



Morrison: a proud part in the growth of women's education

Christine Morrison, former Fellow and Tutor in English at St Anne's College, Oxford died on August 4 aged 95. She was born in India on July 12, 1903.

CHRISTINE MORRISON was one of that early generation of women dons who gave their whole energies to their students. A woman of warmth and humanity, she presided over an era at St Anne's College that produced many distinguished women writers and journalists. Christine, always known as Kirstie (the Scottish form of her name), was ahead of her time in her sympathy with the aspirations of those from modest backgrounds who wished to come to Ox-

ford, and in her work to open the doors of the university to more women and to poorer students. She was very well aware of the inequality and privilege encountered in the early history of the establishment of women's colleges at Oxford and — and, indeed, in more recent years.

Born in Ootachamund, the hill station for Madras, Christine Latto Morrison was one of three daughters of an academic family. Her grandfather was Professor of Education at St Andrews University and her father was a headmaster, who ensured that his daughters received a thorough classical education. After the family's return to Scotland in 1906, Kirstie Morrison attended St

Leonard's School, St Andrews, where she was head girl in 1921.

Although initially disappointed in her efforts to obtain admission to Oxford, she was awarded a scholarship by the Society of Oxford Home Students (later St Anne's College) in 1923, and was placed in the first class in the Final Honour School of English in 1927. She taught at Bradford Grammar School for Girls for two years and then returned to the Home Students in 1930. At first she was an assistant tutor, but very soon became Fellow and Tutor in English and remained there until her retirement in 1970.

Her exceptional abilities and powers of leadership were

noted at an early stage and she was always regarded as a natural university teacher. Teaching was, indeed, her forte and by dint of devoting herself to it she came to preside over a generation of outstanding English scholars, believing that it was more important to develop their talents than to do her own research, although she did write some poetry. Her pupils included the poet Elizabeth Jennings, Professor Dame Gillian Beer and Professor Jillian Mann of Cambridge; and the quality of those who read English under her care was nationally recognised.

There was always a welcome at Norham Road for more than sixty years: a typical North Oxford Victorian house, but with typical acceptance of new ideas — hers was the first in the district to have solar panels. She will be remembered as much for her personal qualities as her academic ones; greatly interested in individuals and with the gift of imaginative sympathy combined with soundness of judgment which ensured success as a teacher.

Kirstie Morrison played a full part in the administrative and development life of the college, holding at one time or another almost every college office from Vice-Principal to Dean of Degrees. She did a great deal of work for graduate welfare, and she also — perhaps more surprisingly — supported Frank Buchman's Moral Re-armament. She had a lifelong hatred of oppression in any form, especially in the shape of racial inequality, and also did all in her power to counteract the inferior status accorded to women in some parts of the world.

She supported every move of the Home Students towards full collegiate status, and after her retirement supported later developments such as co-education. Her joy in the efforts rewarded and difficulties overcome was reflected in gratitude for the generosity of richer colleges to the poorer — especially St John's College, which originally owned so much of the land and property of St Anne's. On her 90th birthday she assembled her memoirs, and commented that in the early days of St Anne's, everything was done on a shoestring: "We were a rather amateurish body and most of the tutors were daughters of academics, having to clear the breakfast or delay the lunch in order to teach in the dining room of their family homes. What a wonderful moment when each tutor had a teaching room for herself!"

Her contemporaries at Oxford included Emyln Williams, Evelyn Waugh and Gerald Gardiner (a pillar of OUDS and the future Labour Lord Chancellor). She was always acutely aware of the difficulties women experienced in participating in the dramatic and cultural life of the university in the 1920s. Her own career paralleled the growth of women's education, in which she had played so full a part.

She continued to visit the college until the final year of her life. She will be remembered by generations of undergraduates who read English, through whose subsequent efforts she consolidated the local and national standing of women scholars. Although she never married, the vast number of her friends and former pupils around the world are her true heirs.