

## *HILDA M. QUICK.*

*1895 - 1978*

*Article from Cornwall Birdwatching and Preservation Society.*

*Our Autumn Newsletter included an appreciation  
of the work which*

*Hilda Quick had given so willingly to the Society for more than forty years right up to the point of her retirement as Honorary Secretary to the Isles of Scilly in the summer of 1978. Three weeks after the publication of the Newsletter she died in the kitchen of her beloved Priglis Cottage on St Agnes. Her death was immediate and without one moment of illness for which all of us are thankful. I am happy that she read our appreciation. She wrote a delightful letter to say how much it had pleased her.*

*Although she was born in Penzance, she spent part of her girlhood in Falmouth. Her father was manager of Barclays Bank there from September 1906 to October 1917. Educated at a Convent School in Berkshire, she worked in the bank at Falmouth during the Great War years. Eventually Hilda was able to go off to London to study at The Central School of Art, then on to further*

her studies in Paris. Her work developed in illustration particularly in wood engraving and was exhibited. One publication which she illustrated was the Shakespeare Head Edition, a special edition of Spencer's Faerie Queen, and a book of the poems of W.H. Davies.

Meanwhile the family had moved back to Penzance to live in Clarence Cottage.

Right at the beginning of the 1930's she became deeply involved with what was to be the founding of the Minack Theatre helping her great friend Miss Rowena Cade with costume and scenery designs and programme illustration for a production of "A Midsummer Nights Dream" in 1931. This was the forerunner of the 1932 production of "The Tempest" the first play on the open cliffside. Thereafter Hilda designed and illustrated and worked to help with subsequent productions. An outstanding "Anthony and Cleopatra" gave evidence of her skill in designing props, costume and scenery.

Meanwhile her interest in bird study grew and her extensive knowledge encompassed the flora and fauna as well as the avifauna of the area. Hilda Quick joined The Cornwall Bird-Watching and Preservation Society three years after it was founded in 1931 by Col. Ryves. By 1937 she was Assistant Honorary Secretary, and

within months was Joint Editor of the County Report with Col. Ryves and Miss Dorothy Valentine. Then came the Second World War. Voluntary work found her in the Penzance area Billetting Office dealing with all the problems resulting from the influx of a host of evacuees as well as completely organising a tremendously successful and necessary waste paper collection scheme.

During her years in Penzance she was a member of the Penzance Orchestral Society playing violin and developing her great and lasting love of Chamber Music. She was devoted to the care of her parents. Her father died in the mid 1940's but her mother survived until the end of that decade being well over ninety. During this period Hilda found time to write her first book. Beautifully illustrated with her often humorous wood engravings, "Birds of Marsh and Shore" was published by Jonathan Cape in 1948.

In 1951 her dream of a lifetime came true when she was able to move to her newly acquired cottage at Priglis Cove, St. Agnes, on the Isles of Scilly. She was absorbed into the life of the Island and became one of its most helpful and active members. The opportunity for bird study was endless and she always said, "I do not feel properly dressed if I am not wearing my binoculars".

1951 was a truly momentous year. Her viewing and identification of a *Blue-cheeked Bee-eater* in June being a first record for the *British Isles*. In the same month she was host to Dr. Ludwig Koch who arrived laden with his early recording equipment to capture the night sounds of the *Manx Shearwater* and the *Storm Petrel* on *Annet*, an episode which she perpetuated with a narrative poem which was published in the 1951 Report.

Hilda Quick travelled widely; from as far north as *Iceland* and *The Shetlands* to as far east as *Greece* and *Turkey*, and this was not only to study birds and plants. Her knowledge of and interest in the Arts made her a splendid and stimulating travel companion. Her love of *Italy* took her back particularly to *Florence*, whereas her visit to *Wales* last October to view *Red Kites* and *Choughs* did prompt the observation that "on my next holiday I will go somewhere a little flatter", but this reflection did not last long. She was already setting in motion plans to visit *North Wales*.

The creation of her charming garden at *Priglis* where the cabbages and carnations vied alongside each other for the attention of her truly green fingers, was the result of years of cutting and wheeling in barrow loads of seaweed and hedgeside trimmings to make successive

great piles of compost to enrich the sandy soil. Her abhorrence of the use of chemicals for growing food was legendary. In the flower season she helped her friends by bunching and tying the narcissi and daffodils. For eleven years she helped to run the Island Womens Institute as well as being much involved in the work and care of the Church of which she was Sacristan.

Apart from gardening in which she became almost self-sufficient in vegetables, her great hobby was wine-making, but although checking the County Bird Report took a great deal of time she still was able to write a second book. "Birds of the Scilly Isles" was published in 1964. Her two books must be memorials to her diligence as a superb observer and true Ornithologist.

It would be difficult to assess her many qualities, but kindness, humour and self-reliance would rank high. She was not only held in affection, but was respected and admired. I think the accolade must have been spoken by a young St. Agnes farmer on the day of her funeral when all the Islands were bathed in November sunshine, "She was a real Islander".

Peggy Visick

Transcribed by D & I Flaxman [www.hildaquick.com](http://www.hildaquick.com)