

Introduction

Insiders, Outsiders and Discoveries

Rosemary loved many people in many different ways, but she loved two men in particular throughout most of her life.

One was her husband, Raymond Firth, regarded by some as one of the founding fathers of social anthropology.¹ She loved Raymond deeply and warmly during the sixty-five years of their married life. Yet she also retained a passionate devotion to her first love, Edmund Leach, who would subsequently become both an *enfant terrible* and the public intellectual face of social anthropology in the late 1960s. Both Raymond and Edmund were part of the process of defining the nature of this growing discipline in the first part of the mid-twentieth century.

This book is about the lives of all three – Rosemary, Raymond and Edmund – but it is written from Rosemary’s perspective. This is because she left a huge volume of letters and many diaries spanning seventy years. We also have the numerous letters Edmund wrote to Rosemary in the 1930s and 1940s. Raymond left some description of his life from the 1920s to the 1940s,² but he wrote very little about his thoughts and feelings about his personal or professional relationships. Our focus is primarily on the life of a woman and how this intersected with the lives of two eminent men. This book is therefore also about Rosemary’s aspirations, loves, marriage, struggles and achievements, and about the resolution of the conflicts she faced in her life.

Inevitably, therefore, this story is told through one particular lens, although this is supplemented by our knowledge and memory of many details of the lives of our parents.

Discovery

It was our parents' deaths that brought us together. The two of us, Loulou (Louisa) and Hugh, had known each other slightly as children, but we had not seen each other for over thirty years when we met at Hugh's mother Rosemary's funeral. It was the start of a very unusual and dramatic story.



I, Hugh, had known since my early teens that my mother, Rosemary, had first met Loulou's father, Edmund Leach, in her teens some years before she met my father, Raymond. I also knew that Edmund had gone off to spend four years in China, that my mother did not wait for him to return and that she married Raymond while Edmund was out east.

Rosemary had always been very straightforward with me and her daughter-in-law Melinda about her very early love for Edmund, whom she fell in love with four years before she ever met Raymond. She was also open about her need to decide whether to wait for a man who offered no sign of engagement, or to look elsewhere. There was nothing to hide.

Not long before my mother, Rosemary, died, she had let me know that there were a number of notebooks that might be of some interest, so I had an inkling that I would find something that might catch my attention in them. I was also aware that she had many boxes of letters, including a few from her mother, many letters to and from her father written when Rosemary herself was abroad, and a box of letters my parents wrote to each other before they were married, while my mother was in Vienna.

In February 2002, seven months after the death of my mother, my father died. I saw Loulou again at his funeral and we kept in touch via Christmas cards and brief letters.

After my parents' death, I looked at the boxes of letters and found one box of over a hundred letters from Edmund, almost all from the early 1930s before he went out to China, when (as I already knew) my mother had fallen in love with him. There were some from the Second World War and a few from afterwards. Sometime later, I contacted Loulou to let her know about these early letters from her father.

When Loulou and I met again, I also showed Loulou my mother's notebooks, which I had begun to read. It transpired that they were diaries, kept intermittently and sometimes every day, from 1931 until shortly before she died. Here were her innermost thoughts and emotions: when she was a young woman managing her disappointments and hopes about Edmund's departure for China; writing about her life with a small son living with her in-laws for seven months while her husband was out of reach and incommunicado on

a remote Pacific island. Here also were her reflections on sixty years of marriage – including the tough years – and her observations on the mental and physical frustrations of old age.

What I hadn't been prepared for were revelations of which I had not the least suspicion. I discovered that the close relationship between my mother and Helen Stocks,³ whom I had known well as a family friend since the mid-1950s, had begun as a love affair between the two of them. I learnt of my father's affairs (at least those of which Rosemary was aware), as well as my mother's own flirtations and one-night stands – and the fact that she had left my father and the family home at one point in their marriage.

