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## **Margery Urquhart OBE**

### **Police Sergeant Special Branch Metropolitan Police**

### **Temporary Inspector Surrey Constabulary Women Police**

Some of the following was sent to Surrey Constabulary History by the modern historian of the Metropolitan Police **Dick Kirby**, who has kindly agreed to its publication. Miss Urquhart is mentioned in Mr. Kirby's book *IRA Terror on Britain's Streets 1939-1940*.

**Robert Simonson** of the Family History Centre found an early record of Miss Urquhart in the Surrey Constabulary though the entry seems to have been abandoned possibly indicating a move to personnel files. Appointments book archives reference 9152/1/2/1/5. The additional sheets of information from the Metropolitan Police for Margery Urquhart (copies of front and back supplied) was inserted in the middle of the double page for her entry in the register.

Yet again **Jean Pelham** has used her family history skills to investigate the background of this notable former member of the Surrey Constabulary.

**Jenny Tuffs** on seeing the history published in the Surrey Constabulary Journal undertook detailed research and in this version 2 of Miss Urquhart's biography much has been added.

Margery has different spellings, but this biography will follow the spelling used in the Surrey Constabulary Appointment Register.

**Margery was born on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1912**, her brother Duncan in 1915 and sister Annie in 1919, all in Punta Arenas, Chile where their father Alexander ran a beef business. Punta Arenas has a large Scottish population dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their parents Alexander and Betsey were originally from Scotland and in 1922 the family returned to Scotland. The family travelled



After university she worked on a farm in Hampshire but left in 1936 to join the Metropolitan Police

**The following from Wikipedia<sup>2</sup>: Margery Urquhart** OBE (27 August 1912 - 9 May 2007) worked as the Deputy Director of Social Work at Grampian Regional Council but unknown to her colleagues she had an earlier career as a Special Branch agent. She was possibly the first female agent to be recruited by Special Branch; furthermore she was the first female officer to become an Inspector in the Surrey Police Force. Urquhart took part in counter-espionage before and during World War II.<sup>1</sup>

Early life and education: Urquhart was born in Patagonia, Chile. Urquhart's parents, Alexander and Betsy Urquhart, were originally farmers in Milton of Culloden, Scotland, who ran a beef business in Chile. Her early education was carried out by her mother on the ranch. When she was 11 years old the family moved back to Milton of Culloden, Inverness.

She attended The University of Aberdeen, graduating in 1935 with a BSc in Agriculture. This achievement made her the first female to graduate with a degree in Agriculture from the University. After her graduation she moved to Hampshire where she worked on a farm.

**Career:** It was while working on the farm in Hampshire in 1936 that Urquhart decided on a major career shift and subsequently joined the Metropolitan Police Force. She was recruited by the Special Branch and it has been suggested that she was involved in covert work monitoring the IRA. By 1946 she had transferred to the Surrey Police Force and had been promoted to become the first female Inspector in the force.<sup>[2]</sup>

At this point Urquhart once again decided on a change of career and undertook training as a probation officer. By 1949 she was once again in Aberdeen taking on the role of a children's officer. She was the only full-time employee working in childcare. She was responsible for over 400 disadvantaged children and carried out much pioneering work. By the late 1970s Urquhart had risen to become Deputy Director of Social Services at Grampian Council. Urquhart retired in 1977.

After retiring, Urquhart immediately embarked on a political career as Conservative Councillor for the Aberdeen seat of Hazlehead. She was awarded an OBE in the 1977 New Year Honours.

Miss Urquhart developed a particular interest in mental health and subsequently took on several tasks as a retiree including being director of Seabank House, a care home in Aberdeen, from December 1990 to October 1997. She was also a director of the Aberdeen Association of Social Service from June 1986 to March 1989. She was also a director of Mental Health Aberdeen from October 1989 to October 1990. She spent her final years in the Fairview Nursing Home dying in 2007 in Bridge of Don, Scotland at the age of 94 years.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margery\\_Urquhart](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margery_Urquhart)

**The 1939 Register** listing individuals and occupations for the war effort, for 162 High Street South, East Ham lists Margery Urquhart, born 27<sup>th</sup> August 1912, single, a Woman Detective Constable Metropolitan Police (C.I.D.)

### **“IRA Terror on Britain’s Streets 1939-1940”**

**With permission of the author Dick Kirby**

There used to be a saying in the Metropolitan Police regarding women officers carrying out observations in a busy shopping area: ‘Put her in plain clothes, give her a shopping bag and no-one will suspect her’ but the women used in this complicated and dangerous surveillance task – where crowds were minimal and shopping bags would be of no earthly use - had to be better prepared than that.

