First Oxford Female Don

Annie Mary Anne Henley Rogers 1856-1937

Annie Mary Anne Henley Rogers (granddaughter of **George Vining Rogers** and **Mary Ann Blyth**) was a trailblazer for women's rights in university education. She was the first female tutor at Oxford University, a tireless promoter of women's higher education, and in later years, a horticultural enthusiast and expert.

Family in Oxford

Annie was born on February 15th 1856 at Wellington Place, St. Giles, in Oxford, where her father, James Edwin Thorold Rogers, was Curate of St. Paul's. He was later an Oxford Classics professor, historian of Political Economy and an MP. Her mother was Anne Susanna Charlotte Reynolds, second daughter of a solicitor to the Treasury. The family lived at 8 – 9 Beaumont Street through the 1860s and 1870s, and like many middle-class families of the time, employed two or three servants. After her father died in 1890, Annie moved to 35 St. Giles with her mother, with whom she was very close. After her mother's death in 1899, she moved to 39 Museum Road where she lived until her death in 1937.



No. 35 (the middle house in the block) St Giles, Oxford, where Annie lived with her mother from 1891-1899. In 2020 an Oxford Blue Plaque was erected on the house in honour of Annie. Source: oxfordhistory.org.uk

Annie had five younger brothers: the eldest was Henry, a Captain of the Westminster School, who committed suicide by hanging, at the age of 18 in their home in Beaumont Street, Oxford. Annie was away on the continent with her father when the tragic news reached them. Her other four brothers: Bertram, Leonard, Arthur and Clement all became high achievers in the fields of Medicine, Mathematics, the Civil Service, and Theology respectively.

Annie in Wonderland

The Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as the children's author Lewis Carroll, lived and worked at Oxford, and was a friend of the Rogers' family and godparent to at least two of Annie's brothers (Bertram and Clement). As well as his famous *Alice In Wonderland* stories, Dodgson is also well known (today sometimes controversially), for his photographic portraits of the young children of his Oxford friends. Between 1861 and 1863, Annie and Henry, were among his many child subjects in studio photography. He also photographed Bertram and Leonard, as well as their parents, and possibly their grandmother Mary Ann Rogers. Dodgson also wrote fantastical letters to his child friends, including to Annie when he failed to turn up at a sitting with her:

'My dear Annie,

This is indeed dreadful. You have no idea of the grief I am in while I write. I am obliged to use an umbrella to keep the tears from running down on to the paper. Did you come yesterday to be photographed? and were you very angry? why wasn't I there? Well, the fact was this – I went out for a walk with Bibkins, my dear friend Bibkins – we went many miles from Oxford – fifty – a hundred say. As we were crossing a field full of sheep, a thought crossed my mind, and I said solemnly, "Dobkins, what o'clock is it?" "Three," said Fipkins, surprised at my manner. Tears ran down my cheeks. "It is the HOUR," I said. "Tell me, tell me, Hopkins, what day is it?" "Why, Monday, of course," said Lupkins. "Then it is the DAY!" I groaned. I wept. I screamed. The sheep crowded round me, and rubbed their affectionate noses against mine. "Mopkins!" I said, "you are my oldest friend. Do not deceive me, Nupkins! What year is this?" "Well, I think it's 1867," said Pipkins. "Then it's the YEAR!" I screamed, so loud that Tapkins fainted. It was all over: I was brought home, in a cart, attended by the faithful Wopkins, in several pieces.

When I have recovered a little from the shock, and have been to the seaside for a few months, I will call and arrange another day for photographing. I am too weak to write this myself, so Zupkins is writing it for me.