Most astonishing of all was the realisation that my mother and Edmund had slept with each other again, some thirty years after Rosemary and Raymond had married, and that their love remained alive until their respective deaths. Throughout her life, my mother had stayed in love with Edmund, as well as being in love in a different way with my father, the ups and downs of married life notwithstanding.

I was taken by surprise – though, on reflection, why should I have been? I had felt safe in my relationship with my parents, and my experience was of a loving family and a loving marriage – peppered with rows, quarrelling and making up afterwards, but not apparently insecure.

My mother had also been frank in talking about relationships. When I was eighteen, at a time when my parents were rowing openly, they had each talked to me in depth as part of their process of trying to resolve the issues. So I suppose I thought that I knew both my parents well, and knew about the important events in their lives. The truth is that I did know them well, and that is precisely why I was so astounded by the events we uncovered. They were well hidden in plain sight, for three of these love affairs – my father's with a younger anthropologist and my mother's with Helen and with Edmund – were with individuals I knew and liked, who visited us more or less often while I was growing up at home. So although my mother talked openly to me (both as a young adult and as an older adult) about relationships, she was in fact scrupulous about not betraying anything she thought might be damaging, either to me or to her other relationships.



Although I, Loulou, had known about Hugh since he was born, I'd actually met him very few times until our parents died. It was then that he began to send me Christmas cards, and I reciprocated. In early 2015, nearly ten years after my mother died in 2005, Hugh cautiously suggested that I might travel to Newcastle to see some letters Rosemary and Edmund had written to each other, and the diaries Rosemary had written. When Hugh contacted me, I

was still grieving the loss of my mother, whom I loved, and was also experiencing vivid memories of my relationship with my father, Edmund, who had died in 1989. These recollections were mostly unpleasant, encompassing his impatience, restlessness, frequent criticism, an inability to connect with me emotionally, and a temper I had found frightening. Nevertheless, I was curious about my father's letters to Rosemary and wanted to read them. We began to look at them together. Initially uncertain and cautious, I felt drawn to find out more. These letters gave me a very different perspective on my father.

I'd had a difficult, distant relationship with my father. After leaving Burma with my mother when I was five months old, I did not see him again until over three years later. When he arrived in England, he was ill with malaria and had suffered many bouts of dysentery and various other diseases contracted while fighting behind the lines in Burma against the Japanese. Battered, thin and worn out, he did not want to be bothered with a small, surly girl who resented his sudden presence in the household; sadly, our relationship remained negative for the rest of his life. He thought I was unintelligent, boring, unattractive and uncooperative, while I thought he was bad-tempered, impatient, uncaring and incomprehensible. I was shunted off to boarding school at the age of five, and if he was around when I was at home, I tended to keep out of his way. The nervous energy he exuded was unsettling, and his moods, like Scottish weather, changed rapidly. I had little to do with him, and I was very surprised when I discovered shortly before he died that I was to be his literary executor. It was only much later that I realised that he'd given me this work so that I could protect my mother, which he knew I would do.

In Edmund and Rosemary's letters, I read about a man who was very different to the one I had known: someone who loved, passionately, with myriads of thoughts that tumbled into each other and often clashed, with the result that he was frequently at odds with himself. Here was a dreamer who, as Rosemary says, saw stars very clearly; a maverick whom a few, including some of his students, Rosemary and my mother, loved, but whom many considered a *bête noire*. He was marmite: you either felt positively or negatively about him – you could never ignore or forget him. Trying to integrate the two perspectives – my own experience of a preoccupied, irritable and negative authority figure who paid little attention to my needs and preferences, and Rosemary's vision of a scintillating (albeit sometimes hurtful), agile, compelling, warm and attentive presence – was intensely disturbing.

