Enid May Parker 1920-2016



Friend of the Afar people of the Danakil Desert

Enid was born in Edenfield, Lancashire, UK on 18 April 1920. Her father died when she was only seven years old and just four years later her mother went into a care home. Different family members and others looked after Enid and her two brothers until they were old enough to be able to earn their own livings. She left school aged 14 with no qualifications and started out as a domestic worker.

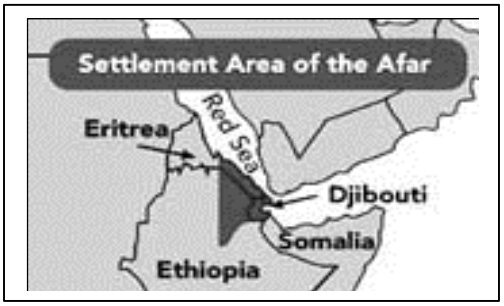
During WWII Enid served first in the Land Army and then in the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) where she first worked in an office and then as an anaesthetist's assistant with Bomber Command. She was demobbed after the war and qualified as a teacher and a sports mistress. About this time (1951) she became a Christian. She was challenged by a book written by Len Moules of WEC surveying Christian work in India and pointing out the need for more workers. He posed the question, ***"Perhaps you, dear reader, could go there and fill one of these places?"***

They needed teachers. Enid had never thought of being a missionary. She was already in her 30s and wondered if she was now too old. She wrote to a number of societies but heard nothing back. As she prayed, she felt that God did want her to serve Him overseas and she was perplexed that she had not been able to find an opening. Shortly after this she was introduced to the General Secretary of the Red Sea Mission Team that had been formed in 1953.

In March 1955 the first printed newsletter of the Red Sea Mission Team was published. It stated:

"The Red Sea Mission Team is an interdenominational, international, evangelical team of consecrated men and women called of God, dedicated to reaching those fast bound in Islam. It is not a new competing mission, but a team cooperating with existing evangelical agencies, sincerely desiring to work with all Bible-honouring, Christ-loving groups engaged in the evangelisation of Muslims and welcoming their fellowship. Their objective is that the Lord Jesus may be made known soon to Muslims everywhere and especially to the unreached tribes around the Red Sea – John 17:21; Nehemiah 4:19-20; Revelation 7:9-10.

Enid joined the team as a teacher in 1955. She had a strong sense that God had called her to serve the Afar people. It was May 1956 before arrangements to set sail could be completed. She spent her first three months in Aden waiting for a visa for Ethiopia. She then went to Asmara as a teacher. Her first task was to learn Amharic – the language of Ethiopia. She had already begun a study of Arabic and was able to continue this.



Visiting Thio, a fishing village on the Red Sea coast, she learned that the Afar language was not yet written. It is a member of the East Lowland Cushitic language family. Afar is spoken in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. The entire Afar population (around 3 million in 1956) was either illiterate or had had to learn another language to progress with any education. Most Afars are poor and many are nomadic farmers. Their territory is known as the **Afar Triangle** and consists of hot coastal and desert conditions much of this being in the Danakil Depression at the head of East Africa's Great Rift Valley.

Together with others, Enid began writing down the Afar language building on the work done by Jim Colby. They produced Bible stories and hymns in Afar. She also produced short radio programmes in Afar for broadcasting in the region. She continued to work on language and literacy among Afar people and published her first Afar-English-French dictionary in 1985.



Afar tent

After the publication of this dictionary, Enid began work on an English-Afar dictionary which was to take 21 years to complete and would include 13,500 English words with their Afar translations as well as an example sentence for every single one. The goal was for the new dictionary to be published locally in Ethiopia and be able to reach the business community as well as the eleven universities and schools in the Afar regions. At the age of 87 Enid made a trip to Ethiopia to look for a suitable publisher and take steps to facilitate this project.

The early reading primers Enid produced included traditional tales as well as poems and riddles. We can scarcely imagine what it means to people to have their language written down for the first time and to have literacy materials to help them learn their language and dictionaries to enable them to translate it into other languages. Locally Enid acquired 'hero' status! In the 1970s the local people gave her the title **Qassa Molta** (Respected Lioness).