Your miserable friend,

Lewis Carroll'1

Great expectations

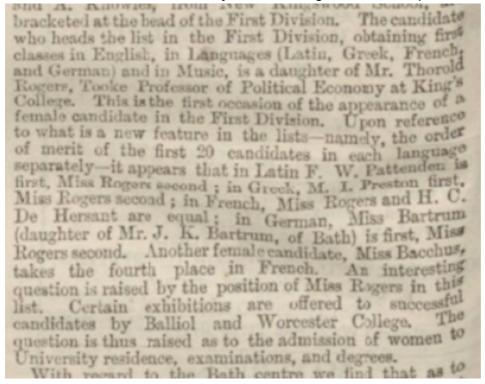
Annie grew up in a household where challenging the status quo was the norm. Her father, had made himself unpopular at Oxford by challenging the Anglican church, the University establishment and aligning himself with the radical and liberal side of politics, including women's suffrage. Annie lived all her life in Oxford, being initially educated at home by governesses, and tutored by her father. Her endeavours and ambitions were wholeheartedly supported by her parents, whose expectations of her,

were no less than that of her high achieving brothers. In 1871, the second year after girls were first admitted to the Oxford school exams, Annie was encouraged to enter and subsequently passed.

Who is A. M. A. H. R.?

At Oxford University from the 1870s, women had been permitted to attend lectures and sit for exams, but were not awarded Degrees or exhibitions (scholarships). In 1873, at the age of 17, Annie sat for the Oxford Local Junior and Senior Examinations and topped the list of examinees, becoming the first woman to gain honours in exams equivalent to that of the male students. However, Annie signed her papers with just her initials A. M. A. H. R., and the examiners, assuming she was a boy, awarded her college scholarships, one from Worcester and the other from Balliol. The story goes that when her actual sex was discovered, the University withdrew the scholarships, Balliol instead offering her a set of books, and Worcester offering their scholarship to a boy further down the list. This of course was not before 'some correspondence between the Vice Chancellor and the Rogers family'2. One biographer³ says that the examiners knew who she was, but that Worcester offered her the scholarship 'as a joke' before offering it to a boy. Newspaper reports simply say that Annie rejected the scholarship offer – well, she had no choice - the colleges were male only. But now, the issue of women's inclusion in the University was opened.

The Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette Aug. 28th 1873 reported:



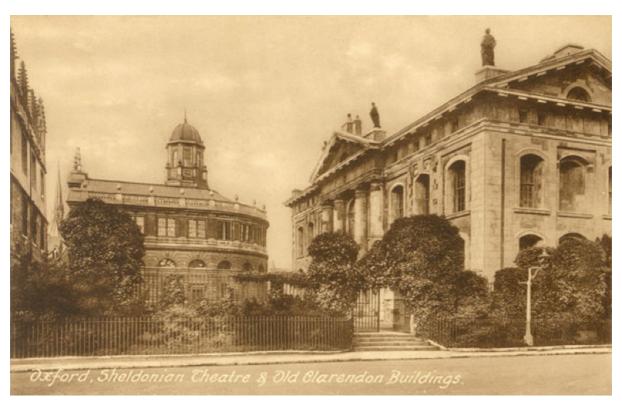
The University then decided to provide separate Degree level exams for women, to avoid any further controversy. So, in 1877 Annie took the Degree level exam in Latin and Greek, achieving first-class honours - the first woman to do so, and in 1879 she achieved first-class honours in the Ancient History exam. However, Degrees were

still not awarded to women at Oxford - that would take another 41 years! (London University granted women Degrees from 1879 and the Scottish universities from 1893.) But Oxford's doors were now slightly ajar.

Association for the Education of Women (AEW)

With the gradual increase in women participating at Oxford, that is, being permitted to attend lectures – with chaperones - and sit for separate exams, it was deemed desirable to establish women's colleges at the University to perform the same role as the men's, although, women's colleges were not given any real status by the University.

In 1878, the Association for the Education of Women (AEW) was formed to oversee the education of residents of the two newly established women's colleges: Somerville Hall and Lady Margaret Hall, and Annie, at the age of 22, was elected a member of the AEW's first council. From 1894 she became the Honorary Secretary to the AEW working from her own office in the University's Clarendon Building, and remained a dedicated committee member until 1920, missing only four committee meetings in over 40 years of service – after all, she did list committee meetings, along with bicycling, as one of her 'recreational' activities.



