

OBITUARY

Dr Joyce Neill

Joyce Gibbon Davies was born on 19 November 1915 in London, and was educated at the North London Collegiate School. She won a scholarship to Newnham College, Cambridge and went on to the Royal Free Hospital in London from which she graduated MB BChir in 1940. After various house jobs she obtained her D(Obst) RCOG while at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford. In 1941 she married Desmond Neill with whom she had four children, three girls and a boy, and moved to Belfast in 1946 when Desmond was appointed Head of the new Department of Social Studies at Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

After various part-time locums while the children were young, she was instrumental in setting up the Northern Ireland Family Planning Association in 1965, opening clinics throughout the Province, training doctors and nurses, and finally seeing Family Planning safely into the National Health Service. She practised at the Royal Maternity Hospital and in the Community Medical Service and led seminars on psychosexual problems.

In pressing for a good family planning service to be available to the people of Northern Ireland she strove to give as little offence as possible to those with differing views and to make sure all methods were on offer.

She served on the Council of the National Association of Family Planning Doctors (NAFPD), on the BBC (Northern Ireland) Advisory Committee and chaired the local Appeals Committee. She also served, as Northern Ireland representative, on the Committee on the future of Voluntary Organisations, chaired by Lord Wolfenden.

In 1998 she was proud to be awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Faculty of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. In the same year she was finally awarded her degree from Cambridge University at a special ceremony for those who completed their degrees before 1948.



Informing all her work and life was her membership of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). She was a member of South Belfast Meeting and was an original member of the Ulster Quaker Service Committee, which helped people on both sides of the religious divide to cope with the difficulties of life during 'the Troubles'.

Poetry was a lifelong love, and it pleased her that her own poems, almost all written late in life, were published as the *Collected Poems of Joyce Neill* in 2007.

She died peacefully on 4 April 2011. At her Memorial Meeting on 18 April 2011, Quakers, friends and family gathered to remember her long life of service and friendship.

Submitted by

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I first met Joyce in 1970 when the Family Planning Association sent me as an inspecting doctor to assess the standards of training clinics in Northern Ireland so that there could be parity of esteem between the clinics in the Province and the rest of the UK. I arrived at the beginning of the week in which the Protestants went on strike and 'the Troubles' really exploded. I inspected about half a dozen clinics in and around

Belfast, most of which had very few patients as public transport stopped, the electricity supply was irregular and petrol unobtainable. At one, a nurse apologised for being late. A bomb had gone off in the car park where she was shopping on her way to work. Joyce and I had a slightly hairy drive to Portadown where there had been an incident on the bridge the night before. The clinic was on the far side of the river and we had to cross it some miles beyond the town to avoid the possible trouble spot. It was a dark, wet night and Joyce was driving her husband's Citroen, which she had only driven twice before; when we had stopped at her regular garage for petrol, the manager said it might cost him his life if he filled up her car. "You watch for road blocks and I'll drive", she said to me.

Needless to say, the standards in all the clinics were excellent as judged by clinical records and the knowledge and attitudes of the staff. The facilities varied but were on a par with those in the rest of the UK at the time.

I stayed with Joyce many times subsequently, until on one occasion after she had retired I had to sleep elsewhere as she and Desmond were living in a minute postgraduate flatlet after a car bomb had exploded outside their house. They were dispossessed for 5 months while it was put to rights. Their only complaint was that they could not access their books, which had had to be stored in the basement while the repairs were carried out.

It was a privilege to be her friend; Joyce herself had no pretensions; made no claims to greatness but changed the lives of thousands of her fellow women in Northern Ireland with the minimum of fuss, quietly and practically introducing family planning to a country that desperately needed it. It was all a long time ago but today's practitioners need to know by whom and how the foundations of the present services were laid.

Submitted by

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