

Goulding, Valerie

by Patrick Maume

Goulding, Valerie (1918–2003), philanthropist and senator, was born Valerie Hamilton Monckton on 12 September 1918 in Kent, younger of two children (she had an elder brother) of Walter Monckton, barrister (later a confidant of King Edward VIII and afterwards a conservative cabinet minister, 1st Viscount Monckton of Brenchly) and his first wife Mary Adelaide, known as Polly (née Collyer#Fergusson), daughter of Sir Thomas Colyer#Fergusson, landowner, of Ightham Mote, Kent.

She was educated privately (by governesses) and at Downe House school near Newbury (1933–5). During the 1936 abdication crisis she acted as a confidential go#between, ferrying messages between the king at Fort Belvedere and Downing Street; she retained favourable memories of the king, believing that his professed social concern was genuine but regretting that he and Mrs Simpson were not prepared to put duty first. She had nonetheless also formed a favourable impression of Mrs Simpson and was present at a lunch given for her before she left for France a week before the abdication. She later worked in the War Office (having been advised to do by Winston Churchill, whom she had met at Fort Belvedere in autumn 1936) and in 1938 joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) (then the women's branch of the British army), while still enjoying life as a socialite.

In June 1939 while attending a race meeting at Fairyhouse she met the Irish businessman Sir Basil Goulding (qv), 3rd baronet; they became engaged in two months and married in Donegal in August 1939 (the wedding was scheduled for 20 September in London but was brought forward because Valerie received her call#up papers; marriage exempted her). She returned to Britain soon after the birth of their first son in July 1940; Basil joined the Royal Air force, serving in Britain throughout the war, while Valerie, after working with the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, rejoined the ATS and became in time a second lieutenant, before leaving in 1944 due to the imminent birth of her second son. A third son was born in 1947.

When the Gouldings returned to Ireland, Valerie (who had a longstanding interest in medicine and regretted not having become a doctor) grew increasingly conscious of the poverty visible in Dublin and became involved in social work. For some years she helped in the kitchen at the Marrowbone Lane Fund, Dublin.

In the late 1940s she met the remedial therapist Kathleen O'Rourke, who persuaded her to study at the Dublin school of physiotherapy. She left before qualification because of other commitments and because 'the more I saw of the polio situation the more I realised that after#care and helping mothers get their children to and from a treatment centre was the real problem. There was only one physiotherapist per hospital at the time, and no occupational therapy' (Hayden, *Lady G*, 89). In

1951 Goulding and O'Rourke co-founded the Central Remedial Clinic (CRC). Goulding used her social contacts and her ability to enthuse others to become a highly successful fundraiser; the fact that her approach was businesslike rather than emotionally driven was central to the clinic's success, as was her determination to make available the best modern methods of therapy. She combined elite contacts with high-profile events (such as balls and sponsored walks involving the television presenter Jimmy Saville) which raised the clinic's profile even if they did not directly generate large profits. Her successor as the head of the CRC, Ken Holden, thought that her principal ability lay in attracting capable people, motivating them and giving them the autonomy to pursue their own work. Her longstanding friend Sir Anthony O'Reilly described her as 'a benign activist ... part Thatcher, part Florence Nightingale and part sergeant-major'.

Founded in Pembroke St., the CRC moved to Prospect Hall, Goatstown, in 1954 and finally to Clontarf. The CRC was funded entirely by voluntary donations until 1977, when it received state help. Its primary initial function was to help children suffering from the polio epidemics which hit Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s. As polio declined from the mid-1960s, the CRC branched out to assist children with such disorders as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy and arthrogryposis. At the time of Goulding's death it was providing services to 3,500 children and 500 adults. Amongst the beneficiaries of her work were the writers Christy Brown (qv) and Christopher Nolan (1965–2009). Her fierce commitment to Nolan's potential led to the clinic's development of various therapies (including the use of computers) which assisted later patients; Nolan afterwards wrote that he owed his success to 'Lady Goulding and her harbour of hope' (*Daily Telegraph*, 14 Aug. 2008).

Goulding was both chairman and managing director of the CRC from 1951 to 1980, remaining as chairman until 1984; she also chaired the management board of the CRC school. Although John Charles McQuaid (qv), catholic archbishop of Dublin, was related to Kathleen O'Rourke, he refused to support the clinic on the grounds that he only gave his support to fully catholic charities. Because of this Goulding's conversion to catholicism in 1962 was attributed by some to concern for the clinic. In fact, her family had long had catholic leanings; her father combined devout Anglo-catholicism with compulsive womanising and contemplated conversion on several occasions though he died an anglican; her brother Gilbert converted to Rome some years before she did, and her mother joined the catholic church on her deathbed. Goulding's conversion caused some tension with her husband, who regarded religious belief in general and catholicism in particular as mumbo-jumbo and was afraid of possible religious enthusiasm; this was resolved (partly because she adopted an à la carte approach on such doctrines as contraception and partly because the priest who received her advised that in case of conflict she should defer to her husband's wishes). Although the Gouldings did not have a particularly demonstrative relationship (like members of their class in previous generations they sent their children to boarding school early and did not engage in public displays of emotion; brought up in an era of servants, Valerie never took much interest in

housework and Basil appears to have felt some jealousy of her focus on the clinic), they nonetheless appear to have been close. Their parties at their house, Dargle Cottage, near Enniskerry, were celebrated social events.

