

Nancy Champion de Crespigny Movius and her 'unusual career'

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Abstract: The paper traces the life of Adelaide-born Nancy Champion de Crespigny Movius whose interest in the ancient world led her in 1932 to undertake archaeological training in England with Mortimer and Tessa Wheeler at the Verulamium (St Albans) and Maiden Castle excavations and with Dorothy Garrod at Newnham College, Cambridge. Her participation in archaeological exploration continued with her marriage to Hallam L. Movius Jr, an archaeologist who became Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University and with whom she worked in SE Asia and Europe, and in particular at Abri Pataud.

My mother was born Nancy Champion de Crespigny in Adelaide, South Australia, on November 27, 1910. She was the daughter of Dr. Constantine Trent Champion de Crespigny and Beatrix Hughes of Adelaide. She died on December 9, 2003 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the widow of my father, Professor Hallam L. Movius Jr. In her own words, she was 'a tough old bird,' but a kind, gentle, and highly intelligent one.

Packed into her 93 years was a lot of archaeology: first on excavations in England, the Middle East and Ireland as a graduate student at the University of London and Newnham College, Cambridge University; later as Nancy Movius, traveling with my father in Burma and Southeast Asia; and finally as his much-loved and essential assistant at the Abri Pataud in Les Eyzies (Dordogne), France.

My mother was one of Australia's earliest trained professional archaeologists. She studied under some of Britain's leading practitioners, including R.E. Mortimer Wheeler and Dorothy Garrod. She was my father's first reader and editor of his considerable list of publications over some 40 years, ranging from *The Irish Stone Age* (1942) to his reports on the Abri Pataud excavation which he directed (1977).

I am indebted to Christopher Davey for his help in gathering Australian press clippings and other archaeological sources to document much of the following. For the rest, I urge the reader's forbearance, and trust he or she will keep this in mind: 'Memoir is not an act of history but an act of memory, which is innately corrupt.' -Mary Karr, (b. 1955) poet and memoirist.

Early in her life, Nancy Champion de Crespigny (she insisted on the 'Champion', which she said was a proper part of the name) had a comfortable life as the daughter of an eminent Australian physician. Sir Trent, as he became in 1941, was the son of Philip Champion de Crespigny, a widely respected bank executive in Victoria, himself the son of another Philip, police magistrate and sometime warden of the goldfields. Her mother was Beatrix Hughes, also from Victoria, who became well known and respected in Adelaide for her charitable work (Hackett).



*Figure 1: Nancy Champion de Crespigny at Larne, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, 1935.
Photo: courtesy of the author*

World War I had significant impact on the family. Dr. de Crespigny went overseas and served in the 3rd Australian General Hospital during the Gallipoli campaign and commanded 1st A.G.H. at Rouen, France, where he was mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Distinguished Service Order. He was later one of Australia's earliest 'flying doctors', reaching patients far out in the bush by aeroplane. (His son, Richard Geoffrey, also a physician, served with British forces at Tobruk in World War II. Both father and son were eventually knighted.) My mother told me she was deeply hurt as a girl when her father, who she worshipped, told her that she could never be a doctor, as women were no good in the operating theatre because they are apt to faint at the sight of blood. Sir Trent was nothing if not thoroughly Victorian in his view of women.



Figure 2: *The Samaria Excavation Team 1933:*
Standing, J. Crowfoot, Mrs. Crowfoot, Nancy Ch. deC.,
Prof. Blake, Mrs. Lake, Prof. Lake,
Sitting: J. Hood, C.H. Inge, K. Murray, Joan Crowfoot,
A. Buchanan, K. Kenyon, E. Sukenik?
Photo: courtesy of the author

As a university student at Melbourne University, Nancy became interested in prehistory. The excavation of Tutankhamen's tomb was still very much a matter of public interest, as were other discoveries in Europe and the Middle East. She had a small collection of Egyptian tomb objects given to her by friends of her family and others who knew of her interest; and while the formal



Figure 4: *Samaria 1933: Nancy Ch. deC. in work clothes. Photo: courtesy of the author*



Figure 3: *Samaria 1933: removal of an architrave from a trench. Photo: courtesy of the author*

study of prehistory was not available to her at Melbourne, she read history avidly. However, after three years of university, the opportunity to study archaeology in England came up, and she jumped at it, sailing in April, 1932 with her brother Geoffrey, on the Orient Line S.S. *Orford* (*News* 24/3/32: 10).