In contrast to Hugh, I felt life with my parents to be very insecure and spent my childhood feeling afraid of many things, including my future as an adult. For me, the process of reading these diaries and letters was therefore unsettling and disconcerting; but as Hugh and I began to talk more about what kind of a man Edmund had been, I was gradually able to see the relationship I had had with the difficult man that was my father from a new per-

spective. Through the process of sharing and debating our often contradictory or inconsistent perceptions and understandings of our parents, and selecting and organising the material in the chapters that follow, I have to some extent been able to come to terms with my father, whom I had never really known. Moreover, Hugh and I have developed a close and valuable friendship as we have worked together to bring this manuscript to fruition.

Why Publish?

Diaries and letters are intensely personal documents. They reveal intimate aspects about their authors and, more often than not, unprepossessing perspectives on the authors' nearest and dearest. One may therefore wonder why it seems appropriate to publish them, especially as they reveal the individuals' shortcomings in the full glare of public attention and may therefore appear to tarnish their reputations.

We have chosen to publish them for several reasons.

There is a growing interest in the wives of important men, and the struggles and compromises that they face. Both Rosemary and Celia, Edmund's wife, were the wives of prestigious academics. Their husbands were close friends as well as colleagues. The two women had an affection for each other and shared something of their mutual challenges. All four were close-knit. We think the relationships between them are therefore of particular interest.

We also believe that the ambivalences, uncertainties and outcomes of the protagonists' aspirations and disappointments will resonate with many people. We think this account illustrates how people can negotiate and survive the messiness of their lives through a combination of loyalty, care, hard work and an attempt at mutual understanding. Moreover, the text highlights issues which touch on conundrums and tensions in very many relationships.

We think readers may gain a more rounded understanding of these individuals, our parents. They have reputations that stand by their achievements, not their human frailties, and their lives are now, after some two decades, part of history as well as memory.

Furthermore, we believe Rosemary herself expected that her letters and notebooks would be read; indeed, she herself considered publishing something of an autobiography, which might draw on this 'Pandora's box full of treasure'.⁴

We are confident that Rosemary would have approved of the publication of this book as a whole, although, out of loyalty to her husband, she would undoubtedly have edited out many details of her difficulties with Raymond which we have left in this book. Edmund would probably have told us to do whatever we wished by way of publication, and brushed aside his own contradictions and inconsistencies.

Raymond preferred privacy, but he, like Rosemary and Edmund, believed passionately in honesty. Raymond's posthumous self would, we think, have tried to dissuade us from publishing this book, but he would have listened, understood and respected our decision. Raymond mellowed as he grew older. He loved Rosemary and cared greatly for her. He steadily learnt to be more appreciative of his wife's abilities and her contribution to anthropological thinking. He would have been embarrassed by some of the events we describe in this book, but he would have understood our carefully considered decision to tell this story.

This account of the relationships between our parents, complete with the candid as well as the more favourable aspects, has been written with care and respect for them. Hugh loved both his parents equally, albeit in different ways. Loulou, although she deeply loved her mother, did not love her father. In drawing these perspectives together, we have endeavoured to present a fair and accurate portrayal of their interlocking lives. Inevitably, the process of compiling this account has been unsettling and emotional for both of us, as we have explored and distilled the details of their lives.



As Ann Oakley has observed, it is often only the preservation of letters and diaries that enables us to ensure that the wives of publicly well-known men are not forgotten.⁵

Many people take their secrets with them to the grave. Rosemary was hesitant and ambivalent for many years about how much of her vast correspondence to keep or destroy.

When she was depressed in mid-life, she nearly destroyed all her letters and diaries. Yet, twenty years later, with her own forthcoming death in mind, Rosemary wrote remarks in her diary such as 'begin at the end, whoever you are who reads this', suggesting that she expected her diaries to be read by others after her death.⁶ Shortly afterwards, she wrote to a friend about her uncertainty regarding 'how much of private letters, diaries and so on, to leave around for others to pick up, read, use, or destroy at their own choice; or how much to authorise others to use; or again whether to try to write something oneself'.⁷ Her final decision to leave these personal letters and diaries for the use of the next generation is clear, in that, shortly before her death, she directed both her daughter-in-law Melinda and Hugh, separately, to some notebooks in her desk that held significant information about her life and relationships.