Margery Urquhart had been born in Patagonia in 1912 and in 1936, she joined the Metropolitan Police. She served as a uniform officer on ‘J’ & ‘K’ (two of the outer divisions) but her capabilities were soon noted and she was seconded to Special Branch. Anne Winterbottom joined one year after Urquhart, and she served on ‘A’, ‘W’ & ‘M’ divisions before she, too was snapped up by Special Branch.

The surveillance commenced at 6.20pm on 3 May and finished at 2 o’clock the following morning.

The two women saw Patrick Dower and Patrick Joseph McAleer leave their lodgings at Sidmouth Street, WC1 and followed them as they walked a mile to Great Portland Street Underground Station where they met the third member of the gang, Gerard Bradford. From there, the three men travelled on to Baker Street Underground Station where they met Timothy Murray plus Gerald Lyons and one other man, where it appeared that Bradford was giving instructions to the others; and from time to time during that evening, McAleer met up with various of the gang. Shortly afterwards the group split up – so did the watchers. Miss Urquhart followed Dower, Murray and the other man. At 11.35pm, in the Euston Road, she saw Dower put something through the letterbox of George Newman & Co., motor car agents at No. 369. Shortly afterwards, the men went to Com-Motors at No. 349 where Miss Urquhart saw Murray insert something into that company’s letter box. The two men split up, so it was only Murray, whom she did not know, who was followed; he went alone to the Edgware Road where he was seen speaking to two girls and some young men after which he took the long route home to his lodgings at St Mary’s Terrace, Paddington, arriving there at 1am. Fortunately, the two empty milk bottles that Miss Urquhart had put into her handbag for protection, were not needed.

Meanwhile, Miss Winterbottom had followed Bradford and Lyons to the Aldwych where, at 12.30am outside the Aldwych Theatre she saw Bradford take something out of his coat pocket. Both men spent five minutes looking around them before walking away, into Kingsway where she saw them go to the shop premises of D. Gestetner Ltd. From there, the men walked and ran north, to High Holborn and when Miss Winterbottom was able to catch

up to them, she saw them walking away from the Crittall Manufacturing Co. Ltd. By now, the streets were pretty-well deserted and it would have been foolish indeed for one woman to try to continue to follow two very dangerous individuals. It is more than probable that the two men were responsible for planting bombs at Tottenham Court Road and Charing Cross Road; they were already heading in that direction, up Denmark Street to Charing Cross Road, then north, into Tottenham Court Road before a leisurely stroll back to their lodgings at Acton Street, but if they did, nobody saw them. The two men returned home at 2am.

The women returned to the Yard to be de-briefed and one would have thought that officers would have been dispatched to the various premises that the gang had visited and the keyholders called out so that the premises might be searched but for whatever reason, they were not. It has since been stated that 'the other man' with Dower and Murray was John Joseph Keane but this, of course, is nonsense. As has already been seen, Keane was arrested with others on 18 April, two weeks prior to the surveillance operation and remained in custody until he was later sentenced to 10 years' penal servitude. So, who was 'the other man' who was never caught? If he was a participating informant for Special Branch, it would explain why no action was taken to stop the bombs detonating, to prevent suspicion falling on him. It would also explain why the gang were able to be charged with planting the bombs at Tottenham Court Road and Charing Cross Road, even though none of the police officers saw them do it. All a bit bewildering, isn't it? Back now, to the early hours of 4 May.

At 1am – and this would have been minutes after Miss Winterbottom saw the two men at Gestetner's – just by chance, patrolling Police Constable 164 'E' Blake found a parcel outside the premises which contained two balloons, one inside the other filled with liquid and a stick of gelignite and a detonator. The parcel was placed in a bucket of water and he was later commended by the commissioner for his actions.

There were explosions where Dower and Murray had been seen at George Newman's in the Euston Road at 2.25am where the shop front was blown out and damage estimated at £90 was caused and also where Bradford and Lyons had been seen at Crittall's in High Holborn at 2.41am which caused £125's-worth of damage.

At 5.15am and again, just by chance - Police Constable 560 'C' Ernest Haywood discovered a brown paper parcel in the doorway of the furnishing company Heal & Son Ltd., in Tottenham Court Road. Opening it, he found a balloon, a stick of gelignite and a fuse; after separating the gelignite from the balloon, he immersed the items in a bucket of water which he then took to the police station. He was later awarded £15 from the Bow Street Reward Fund and awarded the King's Police Medal for gallantry.