In London, Nancy attended lectures at University College and volunteered at the British Museum. Her first mentor and teacher in the field was R.E. Mortimer Wheeler, who introduced her to field work in August at the Belgic/Roman site of Verulamium (St. Albans). She was evidently not only a competent student, but sufficiently adept to be put in a supervisory position on the excavation (Wheeler 1933: 27).

In February, 1933 Nancy left England for the Mediterranean and Middle East. In Palestine, she joined the excavation at Samaria under the direction of J.W. Crowfoot, Kathleen M. Kenyon, and the Israeli archaeologist, Eleazar Sukenik (Crowfoot et al. 1942: xvi). She returned to Australia in July, to see family in Adelaide and to finish her degree at Melbourne. While there, she met Veronica Seton-Williams, who was taking her degree in Medieval History, and the two became good friends. When it was time to go back to England, Nancy persuaded Veronica to sail with her, promising an introduction to Wheeler. They



Figure 5: Maiden Castle 1934 Trench A, a note on the verso says 'the one I wish I'd got'. The fact that the women were supervising male labourers was a matter of some comment in the Australian press.

Photo: courtesy of the author

left in May, 1934. The Adelaide press was somewhat mystified at the 'unusual career' the 'clever daughter' of the de Crespignys had chosen for herself (*Advertiser* 2/1/33: 9; *Mail* 7/4/34: 16).

By July, Nancy was working on Wheeler's Society of Antiquaries dig at Maiden Castle in Dorset, as was Seton-Williams, the introduction apparently having borne fruit (Wheeler 1943: 2). When the season ended, Nancy headed for Newnham College, Cambridge, for further training and education. Dorothy Garrod and Gertrude Caton Thompson were at Newnham, and E. H. Minns was the Disney Professor at Cambridge, to be succeeded in 1939 by Garrod, the first chaired woman at the University. Nancy spent Christmas of that year in Sussex as the guest of Kathleen Kenyon, who she had befriended at Verulamium and Samaria (*Mail* 15/12/34: 25).

1935 was an important year for Nancy. She signed up to work on an American excavation in Larne, Northern Ireland, which was under the direction of Hugh O'Neill Hencken of Harvard University. Hencken's assistant director was Hallam L. Movius, Jr., who was working on his graduate degree in archaeology at Harvard. Thalassa Cruso, an English friend of Nancy's and fellow student of Mortimer Wheeler's, who had just returned from a stint on the dig, warned her, 'Watch out for Movius, he has a gleam in his eye.' When he met her in Stranraer, Scotland, for the ferry trip to Belfast, Nancy had occasion to see that gleam firsthand. (In due course, Thalassa became



Figure 6: Nancy Ch. deC. on site in a cooler climate 1934-5. Photo: courtesy of the author

engaged to Hencken, and Nancy to Movius.) During the year, in addition to a lengthy Irish sojourn, there was a holiday trip with Veronica Seton-Williams to the palaeolithic caves of France and Spain, and the awarding of Nancy's diploma in archaeology from Newnham (Seton-Williams 1988: 26). In November, she returned to Adelaide and her engagement was announced (*News* 19/11/35:9; *Advertiser* 25/11/35:10).

In early 1936, Hallam Movius came to Australia to meet Nancy's family and friends. It must have been very busy all around, for my mother's diary of that period contains lacunae of several days at a time. They visited a number of archaeological sites including Panaramatee on the Winnininnie Creek with C.P. Mountford and Kangaroo Island with N.B. Tindale (*Advertiser* 11/3/36: 18; 1/4/36: 27). Nancy had dug on Kangaroo Island on an earlier occasion. In July, she and her mother sailed for England, and on September 25, the small wedding took place in St. James' Church, Piccadilly. Veronica Seton-Williams was a bridesmaid.

There had been a plan that the newly married couple would return to Massachusetts briefly, then set off to excavate in Eastern Europe, most probably in Czechoslovakia, where Movius had worked in 1931. I believe the rise of Nazism may have influenced their intentions, as after a brief honeymoon in Germany and a quick visit to Boston, they were off instead to join an expedition in Southeast Asia, starting in Rangoon.



Figure 7: Nancy Ch. deC. and Hallam L. Movius, Jr. engagement portrait, Adelaide 1936
 Photo: courtesy of the author

Their company on the Burmese portion of the trek, organized by the geologist and geographer Helmut de Terra, included the theologian and palaeontologist Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who had been involved in the discovery of Peking Man. Along the Irawaddy, they were joined by Nancy's father and sister, Dr. Trent and Margaret de Crespigny, who had flown on holiday from Australia, and accompanied them downstream, back to Rangoon (*Advertiser* 2/2/38: 8).

