

Ada Ellen Bayly A.K.A Edna Lyall (25.3.1857- 8.2.1903)

## Biography

She was born in Brighton at No. 5 Montpelier Villas on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1857, she was the youngest of 4 children of a barrister of the Inner Temple. Affectionately called Ellie, she had a happy childhood with her brother and sisters, holidaying in a little village near Brighton and Farnham. Her school days were of a mixed experience, she described herself as not very good at arithmetic and hating grammar but often got lost in her own daydreams which she wrote down as she always had a love for stories, she always dreamt of writing books and kept a notebook with her to jot down any anecdotes that happened throughout her day- some of these anecdotes would later feature in her novels, she also had a great love of music and was deeply religious. Aged 10 she contracted and survived measles but the disease caused trouble with her eyes and left her in a 'delicate nature', so she was sent to live in the country for about 2 years with her Aunt and Uncle in Caterham. She lost her father just after she had moved to live with her aunt and uncle and returned home to Brighton as her mother had become quite ill, the family had now moved to Denmark Terrace after outgrowing Montpelier Villas. Her mother died when she was 14 and, in 1887 on hearing one of her sisters was to be married, the family home in Denmark Terrace had to be given up, the younger siblings were allowed for a year to live under the chaperonage of a lady in the family home, but Ellie requested to move to a boarding school in Sussex Square, she spent 2 years there before moving to Miss Chapman's school in Dyke Road. When Ada was 17 the second eldest of the sisters were married and it was arranged that the 2 youngest should make their home with the eldest sister at Lincoln.

Although Lincoln was her home, she was constantly travelling, paying visits to her many friends and relations. She often stayed with her sister at Beccles, or with her cousins in Farnham and visited her uncle and aunt at Caterham. In 1876 she went to Wales with them for which she kept a journal.

In some of her letters she describes the parish work she took up in the poorest part of Lincoln.

In 1880 Edna left Lincoln and moved to live with her sister Mrs Jameson, this was for a time in London, she also visited Italy with her friends and again in 1881 spending Easter there.

The family came to Eastbourne in 1884 when Hampden Gurney Jameson, her sister's husband, became a curate at St Saviour's Church; he was later to become the first vicar of St Peter's, Edna lived in the family house in College Road until her death in 1903.

She befriended Charles Bradlaugh MP and his daughter Hypatia Bonner and helped pay his electoral expenses. After his death, she founded a memorial fund in his honour. The hero of her 3<sup>rd</sup> novel 'We Two' was based on him.

IN 1887 she gave St. Saviours a peal of 3 bells which she named from 3 main characters from her novels (Donnovan, Erica and Hugo).

She was a member of the congregation of St. Peters where she presented new seating.

Ada was a suffragist and served as honorary secretary of her local branch of the Woman's Liberal Association

Bayly never married

She died on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1903 aged 45

## Career

She wrote under the 'pen name' Edna Lyall (formed using letters from her 3 names) which was unusual at the time- female novelists normally wrote under a male pseudonym, this could have been a sign of her burgeoning feminist attitude. Part of her success was due to her practice of using characters from one novel in a different capacity for her next. Many of her novels offered interesting explorations of the writer's creative process.

She was forced to reveal her true identity in 1886 when an imposter in Ceylon claimed to be Edna Lyall and to quash a rumour that she was incarcerated in a lunatic asylum.

1879, *Won by waiting*

A story for girls and begun soon after she finished school

1882, *Donovan*

The book was published in 3 volumes and received mixed reviews of both good and scathing. She sent a copy to the prime minister of the time William Gladstone

1884, *We two*, sequel of the former

This book was her first success, it was based on the life of Charles Bradlaugh, who was a social reformer and advocate of free thought.

1885, *in the golden days*

First novel to be written in Eastbourne. Most successful of her novels

1887, *autobiography of a slander*

Written on the back of claims that she was incarcerated in a lunatic asylum which was translated into several languages.

1890, *Derrick Vaughan: novelist*

Semi autobiographical

1894, *to right the wrong*, 3 vols

1894, *Doreen: the story of a singer*

Based on the Irish troubles and dedicated to W.E Gladstone

1896, *the autobiography of a truth*

Dealt with the Armenian cause and the royalties went to the Armenian Relief Fund.

1898, *hope the hermit*

A bestseller in the Lake District, and the later inspiration for Hugh Walpole's *Rogue Herries*. Last book read to John Ruskin on his death bed

1902, *the Burges letters*

Autobiography

1902, The Hinderers

Dealt with the second South African War

Researcher's view

Ada is an inspiration in the sense that she followed her dream of becoming a writer no matter what obstacles were in her way, whether it being losing both her parents at a young age, facing health challenges or criticism for her works she carried on none the less. She seized all opportunities presented to her and had the support of her family (sisters, aunts etc.) which I can relate to. Despite being semi disabled most of her life she managed to write her novels and commit charitable, religious and political work. She seemed very down to earth and had a good sense of humour.