Police Constable William Marshall was called to the explosion at Com-Motors – again, this was where Dower and Murray had been seen - which occurred at 8.45am and where the shop front was blown out; 21 year old Miss Amy Brand, standing at an adjoining tobacconist's kiosk was taken to hospital having been injured by wood splinters from Com-Motors. Similarly, Edward Buckland who was a timekeeper to Selmer & Co., musical instrument makers at

Charing Cross Road found a parcel inside the shop and believing it had been delivered to the firm, placed it on a desk. When he picked it up at 9.15am, it exploded in his hands and he threw it on the floor, whereupon it burst into flames. Curtains were thrown on to it and while Mr Buckland was trying to stamp out the flames, there was a second explosion and he and John Ivor Lloyd, a salesman, were thrown to the floor. Both men were taken to hospital, Mr Buckland suffering from leg injuries.

That morning, the bombers three addresses were raided by a mixture of Special Branch men and CID officers and were asked to account for their movements over the past few hours. Patrick Dower told Inspector Bridges that the case was a frame-up and that he had nothing further to say, then changed his mind and said, 'I'll take the lot. I'm standing up to my principals. I have nothing further to say'. When Patrick McAleer was arrested, two detonators were found on him. 'I have nothing to say at all', he said. 'I think it's a frame-up by your people of the Special Branch. I have nothing to say at all; that's definite'.

Gerard Bradford told the arresting officers, 'I don't wish to make any statement', Lyons said, 'As to my movements, I don't think that matters' and Murray made a signed statement.

Charged with conspiracy to cause explosions and with causing or attempting to cause explosions during 3-4 May the men appeared at the Old Bailey before the Common Serjeant who conducted an extremely fair trial against the terrorists. He ruled that there was no evidence to suggest that any of the defendants were guilty of the explosion in Charing Cross Road, nor that McAleer, Bradford or Lyons were guilty of the explosions in Euston Road nor the attempt at Tottenham Court Road. Additionally, he ruled there was no evidence to show that Dower, McAleer or Murray were responsible for the explosion at High Holborn or the attempt at Kingsway, nor that McAleer could be connected with any explosion.

If the bombers were pleased at this dispensation of British justice, which they despised, they gave no indication of it, sitting sullenly in the dock, saying nothing.

Found guilty of conspiracy to cause explosions, Inspector Bridges informed the court that Dower was a member of the IRA, was a section commander and a trusted soldier of the Republic. McAleer was a volunteer in the IRA and when Inspector Bridges stated that he had been receiving treatment for tuberculosis, it caused McAleer to bellow from the dock, 'I don't want sympathy from this court on account of my health!'

Bradford's arrest was, said Inspector Bridges, 'regarded by the police as of considerable importance'. His real name was Kirk and he had attended an IRA course of bomb instruction in Ireland, while Murray was a member of the IRA who had for some time been closely associated with fellow Irishmen who had been causing explosions in London.

Sentenced to 20 years' penal servitude each, Dower, McAleer, Bradford and Murray all struggled violently in the dock with warders before being removed, with McAleer shouting, 'Long live the Irish Republic!'

The identities of the two policewomen had not been disclosed in court; they were referred to simply as 'Miss A' and 'Miss B'. Now, the Common Sergeant called them before him and told them:

I think it right to express the appreciation of the court to you for the fine police work you did during all those hours and also for the way in which you both gave evidence in this trial. I hope the attention of the Commissioner of Police may be called to what I have said.

It was. While Inspector Bridges and seven other officers were commended by the commissioner 'for ability and persistence in a difficult case of conspiracy to cause explosions' which was published in *Police Orders*, a footnote added that 'two women police constables who were engaged in the above have been highly commended by the commissioner'. No names were given – the high commendation was appended to their personal records, although no details were disclosed – and both were appointed to Special Branch thereafter as women detective constables.

The events covered by Dick Kirby were also written up in "Special Branch A History 1883-2006" by the late Ray Wilson and Ian Adams published in 2015 page 196.

**1943 Aberdeen Press and Journal 25<sup>th</sup> May** - Women Detectives- There are only two women in the Special Branch of the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard and both strangely come from the north of Scotland. They are Hilda Gordon of Aberdeen and Marjory Urquhart of Mill of Culloden Inverness. They are both in their twenties. Miss Urquhart is a graduate in Agriculture of Aberdeen University and after her graduation seven years ago worked for a time on a farm in Hampshire. She then joined as a uniformed policewoman and served in this capacity until her transfer to Special Branch.