The Clarendon Building (right) where Annie had her AEW office. In 1896 it housed the Registrar of the University, the Secretaries of the Curators of the Chest, of the Boards of the Faculties & Studies, of the Oxford Appointments Committee, of the Association for the Education of Women, and of the Local Examinations Delegacy, and the controller of the Lodging Houses Delegacy. There was also a Delegates' Room. Source: oxfordhistory.org.uk

College principals had the responsibility of applying the University's code of conduct. Annie was appointed by the AEW to assist Emily Penrose, the Principal of

Somerville, in setting out disciplinary procedures for women students, as well as making a report on the current disciplinary rules for women students at the universities of Great Britain and Ireland.

Oxford Society of Home Students

In 1879 Annie became a Founding Fellow of the Society of Oxford Home Students (later St. Anne's College), and from 1881 was their Senior Tutor in Classics. The Society was set up to provide educational and residential services for women students who were not able to afford boarding at the other women's colleges. Many of these students lived at home in Oxford or boarded privately. The Society was able to provide tutors, access to lectures, accommodation assistance, study facilities etc. The Society's main principle was to make university life accessible to all women who sought to study at Oxford, regardless of their socio-economic status, religion or race (in 1919, 39 of the 167 Home Students were from overseas). Annie devoted much of her time to building up the finances of the Society and developing its constitution – a skill she was highly praised for. She also left a bequest to the Society in her Will.

As a teacher

Dorothy Hammonds, a student, recalls Annie was:

'the Vampire of the AEW, the fell tyrant of the classical students, bully of all beginners'4

'Yet "the Rodge" had qualities of kindliness, loyalty, and humour that endeared her to many students.' (Jane Howarth)⁵

She was also a part-time teacher of Latin at Oxford Girls' High School in 1893, and in 1894 she was the President of the University Association of Women Teachers. Annie also worked on the Council of Barnett House, which specialised in researching social and economic issues and training people to work in adult education and with disadvantaged groups.

St Hugh's College

This college was established in 1886, and like the Society for Oxford Home Students, its original aim was to cater for students who could not afford residence at the other two women's colleges. Annie became its first Classics tutor. St. Hugh's was governed by the AEW, and then from 1910 to 1921 by the University Delegacy for Women Students of which Annie was a member throughout. Annie also served on the St Hugh's College council from 1894 to1936, although she was briefly voted off the council after strongly supporting a fellow tutor who had been wrongfully dismissed during the 'St. Hugh's row' of 1923-4. However, she was quickly reinstated and set to work helping to draft a new charter for the college.

The push for Degrees

Although Annie was earning a comfortable living as a tutor (earning £300 a year teaching 20 hours a week), this work alone did not satisfy her. Her true objective was

to see all Oxford women on an equal footing with Oxford men. She was admired for her detailed knowledge of the University's statutes and protocols, and her practical and determined methods of putting the case for women students. A great tactician, one of her favourite sayings was 'never argue with your opponents; it only helps them to clear their minds'6.

'She was persistent, stable, and resourceful, fearless of unpopularity, and completely unintimidated by the age or status of any opponent.7'

Other comments on her working style:

'Annie Rogers advertised her preference for working with men and 'a highly critical attitude towards her own sex' (*Oxford Magazine*).

'In later years, though still appreciated for her mastery of detail, she made herself unpopular by intrigue and canvassing, and, it was claimed, 'drove most people to desperation by her persistent talking in an unpleasing voice" '8

'Miss Rogers was called "masculine.... Is it because she is so clear-headed and business-like?" She possessed unusual brain power, and keen insight, yet she was "strong, practical, common-sense, individual, business-like, and yet womanly." '9 (Margaret Addison)

Sexism at Oxford

She recognised Oxford's staunch conservatism, but at the same time respected its ancient traditions, and so sought to have women gain access to these, rather than tear them down. She was patient, yet determined to achieve these goals. The University could not bring itself to grant Degrees to their women students, or 'honoured guests' as they were referred to. The excuses ranged from: fearing a sudden influx of women students would change the 'masculine' environment; cruelty to women due to the heavy demands of study; damage to women's reproductive organs – what?; the 'softening of moral fibre' by assimilating the education of the sexes; and preference for a women's only university (this was supported by Charles Dodgson).