When, in 1984, Rosemary asked Edmund what he had done with her letters, and what she should do with his (he was considering authorising someone to write his biography), he said, in effect, do 'What you like – burn them

all or give them all to Martha Macintyre⁸ – I have kept *no* papers!’⁹ Edmund’s remarks were perhaps designed to hide the significance he attached to such things: in reality, he was obsessional about his retention of letters and papers, and it is certain that Rosemary’s letters to Edmund were preserved until his wife Celia destroyed them sometime after his death.

Edmund’s remark is significant because although he certainly had a number of sexual liaisons during his life, there are a couple of indications that he continued to hold a special candle for Rosemary, whilst retaining his love for, and loyalty to, Celia. Perhaps the most persuasive clue is the inconsistency in Edmund’s behaviour towards Rosemary when they met socially. At times, when Raymond was present, Edmund appeared to ignore Rosemary; yet he paid her great attention when Raymond was away or out of the country. His untrue but forthright denial that he had kept Rosemary’s letters may suggest a degree of sustained affection for Rosemary, of which she herself was unaware.



There is a structural imbalance in societal expectations of women and men that profoundly affects what women could, and can, achieve. This imbalance is a thread running throughout this book. Despite Rosemary having been brought up by relatively unconventional parents, her aspirations about marriage, a career and her role as a mother were all profoundly influenced by societal expectations in Britain in the half-century from the 1920s.

Rosemary was no feminist, although she was acutely observant of the different position of women and men both in Britain and abroad. In many ways, she was a ‘difficult’ woman. She was clear about her own values, even if others might see inconsistencies in her application of them. Towards some people, Rosemary exhibited great thoughtfulness, care and affection. Yet she rarely hesitated in expressing her views and was often thoughtless as to how her views would be perceived by others. In consequence, she was frequently perceived as opinionated, even plain rude. Quick to dismiss opinions she thought wrong-headed, she could be quite intimidating.

When Rosemary was just fifteen, Rosemary’s mother Blanche had shared something of the difficulties she had experienced early in *her* marriage to Rosemary’s father Gilbert, to show Rosemary how, with good will on both sides, such difficulties could be overcome. This was something that Rosemary held on to and which greatly helped her when there were difficulties in her marriage to Raymond in the 1960s. Despite her flirtations and one-night stands, Rosemary firmly believed in the importance of loyalty to the marriage between herself and Raymond. Inconsistent though this may seem to the reader, it had its own clear logic to Rosemary. Edmund felt a similar loyalty to his wife, Celia. Their loyalty took at least two forms: a determination to do

their utmost to preserve their marriages and also to ensure that the difficulties in their marriages should not become public.

Long-term relationships are complex, full of ambivalences and ups and downs. For most of their time together, Raymond and Rosemary greatly loved and respected each other. Equally, Celia and Edmund loved each other and cared for each other deeply throughout a long marriage of nearly fifty years.

Celia and Rosemary were good friends over many decades. They had many experiences in common, as the wives of eminent men who were frequently absent from the home for both short and long periods, and often absent in spirit even when they were at home and working.

All four were individuals who were capable of great compassion and understanding towards others. Rosemary believed deeply in the importance of honesty, courage and compassion. She once remarked in her diary, 'Judge us with charity, those who love us'.¹⁰ We are all flawed human beings, and the awareness of this can, it is hoped, help us to be more understanding and less censorious of ourselves and others, in a society that is, in some respects, increasingly strident and judgemental.

'Great, Cruel, Egoistic Angel'

'That great, cruel, egoistic angel', as Rosemary once described Edmund,¹¹ had a profound effect upon all those with whom he was involved. His influence was equally powerful, if ambivalent or contradictory, upon each of us and anyone he met. Loulou's perception of Edmund as an impatient, irascible father was borne out by Hugh's childhood recollections of staying with Edmund, Celia and their son, Alexander: they were not happy memories. Yet, as an adult, Hugh's own experience of Edmund had been different again: Hugh found him a warm, enthusiastic, magnetic individual with a razor-sharp intelligence.