### **Surrey Constabulary's First Woman Inspector**

After almost 8 years in the Metropolitan Police Sergeant Urquhart transferred to the Surrey Constabulary on 24 July 1944 as a temporary inspector. The war was still going at a pace with Surrey an armed camp as the Canadian divisions and others formed up with all their hardware to cross to France. Across the county there were numerous secret establishments and the Surrey Constabulary's CID undertook a great deal of the confidential work under Detective Superintendent Tom Roberts. This was a strange career choice for Miss Urquhart as a great deal of her work was to be associated with lady camp followers and the children and young person duties that became the major role of the policewoman. However, she was posted to Tom Robert's department which may mean she remained involved in secret work.

Tom Roberts wrote a biography "Friends and Villains" published in 1987 mentions the recruitment of Miss Urquhart. During the war, Surrey like police forces throughout the country had recruited many women as temporary WPCs to replace the men who had been called up and

were serving in the forces. Usually, the women dealt with clerical and administrative work and were not asked to do patrol duties. It was not long before a powerful lobby was building up in favour of a permanent force of policewomen. --- The Surrey Standing Joint Committee eventually agreed to the appointment of a woman police inspector and ten policewomen to cover the county.

The post was advertised in Police Review for substantive sergeants. The Chief Constable told



me that the new inspector would be a part of my department as I had been in favour of the appointment and would cope with any problems that might arise. Final interviews with a short list of two, were held on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1944 and Miss Urquhart from the Metropolitan Police SB was offered the job. She was a first-Class highly competent officer who became very popular throughout the Force. Not wishing to spend the rest of her working life in the police after three years she left to become a

children's officer in Aberdeen late being awarded the OBE for her work. Miss Urquhart was replaced by Miss McKenzie from Kent.

#### **Miss Urquhart sat in front row, centre**

**1944 Surrey Mirror 4th August** – Women Police for Surrey – Police Woman Inspector Urquhart, of the Surrey Joint Police has now taken up her duties at the Police Headquarters, Guildford. Two attested women auxiliaries have been allocated to the Borough of Guildford and have commenced patrol duties. Some difficulty is being experienced in regard to recruiting and the Chief Constable of Surrey would be glad to receive applications from eligible women, married or single who would be interested in this class of work, but candidates must first apply through the Ministry of Labour and National Service at their local exchange.

After 4 years at Surrey Constabulary Margery Urquhart left to become a probation officer.

The following are copies of the personal record now stored at the county's archives. There are two pages that came with Miss Urquhart from the Metropolitan Police.





# Margery URQUHART

Age 31 years. Date of Birth 27 Aug 1912. Height 5 feet 6 inches. Complexion *Fresh*  
 Eyes *Hazel* Marks *Mark base of left thumb nail* Hair *Brown*  
 Born in the Parish of *Punta Arenas* in the County of *Chile*  
 Trade *Dairymaid* Last Residence *162 High Street South, East Ham*  
 By whom last employed, and where *Metropolitan Police - in Special Branch at New Scotland's Yard*  
 What relatives residing in Surrey, and where *none*  
 Previous Public Service *Metropolitan Police 24 Aug. 1936 to 23rd July 1944*  
 Length of Service *7 years and 335 days*  
 Date of Appointment *24th July, 1944* No. on Collar  
 When sworn in, and where *28th July, 1944 at Guildford*  
 Before what Magistrates *Mr. J.H. Wenham and Mr. G.W.J. Briggs*  
 Where first stationed *Guildford - Headquarters*

DATE	FROM	To
24 July 1944	Appointed Temp. Policewoman Inspector with substantive rank of Sergeant	

Cause and Date of removal from the Force *Resigned 30th November 1946*  
 Conduct during Service *Exemplary*  
 Date of Retirement Certificate *30th November, 1946*  
A 2533, 1B-41L 27.10.31, S.C.C. 1948.

REMARKS  
 No. of APPOINTMENTS **2394**  
 Appointed Temporary Police woman Inspector in the Surrey Constabulary with the substantive rank of Sergeant. Pay Scale £200 rising by annual increments of 10 to a max. of £300 p.a.  
 Graduated B.Sc. - Aberdeen University  
 Transferred from Metropolitan Police with the consent of the Commissioners under the Police Pensions Act, 1921. For details of service in Metro. Police see Certificates (3) attached.  
*Police Medal.*





**Margery Urquhart with her brother and sister receiving her OBE (Photo from Dick Kirby)**

**From Jean Pelham:** I cannot establish a definite record for Margery Urquhart, other than she was born in Patagonia, Argentina in 1912 and died in 2007 in Aberdeen, she doesn't appear on any Census forms, birth or death records. I have come across the attached which I found on **The Herald dated May 2007**. Which gives us a few details of her life.