In 1896, responding to increasing public debate and pressure on the issue, the Hebdomadal Council at Oxford (the executive council) decided to form an inquiry into the negative impact, from an educational and professional point of view, of women being denied Degrees. Annie was among several women, including college leaders, headmistresses and principals, invited to give evidence. However, the verdict of the inquiry was to take the patronising, and perhaps disingenuous view, that women should be protected from the 'hardship' of competing with male students. Perhaps it was really for the protection of the men. As Annie said:

'The real strength of the opposition lay, not in any alleged care for the education or health of women, but in a dislike and fear of their presence in the University.'¹⁰ The University voted 215 to 140 votes rejecting Degrees for women.

13 years later, Lord Curzon, the new Chancellor of the University, requested that Professor Arthur Sidgwick (AEW chairman), report to him on the reasons for giving women Degrees. Professor Sidgwick drew up the report with Annie. She acknowledged that the interest and support of Lord Curzon, although a conservative, was a great help in promoting the cause amongst the establishment, for women's full admission to the University.

Women's suffrage

The early 1900s saw an increase in the momentum of the women's suffrage movement, which had been building over the previous decades. By 1918 some women were granted the right to vote and stand for parliament. Then in 1919 the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act was passed, which amended laws that disqualified anyone from civil or public service on grounds of sex or marital status. Annie had participated in women's suffrage through membership of several groups including: the Women's Emancipation Union; the Oxford Women's Suffrage Society; the University Club for Ladies; the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and the Church League for Women's Suffrage. Clara Mordan, a wealthy women's suffrage supporter, left a large bequest to St Hugh's, after hearing Annie give a speech. The Present Position of Women at Oxford, at a meeting of the Women's Emancipation Union in 1896 in London. Annie also wrote many articles in the local Oxford press concerning the suffrage campaign. For example, in the Oxford Chronicle (23rd June 1911), she wrote an emotional description of the suffragists' Women's Coronation March in London. In reference to the suffrage procession in Oxford in January 1913, where protesters were attacked by a mob in St Giles, she noted a 'small stone which fell—not very heavily—upon me¹1. A few stones would not deter Annie.



Oxford suffragists on a march from Carlisle to London 1913. Source: oxfordmail.co.uk

Degrees at last!

Changes in the world outside Oxford added pressure to the University to give women full membership. On February 17th 1920, the Preamble of the 'Women's Statute' was debated in Congregation (Oxford University's 'parliament'), and 'those who were present on February 17 long remembered the sight of Professor Geldart and Annie Rogers shaking hands when the Preamble went through.'12

At last in 1920, a new University statute, 'The Women's Statute', was created that enabled women, who obtained honours at the University's exams, to be awarded Degrees. Annie had worked for this for 40 years and as the statute was retrospective, she was among the first women who graduated in a formal ceremony on October 26th at Oxford's *Sheldonian Theatre*. On December 20th, now no longer needed, the AEW held its last meeting and so came to an end Annie's 40-year service on its behalf.



Interior of the *Sheldonian Theatre* (c1905) where the first graduation ceremony for Oxford women students took place on October 26th 1920. Source: oxfordhistory.org.uk

But....

Degrees were achieved, but the fight for equality was not over. Women were now full members of the University, and yet, perhaps partly due to their numbers rapidly increasing, a backlash occurred. In 1927, the University voted, after strong debate, in favour of limiting the number of female students to 840 (one sixth of the male student population at that time). It was also a time when many of the women pioneers at Oxford were dying out or retiring. The *Oxford Magazine* assumed Annie, now 71,

was joining the latter since she had resigned her position as tutor at St. Hugh's back in 1921. She quickly responded that she intended to continue her work 'improving and strengthening the relation of women to the University, a work in which, until this year, there has been no setback and no serious cause for discouragement.'13

Custos Hortulorum

In 1927 Annie was given the title of Custos Hortulorum at St Hugh's, which means, keeper of the garden. This is because apart from 'bicycling and committee meetings', her other favourite recreational activity was garden design. In 1920 Annie had designed the layout and began the planting of the large St. Hugh's College garden. 'Between the wars, tutor Annie Rogers developed a wild garden, shrubberies, winding paths and a terrace garden.' She stocked the garden mainly from cuttings and became notorious amongst Oxford gardeners and porters who were warned to keep a close eye on her when she visited a garden carrying her umbrella (in which she would secretly deposit a few specimens that took her fancy).