The epochs Nancy and Hal were now examining were decidedly older than those with which Nancy was familiar. Nevertheless, she forged ahead in a largely male group, christening her and her husband's newly acquired, but ancient Studebaker 'Ozymandias' after Shelley's 'king of kings' in the eponymous poem, whose ruins enjoined rivals to 'look on my works, ye mighty, and despair.' It was during this journey that Hal began to work out his theory of the 'Movius Line,' which he was still discussing with his wife years later, during my childhood. His concept, of course, remains a matter of continuing controversy, but my mother was certainly involved in the research and thinking behind it from the outset.

Leaving Burma, Nancy and Hallam visited Java, Bali and Borneo. In Java, they met with the palaeontologist and discoverer of Java man, G.H. Ralph von Koenigswald, who was to visit them later in Cambridge, Massachusetts with his family following their wartime internment by the Japanese. (It may be worth mentioning in this context that during the war, American intelligence officials visited Nancy at her home outside Boston to examine the many Southeast Asian photographs she had from this expedition, and that some of these may have been useful in the war effort against Japan.)

In 1937, Nancy travelled to the U.S. with her husband, where they lived in Cambridge while Hallam completed his doctoral dissertation on his work in Ireland. She was his principal editor, and he acknowledged to me many years later that he 'couldn't have finished it without her.' The paper was published in book form in 1942 as *The Irish Stone Age* by Cambridge University Press.

Hallam's doctoral work was completed in 1938, and the Moviuses found a small house to rent in Sudbury, Massachusetts, about a 40-minute train ride from Cambridge. Shortly after they moved in, the infamous 1938 Hurricane visited New England, bringing gale-force winds and torrential rain, destroying homes and downing many trees. When things had calmed down, toward the end of the year, Veronica Seton-Williams paid a visit (Seton-Williams 1988: 83f).

Several acres of a large dairy farm stood across the road from the Movius house. Sudbury before the war was still very much a farming community, and quite rural. There were some interesting neighbours, however, among them Carleton Coon, Hal's good friend and an anthropologist then at Harvard, Lawrence Winship, editor of *The Boston Globe*, and the baseball star Herman 'Babe' Ruth. Not to lose touch with fieldwork entirely, the two did one small excavation of a Native American burial site nearby. Nancy missed Australia, but Hal had a lot of extended family nearby, and they welcomed her warmly.

Hal commuted by train to the Peabody Museum in Cambridge, while Nancy kept their home and garden going, complete with Irish setter, a cat, a canary and chickens. I joined the menagerie in January, 1940. The global situation was growing very dark, and Hal had been

in the army reserves since college. He was drilling near the Sudbury Town Hall on Sunday, December 7, 1941, the day Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor. Within a few months, he was fully mobilized, eventually as a member of the 12th Air Force, Intelligence division, and was shipped overseas in 1942, not to return for 39 months.

Life for Nancy during the war was a challenge. She was close to members of Hal's family, who kept a careful watch on her and her son; but there were other sad and serious matters to contend with. Just before Hal left for England and further training before service in North Africa and Italy, his father had died suddenly. Nancy's mother also passed away within the year in Adelaide, followed shortly by Hal's mother in Boston.

There were some moments of excitement, however. In the spring of 1943, Nancy reported to her parents that she had seen Madame Chiang Kai-shek at a ceremony in Boston's Symphony Hall, and thought her to be 'one of the three leaders of the world, Churchill being one of the other two' (*Mail* 5/6/43: 11)

Thanks to Hal's aunt, Dorothy West, Nancy had become a member of the English Speaking Union in Boston, which filled some of her time with work for the war effort. Among her tasks she entertained several Australian airmen who had been shot down in North Africa and were being repatriated. And then there were the dog, cat, canary, chickens and me to manage.

In late 1944, the family insisted that she move closer to them for whatever support she might need. They made the home of Hallam's cousin, Leverett Saltonstall, available to her, since he was off to Washington, D.C. as the newly-elected Senator from Massachusetts, having served that state as its Governor since 1939.

In 1945, Sir Trent managed to get to Boston to do research on paediatric care in hospitals there, and was able to stay with us in our new home in the suburb of Chestnut Hill. My mother was enormously happy to see him and to have news of Adelaide. And there was shortly more joy after so much harshness: the war ended and in September my father returned from Italy. Not all was sheer delight, though, since he brought with him a fearful case of hepatitis.