## **MARGERY URQUHART**

**Born 27<sup>th</sup> August 1912 – Argentina died 9<sup>th</sup> May 2007 – Aberdeen, Scotland**

**Parents: Alexander and Betsy Urquhart:** Margery Urquhart was born in Patagonia, Argentina where her father ran a Beef Business. Until she was 11 her mother educated her on the ranch, before the family returned home to Milton of Culloden, Inverness. She graduated from Aberdeen University in 1935 and heading to Hampshire to begin Farming.

**Social Work Chief and Special Branch Agent.** No one would have known that Margery had been a spy, certainly not her colleagues at Grampian Regional Council, where, in her role as director of social work, her trademark was an unassuming demeanour. She personified the cliché that no one would have picked her out in a crowd. Her record is that she was probably the first female agent recruited by Special Branch, she was the first female to reach senior rank in the Home Counties Police Force and she played an unknown role in counter espionage in the UK before and during the Second World War.

Alongside this, it's almost an incidental that she was one of the first women anywhere to graduate with a BSc in Agriculture, and that she helped pioneer children's welfare as part of Local Authority responsibility.

Then, in the first of a series of career switches which frequently left her colleagues both baffled and in admiration of her polymathic abilities, she dropped plans for a career in agriculture to join the Metropolitan Police. Even within the police, she switched. In a pioneering role she developed her work to become involved in crimes by and against children, and rape. It was her police background allied her ability to change guises so convincingly that brought her to the attention of Special Branch. She had been 'noted' by a local head of Special Branch, and he recruited her as his first female agent. After training, she was used in covert operations pre-war against IRA agents. This was serious business, for in Coventry in 1937 the IRA had exploded the first cycle bomb.

Though her male colleagues were frequently armed, Margery was not. But on one occasion, knowing that violence might ensue, she armed herself with two empty half pint milk bottles in her handbag. She also chased an armed IRA man along The Strand in London, and when he jumped on a bus to elude her, she followed on the next bus.

To the end of her life – and she died in her 95<sup>th</sup> year – she refused to discuss her Special Branch role or the fact that she had also been involved in Counter Espionage work, gently pushing aside all references to it. Councillor John Porter, Tory group leader on the Aberdeen City Council and a one time colleague, said 'I don't think anyone will ever know exactly what she did'. To look at her, you would think she had just put down her knitting.

When Surrey Police Force recruited women for the first time in 1942 – initially employed only on a temporary basis and known as the Women's Auxiliary Police Corps – Miss Urquhart took command as first women inspector in the Home Counties in 1944 when permanent establishment of the corps was authorised. The recruiting notice for women officers stated that they had to be "of average intelligence and single, although they could be widows."

Two years later in 1946, she promptly changed direction yet again, to train as a probation officer in London, saying that children were her first love.

In 1949 she returned to Aberdeen, becoming first children's officer for the city. This, too, was something of a pioneering role, with Margery making clear the value she put on steering broken families and troubled children towards better paths. Of those early days Margery herself said 'There was a sense of mission. I left the police but I could not leave child care.' That sense of mission manifested itself with Margery herself appearing at children's homes at weekends to help care for youngsters. 'Her' children had reason to be grateful to her, and many kept in touch for years afterwards.

She became the first Head of Social work for the old counties of Aberdeen and Kincardine in 1969, and six years later became deputy director of social work for the newly formed Grampian Region, later rising to director. Her reputation for keeping her own counsel and maintaining an unassuming manner greatly impressed all who came into contact with her. A warm caring person who remained calm no matter the stresses she always gave a good account of herself in

local authority work, impressing elected members with the ability to present arguments and Marshall Facts.

She retired in 1977 and soon afterwards stood for her old council, gaining the Aberdeen Tory seat for Hazlehead. Back in Grampian Regional Council, in her new guise, she worked quietly and rarely spoke – though when she did her audience tended to pay attention. In 1977 she was made OBE, and her investiture at Buckingham Palace memorable for two reasons, waiting outside to congratulate her was one of ‘her’ boys, a onetime tearaway from a broken home in Aberdeen but now a successful businessman. Then on the tube, in what was for her an unusual moment of forgetfulness, she left behind her hat and the shiny new insignia of her OBE. Happily both were returned to her.

She never married, and died in a nursing Home in Aberdeen, Fairview Nursing Home, Bridge of Don, Aberdeen.

**Additional material** on the life of Margery has been found by Jenny Tuffs, a former Woman Police Constable in the Surrey Constabulary.

**1949 Aberdeen Press and Journal 24<sup>th</sup> February** – Shortlist for Council Post- A shortlist of four from the thirty-one applicants for the post of Children’s Officer of Aberdeen has been drawn up – the carrying a salary of £700 -£850. Miss Marjory Urquhart, probation officer for West Ham, London, of Monega Road West Ham was on the shortlist.

