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**Meads [*née Gladish*], Dorothy May** (1891–1958), historian and college principal, was born at London Road, East Retford, Nottinghamshire, on 21 December 1891, the eldest of six surviving children of Charles Walter Gladish (1862–1946), a master grocer and corn merchant, and his wife, Annie, *née* Mettam (1870–1919). Her father was the proprietor of Gladish and Sons in Retford, and his eldest son, Charles Richard Gladish (1893–1968), became mayor of Retford in 1951. She was educated at Retford High School for Girls, School of St Mary, Abbots Bromley, and Stoneygate College, Leicester; in 1910, she won a scholarship to University College, Nottingham, where she read for the external London University degree in history. She was the first member of her family to attend university.

Gladish had a distinguished student career at Nottingham, winning a Gladstone prize for history in 1912 and a Heymann scholarship to undertake research for a master's degree. Her subsequent book, *The Tudor Privy Council* (1915)—completed when she was just twenty-three years old—was favourably reviewed by the Tudor historian A. F. Pollard, and continues to be cited. She served as vice-president of the Students' Representative Council from 1912 to 1915, developing the constitution of the new Union and becoming editor of the first Union handbook in 1914. She joined the editorial committee of the student magazine *The Gong*, and as a result of her numerous roles (notably, as ladies' hockey captain), she was frequently featured in its pages. Memorably, *The Gong* recorded a 'Mock Trial', when students, lecturers, and family members transformed a theatre into a courtroom, donned wigs, and found Gladish guilty of 'despotism in Union affairs' (*The Gong*, V.1, 1915: 32–33).

One participant was a fellow student and assistant Union secretary, John Arthur Meads (1893–1917), the son of Zachariah Meads, blacksmith, of Sawley, Derbyshire. They married on 8 January 1917 in Ordsall parish church. Her husband was by then a captain in the Sherwood Foresters, having been commissioned a temporary second lieutenant in November 1914, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. Awarded the Military Cross and twice mentioned in dispatches, he was killed in Flanders on 10 October 1917, just nine months after their marriage. Gladish had begun teaching at Mexborough Grammar School in

1915, but resigned her post following her husband's death. In January 1921 she returned to teaching, as lecturer in history at Dudley Teacher Training College.

In 1925 Meads commenced doctoral research at King's College, London, under the supervision of the then professor of education, J. Dover Wilson. Her thesis (1929) was the first major study of early modern women's education, drawing on extensive primary sources to investigate literacy among women of all social classes, as well as examining philosophical and literary treatments. Her approach was influenced by the work of both Dover Wilson and his fellow Shakespearean scholar, R. B. McKerrow, who included Meads in the network of contributors that shaped the intellectual direction of his newly founded *Review of English Studies*; and by economic and social historians from the London School of Economics, including Alice Clark and R. H. Tawney. Meads formed a close working relationship with the medieval women's and economic historian Eileen Power, who was editor of the series which subsequently published the final volume of Meads's thesis, *The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, 1599–1605* (1930), an edition of what is generally believed to be the earliest surviving diary by an Englishwoman.

After completing her doctorate Meads resumed her career in teacher training as lecturer in education at Chichester Diocesan College, Brighton (1929–33). From 1933 to 1936 she was vice-principal of Crewe Training College. In 1936 she was appointed principal of Bishop Otter College, Chichester. This was a Church of England college for women training to become primary teachers, and Meads arrived with ambitious plans for intellectual and physical expansion. She quickly established new advanced courses in practical subjects, including craft work, gardening, and physical education. New land was purchased and, in 1939, a gymnasium was constructed. The post of consulting architect was created to plan further developments, which Meads hoped would include the training of nursery teachers. However, the outbreak of the Second World War halted such plans, and when in 1942 the college was taken over by the RAF for D-day planning, Meads and her college council took the decision to re-locate to Stockwell College in Bromley for the next three years.

Meads's wartime letters to her council provide vivid eyewitness accounts of air raids, and reveal her struggle to maintain college life and her tireless efforts with the Air and Education ministries to secure alternative accommodation. Both the chairman of the college council, Bishop George Bell, and Meads's successor as principal, Elisabeth Murray, later

claimed that she was responsible for the college's survival. Nevertheless, in March 1944, after several direct hits in the neighbourhood, Meads briefly disbanded the college.

During this difficult period, however, Meads formed links with Bromley Art School, appointed her first full-time art lecturer, Eleanor Hipwell, and instructed her to purchase artworks for the college, thus commencing the art collection which Murray would expand. Her commitment to student autonomy, and to greater co-operation with universities, was evident when the college union became affiliated to the National Union of Students in 1943, she was elected to the court of Reading University in 1945 and, in 1946, set up a joint management committee of staff and students which was made compulsory more than twenty years later. Her extensive correspondence with Bishop Bell reveals her enthusiasm for the teacher training reforms proposed by the 1944 McNair Report, and, in her comments on Bell's speeches in the House of Lords, her strong beliefs in church involvement in education, and in the evangelization of England. Her decision to screen *Birth of a Baby* (1938), a controversial sex education film which had been banned in several American states, underscored her wide-ranging definition of women's physical education, and its importance.

Meads had suffered from heart problems since the early 1940s and, following serious complications, she retired in December 1947. Her last letter to the college magazine, in 1948, expressed her regret at leaving her work unfinished. Her illness, and the onset of war, meant that many of her planned reforms were accomplished instead by Murray in the more favourable conditions of the post-war period. Meads remained an invalid until she died at her home, 28 Lime Tree Avenue, East Retford, on 20 October 1958.

Meads's work on early modern women laid foundations for an international revival of scholarly interest in the 1980s and, since then, her edition of Hoby's diary has become a standard text. In the same decade, new women's histories probed the significance of women's training colleges in the history of female education, and included limited recognition of Meads, though not generally identifying the principal of Bishop Otter College and the early modern scholar as the same individual.

## Sources

*Retford Times* (24 Oct 1958); (31 Oct 1958)

G. P. McGregor, *Bishop Otter College and policy for teacher education, 1839–1980* (1981)

H. Warne and T. Brighton, *A portrait of Bishop Otter College, Chichester, 1839–1990* (1992)

E. Edwards, *Women in teacher training colleges, 1900–1960: a culture of femininity* (2001)

S. Edwards, ‘The female student on trial, 1910–15: Dorothy M. Gladish versus University College Nottingham versus Oscar Wilde’, *Women’s History Review* (26.6 (2017): 880-899)

student union minute books (1912–15); calendars; *The Gong* magazine; student registers, U. Nott., archives – list under ‘Archives – important’?

application for employment; minutes of committee meetings at Crewe Training College, Manchester Metropolitan University, records

Dudley Training College minute books, University of Wolverhampton

application for employment at Mexborough Grammar School, Doncaster Archives

*Retford Times* archive, Retford Public Library

records from Gladish and Sons, Retford High School, and RAF Retford, Retford Historical Society, Bassetlaw Museum, Retford

b. cert.

m. cert.

d. cert.

## **Archives**

## **Important**

corresp.; college council reports; articles, *Bishop Otter College Magazine* (1938–48), University of Chichester

## **Wealth at death**

£4371: probate, 25 Nov 1958, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

## **Likenesses**

photographs, special collections, University of Chichester

photograph, c. 1915, Bassetlaw Museum, Retford

photograph, special collections, U. Nott., repro. in *The Gong*, 4/2 (June 1914), 14