



Jane Annie Roadknight nee Powell 1852/3-1929

Teacher, Schools Inspector

Jane was born in Leeds in 1852 or 53 – no record has been found. Her parents were George and Eliza Powell, she attended St Mary's National school in Quarry Hill and was a pupil teacher in 1865. In 1872 she was awarded a first-class Queen's scholarship and by 1873 had a kindergarten certificate. She went on to attend the Home and Colonial College in London where she learned new ideas in education created by Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852). In 1883 Jane married Tom Roadknight in Kings Norton who was a maltster and went on in 1885 to become a Kindergarten teacher at the Blue Bell Hill Board schools in Nottingham, where she transformed elementary education establishing a model kindergarten heavily influenced by continental trends of innovative pedagogy led by Pestalozzi and Froebel. It incorporated a holistic approach and involved play, music and movement. Her methods were passed on to trainee teachers via the Kindergarten Examination for Head and Assistant Mistresses for both board and voluntary schools. In 1886 the School Board and the University College joined up to set up a training school for elementary school Kindergarten teachers which took on 70 teachers in the first year.

Jane was only 32 and worked with the Nottingham School Board and then with the City's new Education Authority until her retirement in 1919. Her new teaching methods were clearly effective and a report covering 1886 to 1889 recorded the Board's 'phenomenal success' using directed play incorporating music, games, toys and storytelling. Blue Bell Hill Infant School achieved national recognition and in 1892 a Government report acknowledged it as "a model of what an infants' school of the present day should be".

Her adoption and promotion of learning through discovery foreshadowed much of today's education – methods even in HE today – problem-based learning. She was "an educational luminary" but sadly is largely forgotten today.

In 1893 she was appointed Instructress of Kindergarten and Needlework for the School Board and later promoted to an Inspector for the School Board. She initiated the Children's Guild of Play -Happy Evenings- the initiative was hugely popular and attracted an average of 300 children per session for the songs, games and fairy tales. She enlisted 12 volunteer workers to work with her and one Christmas, 500 children enjoyed tea and circus entertainment.

Jane was the **first** and only female inspector of 3 appointed to implement the powers and duties of the City's Education Committee, appointed under the Balfour Education Act of 1902. The 1904 Elementary Code allowed her visionary liberal approach to be disseminated further. Observation, reasoning, self-expression as well as kinaesthetic and physical learning super-ceded the boredom of rote learning – in short, a child centred approach.

In 1905 she established a Nottingham Branch of the Froebel Society with Lady Belper as President and Jane as Chair and was its representative on the Central London Council. There were 250 members at the first meeting on 24 January 1906, and within 3 years there were 500+. It helped to disseminate the application of Froebel's principles further. She recognised the need for constant improvement and established classes for children with special needs and lessons in personal hygiene. For staff, she advocated peer observation and experiments in teaching methods.

In 1891 she was living at 58 Wells Road with her husband and widowed mother. Towards the end of the century they moved to 4 Station Villas in Beeston where they are still living at the 1911 census – though some of the details she gives on that census are clearly wrong!

In 1919, ill health forced her to work part-time as Consulting Organiser of Infant Schools, and she retired fully later the same year. She died in 1929 at Winhill outside Burton on Trent.

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography has an article on her by Anne Bloomfield published in 2004