

Royal Holloway, University of London
19 May 2004

Citation for Enid Light

It would be difficult to think of anyone who would better meet the criteria for election as an Honorary Associate of Royal Holloway and Bedford New College than Enid Light. She came to Bedford College as an undergraduate in 1952 from Blackburn High School for Girls to read German in the Department headed by Miss Purdie, one of the great characters of Bedford's early history. After graduating she took a job with Lufthansa just re-establishing itself after the war, a challenging environment in the face of the post war problems of reconstruction. Three years later she moved to BOAC as an air stewardess flying routes to the middle and far East. Those were the days when being a stewardess was regarded as a glamorous occupation and one where you were highly likely to meet your future husband which Enid duly did, marrying Jim, with us tonight, in 1960. Her early attachment to Bedford was demonstrated by holding the wedding reception in Reid Hall in Regent's Park.

Then came the babies! By 1965 Enid had three children (again all with us I am happy to say tonight) but as she put it she did some evening tutoring to keep her hand in and to avoid becoming a cabbage. From 1970, however, she entered adult education seriously becoming head of what was eventually known as Marlow Adult Education College. This alternative view of the issues in further education during the seventies and eighties infused her approach to the problems which beset Bedford at the time when Enid became actively involved with the Bedford College Association.

That was in the seventies, when encouraged by her former headmistress, who had become President of the Association, Enid joined the Committee, of which she has remained a member until the present day. Enid has always been an activist and was soon membership secretary involved in fund raising for the then Bedford College Appeal launched optimistically to provide more accommodation in Regent's Park, initially for the successful Psychology Department. But the storm clouds were gathering. Even while the appeal was proceeding the context of higher education was changing from one of expansion to one of contraction.

The smaller London University colleges were particularly affected and none of them escaped the huge cuts in the UGC grant to London of 1981-2. As it became clear that Bedford would merge with Royal Holloway and that this would involve a move from Regent's Park to Englefield Green the atmosphere in Bedford became quite hysterical with appeals to the Royal Patron (the Queen Mother) and demonstrations. Many former students played an active part in these. But pained as she was by the path that had to be followed Enid exercised a calming influence upon her colleagues and helped the decision-making process forward in a positive way.

She used these same skills to drive forward the amalgamation of the two old students' associations, a process, which at times seemed even more fraught than the merger of the parent bodies. It is a tribute to her efforts that she was elected to be the first Chair of the newly formed RHBNC and as such became a member of the new College Council. A colleague commented to me that once Enid had made up her mind she was not easily put off and that, if it was necessary, she would fight the Bedford corner determinedly but with a view to reducing and eliminating the number of those corners that could be so described.

1999 was the 150th anniversary year of the founding of Bedford College. RHBNC celebrated the occasion with a most impressive programme of events for the Sesquicentenary. Enid played an important role in planning the occasion, the highlight of which for many Bedford College students was the unveiling of a green plaque to commemorate the founding in 1849 of the college at 48 Bedford square by Mrs Jesser Reid. Getting the necessary permissions and arranging for the design and making of the plaque was a time-consuming job, in which Enid was the prime mover. She has also ensured that the terms of reference of the Bedford College Association Special Trust Fund have been widened so that today it can benefit former students of the new College. Nor has she overlooked the importance of the public image of RHBNC. As President of the University of London Intercollegiate Women's Luncheon Club in 1997/8 she hosted a day of events at Englefield Green for the members.

Enid has been a treasure. The kind of alumna that institutions of Higher Education increasingly need today.

In recognition, therefore, of her long service to the College and in particular to her contribution to building bridges between Bedford and Royal Holloway, may I invite you, Chairman of Council, to induct as an Honorary Associate of Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, Mrs Enid Light.

Professor Dorothy Wedderburn
Former Principal Bedford College 1981-1985
Former Principal Royal Holloway & Bedford New College
1985-1990