

LADY ALLEN OF HURTWOOD

Work for Children

The Times, 13th April 1976

Lady Allen of Hurtwood, has died at the age of 78, after a serious illness borne of characteristic courage.

Marjory Gill was brought up in the Kentish suburb of Keston in a nonconformist home with a number of brothers, including Colin Gill, the artist. This early life has been lovingly described in her recent autobiography *Memoirs of an Uneducated Lady*, a book which received far too little attention. Educated at Bedales and later at Reading University, Marjory Gill was never a good examinee ; she was always the practical one, the organizer, the gardener, the country woman. Bedales was just right and allowed her to develop and finally enrol as a student in the horticultural diploma course at Reading. Gardening became one of her passions in life, and she was most proud at a later date (1930) to be a fellow of the Institute of Landscape Architects.

In 1921 she visited her artist brother at the Bristol School in Rome and met several of his friends, including Clifford Allen (or C. A. as he was always called), then sharing a flat in Battersea with Bertrand Russell. Thus started a most happy marriage between the rebel, practical gardener and the ex-Cambridge Fabian and pacifist, a marriage which brought a daughter and great joy to them and to hundreds of friends who visited Hurtwood, including Herbert Morison and their beloved neighbour, Bob Trevelyan. The story of his Peerage given to him by Ramsay Macdonald in 1931 is written elsewhere. Suffice it to say that Clifford Allen never really recovered from his tuberculosis contracted in prison for his pacifist views and that Marjory kept him alive in more ways than one. For example, she wrote the Country Diary in the *Manchester Guardian* for many years, to help with finances. He died at a sanatorium in Switzerland in 1939.

At the age of 42 Marjory Allen started a new life, first at Hurtwood, then at Ewhurst, and finally in London. The Nursery School Association, Homeless Children, the Curtis Report, Unicef, OMEP (Organization Mondiale pour l'Education Prescolaire), Children's Cinema Clubs, Adventure Playgrounds for Handicapped Children – all these accomplishments are documented, not only in her autobiography but in dozens of pamphlets, articles, speeches and letters to the press, especially on homeless children.

It is fitting, therefore, to quote from Sir William Haley's Haldane Memorial Lecture in 1958, when Editor of *The Times*: "In March 1944 Lady Allen of Hurtwood, then chairman of the Nursery School Association, had circulated a memorandum on the need for an official inquiry. Getting no response from the Government, she wrote a letter to *The Times*. After investigation of its own, *The Times* printed the letter on July 15 1944. The response was staggering. Day after day and week after week the letter poured in. Many came from leaders in social work and others who had first-hand experience. Even after the normal correspondence had been closed, *the Times* had to publish no fewer than six round-ups of further letters."

Here was a classic case of how person can influence opinion, stir a government into action by setting up a committee of inquiry (Curtis Report), and pass a bill, *The Children Act 1948*. "When a silence falls on such a voice", wrote the Hammonds of Lord Shaftesbury, "Some everlasting echo still haunts the world, to break its sleep of habit or despair."