

BHR 5: 192-4

**Dr Daisy Dina Ronco
1922-2009**

Daisy Dina Ronco, academic and biographer, died peacefully at the end of February 2009 on the isle of Anglesey, North Wales, at the age of 87.

One of the children of Stefano Cesare Ronco of Genoa, a respected and highly influential leader of the Italian ‘Churches of the Brethren’, and of a francophone Swiss mother, she grew up during the time of the fascist government of Italy under Mussolini, when despite their strong indigenous roots the Brethren, like all Italian Protestant churches, suffered many disabilities. From this background she drew her deep Christian faith and a lifetime suspicion of authoritarianism and nationalistic attitudes. She studied at the Universities of Lausanne and Genoa (where she obtained her degree) and also obtained the diploma in piano (as teacher and performer) at the Genoa Conservatoire.

Bilingual in Italian and French, and fluent in English, she was through her Brethren links appointed after the war to a teaching post at Clarendon School in North Wales and later to a lectureship at the Bangor campus of the University of Wales, where she headed the growing Italian department. She also served as warden of one of the university halls of residence, one of her senior university colleagues speaking warmly of ‘the understanding, advice and help’ she made available to all. She used to speak of her early perplexities as the child of a dual nationality marriage, and doubtless this served her well in the bilingual environment of North-west Wales.

On retirement she settled in her cottage on high ground in Anglesey and, from her study there with its liberating outlook across the Menai Straits to the mountains of Snowdonia, she devoted herself to a series of scholarly works, drawing freely on painstaking research into original documents preserved in archives in Italy (especially in Florence), the Brethren archive at Manchester and *Echoes of Service* in Bath. She also contributed several articles to *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1974). The first of her major works appeared in 1986—a centenary biography in Italian

of the most prominent of the two major early leaders of the Italian 'Free Italian Churches', later to become 'Churches of the Brethren'. This was Count Piero Guicciardini (1808-1886), then head of one of the foremost noble families of Florence. It was followed in 1991 by an equally deeply researched Italian biography of the other major leader, Teodorico Pietrocola-Rossetti (1825-1883), untiring evangelist, poet and hymnwriter, and a relative of the English poets Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Both works arose from her affection and concern for the still growing movement in Italy. They were additionally valuable to the student for including as appendices reproductions of many of the original documents she consulted, and the former was also accompanied by a supplementary volume reproducing primary documents not otherwise easily accessible. A third Italian biography was of an important figure who was dear to Daisy's heart—the Swiss educationalist Matilde Calandrini, who was influential in Tuscan Protestant life in the period after 1830. Finally, in 1996, she published for readers of English a history of the Italian movement, *Risorgimento and the Free Italian Churches (now Churches of the Brethren)*, drawing on her earlier works on Guicciardini and Rossetti.

She spent time, during her researches and after, using the facilities of the St. Deiniol's Library at Hawarden in North Wales, the study centre in Gladstone's house there which was built around the massive library he left to posterity. She valued this centre and endowed there the Dr Daisy Ronco Scholarship for research into nineteenth century studies. During her retirement she had been freed from financial worries by a bequest from her bachelor brother, who had become a highly placed financial executive in the Fiat car group, and as well as making frequent visits to Italy gave herself to service of the different churches of the Bangor area. Daisy had eschewed marriage by deliberate choice, but retained fond memories of an early romantic attachment to a young former seminary student who on conversion had joined Brethren, but had died not long after the attachment was broken off. His portrait remained on her sideboard throughout her life. She also assumed as protégé the daughter of an Italian Brethren family who, like herself, was following an academic career in Britain

and in whose English family she took a close interest. She enjoyed a circle of local friends from churches and university, but her closing years were also overshadowed by family tragedies that deeply affected her, and she spent much of those years in a care home near her Anglesey cottage.

Roy Coad