

Researching Grace Eyre Woodhead by Nathaniel Lawford

It has been a great privilege learning of the history of Grace Eyre's life and her close family. I felt this journey of discovery to be especially impactful as only six months ago I did not know even of the name of Grace Eyre - either the organisation's remarkable founder or of the organisation itself. So to be able to learn of a work and a person that had been there but that I only now was starting to learn about and from - truly a remarkable experience.

I also found my bias challenges during the research, for example Grace Eyre and her sister Hilda attended university, this in combination with other factors such as their rather affluent family background meant I had some preconceptions on the things Grace Eyre would and would not do.

So it was with the greatest surprise that I found out Grace Eyre and her sisters seemed to share an interest in sport and had competed for various towns and counties throughout her life. Whereas previously I had presumed her to be an academic and organizer with precious little experience or likely interest, in the more physical experiences such as sport.

Thus in addition to learning of Grace Eyre and her family's life, I found myself also relearning the lesson of being aware of our bias and ensuring that we challenge those bias, for we are all made of innumerable elements and it is important to remain open to and value all those elements, no matter whether they fit a certain category or not.

Also I was deeply moved by looking at all the work that the guardianship (as it was known then) did for the support of those experiencing learning disabilities. For example when in September 1919 Grace Eyre assisted through the offering of a reward, to help find and thus ensure the safety of a missing resident of one of the many farms the guardianship ran. This really showed I believe a deep sense of real responsibility and concern on the part of both Grace Eyre and the Guardianship, and such concern was present also in innumerable cases where the Guardianship had to stand up against local government in order to continue the good work despite being in a society which had at the time a great deal of negativity associated with those struggling with learning difficulties.

Thus through my research I have been able to see, piece by piece, a journey of victories and hardship, but above all the importance and determination which Grace Eyre demonstrated of fighting for and embracing all our aspects both as a society and individuals.

So it is our diversity external and internal that give us strength and thus must be valued.