After Edmund's death in January 1989, for weeks and months Rosemary felt as if she were back in the 1930s, passionately reliving and regretting the failed fruition of a once-great love. Why had he behaved so inconsistently towards her, not only when they were young, but throughout his long professional career? For their love was sufficiently lasting to resurface after long periods when each been preoccupied with other issues, even whilst Rosemary, Raymond, Edmund and Celia were all close friends.

Inconsistent Edmund certainly was, both – by his own admission – in his work,¹² but also in his relationships. Driven by ambition instilled in him by his mother when he was young, he was capable of ignoring those who were not useful to him at any particular moment. Rosemary once commented in her diary that 'It now seems to me that E.[Edmund]'s greatest betrayal was

not his jilting of me in regard to engagement for marriage, but his casting off one who had become so intimate intellectually, emotionally and culturally, so to speak. His overweening ambition and vanity made him find excuses to throw me off – not once, but twice.¹³

What Rosemary did not say was that Edmund could not bear any competition. Loulou was told many times by her mother, Celia, that Edmund would not tolerate any rivals, and he made quite sure that his family had absolutely nothing to do with his work as an anthropologist. The rigidity of this distinction between work and family life – and the great wariness, which almost amounted to a taboo, on any discussion about difficulties in family relationships – contrasted dramatically with the ethos in the Firth household.

Insiders and Outsiders

Rosemary, Raymond and Edmund were inextricably linked through love, friendship and their careers; yet each of them was distinctive in some respect. Each was, to some degree, destined to be an observer, either by inclination, by geography or by gender.

Raymond Firth was a New Zealander, the son of a carpenter and house-builder. He came to England in 1924 to pursue a career in economics, only to be drawn into social anthropology by the charismatic Bronisław Malinowski.¹⁴ Raymond would go on to develop economic anthropology as a significant discipline within social anthropology.¹⁵ He spent a year on a tiny, remote, almost unknown, largely pagan Pacific island in 1928–29, seventy miles from its nearest neighbour at the far end of the Solomon Islands. The first book he published as a result of his time there, *We, The Tikopia*, was on the verge of publication when he met Rosemary for the first time in 1935. The book rapidly became a classic analysis of a society as yet largely untouched by western colonialism. In time, Raymond Firth would become the almost unchallenged elder statesman of British social anthropology.

Edmund Leach was an outsider within his own family. With twenty-seven first cousins, he was the youngest of his generation in this large, extended family. Most of the male Leaches who had attended school at Marlborough became ardent members of cricket teams; Edmund, however, hated both cricket and his years at Marlborough, which were, he said, the worst years of his life, worse even than the time he spent in Burma during the Second World War. An engineer by training (both Rosemary and Raymond were economists), he spent four years in commerce in China.¹⁶ He returned to England with an interest in anthropology and asked Rosemary to introduce him to Raymond. All three became part of a generation of anthropologists who completed their key pieces of fieldwork in the first half of the twentieth cen-

ture. Along with Celia, they remained firm friends for the rest of Edmund's life. Edmund's uncompromising approach and formidable intelligence soon propelled him into notoriety: first, as a rebel within the profession and then as a public intellectual whose 1967 BBC Reith Lectures caused a small uproar.

Rosemary, in common with all bright women of her time, was handicapped on account of her gender. Like Edmund, she had been born into the English upper middle class. Like Raymond, she graduated with first-class honours in Economics. Rosemary wanted to use her education and initially expected to follow her aunt Janet Upcott into social work, or what is now called social housing management. Sociable, outspoken, but with inner insecurities, she had seen in Edmund an intellectual equal who enjoyed debate and with whom she could develop her ideas. She was hardworking and ambitious to achieve something, to be socially useful, and she was interested in applying ideas to the real world. With Raymond, she saw the opportunity to do collaborative work, to build something together. Her admiration for Raymond's female colleagues Audrey Richards¹⁷ and Lucy Mair¹⁸ greatly influenced her decision to engage in anthropological fieldwork. Returning in 1940 from their first fieldwork expedition to Malaya, she promptly published the results of her own work there during the war years in 1943.

