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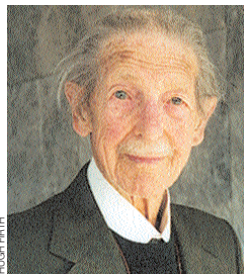
Sir Raymond Firth's brilliant century

Honorary fellow
Sir Raymond Firth
celebrated his 100th
birthday on 25 March
this year. **Peter Loizos**
tells us more of his life in
the service of LSE.

Raymond Firth arrived from his native New Zealand in 1924. It was a step on the road to changing from being an economist to an anthropologist, influenced by Seligman and Malinowski, both then 'ornaments' of the School. Firth became the fledgling Anthropology Department's first PhD, for a study of Maori economics. He became better known, however, for his next book, the illuminating and vivid *We, The Tikopia* first published in 1936 (and still in print) – a study of kinship and social organisation among 1,200 people on a remote Polynesian atoll less than four miles long. Firth put the islanders on the world map of seriously-studied peoples, and the *Tikopia* put Firth on the map of scholars who go deep and stay down for as long as it takes. He has written ten books, spanning 3,000 pages, about the islanders. He is their prime ethnographer and the historian young Tikopians read to find out who their pagan grandparents were, and how they lived then.

Not satisfied with studying the Maori and the *Tikopia*, Firth and his wife Rosemary, then a graduate economist, squeezed in a study of Malay fishing people in Kelantan before world war drove them from the field. The war saw them both co-opted, he to the Admiralty's geographical





HUGH FIRTH

The Rosemary and Raymond Firth Award

Sir Raymond Firth has had a long and rich history with LSE. This year, his 100th, Sir Raymond established The Rosemary and Raymond Firth Award in the Department of Anthropology with a generous donation which will create an endowment of £100,000. The award is intended to promote anthropological research in general but with the specific aim of promoting Rosemary's interest in 'the anthropology of household management and the organisation of domestic affairs'. Commenting on his time at LSE, Sir Raymond said he 'benefited greatly from the multi-ethnic and interdisciplinary tradition of the School' and that his gift 'is only a small token of recognition of my debt to the School over three-quarters of a century!' The School is honoured to receive this magnificent award and to have Rosemary and Sir Raymond's names permanently associated with the School.

'At LSE itself, anthropologists celebrated Raymond's century in a different way – less global, more local'

intelligence unit, she to the Ministry of Supply. In 1944 Firth was made secretary of the Colonial Social Science Research Council, and was later a key figure in setting up the Australian National University in Canberra.

Malinowski had moved from LSE before the war, leaving Firth to take charge. After the war Firth returned to consolidate the gains of the pioneering 1930s, when half the future anthropologists of Britain trained at the School. LSE, under Firth, trained many young overseas scholars from China, the Pacific, Africa and later, South America. As colonial domination gave way to the challenges of political independence, anthropologists found new problems in economic and social change, and political transition. Indigenous anthropologists were particularly welcome – LSE played a key role in freeing the discipline from colonial baggage.

Firth's last major research initiative was a pioneering study of middle class kinship in London, loosely linked to a similar one in Chicago, and which allowed numbers of young LSE scholars to get basic field experience.

Having made leading the LSE Friday morning Anthropology seminar an art form, he retired from the Department in 1968 but continued to write, and indeed in his centennial year has two papers in press. He has stood well back from the Department but continued to attend seminars from time to time until last year. His concern for the Department's well-being has been reflected in a number of acts of generosity. Together with Isaac Schapera, he instituted the LSE Monographs on Social Anthropology which have continued publication until now, and created the Malinowski Lectureship and Seligman Library in commemoration of the founders of the Department, Bronislaw Malinowski and CG Seligman.

Firth's century has been celebrated in style. In March the Association of Social Anthropologists hosted a lunch for him, as its life president, at New Zealand House. The high commissioner, Paul East, made available the 17th floor penthouse with its spectacular view of London, and gave a warm and witty speech, which climaxed with the Kiwi informality of 'You've done all right for yourself,

mate.' Professor Judith Macdonald, who had studied women in Tikopia, flew in from New Zealand, and said Firth had left her just about enough to do, while Dr Judith Huntsman flew the same distance to present him with the Polynesian Society's Nyacacloou medal. Other speakers included Professor Jean La Fontaine, who recalled Raymond's wise and liberal steering of a committee of inquiry into the dismissal of a young colleague by the School of Oriental and African Studies; John Davis, the warden of All Souls, Oxford, who pointed out that Raymond had lived through twice as much as most of us so that we literally 'didn't know the half of it'; and Professor Adrian Mayer, who recalled Raymond as a wise and supportive research supervisor. Raymond responded with a speech on the virtues of indigenous ethnographies, which many a younger colleague might have envied. The 60 guests were from many parts of the world, and included, from Malaysia, former student Dr Dato Moxani and his wife. A photo exhibition, organised by LSE anthropologists, featured an enlarged batch of Raymond's extraordinary fieldwork photos.

At LSE itself, anthropologists celebrated Raymond's century in a different way – less global, more local. The first Friday seminar of the term had a mysterious title with no named speaker but Raymond was invited to attend. Instead of a conventional research paper, the members of the Department, junior and senior alike, took it in turns to read out their favourite short extracts from Firth's 20 books. Professor Maurice Bloch chaired, and afterwards a home-made birthday cake was melodiously and ritually consumed.

Sadly, in mid July, Lady Rosemary Firth died. She was Raymond's wife and intellectual companion for more than 60 years. We offer our condolences to Sir Raymond, his son, his daughter-in-law, and his grandchildren. ■



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