Section of garden at St Hugh's following Annie's design. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2018

Over the next 10 years, Annie gradually gave more and more of her time and attention to the garden, supervising the gardeners, of course, and showing off rare plant specimens to friends. She was particularly interested in acquiring flowering trees and shrubs, and her gardens were always able to display colour at any time of the year. Annie also began a custom that each new member of the council, present a tree to the garden, a tradition that continued for many years. The *Oxford Magazine*'s 'Notes and News' wrote, 'Her relation to the plants and shrubs was personal and individual, and they responded well to her affection.'

'In gardening she showed the aesthetic sense—surprising to those who knew her as a thick-skinned campaigner—of a woman who spent holidays in Italy and filled her house with beautiful objects.'16

St. Hugh's College student Eileen Mackinlay recalled:

"Variously described as "mysterious" and "witchlike" or as suddenly erupting "from behind a bush to chase us away on our bicycles", she was as much a part of the garden as the Wistaria (sic) or the terrace and to those who came near enough she was found to provide "entertaining and instructive diversions, pausing on her walks to chat or show me some new plant she had acquired". ¹⁷⁷

In 1936 Annie was made an Honorary Fellow of St. Hugh's.

Annie around Oxford

Having lived in Oxford all her life, Annie became a regular character known for her distinctive dress and bicycling:

'Usually clad in a long dusty black coat, she walked or bicycled the city streets wearing the stout, low-heeled square toed shoes once characteristic of women dons....'18

'Miss Rogers on a blustery autumn day, wearing four coats each shorter than the one beneath it, and a man's trilby hat.....'19

Annie 'became a familiar Oxford character, riding a bicycle well into her seventies. A sturdy, vigorous figure with opaque brown eyes, strong features, and fine bones, she was not indifferent to fashion in her youth but latterly dressed always in a long skirt, stiff shirt, heavy woollen stockings, boots, and a variety of old-fashioned hats.'²⁰

- '.....watching Miss Rogers in antiquated hat and long garments, trying to mount her bicycle usually about 10 times (in Banbury Road) each time looking round at the traffic before trying again.'21 (Barbara Reeves student)
- '....she rode with complete disregard for any rule of the road.'22 (Kathleen Hobbs student)

The accident

One wet and windy night in St. Giles, 28th October 1937, whilst riding her bicycle to a meeting of the Archaelogical Society, a lorry knocked her down. She was taken to the Radcliffe Infirmary but died the next day, never recovering consciousness. Her simple grave is at Wolvercote Cemetery in Oxford where she joined her brother Leonard who died in 1933.



Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford where Annie died following an accident in 1937. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2016



Annie and her brother Leonard's simple and neglected grave at Wolvercote Cemetery, Oxford. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2016

The year after her death, Annie's brother Clement Rogers gathered together her memoires, publishing them under the title of *Degrees by Degrees*. An apt title, symbolising Annie's steady patience and persistence, in revolutionising Oxford University, and keeping a focus on the end goal.

Memorials

In 1939, a garden commemorating Annie, designed by Arts and Crafts architect, Herbert Buckland (the architect of St Hugh's College), was laid out at Annie's church, the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin. Today you can find students and visitors relaxing on its lawn and the memorial garden seat.



Annie Rogers' memorial seat at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin Oxford. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2016

The seat is inscribed:

'VT FLOREAT MEMORIA ANNIE MARIAE ANNAE HENLEY ROGERS A M LITTERARVM ANTIQVARVM PRAECEPTRICIS MVLIERVM IVRIS IN VNIVERSITATE VINDICIS FLORVM HORTORVMQVE CVLTRICIS QVAE IN HAC AEDE DEVM FREQVENTER ADORABAT HOC SEDILE EXSTRVXERVNT HORTVLOS CIRCVM FLORIBVS REPLEVERVNT COLENDOS IN FVTVRVM CVRAVERVNT COLLEGAE ALVMNAE AMICI MCMXXXVIII'

