

DORSET HOUSE SCHOOL OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Elizabeth Casson Memorial Fund

To commemorate and complete the life-work of Dr. Casson, a fund is being opened. We, the Governors and Principal of the Dorset House School, hope to have the co-operation of students and friends.

It was a matter of regret to Dr. Casson that one section of her work remained incomplete, the establishment of a successor to the Allendale Curative Workshop, which she started in Bristol in 1939, and which was closed owing to war conditions.

The opportunity may shortly arise to have such a Curative Workshop in Oxford as part of a Sheltered Workshops Scheme sponsored by the Health Committee of the City Council. The Curative Workshop within this scheme would bear the name of Dr. Casson and it is proposed to raise funds to provide the initial equipment for this. A succession of students of the Dorset House School would train and serve there, thus rendering it a continuing and living memorial to our Founder.

The Trustees of the Casson Trust have agreed to handle the Fund. Subscriptions may be sent to:—

THE ELIZABETH CASSON MEMORIAL FUND,
c/o The Secretary,
The Casson Trust,
Harberton House,
Headington,
Oxford.

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Copies of Mrs. Irving's
Clifton Hill House
Memorial Appeal.

Elizabeth Casson, M.D., D.P.M., O.B.E.1880 - 1954

The University of Bristol has lost, in Elizabeth Casson, one of its most distinguished and devoted members. Before becoming an undergraduate she had worked for some years at estate management in Southwark under the famous social worker Miss Octavia Hill. Whilst there she decided that she could do better work if she became a doctor, and, after matriculating, became enrolled as an undergraduate of Bristol University, where her Uncle was the Vice Chancellor. She studied as a medical student from 1913 until qualifying as a practitioner in 1918. She lived at Clifton Hill House, and was always highly appreciative of the sympathetic atmosphere created there by Miss Stavely and Miss Barry, for whom she felt sincere admiration and affection: and she constantly expressed gratitude towards the University and the Hall of Residence for what she had gained from her life in Bristol.

In her first posts she had the opportunity of making a special study of nervous disorders, in which she was taking a growing interest. Consequently she welcomed the opportunity to join the staff of the Royal Holloway Sanatorium. It was there that she achieved the distinction of becoming the first woman to gain the degree of Doctor of Medicine at Bristol University, and, in addition, she was awarded the much coveted Gaskell Prize. While working in the Home Counties, she was one of the moving spirits in starting the London branch of the Association of Alumni.

Following a decision to establish a nursing home of her own, Dr. Casson travelled widely in the United States and in Great Britain, to learn all she could about new methods of treating psychotic and neurotic diseases; and in 1929 Dorset House on Clifton Downs was opened. The following year she incorporated in the nursing home a school for occupational therapists, for she had become a firm believer in the value of craft work and active recreation for her patients. About this time Dr. Casson started her long tenure of office of Honorary Consultant to the Bristol General Hospital, with its small new Occupational Therapy department. As years went by the Dorset House School expanded, and Dr. Casson was always seeking new ways to help sufferers from both mental and physical disabilities. Her selfless devotion and enthusiasm were an inspiration to her staff, and innumerable letters from patients have shown their gratitude and affection.

Then came the war, and Dorset House had to be evacuated. Dr. Casson took some of her patients to a new nursing home, St. Margaret's in Clevedon, and the Occupational Therapy School, now taken over by the Ministry of Health, was moved to Bromsgrove, and later to Oxford, the Principal being Miss Macdonald. This was a sad separation, but Dr. Casson still supervised the School and visited it frequently, even after the war, no return to Bristol was possible, for the old quarters were by then far too small. So in 1948, in order to give the School a permanent identity, a limited non-profit-making company was formed, with Dr. Casson as Medical Director and Vice-Chairman, and Sir Geoffrey Peto as Chairman of the Governors. This trust was so formed as to be open to receive contributions and legacies. In 1951 Dr. Casson was awarded the O.B.E., a fit tribute to her generosity and selfless work as founder of the School and Casson Trust.

No one familiar with the life in one of her nursing homes, or in the School, can doubt the value of the work she carried out with such unflagging courage and devotion in spite of illness and failing health. Her enthusiasm and vivid imagination were combined with a sound business knowledge, which enabled her to turn her ideals into highly successful enterprises. She never lost her affection for the University and Clifton Hill House, proudly taking

- 2 -

part in the formal functions of the one, and frequently visiting the other. She was a member of the Court of the University and of the Joint Executive Committee of the Convocation and Alumni for many years.

Hers was a unique, and a very human, personality, and her interests were wide. She was a lover of beauty in all forms, an amateur performer in many of the arts.

It is known that numerous old friends and admirers wish to contribute to a memorial to Dr. Casson, and many of them will think it fitting that a small gift purchased for Clifton Hill House. In addition, it has been proposed that there might be a grant to a student of the School of Occupational Therapy for further study or travel, or assistance for a member of the University who may be in need of treatment for nervous trouble, or for one of the present patients in the nursing homes at Clevedon. A curative workshop to be attached to the School of Occupational Therapy.

A small committee will decide what form the memorial shall take. It would be helpful if those subscribing would express any special wishes which they would like to have considered.

Please send your contributions to:-

Mrs. N. S. Irving, M.Sc. (Bristol)
Winscombe,
Leigh Hill Road,
Cobham,
Surrey.