However, she suffered as a result of the patriarchal attitudes, common amongst academics at the time, that both Edmund and Raymond held towards women and their place as 'equals'.¹⁹ Edmund and Raymond were very different in this respect. Edmund was willing to listen to his wife's comments on a draft lecture, but openly dismissive of his daughter's intellectual abilities and Rosemary's intellectual achievements. Raymond was more subtly patronising, kept a tight control over the salary he brought home and was quite comfortable viewing Rosemary as a wife and mother, rather than a genuine colleague, for nearly twenty years while their son was still at home.

Both Rosemary and Raymond wanted children. As a married woman with a young son, however, the culture of post-war Britain dictated that her role as wife and mother came before any career for herself. Rebuilding a career later, when she was in her mid-forties, was difficult and it was not until the 1960s that she realised three equally important achievements: a University of London lectureship, financial independence and membership of the small professional body of the time, the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA). It was when they met through the ASA, while Raymond was abroad, that the love between Edmund and Rosemary was able to grow once again.

To some extent, all three were, like many other British anthropologists of the first half of the twentieth century, outsiders of one kind or another in their relationships to the establishment of the time. Social anthropology in Britain in the 1930s was a tiny profession, comprising barely a few dozen unusual individuals – most of them foreigners to the country – who spent lengthy

periods living alone in other cultures in conditions that were basic in terms of the creature comforts they afforded. Rosemary, Edmund and Raymond had all come from families that viewed travelling abroad or living abroad as natural. Rosemary's maternal grandfather had fled Prussian militarism; her uncle Maurice Upcott and her aunts Katherine and Janet had all spent time in colonial Malaya as part of the apparatus of British Empire. Some of the Leaches, sons and daughters of a Lancashire mill-owner, including Edmund's father, had acquired land and managed and lived on a large sugar plantation in Jujuy in northern Argentina; Edmund's mother expected him to become a missionary abroad. Wesley, Raymond's father, and his family had emigrated to New Zealand from Lancashire in 1886, when Wesley was just thirteen. Raymond in turn went 'home' to England in 1924 to study, before embarking on his renowned expedition to Tikopia.

Travel and connections were an essential and integral part of life amongst the very small community of British social anthropologists in the 1930s. They all knew each other, and most of them had worked together at some point in their careers, either as colleagues or as students and teachers. Thus, Raymond enabled Edmund Leach to join him at Malinowski's seminars in 1937; Edmund worked as research assistant to Raymond from 1938 to 1939, returning to the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1945 to complete his doctorate under Raymond before becoming Raymond's close colleague as a member of the LSE staff in 1948.

There were other international connections. Raymond knew all the New Zealand anthropologists who qualified before his retirement in 1968. He and Rosemary became good friends with a number of them, including Cyril Belshaw,²⁰ and kept in touch wherever they were, be it in London in the 1940s, Australia in the 1950s or Vancouver in the 1960s.

The women in these networks, whether they were anthropologists or the wives of anthropologists, often developed especially close relationships. Rosemary and Celia developed a close friendship during the Second World War when Edmund was in the army in Burma, while Rosemary and Cyril's wife Betty Belshaw²¹ were both in London with very young children in the late 1940s and saw each other frequently then. Subsequently, when Rosemary and Betty were both in Canberra together in 1951, they shared their thoughts and feelings about being tied to prestigious, busy academics. Rosemary later became very close to the anthropologist Judith Freedman,²² and to Greta Redfield and Marion Benedict, the latter two respectively married to the American anthropologists Robert Redfield and Burton Benedict.²³ (Long-distance and international telephone calls were extremely expensive until the end of the 1950s, so when they were separated by their own or their husband's jobs, as repeatedly happened, these women regularly wrote to each other to keep in touch.)

