

The tale of Student's wife

Scanning the list of baptisms for the turn of the (last) century, two entries jumped out at me, married as I am to a statistician, which otherwise might have been missed: Marion Bertha and Ruth Helen with their father's name recorded: 'William S Gosset', and his occupation: 'Brewer'. Now some reading this might be surprised to know that they are very familiar with the work of William Gosset, though they may not recognize his name. Those of us



William S. Gosset
(at bowls)

who have struggled on elementary statistics courses with the basics of 'The Student t-test' may have been told with pride that 'Student' was actually the pseudonym of a very famous statistician who worked for Guinness and was not allowed by his employer to publish his academic work under his own name. Perhaps we heard the joke that his work on the statistical theory of small samples was necessitated because they were the only samples which Guinness would provide! His name was William

Sealy Gosset, and he is another of our church members with an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Numerous appreciations and retrospectives of Gosset have been written, and words like 'modesty', 'unconventionality', 'tolerance' and 'humour' appear frequently. The ODNB has an unexpected and delightful comment: "Gosset was a Christian, but was otherwise reticent about his religious views." How good to find that it was here, at Kill, that he grew his quiet Christian faith for nearly thirty years.

Student's wife

If William Gosset was a low-key church member, the same could not be said of his wife. Marjorie Gosset was an organiser *par-excellence*. One biography, commenting on the amount her husband packed into every day added "his wife certainly organised things so that the minimum amount of time was wasted". She was born 'Marjorie Surtees Phillpotts', and had been a national hockey player and coach. The authoritative volume *The complete hockey player*, published in 1922, has a chapter on ladies' hockey which described Miss Phillpotts, who played for England for the last time in 1901, as "Perhaps the finest centre-forward England has ever boasted". Marjorie and William were married in 1906.

The Select Vestry

William's name was added to our register of vestrymen in 1909, but at that time it was just that: a register of vestrymen. At the General Synod of 1920 a motion was passed allowing women to register as vestrymen (terminology did not change!) and take parochial, but not diocesan, office. Initially, very few women responded; but two did appear on the list for

Kill at the first opportunity, and both were promptly elected to the Select Vestry. One was Mrs Gosset. She was to remain on the Select Vestry for the rest of her time at Kill, and from the beginning was an active member. Her energy and ability saw her taking responsibility for raising funds. Sales of work, tennis tournaments and social functions followed for many years, and she also obtained permission to start up an envelope scheme.

Parochial nominator?

In May 1928, an emergency meeting of the General Vestry was called. The secretary of the vestry had received notification from the diocesan secretary that he could not accept the name of Mrs Gosset as a parochial nominator, despite her election at the Easter Vestry meeting; the position was not open to a woman. Mrs Gosset, with great grace, made no comment, but continued her work on the vestry with her usual enthusiasm. The parish made its own opinion clear when, the following Easter, she was elected people's churchwarden.

A brass plate, and stained glass

When Charles Welland announced his retirement in 1922, Mrs Gosset proposed to the vestry that she be permitted to add a brass plate on the oak panelling in the chancel of the church, setting out that it was presented by Rev. C.W. Welland. Then in 1930, following Welland's death, it was Mrs Gosset who submitted to the Select Vestry, on behalf of the Welland memorial committee, a small plan of the proposed memorial window. The vestry was of the opinion that some of the colours proposed were unsuitable, but I suspect that little was changed when just two weeks later she obtained approval for the design from the General Vestry. And so our east window was commissioned.

At the end of 1935 the Gosset family left Ireland as William took charge of the new Guinness brewery in London. The Select Vestry, in accepting Mrs Gosset's resignation with deep regret, thanked her "for her untiring devotion to the welfare of the parish and her cheerful willingness to help in any way." We can add our thanks for the tangible reminder of her organisational skills in the vibrant colours of our beautiful Good Shepherd window.

Marjorie Surtees Gosset: now *there's* a statistician's wife!



Mary Williams