**1949 Aberdeen Press and Journal 30<sup>th</sup> September** -Woman gets £595 post as Children’s Officer. A native of Inverness and graduate of Aberdeen University, Miss Margery Urquhart has been appointed children’s officer for Aberdeenshire. Miss Urquhart who is meantime a probation officer in London served with the Metropolitan Police Force from 1936-1944, for four years being attached to the Special Branch at New Scotland Yard. when she was appointed inspector in charge of the women’s police branch of the Surrey Constabulary where she remained for four years before joining the probation service. She is the daughter of Mr. Alexander Urquhart and the late Mrs. Urquhart, Milton of Culloden, Inverness. While at Aberdeen university where she graduated in 1935, Miss Urquhart was president of the Agricultural Society and secretary of the Christian Student’s Fellowship.

During her time as children’s officer Miss Urquhart did a great deal to make the lives of children in care a better experience. For example, in 1950 some went to a camp at Fergie where they met and played with brothers and sisters of whom they knew nothing for the first time. She also did her best to recruit more foster carers, so that children would experience more of a home life.

In 1969 Miss Margery Urquhart (56) of 9 Station Road Dyce who had been Aberdeenshire’s children’s officer for 20 years was chosen to be the first director of the newly created Aberdeenshire and Kincardine social work department. The new department incorporating the probation, welfare and children’s departments as well as a section dealing with mental health.

**1970 Aberdeen Press and Journal 2<sup>nd</sup> July** - The new children's home at Dyce which comes into operation at the end of August will be named after former woman detective Miss Margery Urquhart, director of Aberdeenshire and Kincardine social work department. Members of the social work committee decided to call the home "The Urquhart House" at their meeting yesterday. (The home closed in 2000)

**1974 Aberdeen Press and Journal 13<sup>th</sup> December** - Social Work Boss Milestone - Aberdeen and Kincardine director of social work, Miss Margery Urquhart celebrated her 25 years' service with a get together in the Marcliffe Hotel Aberdeen with colleagues. To mark the occasion Miss Urquhart was presented with an 1870 piece of jade jewelry.

**1976 Aberdeen Press and Journal 31<sup>st</sup> December** - A pioneer of social work in the North East, Miss Margery Urquhart, becomes an OBE.

**By January 1976** Margery Urquhart was deputy director of social work for the newly formed Grampian region.

**1977 Aberdeen Press and Journal 21<sup>st</sup> October** – Tribute to top social worker- Tribute was paid to Miss Margery Urquhart, Grampian Region's acting director of social work at her last committee meeting before she retires next month. Social work committee chairman, Mrs. Jane Lamb said, "Miss Urquhart is renowned for her outstanding contribution to social work not merely throughout Grampian region but is esteemed and respected in her profession throughout the whole of Scotland". So high was the esteem said Mrs. Lamb that recently the Queen bestowed on her the OBE, in recognition of her great contribution to the welfare of the young, the old and the handicapped and for her devotion to service far beyond the call of duty, the whole region was greatly in her debt and thousands of children formerly in care and now scattered across the four quarters of the world owe her a debt that words can never express.

**1977 Aberdeen Press and Journal 8<sup>th</sup> November** -Article regarding Margery Urquhart –

SHE is not married — but she counts her “family” in thousands. Those who live near call to take her to tea, to show her a new baby, to ask her about a problem. Others keep in touch by letter, from anywhere, even from prison. Some just drop in when they are home on a visit.

One young man called at her office at Woodhill House in Aberdeen recently. “Do you remember me?” he asked.

“How could I not?” she muses rhetorically. “He had been a little ‘monkey’. His headmaster remembers him as ‘the one with the gun’.

“But he has done well. He is holding down a job not unlike my own. In administration. Responsible to a committee. Involving public speaking.”

Miss Margery Urquhart, deputy director of social work for Grampian Region, finds time in a busy life to see them all . . .

□ □

She is speaking now as if she were relishing the success of her own son. Which, in a way, he is. In the 20 years she was children’s officer for the old Aberdeen County Council and in the subsequent six she was director of social work for Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, she was *in loco parentis* — which is just another way of saying legally responsible for — thousands of children who over that time were in the long-term care of the local authority.

No, not “deprived” children — she almost bristles at the word — “what is deprivation?” No, not children in “trouble” — she dislikes the connotation. No, not even children who have been affected adversely by early experience — “after all, children in conventional families have difficulties too.

“They were just children in difficulty,” she corrects firmly.

