

In memoriam Anna Allott (1930–2024)

Hana Navratilova

There are exceptional people who touch many lives in a way that is best described simply as warm and deeply positive. Anna Joan Allott OBE¹ née Sargant was one of them. Born September 22, 1930, Anna was the daughter of two remarkable people: Marie Sargant née Hloušková (1899–1991) and Thomas Sargant (1905–1988). Her mother was one of the first female students of philology at the Charles University in Prague, and went to become a philologist, teacher, lecturer and epigrapher. Anna's father became a respected law reformer, campaigning for human rights. The marriage of Anna's parents ended in divorce. However, this paved way for her interaction with another remarkable figure, Jaroslav Černý (1898–1970), a cosmopolitan Eryp-

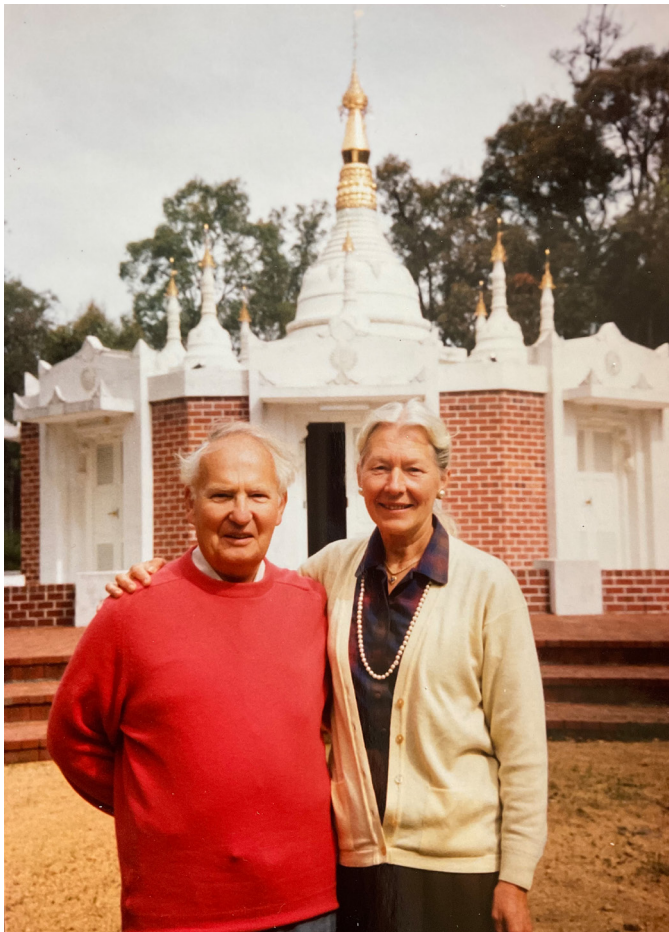


Fig. 1 Antony and Anna Allott in Burma, courtesy of family archive (photo by Lucy Heatherington)

¹ Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

tologist, who became her mother's partner and then second husband. He believed in Anna's academic ability, and supported her studies, as he had done with other female scholars in a time when this attitude was not a common practice.

Anna went on to have a distinguished career of her own, studying Burmese under H. F. Searle, and becoming a foremost Burmese scholar at School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), where she also met her husband, Antony Allott. Since 1957, she had taught Burmese to junior British diplomats pre-posting, most of whom went on to obtain high diplomatic offices. Anna visited Burma (Myanmar) regularly until a regime change stopped that opportunity, and she remained in touch with the Burmese intellectuals. Awarded the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1998 for "services to British-Burmese relations", Anna was, among other academic duties and offices, also the secretary of the Britain-Burma Society from 1980 to 1997. Her interests in life were far from exhausted by her academic activity. Mother to four children, she was also a keen gardener, who regularly opened her gardens in Bodicote, Oxfordshire, for local charities. She continued to do so in Wedmore, Somerset where she spent the last twelve years of her life.

Her links to the world of Egyptology consisted of many acts of generosity. In the early 1990s, she and her sister Naomi revived links with Czechoslovakia and then the Czech Republic. Their contributions to the archives of both the Griffith Institute (Oxford) and the Czech Institute of Egyptology (Prague) helped to obtain a richer picture of the life of Jaroslav Černý. When Černý's first biographer, Jiřina Růžová, was working on her portrait of this exceptional Egyptologist in the 2010s, she was invited to visit Anna, who shared her insightful memories. Anna acted equally generously toward Černý's second biographer a decade later, making a material difference to the volume that appeared as 'The citizen of nowhere', showcasing the transnational character of Černý's professional life, but also of the unique open-minded environment that surrounded him in his personal space. Without Anna's recollections, her diary, and eventually a generous support for the publication, the biography would have been much poorer. It was a very sad moment to realise that there won't be any more phone calls which brought so many insights into the unique journeys of Anna's family through the 20th century.

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