'In order that the memory of Annie Mary Anne Henley Rogers A M [Master of Arts] teacher of classical literature, claimant of women's rights in the university, cultivator of flowers and gardens, who in this temple frequently worshipped, may flourish, her colleagues, students and friends, built - along with this seat - gardens around, filled with flowers that should be cared for into the future. 1938' (translation by Harold Wood)

Also, in 1939, at St Hugh's College, a sundial was installed on the terrace upon a pedestal dedicated to Annie. St. Hugh's college councillor Professor Myres, wrote an inscription:

'Floribus, Anna, tuis faveat sol luce perenni.' ('Anna, may the sun favour thy flowers with perpetual light')



Above: Looking towards the terrace garden at St Hugh's College, Oxford - the memorial sundial can be seen in front of the door. Below: The reverse side of the pedestal. Photos: Euan McGillivray 2018



A final quote

'If the women of Oxford could be said to owe their triumph to any one individual, the credit is hers. She was their forerunner, their expert, their champion, and the symbol of their struggle.'23

Acknowledgement at last!

On January 14th 2020 St Anne's College, Oxford University announced the establishment of the Annie Rogers Junior Research Fellowship, to celebrate 100 years since women were formally admitted to the University of Oxford and first awarded Oxford degrees...excellent!

And, as of September 23rd 2020 an Oxford Blue Plaque²⁴ has been erected at 35 St Giles, where Annie and her mother lived from 1891 to 1899.

Ann Hurley

2020

hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au

Notes:

¹ Hamilton Reading Project (2003) Letter from Charles Dodgson to Annie Rogers written c1867.

² Brittain, Vera - *The Women at Oxford, A Fragment of History* (1960)

³ Howarth, Jane - Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004)

⁴ Women in Higher Education, 1850-1970: International Perspectives - E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz - Eds. (2016)

⁵ Howarth, Jane - Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004)

⁶ Howarth, Jane - Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004)

⁷ Brittain, Vera - *The Women at Oxford, A Fragment of History* (1960)

⁸ Howarth, Jane - Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004)

⁹ O'Grady, Jean - Margaret Addison: A Biography (2001)

¹⁰ Brittain, Vera - The Women at Oxford, A Fragment of History (1960)

¹¹ Oxford Chronicle January 17th 1913 from Howarth, Jane - Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004)

¹² Brittain, Vera - *The Women at Oxford, A Fragment of History* (1960)

¹³ Brittain, Vera - The Women at Oxford, A Fragment of History (1960)

- ²⁰ Howarth, Jane Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004)
- ²¹ St Hugh's: One Hundred Years of Women's Education in Oxford Griffin, Penny Ed. (1986)
- ²² St Hugh's: One Hundred Years of Women's Education in Oxford Griffin, Penny Ed. (1986)
- ²³ Brittain, Vera The Women at Oxford, A Fragment of History (1960)
- ²⁴ Oxford Blue Plaques Annie Rogers http://www.oxonblueplaques.org.uk/plaques/rogers.html

Other resources:

British Newspaper Archive (British Library)

England & Wales National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) 1858-1995 (Ancestry.com)

England and Wales Census Records (Ancestry.com)

England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975 (Ancestry.com)

Hodges, David - St Hugh's College, Oxford.

Oxford High School Girls - Public Day School Trust 1875-1960 - Stack, V E - Ed. (1963)

St. Anne's College, Oxford, Annie Rogers https://www.st-annes.ox.ac.uk/this-is-st-annes/history/founding-fellows/annie-rogers/

The Family Papers of J. E. T. Rogers - The Bodleian Library, Oxford

¹⁴ The Register-Guard, Home and Garden, March 10th 1994

¹⁵ Brittain, Vera - The Women at Oxford, A Fragment of History (1960)

¹⁶ Howarth, Jane - Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004)

¹⁷ St Hugh's: One Hundred Years of Women's Education in Oxford - Griffin, Penny Ed. (1986)

¹⁸ Brittain, Vera - The Women at Oxford, A Fragment of History (1960)

¹⁹ St Hugh's: One Hundred Years of Women's Education in Oxford - Griffin, Penny Ed. (1986)