□ □

Is she challenging then the widely-accepted view that unfortunate early experience often has a detrimental effect upon the developing personality? Yes, she is; not in essence but in degree.

“When something goes wrong, we look around for a reason — and we’re fine pleased to find a reason: ‘Ah, yes, something happened to him when he was

# Children’s champion talking . . .

**‘If you’re deprived of love that will have an effect, but you can get love from someone other than your parents.’**

young’. My contention is that this may not be the right reason, not the explanation at all.”

There is just no way that this children’s champion will go along with any kind of theorising, however authoritative, if it does not accord with what she has found in her long and practical experiences. Plainly, behind her insistence upon accuracy absolute, accuracy without trace of ambiguity, is her acute awareness of how sensitive children are about being labelled in any way, about being thought “different.”

Now she chuckles mischievously, knowing perfectly well that she is being controversial, quite well aware that one would be brave indeed to challenge her opinions based on so much experience and founded in so much commonsense.

She leans back in her chair, pausing, waiting for the comeback which does not come, clearly enjoying herself.

“If you’re deprived of love, that will have an effect,” she makes it sound like a concession, “but then you can get love from someone other than your parents.”

In the context, of course, she means foster parents, adoptive parents, substitute parents in residential homes.

And she dismisses any notion that children brought up “in care” — either in homes or by foster parents or children who have been adopted — grow up to have any more hang-ups than any others.



“Some do. But many, many more are perfectly happy. They do not carry anxieties about their origins and are able to accept their substitute family.”

She speaks with the same authority as she carries, unexpectedly, perhaps, in a woman whose appearance is matronly, whose manner is friendly. One gets the feeling fairly quickly that a child — pushing his luck, as they all do — would be left in no doubt about her limit and so respond to the stabilising security found in discipline.

“You have to get hard, Jock,” burly London bobbies told her years ago when, as a raw policeman in the capital making her first arrest, she paid the man’s 7/6d fine, leaving herself with twopence until pay day.

“He was a drunk, but a nice old man,” she remembers sympathetically without a trace of the “hardness” she had been advised to acquire.

She left the police after serving throughout World War II in London, later in the Special Branch involved, she says vaguely, “in things like counter-espionage and the security of the State” and after having established, with the rank of inspector, a

By PEARL MURRAY

women’s force in Surrey. It meant a drop in salary to go back to London — as a probation officer.

Although she may dispute it, her sympathy for the “drunk” may well have had its roots in her own early experience. As the impressionable, young daughter of Scottish immigrant ranchers in Chile, she watched her mother “do her best” to help an alcoholic neighbour.

“She would pour liquor into a saucer and set it alight to try to show him what he was drinking,” she remembers. “And she would try to wean him off it gradually.”

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That practical expression of care must have been unique in that lawless society — one which her parents left, for the benefit of their children’s education, to return to Scotland, to Inverness, when she was 11. Not until then did she, the eldest of the three Urquhart children, begin her formal education.

It says a lot that not only did she catch up with her schooling but that she went on to be among the first women to graduate B.Sc. in agriculture at Aberdeen University. Had there been openings for women in her field then, had there not been waiting-time of about two years to get into nursing — “that was one of my choices” — her career



MISS MARGERY URQUHART outside Buckingham Palace after the investiture ceremony last March.

might have been very different. But it was the hungry Thirties and there were precious few jobs of any kind.

“Nevertheless,” she reminisces, “my degree wasn’t wasted: It was a mind training, wasn’t it?” From her time in the police, she added to her formal education a layer of wide-ranging experience. She learned how to use the law; how to build relationships; to observe — much more important than the two commendations she received.

“Much of my work in the police was with prostitutes and with young girls who had drifted into London. The emphasis was on prevention rather than on punishment and in this I worked closely with probation officers.”

It was but a short step into the probation service and, two years later, answering an advertisement for a children’s officer “for the ignoble reason of a free trip home,” she was appointed to Aberdeen County.

Now, at 65, she prepares to retire later this month with misgivings.

She has seen great social change in her working life

— better provision by the State for the sick, the young, the old, the homeless, for those who are by current standards “poor.”

She has had great satisfaction in her work: “If you can prevent people in difficulty from going deeper into the pit, that is satisfaction. To see them being able to stand on their own feet without support from us, that is satisfaction, too. But to see a young person married and have a happy home of his own would be the ultimate for a social worker.”

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In all those years she has never seen her role as that of social reformer. “I see my remit as being here to help an individual,” she insists. “If by doing that I am helping society, then that is a bonus.”

