

### Antoinette Powell-Cotton

She was the youngest of the three daughters of Major and Mrs. Powell-Cotton. From an early age, she expressed strong disapproval of her given name Antoinette and was known as Tony Cotton throughout her life, except on formal occasions and for official purposes. She was born in 1913 and was evacuated to Leamington with her sisters, a governess and a nanny, where unfortunately she developed T.B. Although she made a complete recovery, this retarded her education and she was regarded as delicate for some years. However at 13, she followed her sisters to Wycombe Abbey and took a School Certificate before leaving at 18.

To further her education and more especially to learn French she was sent to Versailles. On return to England, she worked as a volunteer in the Pitt Rivers Museum of Ethnography in Oxford and amongst other activities rode to hounds with the Bicester. From an early age, she showed that she had inherited her father's interest in collecting and collections. As a girl, she made her own collections of stamps, fossils and bygones. She welcomed the opportunity to accompany her father on a collecting trip to Zululand in 1935 and between 1936 and 1938 with her elder sister Diana to Southern Angola on their two major expeditions on which they made valuable additions to the Museum's ethnographical series, some good 16 m.m. films and a copious photographic record. Some of this material was presented both to the Pitt Rivers Museum and to the Department of Ethnography at the British Museum; botanical specimens were provided for Kew and other items went to the Cambridge Museums. Tony was engaged in sorting and cataloguing this material in London up to the outbreak of the War in 1939. She was a volunteer in the First Aid Centre at St.Mary's Hospital in Paddington until she was accepted for nursing training at University College

Hospital where she worked on the wards through the blitz. She qualified as an SRN in 1944 and subsequently as a midwife (SCM) and continued to work as a nurse midwife until her mother's health began to deteriorate and she returned to live at Quex.

During the period between her return to live at Quex in the nineteen fifties and her mother's death in 1964, Tony divided her time between her growing archaeological interests and caring for her mother. This was not at first particularly demanding but as her mother's health deteriorated it necessarily became her priority. The Museum had long held a small collection of archaeological material mostly from digs on the estate following up accidental finds in the course of building operations, road works etc. With the additions of Galleries 5, 6 and 7 to the Museum it became possible to plan a somewhat condensed and limited local archaeological exhibit from the early stone age to medieval times based on Thanet finds but extending to the Sandwich-Canterbury area. For the development of this collection, Tony was largely responsible and in particular she undertook over the years a systematic investigation of the Minnis Bay site, occupied throughout this long period by a relatively poor community of farmers and fishermen. Since most of the site lay between high and low water, it was exceptionally difficult to investigate because in the interest of the users of the beach, it had to be filled in after each days work. More rapid progress was possible after her mother's death and until her own activities were reduced by the onset of old age and a relatively severe stroke which she suffered in 1990 and from which she never fully recovered. She died in a nursing home in Margate in July 1997, just short of her 84<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Apart from her work on the archaeological collections and since her elder sister Diana did not live at Quex, Tony was responsible for a degree of supervision and curatorial care of the ethnographical collections in the Museum and of the domestic and

historical furnishings in the house, particularly in the public rooms. The Museum, therefore, owes to her care and interest not only a large part of its archaeological display, but also in part the preservation of the ethnographical material in a condition in which it can and is being further researched and recorded. Finally having spent little on herself during her lifetime, she left the residue of her estate to the Museum, a very handsome bequest.