Although she believed a united Ireland should rejoin the British commonwealth, she was a Fianna Fáil supporter (a position which she attributed to revulsion at the manner in which Fine Gael in government had reversed its position on Irish membership of the commonwealth in 1948). In 1977 she unsuccessfully contested the Seanad Éireann election on the administrative panel (nominated by the Central Remedial Clinic) and after her defeat was one of eleven nominees of the taoiseach, Jack Lynch (qv), subsequently taking the Fianna Fáil whip. She rarely spoke in the seanad, seeing her position as ancillary to her work for the clinic. She was regarded by some female representatives as a conservative who took little interest in feminism (she thought feminists wished to be too much like men and judged the contemporary position of women by comparison with memories of her youth). Goulding also encountered some resentment because of her upper-class English accent and mannerisms.

Her support for Charles Haughey (1925–2006) in the 1979 Fianna Fáil leadership election caused some in the Lynch/Colley faction of the party to accuse her of ingratitude. She was, however, a close friend of Haughey, whom she had recruited to assist with fund-raising for the clinic in the aftermath of the 1970 arms trial; he was part of a fund-raising group that she took to America in 1972. Although her involvement of Haughey was based on the calculation that the clinic might benefit from his desire to rehabilitate himself in the public eye, she came to admire his skills and to regard him as the personification of caring government. She thought of becoming a dáil candidate in Haughey's Dublin North Central constituency; in the event she did not contest the general elections of 1981 or February 1982 because of the fatal illness of her husband (he died of liver cancer on 16 January 1982). In the November 1982 general election she was an unsuccessful Fianna Fáil dáil candidate in Dún Laoghaire, where both outgoing Fianna Fáil TDs had opposed Haughey's leadership of the party in an October 1982 vote of no confidence; she was imposed by the party leadership after the constituency party selected three candidates for the five-seat constituency. This encouraged suspicions that Haughey promoted her candidacy in order to undermine his internal opponents, even if this lost the party a seat. Goulding denied this, stating that she hoped to attract a personal vote that might assist the party to achieve a second seat. In the event, she won 2,492 first preferences (4.97%) and did not secure a seat, and Fianna Fáil lost its second seat in the constituency.

In 1987, having campaigned for Haughey in the dáil election, she was disappointed not to be one of the taoiseach's eleven nominees for the seanad (Haughey attributed this decision to realpolitik). In addition to her work for the CRC, Goulding was active in a number of cross-border peace groups, including the Southern Movement for Peace (as committee member), Peace Point (as a co-founder) and Anglo–

Irish Encounter founded in 1983 by the British and Irish governments. She was a member of the advisory committee of the American Ireland Fund and chairman of the National Council for the Elderly. Although some friends thought that in her later years she was somewhat ill-at-ease with newer fund-raising techniques and the more bureaucratized and state-driven nature of services for the handicapped, she remained active well into her sixties; she led a working group which went to Beirut to help children with disabilities (1983) and assisted the building of a national sport and social centre for the disabled in Jordan (1984). Her activities in the middle east were under the auspices of the Order of Malta. In 1966 she had been made Dame of Honour and Devotion in the Irish Association of the Order of Malta.

When her official biography was published in 1994, it was said that she was still restless and looking for new tasks to undertake. She received various honours: LLD (NUI), an honorary doctorate in the humanities from Stonehill College, Boston, and the gold medal of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. In 1990 she received the Lord Mayor of Dublin's Award. She died in a Dublin nursing home on 28 July 2003, survived by her three sons. Sir Anthony (Tony) O'Reilly paid tribute to her as 'the epitome of all that is good in the Anglo-Irish relationship ... a symbol of care and compassion for countless generations of Irish people' (*Ir. Independent*, 29 July 2003).

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*Ir. Independent*, 29 July 2003; *Ir. Times*, 29 July 2003; *Times*, 30 July 2003; *Sunday Independent*, 3 Aug. 2003; *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Aug. 2003; Jacqueline Hayden, *Lady G: a biography of the Honourable Lady Goulding LL.D.* (1994)