Certainly there has been that bonus. And if, in the days to come, her vast “family” continue to call . . . to take her to tea . . . to show her a new baby . . . to ask her advice . . . then her retirement will be as full as her career has been.

In November 1978 Margery Urquhart, Conservative, former acting director of social work in the Grampian region, now retired won the Hazlehead seat, Aberdeen division on Grampian Regional Council. She remained an active a councillor for Hazlehead until standing down in March 1990.

1990 Aberdeen Press and Journal 4<sup>th</sup> May – Grampian Council - A gallant failure for the Tories was Miss Margery Urquhart in the West Don Division. A former senior officer with Grampian Region’s social work department, she had been a councillor for Hazlehead for some years. She had intended retiring to live in Inverness, but her sister died there some weeks ago

and she was persuaded to fight the Liberal/Democrat stronghold of West Don where her home is situated.

Margery Urquhart developed a special interest in mental health subsequently taking on several appointments when she retired including director of Aberdeen Association of Social from June 1986 to March 1989, director of Mental Health Aberdeen from October 1989 to October 1990 and director of Seabank Home, a care home in Aberdeen from December 1990 to October 1997.

**1993 Aberdeen Press and Journal 2<sup>nd</sup> January**- Missing Dyce cat faces long walk- The hunt is in for a much-loved Aberdeen cat which may be trying to make the long walk home from Northfield to Dyce. Owner Miss Marjory Urquhart is trying to locate her missing tom cat, Taille, which went missing on Boxing Day. Miss Urquhart of 9 Station Road, Dyce gave Taille to a friend for Christmas as she was expecting visitors who did not like cats, but Taille escaped from temporary keeper Mary Stevenson at Byron Crescent Northfield. Mrs. Stevenson said, "He was looking out of the window for a chance to get out and the door was accidentally left open and he ran out." Taille has distinctive markings and is grey/black with a gingerish tummy and fat face. (Contact phone numbers were then given)

**1994 14<sup>th</sup> May a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner** for women police in Surrey was held and Margery Urquhart travelled down from Scotland to attend.

In **June 1995** Margery Urquhart attended a get together to celebrate the quincentenary of Aberdeen University with students from the 1930's to 1990's

The **obituary notice** for Margery published on 14 May 2007 - Urquhart - Peacefully on Wednesday May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007, after many years of loving care, at Fairview Nursing Home, Bridge of Don, Margery Urquhart, age 94 years (late of Station Road Dyce). Daughter of the late Alexander and Betsey Urquhart, formerly of Milton of Culloden, sister of the late Duncan and Annie, a dear aunt and great aunt.

The funeral service was at Dyce Parish Church and after at Tomnahurich Cemetery.

The following was published in the **Guardian Newspaper 28<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

Farm worker, spy, police inspector, social worker: Margery Urquhart, who has died aged 94, had a remarkable life. She was born in Chile, where her Scottish father ran a beef business and her mother was a cook. They returned to a small farm in Scotland and Margery eventually became the first woman to obtain a BSc in agriculture at Aberdeen University.

While working on a farm in Hampshire, she realised that other careers were open to her and enlisted in the Metropolitan police in 1936. She was recruited by the Special Branch, and although reluctant to speak about her experiences as a spy, it is known that she was involved in tracking down enemy agents. She transferred to Surrey police and became one of the first women inspectors.



While in the police force, she had developed an interest in children and had trained as a probation officer. In 1949, Margery was appointed officer for the children's department of Aberdeen county. It was responsible for 400 deprived children and for a while she was its only full-time childcare worker. Gradually, she persuaded the council to engage further staff. She pioneered small children's homes in council houses and initiated a scheme under which paid housekeepers moved in with troubled families to prevent their children being sent into care.

She insisted on seeing families herself, even when it meant tramping through snowy fields in isolated areas. She started camps for foster children where, she claimed, she could learn more by living beside them than by periodic visits to their homes. The camps also brought together some siblings who had been with separate foster families. Margery pioneered childcare practices which became popular much later: small residential units, preventive work and the re-uniting of siblings.

She stayed 20 years as children's officer, never seeking financial advancement by moving elsewhere. In the late 1960s, children's departments were merged with other services to form social work departments. Margery served Aberdeen and Kincardine and then Grampian in senior positions, before retiring in 1977. Soon after, she was elected as a Conservative councillor.

Margery was a doughty woman who had survived in a completely male-dominated police force. She led from the front in childcare and was known to put other children's officers in their place. Her strong character was displayed in her commitment to deprived children, together with the warmth and loyalty she showed towards them.

Children she had helped visited her in her retirement, to enjoy her company and dry humour, and to thank her for the good she had done them.