After three months of nursing, Nancy was relieved to see Hal go back to the Peabody Museum. Within a year, they had bought a house in Cambridge, within walking distance of the Museum. A little while later, my sister, Alice, was born.

Dinner time in those years was dominated by conversations between my parents about archaeology and archaeologists. My father excavated an Upper Palaeolithic site at La Colombière (Ain), France, in 1948 and made some important finds. He was also constantly reading in three or four languages to keep up with his field. He was awarded the Viking Medal of the Wenner-Gren Society and achieved tenure at Harvard at much the same time. My mother was always there to discuss ideas with, and to offer opinions on the ins and outs of career and collegial relationships. It is safe to say that she willingly merged her professional life with his. In their marriage, the whole was clearly greater than the sum of the parts. I never knew a moment's regret on her part, and I was always aware that my father depended on her for many important facets of his academic life.

During the summer of 1949, the family travelled through France while my father looked for a promising Palaeolithic site. The one that stood out was a rock shelter at the Abri Pataud in Les Eyzies. During the



Figure 8: Abri Pataud, the rock shelter museum with a dedicatory plaque to Hallam L. Movius.
Photo: courtesy Muséum National D'Histoire Naturelle © JC Domenech

next couple of years, funds were raised to purchase the property, and a full-scale excavation was planned and supported—undertaken as a joint venture of the Musée de l'Homme and Harvard University.

My mother flew to Australia in June, 1950, her first visit since leaving before the war. It was a brief few weeks, and there was no archaeological activity on her part that I know of. The Korean War broke out while she was away, and we were glad to see her back. This was an important trip, as her father died just two years later.

The Abri Pataud's first test trench was dug in the summer of 1953, revealing a remarkable wealth of material in the talus downhill from the main shelter. There were visits from many archaeologists, including the Abbé Breuil and François Bordes. Nancy was always near the centre of action, excavating, providing meals as needed, and making people comfortable, whether graduate students or eminent scientists. Most importantly, she could speak with all of them at their level, with her now substantial expertise in most phases of the discipline and all aspects of the operation.

In the years to come, Nancy became the logistical heart of every season at the Abri Pataud. In 1958, she and Hal bought and refurbished a small farmhouse in the nearby village of Tursac, on the road to Montignac, where the Lascaux cave had been discovered during the war. There was enough material being found at the Abri Pataud excavation to keep a large number of professionals and students busy, some of them there for many months at a time. My parents were often in the Dordogne for periods of up to 18 months. Their closest friends and neighbours were Heinz Henghes, the sculptor, and his wife, Daphne. Many archaeologists, palaeontologists, geologists and students came to visit and work on the excavation (Bricker 2007).

When Hal suffered a serious stroke in the summer of 1969, Nancy took on not only the logistical complexity associated with wrapping up the excavation, but continued to manage their daily lives together. She did this for almost a decade, on both sides of the Atlantic, until the house in Tursac was sold and they both finally repaired to Cambridge

My parents' last years together were spent quietly, though their lives were somewhat limited by the disabilities suffered by my father. Nancy helped him organize his final written work on the Abri Pataud excavation and to see it and all the related papers through to publication. The final work they had both hoped to complete, a *catalogue raisonné* of Palaeolithic sites in Europe, was no longer possible. There was no more overseas travel, but the presence of Harvard colleagues, children and grandchildren was a comfort.

Hallam Movius died on May 30, 1987. Nancy and her daughter, Alice, made a trip to Australia during the summer, which was a much needed respite after such a long period of selfless caring for Hal. They visited her

friends and relatives, spending time in Tasmania and Adelaide. When Nancy returned, she organized what remained of Hal's papers for appropriate distribution and cataloguing—at Tulane and Harvard Universities.

In 1990, the French government dedicated a museum at the Abri Pataud, with a plaque honouring Hallam Movius for his work there. My mother was present in Les Eyzies, accompanied by my sister, Alice Johnson, myself, my son Hallam L. Movius II, along with representatives of both the French and American archaeological establishments. It was wonderful to see how many people remembered Nancy well and showered her with warmth.

During the 1990s she kept busy in the Cambridge community, walking her dachshund, 'Cobber,' gardening, reading voraciously and corresponding with friends all over the world. When she was no longer able to get about easily and began to lose her sight, she spent her time at home quite content, as she once said, 'because I have a rich inner life.' As she began to fail, she confessed to being annoyed, principally because, 'I really want to know what's going to happen next.' She died on December 9, 2003.

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