

## Clotworthy, Pauline (Cecily Elizabeth)

by Linde Lunney

Clotworthy, Pauline (Cecily Elizabeth) (née Keohler, later Keller) (1912–2004), teacher of fashion design, was born 17 May 1912 in Dublin. She was the daughter of Robert Nesbitt Keohler, a solicitor, and his second wife, Ethel M. Keohler (née Thompson), the daughter of William Thompson, a member of the Society of Friends and an engineer, from Ballyboggan, Co. Wexford. Robert Keohler's first wife was Edith Thompson, Ethel's elder sister, but she had died after two years of marriage, around the time of the birth of her daughter in 1902. In October 1914, two months after the outbreak of war with Germany, Robert Keohler (also spelled Köhler) changed his surname by deed poll to Keller.

Pauline attended Alexandra College, and then the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin (1931–2), where she was taught by Seán Keating (qv), who tried, unsuccessfully, to stop her producing fashion sketches when she was set to draw figures from life models. Fashion was what she cared most about, and she decided to move to Browns Paris School of Fashion on London's Bond Street. She then considered working for the dressmaking department of Arnotts department store in Dublin, but realised that her artistic and impressionistic designs were not enough. She needed to understand the technicalities of pattern-making, cutting, and garment construction. On the advice of Ronald Nesbitt, advertising manager (later managing director) of Arnotts, she returned to London to the British Institute of Dress Designers, for training in the practical skills that underlie dress-designing; fellow students included Hardy Amies. She completed the course successfully in May 1938. Spotting an opportunity to bring equivalent training to Dublin, and with her father's help, she leased rooms at 6 St Stephen's Green, in Dublin city centre, to establish the Grafton Academy of Dress Designing and Millinery.

The first fifteen students enrolled in 1938; annual shows of student work quickly became a feature of Dublin society. Rather unusually for the period, she continued to work professionally when married and even after having had children. Some of the most prominent people in Irish fashion were associated with the school over the years, some as teachers, such as Neillí Mulcahy, and many others as pupils, including Ib Jorgensen and Clodagh. Designers who established Ireland's reputation in international fashion studied under Clotworthy, whose pioneering academy also provided skills that enabled hundreds of less celebrated people to earn their living as dressmakers and tailors throughout Ireland, or to enjoy hobbies in fashion-related crafts. The academy's seventieth anniversary celebrations in 2008 highlighted Clotworthy's contribution as the 'backbone of the Irish clothing trade' (*Irish Times*, 5 April 2008); for many years there was no other training course available in Ireland.

Pauline Keller married in 1940 Neil Desmond Clotworthy (1917–92), an officer in the Irish army, who was born in Saskatchewan, Canada; his Irish parents had brought their family back to Dublin in 1931. He later trained in electrical and mechanical engineering, and became engineer-in-chief with the Commissioners of Irish Lights, responsible for all aspects of the provision of navigational aids round Irish coasts, as technologies developed rapidly from the 1950s. He and Pauline had two daughters and a son. Pauline died in the Blackrock Clinic, Co. Dublin, on 22 December 2004 and was buried in the Friends' burial ground, Blackrock. She was survived by her daughters, one of whom continued the family involvement with the Grafton Academy.

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NAI: Census of Ireland 1901, 1911, [www.census.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie); *Ir. Times*, *passim*, esp. 2 Sept. 1902; 14 Oct. 1914; 27 Jan. 1993; 14, 19 Feb. 2005; 5 Apr. 2008; Robert O'Byrne, *After a fashion: a history of the Irish fashion industry* (2000), 49–50; website of the Grafton Academy of Dress Designing at [www.graftonacademy.com](http://www.graftonacademy.com); [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) (for Irish civil registration indexes) (internet material downloaded Apr. 2011)