Early Influences

One of the most intriguing insights arising from reflections on Edmund, Rosemary and Raymond is the influence that upbringing might have had upon each of them. Raymond had a younger sister, Gretta, who died of measles at the age of two and a half. His mother's grief was intense: she may well have been seriously depressed. She also seems to have suggested to the six-year-old Raymond that he was partly responsible for her death, as he had brought the measles home from school. The consequence was that Raymond apparently experienced little warmth and emotional support from his mother as he grew up. Raymond was often reluctant to express his feelings, had a sensitivity to perceived personal criticism and sometimes seemed to need approval or admiration to maintain his self-esteem – which he sought from his career, his colleagues, his students, his occasional affairs and his wife. At times, he could come across as dogmatic and patronising.

Edmund saw very little of his father, whose birthday was on the same day as his son's and who turned fifty-nine the day Edmund was born. To Edmund, his father was more like a grandfather than a father: old, remote and not someone he empathised with or could relate to. His mother, however, cosseted him and fostered in him the idea that he was exceptionally talented. He later commented, 'I was her nearest and dearest. It made it very difficult to grow up. She slaughtered my girlfriends one after another.'²⁴ His outward self-confidence, however, belied an inner insecurity. He believed he had to succeed to fulfil his parents' expectations.²⁵ This translated over time into an inability to bear any competition or tolerate rivals. Edmund certainly lacked the role model of a youthful, actively involved father who was in tune with the feelings of his young children, and his own childhood perhaps led him to assume that the mother would provide the close emotional contact and support for children in a family.

Rosemary faced tragedy early in her life. When she was just twelve years old, her uncle Maurice, whom she adored but who suffered intermittent depression, killed himself. Her relationship with her father, Gilbert Upcott, was positive and close for almost all of his life. Her relationship with her mother Blanche, however, was more complex and possibly more profound. Blanche had had a difficult relationship with her own mother: she had witnessed her younger sister being beaten for her poor eyesight and shut in a cupboard for using local dialect in the family home. Much later, by now an intelligent, independent-minded and artistically gifted young woman with a strong sense of humour, Blanche tried to be a warm and supportive mother to her children. But her forthright personality seems to have made this difficult. Gilbert was a remarkably gentle, unobtrusive man, quiet and supportive as a father. Gilbert and Blanche had had a difficult start to their marriage, living

for a year or so with both of Gilbert's sisters, during which time, in Blanche's view, 'Gilbert would not stand up for me'.²⁶ Certainly Gilbert thought his wife too rigid in her approach to, and discipline with, the girls. When, as a young adolescent, Rosemary's elder sister Margaret underwent a religious conversion, she was so scared of her mother's response that she put a letter under her mother's pillow rather than face her directly.

Rosemary never described herself as having been fearful of her mother, whom she characterised as 'a lively, energetic woman, a great organiser' who was very involved with her children.²⁷ Yet she almost certainly had to work hard for her mother's approval – and well into Rosemary's adulthood, this may have driven a continuing insecurity, a need for visible, constant support, for an anchor.

There thus appears to have been a tension that remained with Rosemary throughout her adult life. On the one hand, she had the confidence that comes from a secure, fairly privileged upbringing. She had received an unconventional education from 'strong' women teachers who provided her with positive role models, attuned her to gender issues and gave her a strong sense of the undervalued contribution that women make to society. On the other hand, her relationship with her freethinking but forceful mother seems to have bequeathed her an enduring emotional uncertainty and vulnerability.

