

Eglantyne Jebb

Eglantyne Jebb was an educator and economist, a philanthropist and social activist, a political campaigner for women's rights and children's rights and refugees' rights in the era of Queen Victoria. Her story can be pinned to her family home which still exists called "Springfield" on the corner of Sidgewick Street and Queens Road overlooking the backs at Queens Green. And although Queens Green and Road were named such to mark the visit of Queen Victoria to Cambridge in 1842 and 1847, Eglantyne was not herself born until 1876 in Shropshire but frequently came to stay in Cambridge because she came from a powerful intellectual family, her Uncle being the Professor of Classics who socialized with the Darwin family and the founders of Newnham College, filled with feisty educated women with progressive ideas and activist attitudes.

It is no surprise that Eglantyne went to College too, first to Oxford and then to teacher training college, showing a quirky streak by chucking out most of the furniture so she could study in a room with no distracting objects. Importantly for Cambridge, she returned to live there in 1900 and was put to work by the infamous social reformer and economist Florence Keynes, to research the poverty and inequality between town and gown that most in the University overlooked.

In 1906 Eglantyne published this survey of economic inequalities and the social consequences of poverty, which was called "Cambridge: a Social Study" highlighting the poor working and living conditions, especially the diseases and deaths arising from bad sanitation. Her activism made a difference to Cambridge and then to the UK, because Eglantyne joined the marches and processions of the suffragettes to campaign for the vote for women.

And after that, her work made a difference internationally when she campaigned as a refugee organizer in the Balkans during the First World War, fundraising for the relief of famines and food distribution to refugees, becoming a particular expert about the plight of displaced children in war, going on to co-found the Save the Children Fund on 6th January 1920, a charity that works in war torn situations to this day. Her determination to change the world for the better did not stop there, and her most important achievement in terms of safeguarding child protection which still has resonance today, was that in 1924 the League of Nations endorsed her Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

