She called herself an 'engineer by marriage', because for many years she accompanied her husband on inspection visits to his civil engineering projects, taking a keen interest in their construction. She visited the Forth Bridge and became the first woman to walk through the Dartford Tunnel.