

## Obituary

# Shirley Kate Strong MBE 17 May 1930–21 August 2023

Andrew Strong, Paul Bennett and Susan Walker

### Andrew Strong

Shirley was born in 1930, the eldest child of Jack and Helen Twallin who lived in Bickley. Brother John was born just under three years later and sister Alison two years after that. Her childhood in the long-term family home in Bickley was a happy one, among the many family and friends who lived in the area. However, as the wartime bombing in London intensified, Helen and her family were evacuated to Devon, and Shirley initially lived on a farm before going on to board at Stover School in Newton Abbot and ultimately to Benenden School, which had also moved temporarily to Newquay, in 1944.

After achieving her Higher Certificate, Shirley attended Queen's Secretarial College in London, following which she undertook a few secretarial roles before moving to Italy to stay with the director of the British School in Rome, John Ward-Perkins, and his family. She managed to extend her stay by doing typing work, teaching English and other tasks, and it was there that she met a young Rome Scholar called Donald Strong. She was charged with assisting him in his work of measuring and recording the artefacts in the region. Their relationship blossomed and they wed in January 1954. Early married life was spent in Petts Wood where they raised three children, Andrew, Timothy and Mary, before the family moved in 1961 to an old house in Chislehurst where she lived for the remainder of her life.

Donald, who by now had been appointed Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Provinces at the Institute of Archaeology in London, had been suffering ill-health for some time, and his sudden death in Turkey in 1973 left Shirley a widow at 43 with children of 18, 15 and 13 to raise on her own, so she took on secretarial roles at University College London and later at the Egypt Exploration Society.

Despite Donald's death, she continued the work with the Girl Guides Association that she had been persuaded to undertake in 1969, rising to the rank of Chief Commissioner for London and South-East England in 1984, alongside Guides celebrations and significant fundraising activities. She held the position of President of Greater London Kent for roughly 40 years. Donald had been one of the co-founders of the Society for Libyan Studies and Shirley agreed to become the Honorary Secretary of the society in 1974 (in succession to Olwen Brogan), until 1978. She then retired temporarily and returned in 1984 as the General Secretary. Working for the society helped greatly by keeping her in touch with Donald's colleagues, his world and his work. She finally retired in 2013.

The many friends she made in the Guides and those she worked with in these learned societies meant a great deal to her and she could not have been more proud than when she was included in the Queen's 2001 Birthday Honours List and awarded an MBE for 'Services to the Community including The Girl Guide

Association and the Society for Libyan Studies', which was presented to her by the then Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace.

Her work with the Guides led her to becoming a director of the Tidy Britain Group. She also sat for a time on the General Advisory Council and Complaints Review Board of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, which assessed what was acceptable, or not, for the viewing or listening public on commercial TV and radio stations.

She was bitten early by the travel bug and her adventures took her around the world from the Arctic to the Antarctic, with time spent in numerous places in between. She particularly loved India and organised and led 23 tours there for friends and family keen to explore that part of the world.

Shirley lived a very full life and is survived by her three children, nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. She will be sadly missed by them and many other people whose lives she touched.

### Paul Bennett Head of Mission, BILNAS

When I first joined the SLS Council back in the late 1990s, it was Shirley who made me welcome and explained the running of the society. She was a whirlwind, always hardworking and knowledgeable, taking on much of the organisation of minutes, lectures and lecturers, as well as all the minutiae needed for running an important society and one so close to her heart, having been founded by her late husband, Donald Strong. She forged a great working relationship with the then treasurer, Tim Taylor, and they made a formidable team for many years.

It was Shirley and Tim who encouraged me (severely twisted my arm) to take on the chairmanship of the society after 2000, with Claudio Vita-Finzi as president. Shirley and Tim were of enormous support to us both, as she was for those before and after us. Shirley loved the society with a passion, and it became, possibly from the first, a major part of her life.

Shirley did have other interests, not always apparent to members of Council. She was District Commissioner for the Guides for many years and ran a lecture programme for a retirement home in Chislehurst for decades, persuasively encouraging many to sign up to lecture, including a significant number of scholars and archaeologists. Shirley was charming, very good company, with a wry sense of humour and a huge heart – it was difficult to refuse a person who did so much for others, particularly her local church. She was a force of nature in so many ways. Shirley had a family holiday home in Southwold that she loved dearly (near the lighthouse, for those who know the place) and spent as much time there as she could with her two pet dogs, becoming an important member of that community, organising many events. When Shirley and family members were not resident, she generously allowed others to stay there. Shirley was a splendid, loveable person, a good friend and the most avid supporter of the society and of Libya.

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**Figure 1.** Shirley at her granddaughter Sarah's wedding in 2019.



**Figure 2.** Donald and Shirley touring some archaeological sites in North Africa.

**Susan Walker**  
**Ashmolean Museum and Wolfson College, University of Oxford**

A great force of nature has been lost with the death at 93 of Shirley Strong. Shirley's father, Jack Twallin, was a cousin of John Ward Perkins, Director of the British School at Rome 1946–1976. It was in Rome that Shirley, by then equipped with secretarial skills, tireless energy and a thirst for adventure that never left her, met Donald Strong, already the author of an influential study of late-Hadrianic architectural ornament in Rome. Shirley found herself at the end of a tape measure sizing up Roman marble sarcophagi. She married Donald, then an Assistant Keeper in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum, in 1954. The then Keeper was Denys Haynes, who published in 1955 an invaluable guide to the antiquities of Tripolitania. Donald and Shirley also became engaged with antiquities in Libya, drawing the ornament of the Roman imperial monument at Arae Philaenorum for publication in 1962 by Richard Goodchild, then Controller of Antiquities for Cyrenaica.

I first met Shirley in 1968, by which time Donald had moved slightly north of the British Museum to Gordon Square, where he succeeded Goodchild as Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Provinces at the Institute of Archaeology. Then an independent research institute of the University of London, the Institute had opted to expand its courses to undergraduates. Sadly, both Goodchild and Strong died soon after their appointments, too soon to see students through an entire programme of undergraduate and research degrees. But while Donald was with us, we received inspirational teaching from a world-renowned scholar, and we early students were so few that we could be packed into his estate car and taken off to inspect

Roman sites in the south-east. Such expeditions often involved a stop at Chislehurst, where Shirley, Andrew, Tim and Mary would entertain us to tea and games in the garden of St Alphage, a large house they had taken on in 1961, and in which Shirley remained for the rest of her life.

Shirley was to outlive Donald by exactly half a century. In that time, she unceasingly honoured his memory, but also reinvented herself, with at least three parallel careers in the management of the Egypt Exploration and Libyan Societies, the Girl Guides and as an intrepid tour leader. When I became an officer of the Society for Libyan Studies, I had to be sure to finish the

paperwork in time for Shirley's departures, most often to India, a country she loved. I thoroughly enjoyed working with Shirley, who was completely unshockable, funny, willing and able to talk to anyone, and who always knew what to say and what to do.

Her death really does feel like the end of an era – the loss of an exceptionally able woman who was part of that nexus of British archaeologists who worked in post-war Libya to build a generation of expert Libyan archaeologists and warm relations with international scholars interested in the archaeology of that remarkable country.