

GRACE HADOW 1875–1940

by Teresa Smith (DSPI/ Barnett House and St Hilda's College)

Grace Hadow was one of a remarkable generation of women who combined a life of scholarship with public service devoted to education and citizenship. Known as a superb organiser and doughty campaigner as well as a scholar, she lived her life with energy, enthusiasm, good humour, and common sense.

An assistant secretary in the National Federation of Women's Institutes who knew her before the war, wrote:

'Her conversation strayed from Chaucer to the art of throwing boomerangs, from water divining to women's emancipation. There seemed in fact no subject in which she was not interested and in which she could not kindle the interest of others...'

Grace Eleanor Hadow was born on 9 December 1875 in the village of South Cerney, near Cirencester in Gloucestershire. She was the youngest child and fourth daughter of the vicar William Elliot Hadow, and his wife Mary Lang, whose father was Henry Cornish in Tavistock in Devon. From her family she drew a deep understanding of rural life, a sense of service, and unselfconscious and undemonstrative religion.

She was educated at Brownhill School near Stroud, and Truro High School for Girls in Cornwall, founded in 1880 by the Bishop of Truro, where she stayed on as a student teacher. Grace's connection to Cornwall deepened throughout her life. Her eldest sister Margaret married a lawyer in Penzance, John Cornish, and their house became a home for Grace when she found travelling back to Cerney too far. John Cornish edited the autobiography of Henry Carter (1749–1809), the Cornish smuggler of Prussia Cove, published in Truro and London in 1894. John was a passionate sailor, and in later life he taught Grace to sail the 16-ton yawl *Little Windflower*.

After a year in Trier in Germany, studying music and languages, she taught for a year at Cheltenham Ladies' College. In October 1900 she went to Somerville College, Oxford, graduating with 1st class honours in English language and literature in 1903 (though as a woman she was not allowed to receive her degree; the University did not change its rules until 1920). Her beloved older brother, godfather, and mentor, W. H. Hadow ('Harry' on their holidays together), was then a fellow of Worcester College and a member of Somerville College council. After this she taught for a year at Bryn Mawr College in the US, a liberal arts college for women in Pennsylvania founded in 1885. In 1906 she was appointed English tutor at Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford, and lecturer there in 1909. She published *The Oxford Treasury of English Literature* in 3 vols edited with her brother, and studies of Chaucer, Addison, Goldsmith, Walter Raleigh, Dryden, and Robert Browning; she also translated a German biography of Clara Schumann.

But she combined scholarship with a life of practical public service and a passion for citizenship, particularly for women. She was a Suffragist. She established the Cirencester Women's Suffrage Society, affiliated to Millicent Fawcett's National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies; and served as its honorary secretary 1911–1917.

Grace Hadow wrote in 1917, after the House of Commons Speaker's Conference on votes for women:

“I am glad to belong to a generation which has been **stoned** [literally having stones thrown at her] – not because I like being stoned (it is tiresome, and often messy), but since some women had to go through that to win the [vote], it is a bit of luck not to have been out of it entirely.... In years to come it may interest people to realize that before the War numbers of law-abiding and peaceful women like myself ... got to take being mobbed and insulted as part of the ordinary day's work.... Now the War has brought us to a peaceful recommendation that at least some women should vote.”

Her concern for social problems and their practical solutions and her flair for organisation became apparent in the First World War. When her mother died in 1917 she left home, and resigned her LMH lectureship, to seek war work. She was recruited by Professor W. G. S. Adams, then at the Ministry of Munitions but later Principal Secretary to the PM Lloyd George. She was to run ‘a most unconventional department of Extra Mural Welfare’ in the Ministry of Munitions, responsible for organising women's work in the factories, with the necessary creches and housing. She was a great success, initiating and organising with flair and skill a most complex operation to support women working in dangerous conditions. She visited factories up and down the country, addressed meetings of munition workers, and took part in educational activities for the workers. One example:

‘a lecture on Nature Poetry (with no lantern slides – nothing to help it down) drew an audience of 500 munition workers – men and women – on Friday night and I never talked to a more responsive one. They were quite a rough type, and my heart was in my boots when I began, especially as I had been told the employer's point of view – expressed with some force – was that no sane person could expect factory hands to listen to stuff like that. And they came to such an extent that there was no standing room. How's that for the working man and woman after a hard day's work!’

Following the war, Adams was returning to academic work, but retained an enthusiasm for adult education and voluntary social service. This chimed in with Grace's vision; and he persuaded her to become secretary of Barnett House in Oxford, founded in 1914 in memory of Canon Barnett of Toynbee Hall.

Grace was the key organising figure at Barnett House from 1920 to 1929. The key to her work there was her vision of adult education – particularly for women – as a means to citizenship. Barnett House was developing rapidly as a centre for social and economic studies and social work training. It was also a springboard for new organisations such as the National Council of Social Service, based on ideals of ‘citizen service’ and the ‘the corporate citizen effort to improve social conditions’. Grace put her effort particularly into rural adult education. The Oxfordshire Rural Community Council was founded in 1920. This was based

initially in Barnett House, then moved to 20 Beaumont Street – which was to be named Hadow House in 1955. (But where is the brass plaque that used to be fixed beside the front door?) The ORCC fostered village industries, libraries (Grace delivered book boxes to villages throughout the area in her yellow car according to one memory), lectures, classes, drama, art. etc. Her aim was not simply to take ‘folk dancing and travelling cinemas to the villages’, but ‘to get people to formulate their own demands and tackle problems’ and ‘to take their own place in local government or voluntary organisation: ... future development can be left in their hands’.

In 1929 Grace was appointed Principal of the Society of Oxford Home Students, which was to become St Anne’s College in 1952. She strengthened links between the Society and the university and with Barnett House, increased its academic status and acquired buildings. Her own status was high. She was one of the only two women members of the university’s Hebdomadal Council at the time. She also fostered close links between the university and civic life, serving at *local* level on bodies such as the university’s extra-mural delegacy (particularly the Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Berkshire committee, which organised adult education in the region), and Oxfordshire’s county education committee – and at *national* level, on bodies such as the BBC’s advisory council, the adult education committee of the Board of Education, and the National Council of Social Service.

Grace’s last two years were taken up with *international* travel and lecturing. The British Commonwealth conference in Sydney in the summer of 1938 was followed by a lecture tour in the US where she visited and lectured in 22 colleges. She returned very excited about the international role of women. But she was exhausted, and did not fully recover before the outbreak of war in September 1939. She caught pneumonia and died in London on 19 January 1940.

POSTSCRIPT

Here is a footnote that demonstrates the enduring influence of Grace Hadow on the young of today. Helen King, Principal of St Anne’s College, sent the following quotation:

‘Here is a quote from Grace Hadow speaking at a Mental Health Conference in 1936. The talk was titled "Education for Living". [The passage is also quoted at the end of the chapter on Grace’s tenure as Principal of the Society of Oxford Home Students in Helena Deneke’s biography of Grace.]

“Young Oxford passionately desires to be just. It seems to me, that the keynote of Oxford is the desire to know, to utter and to argue freely; ... the young have a desire for adventure, for experiment, for independence, and ... this generation, having grown up in an atmosphere of change and development, has a real desire not only to enjoy life to the full, but to take a hand in reshaping the world”.

Helen was particularly struck by the fact that Miss Hadow attended a Mental Health Conference and that the term “Mental Health” was used for the conference, when we tend to think of it as a more modern term. She also thought that the quote chimes in well in so many ways with Oxford today, including with the current St Anne’s aspiration to

‘understand the world and change it for the better’.