Notes

1. Social anthropology is the study of human social behaviour through the observation of individuals' behaviour in natural settings. Systematic data collection through prolonged participant observation (fieldwork) was pioneered by Bronislaw Malinowski and his students in the first decades of the twentieth century.
2. Raymond Firth, 'Chronology' and 'Reflections of a Centenarian', unpublished.
3. Helen Stocks, daughter of the historian, writer and broadcaster Mary Stocks, was some eight years younger than Rosemary. She worked as a research assistant for Raymond in the 1960s.
4. Rosemary to Rhoda Lilley, 1 April 1986.
5. Ann Oakley, 2021, *Forgotten Wives: How Women Get Written Out of History*, Bristol: Policy Press, p. 10.
6. Rosemary, diary entry, 1 July 1985.
7. Rosemary to Rhoda Lilley, 1 April 1986. Rosemary subsequently placed her professional records, including her fieldwork notes, in an archive at the LSE Library.
8. Martha Macintyre (1945–) is an Australian anthropologist who has specialised in the impact of development in Papua New Guinea. At this point in time, Edmund Leach had suggested to her that she should be his biographer.
9. Rosemary, in a letter to Rhoda Lilley, 1 April 1986, paraphrased Edmund's remarks to Rosemary in his letter of 3 September 1984. Edmund's remark was quite untrue.
10. Rosemary, diary entry, 1 December 1966.
11. Rosemary, diary entry, 19 May 1989.

12. Stephen Hugh-Jones, 1989, *Edmund Leach*, Cambridge: King's College, p. 23.
13. Rosemary, diary entry, 29 January 1986.
14. Bronisław (Bronio) Malinowski (1884–1942), Polish-born British anthropologist, was a lecturer (later professor) at the LSE from 1922 and had published his major work on the Trobriand Islanders the same year.
15. Economic anthropology examines the use of resources by societies through the observation and study of individuals' actual behaviour, whether in developed or underdeveloped, monetary or non-monetary societies, in contrast to economics, which examines large-scale economic behaviour, often in the absence of a social and cultural context.
16. Adam Kuper, 1986, 'An Interview with Edmund Leach', *Current Anthropology* 27(4): 375–82, p. 375.
17. Audrey Richards (1899–1984), another pupil of Malinowski, was a pioneer in studying the impact of western cash economy and taxation on the Bemba of Zambia in the 1930s. As well as being a colleague, she became a warm friend of Raymond, Rosemary and Edmund, and godmother to Rosemary and Raymond's son Hugh.
18. Lucy Mair (1901–86) was also a pupil of Malinowski. She studied social change in Uganda in 1931–32 and developed the influence of anthropology in colonial administration. A very private person, she was a formidable personality who remained primarily a colleague to Raymond, Rosemary and Edmund.
19. Edmund's attitudes closely paralleled those of Ann Oakley's father, Richard Titmuss, as she describes them. (See Ann Oakley, 2014, *Father and Daughter: Patriarchy, Gender and Social Science*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 34 and 97–98.) Raymond's mindset was more evenly balanced: particularly later in life, he could be equally patronising to his junior male colleagues.
20. Cyril Belshaw (1921–2018) was a prominent New Zealand anthropologist.
21. Betty Belshaw (1920–79) became a respected lecturer in English Literature at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
22. Judith Freedman, néé Djamour (1921–2009) and Maurice Freedman (1920–75) trained at the LSE under Raymond, and both became colleagues and very good friends of the Firths.
23. Margaret (Greta) Redfield (1898–1977) worked with her husband Robert Redfield (1897–1958) during his ethnographic studies in Mexico in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Burton Benedict (1923–2010) taught anthropology at the LSE from 1958 to 1968, then served as a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, becoming director of the Hearst Museum of Anthropology.
24. Adam Kuper, 1986, 'An Interview with Edmund Leach', *Current Anthropology* 27(4): 375–82.
25. Stanley Tambiah, 2002, *Edmund Leach: An Anthropological Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 19–29.
26. Rosemary Firth, 'Janet Upcott and Blanche', 9 November 1983, unpublished.
27. Rosemary Firth, 'Blanche Lieschen Brodmeier and Her Family', 1 July 1995, unpublished.