

Margaret Kennedy was born in London on 23 April 1896, the eldest of the four children of Charles Moore Kennedy and his wife Elinor Marwood, who were of Northern Irish and Yorkshire stock. Her younger brother Tristram was born in 1898, and their twin siblings David and Virginia arrived in 1901. The family lived in Leaves Green in Kent, now Greater London, near Biggin Hill airport, holidaying in Cornwall in the summers. Margaret was educated by governesses to a sufficiently high standard to enter Cheltenham Ladies College in 1912, just before her sixteenth birthday. She went up to the University of Oxford in the autumn term of 1915, to read history at Somerville College. Two of her cousins were killed in the war, in 1916 and 1917; she herself was ill enough with jaundice to have to take a year out of college to recover. Her brother Tristram was killed in 1918 fighting near Jerusalem.

Margaret graduated with the equivalent of a second-class degree in history in 1919 (the year before women were allowed to take their degrees at Oxford), and was immediately commissioned to write *A Century of Revolution* for Methuen: it was published in 1922, and was not much noticed. In 1923 her first novel was published, *The Ladies of Lyndon*, which also received little attention. While she was working on this book she had gone to Pertisau on Achensee in the Austrian Tyrol to stay with friends, and discovered a passion for mountains and walking. It also gave her a setting for her next novel, *The Constant Nymph* (1924), and she returned to Pertisau to finish the novel.

*The Constant Nymph* received an unstoppable swell of approval, and Margaret received congratulations from the leading literary figures of the day, including Thomas Hardy, George Moore, A E Housman and Arnold Bennett. She began to meet more people working in and around literature, and at one of the parties she attended she met her future husband, David Davies, a barrister and a former secretary to Lord Asquith, the prime minister. They married in July 1925. A year later Margaret began adapting *The Constant Nymph*, by now a best-seller, for the stage with Basil Dean, starring Noel Coward as the composer Lewis Dodd. He did not enjoy nor was he well suited for the role, and left the production due to ill health after three weeks, to be replaced by John Gielgud.

In 1927 the Davies family moved to 27 Campden Hill Square, between Holland Park and Kensington Gardens in west London. Margaret continued to write novels and plays, while producing children of her own: Julia was born in 1928, and Sarah (Sally) in 1920. James arrived in 1935. In the late 1920s the family bought Hendre Hall, a large house in Llwyngwrl near Barmouth on the North Wales coast, which was their holiday home for many years.

In 1937 David Davies became a County Court judge. Margaret had become a leading literary figure, enjoying friendships with actors and writers, who included Elizabeth Bowen, Lady Cynthia Asquith, Charles Morgan, Hilda Vaughan, Elizabeth Jenkins, Lettice Cooper, Phyllis Bentley, Marghanita Laski, Rose Macaulay and L P Hartley. While experiencing increasing anxiety over the approach of war, and concern for the safety of her friends in Germany and

Austria, Margaret had to struggle at home with warfare among her domestic staff and with running two houses, as well as working on her writing.

With the approach of war Margaret organised their London home into the local sector's Air Raid station. Her health began to respond to emotional stress, which brought on lumbago, and then in early 1939 she was afflicted with Bells' Palsy which gave her face the appearance of having suffered a stroke. In 1940 she contracted shingles. Meanwhile David Davies' new role as a volunteer Air Raid Warden required him to live in London full-time, making North Wales inconveniently distant for the family to live in for the war. By the middle of 1940 the family had left Hendre Hall for a brief stay in Surrey, and then Margaret and the children moved to St Ives with Nanny, while David remained in London. Margaret visited London frequently for committees and to see her husband, and eventually moved her children and Nanny out of their rented home into a hotel, which made her housekeeping much easier. In 1943 she and the children and Nanny left Cornwall, for James to go to prep school and the girls to go to Oxford High School. In July 1944 their London house was completely destroyed by a V1 flying bomb. They moved into a new home a few streets away, at 11 Argyll Road, where the family stayed for fourteen years.

In 1947 Margaret visited the USA for the first time, and began writing a new cycle of novels, and an acclaimed biography of Jane Austen. More critical writing followed, accompanied by increasing deafness. David Davies was knighted in 1952. His death in 1964 was a great blow to Margaret. Her health continued to deteriorate, and she died in 1967 aged seventy-one.

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