It was a great joy to Enid that the first book ever printed in Afar was the Gospel of John. Yvonne Genat, a former colleague of Enid's, worked on the Afar New Testament that was published in 1994. The Pentateuch has also been published.

In March 2003 a symposium was held in Djibouti on the Afar language. Enid received an invitation as a delegate. There were 80 delegates. The majority were from the three countries where Afar people live. Enid was the only white European taking part. Two others had been invited but were not able to make it.

March 19 saw the formal closing ceremony in the People's Palace. The Somali President, Ismail Omar Guelleh, presented three of the delegates with medals that had been struck in celebration of Djibouti's independence on 27 June 1977. The medals were given for outstanding service to the Afar people. Enid's medal was in honour of her 40 years serving the Afar people – primarily for being involved in writing down the Afar language. In her address to the packed hall she was able to give them a short history of the work of the mission among the Afar people.

Enid's journey with God among the Afar people was not without its challenges, its hard times and its seeming setbacks. In these times she found it vital to look back on all the early leading of God and the times He had confirmed to her that she was in the centre of His will. This gave her the courage to believe and to press on. Her 'service' was in the area of linguistics to which she was fully devoted. But her passion was that Afar people would come to know who Jesus is and worship Him.

Professor R. Hayward who had been with RSMT and met Enid in Ethiopia, was later her supervisor for her PhD in linguistics in 1979. She had previously undertaken are Postgraduate Diploma in Linguistics at SOAS.

At her Thanksgiving Service Prof Hayward said, **"To my mind Enid had two outstanding qualities. One of these is something best expressed in a word not so commonly heard these days but I can't find a substitute for it. She had 'guts'. This was clearly seen in a single woman choosing to live in the dust and heat of a remote desert village reached only by long camel journeys or in small boats and committing herself to this year-on-year. Like so many of the early pioneer missionaries, Enid was in it for the 'long haul'. The other outstanding quality Enid had was 'single-mindedness'. It manifested itself as a total, loyal dedication of all her being and faculties to the Afar people and an inner desire see them find Christ."**

Enid went to be with the Lord on April 8, 2016. A Thanksgiving Service for her life was held on October 1 in London. A number of her Afar friends were present. The following tribute was given from the **Afar Pastoralist Development Association**:

"Dr Enid Parker thoroughly earned her place in the history and the heart of the Afar people as the mother of the Afar language. Had she not been driven by her dedication and love of her Heavenly Lord to decide how the Afar language could be taught in literacy, today the Afar of Ethiopia, who live without a formal education system, would still be bound by illiteracy. Using the five primer books Dr Parker researched and wrote, APDA has managed to teach over 180,000 people to read and write in Afar since launching a literacy programme in 1996. Today Afar people are 26% illiterate as males and 15% as females having come up from 2% literacy in 1996.

Dr Parker's constant presence in visiting as well as sending messages, displayed her unswerving love and concern that the Afar people gain improvement through literacy and education. She wrote her last Afar dictionary only three years ago (2013). Her small storybooks are kept by APDA and we will continue to publish them.

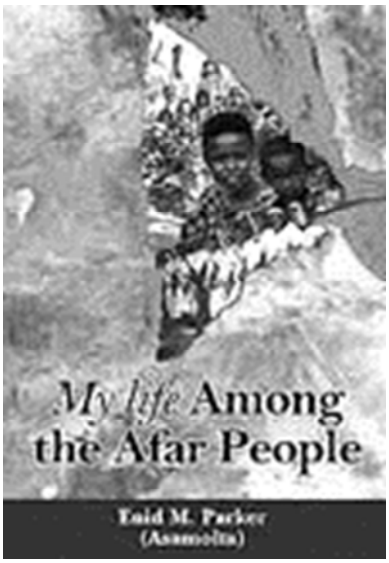
While Dr Enid or Qassa Molta or 'Lioness' as the Afar affectionately named her, will always be missed, her amazing legacy to the Afar development will always be remembered and talked about inspiring others to make the effort to take the language development on further. Her life was literally lived for the Afar and her God."



Afar salt mining



Afar Elder



Enid's autobiography



Afar Family