

Rita Pankhurst Short Narrative

Rita was born in Romania in 1927. She emigrated to the UK with her parents in 1938. After attending the Perse School for Girls in Cambridge she studied modern languages (French and Russian) at Oxford (LMH) and obtained her MA in 1948. She spent the next year in Paris boarding with Russian-speaking Armenians and attending the Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes, obtaining a Diploma in Russian.

Her first job was in the Press Library of Chatham House. She worked there until 1956 when she joined Richard and Sylvia in Addis Ababa. She started work at the National Library of Ethiopia, and began correspondence courses in Librarianship. She married Richard in 1957 and had two children: Alula Andrew and Helen Sylvia. (Both of them now have two children each) Alula was born on 27 September 1960, exactly two years after Sylvia's death. She resumed her courses, interrupted by childbearing, and was awarded the Associateship of the Library Association (ALA) in 1964. (She was awarded an Honorary Fellowship in 1987)

Thereafter most of Rita's working life was spent in academic librarianship. She became University Librarian of Haile Sellassie I University, a post she held for a decade. When, in 1976, the family returned to London, as the revolutionary situation did not lend itself to the children's education, she was appointed Head of Library Services of the City of London Polytechnic and remained in charge for eleven years until she and Richard returned to Ethiopia.

During this period she was instrumental in acquiring the library of the Fawcett Society for the Polytechnic. The Fawcett Library later formed the core of the present Women's Library, erected on the site of the Old Castle Street Baths. Through the negotiations with the Fawcett Society she became involved with that wing of the women's movement and came to know Mary Stott and other stalwarts of the Society.

She and Richard returned to Ethiopia in 1987, leaving the children at universities in the UK. Rita now undertakes library consultancies, and edits academic books and university theses. She devotes more energy than before to voluntary work and has been, or is, Chair, United World Colleges National Committee – Ethiopia; Chair, Programme Committee, Society of Friends of the Institute of Ethiopian; Board member, Ethiopian Gemini Trust.

Her publications on Sylvia and matters related to women are:

- "Collection development and women's heritage: the case of the Fawcett Library". *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 10 no.3, pp.225-239 (1987)
- "Sylvia Pankhurst in perspective: some comments on Patricia Romero's biography *E. Sylvia Pankhurst: Portrait of a Radical*" in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol.11, no.3, pp.245-262 (1988)
- "Senedu Gabru: A role model for Ethiopian women?" in Tsehai Berhane-Selassie (ed.) *Gender Issues in Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, pp. 71-87 (1991).
- "Women of power in Ethiopian history and legend" *Salamta*, vol.13 no.1, pp.25-30 (1996)
- "Forgotten women in Ethiopian history" *CERTWID* [Center for Research, Training and Information on Women in Development] *Informs*, vol. 6, no.2, pp.13-16 (2001)