

Sarah Hannah Milner (1864-1934)

Sarah Hannah Milner was born in Sheffield on 26th November 1864¹, to Isaac and Sarah Milner. Her father was a merchant and partner in Hargreaves, Smith & Company. He became head of the company in 1874 and chairman of Sheffield Savings Bank in 1910, before his death in 1926.² Milner had several brothers, one of whom was a doctor. Her family were Quakers and charitable people. Educated at Sidcot, a private Quaker school in Somerset, Milner was an intelligent and keen writer who loved bright colours and dressing up.³ She had a shy temperament and was fragile in health. In 1899, she was admitted to The Retreat. After her recovery, Milner made The Retreat her home, staying on as a volunteer to help the other patients, often by reading to them. She ran The Retreat's library and was partial to reading the novels of Sir Walter Scott, including *The Talisman* (1825) and *The Antiquary* (1816).⁴ She also became editor of The Retreat's magazine, *Harbour Lights*. Milner was a spiritual woman, offering vocal prayers at the Women's School on Sundays.⁵ Learning never ended for her: a long-term member of the York Adult School Union, she became President of the school's Women's Committee and James Street School for several years, and even President of the Yorkshire Adult Schools' Women's Committee for an annual tenure.⁶ She died in 1934.

Milner as a Patient at The Retreat

In August 1899, Milner first began to receive care as a voluntary boarder at The Retreat, where she continued to stay for much of her life.⁷ From her case notes, it is clear that she was quiet but cheerful and kind to others.⁸ Even in the later years of her life, aged 67 and severely ill, she is described as doing 'a great deal to help other patients.'⁹ Throughout Milner's stay at The Retreat she loved the outdoors, spending much of her time gardening, cycling, or walking the grounds. Indoors, one of her tasks was watering and caring for the plants kept in the main house.¹⁰ She also occupied her time with reading, needlework, writing many letters to friends

¹ Wellcome Collection, *The Retreat Archive: Sarah Hannah Milner*, (RET/6/19/1/114), 2. Accessed November 15, 2023. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ta7368v5/items>.

² Hawley Collection, "Hargreaves, Smith & Company", Hawley Sheffield Knives. Kelham Island Museum, 2024, accessed January 20, 2024, <https://hawleysheffieldknives.com/n-fulldetails.php?val=hargreaves&kel=>, p.932.

³ Wellcome Collection, *The Retreat Archive* (RET/6/20/1/13/47), "Milner, Sarah Hannah", 3, first accessed January 19, 2024, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/kvrgjn7f/items?canvas=>, p. 35.

⁴ Wellcome Collection, "Milner, Sarah Hannah", p. 3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Wellcome Collection, *The Retreat Archive: Casebook of Voluntary Boarders, 1895-1906*, (RET/6/5/2/1), 44. Accessed November 20, 2023. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/q6dggp2b/items?canvas=>, p. 44.

⁸ Wellcome Collection, *Casebook of Voluntary Boarders, 1895-1906*, p. 44.

⁹ Wellcome Collection, *The Retreat Archive: Casebook of Voluntary Boarders, c.1907-c.1935*, (RET/6/5/2/2), 876. Accessed November 20, 2023. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/m2p9nb6m/items?canvas=>, p. 876.

¹⁰ Wellcome Collection, *Casebook of Voluntary Boarders, 1895-1906*, p. 45.

and relatives, and playing cards in the evening with others.¹¹ Additionally she edited the patient magazine, *Harbour Lights*.¹² Whilst Milner did suffer from ill health during her time, she was an active part of life in The Retreat, getting involved with work and activities, and befriending others. She clearly loved her home, writing that she ‘could have no other than kindly recollections of the Retreat.’¹³ From mid-1903 to late-1905, she took a series of lecture courses at the University and, in the summer of 1905, attended a summer school for Quakers known as the Friend’s Summer School.¹⁴ By 1927, Milner had attended several Yearly Meetings, important national gatherings of Quakers.¹⁵ This love of learning was present throughout her life.

The Retreat

The Retreat was founded in 1792 by William Tuke, a prominent Quaker and philanthropist who played an important role in reforming the treatment of mental illness in North Yorkshire, as well as having a profound effect on public opinion in much of the nineteenth century. The Retreat became the first institution in England to regard mental illness as something that could be recovered from.¹⁶ The staff and founders treated patients with respect and dignity, reflected most in the minimised use of restraints such as manacles and chains, and a ban on physical punishment. The centre of the organisation was founded on ideas of personalised attention, and aimed to create an environment in which patients were treated with trust and kindness. Religion was heavily incorporated into daily life, with routines of prayer and wellness focused around the Quaker belief in the “inner light of God.”¹⁷ Although originally founded primarily as a space for the treatment of Quakers specifically, it opened its doors to non-Quakers in the latter half of the nineteenth century, though they were charged a higher weekly fee for residence and care costs.¹⁸ The newly-formed ideas of care were essential to the move away from confinement and punishment, which greatly impacted public opinion and reformed the treatment of mental illness well into the twentieth century.

The Retreat Magazine
Harbour Lights was a magazine that ran from January 1923 until January 1942, with the

¹¹ Wellcome Collection, *Casebook of Voluntary Boarders, 1895-1906*, p. 106.

¹² Wellcome Collection, *Casebook of Voluntary Boarders, c.1907-c.1935*, p. 876.

¹³ Wellcome Collection, *The Retreat Archive: Sarah Hannah Milner*, (RET/6/20/1/13/47), 31. Accessed December 15, 2023. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/kvrgjn7f/items?canvas=>, p. 31.

¹⁴ Wellcome Collection, *Casebook of Voluntary Boarders, 1895-1906*, p. 114.

¹⁵ Wellcome Collection, *Casebook of Voluntary Boarders, c.1907-c.1935*, p. 869.

¹⁶ “The Retreat, York, England,” *Quakers of The World*, accessed Nov 30, 2023. <https://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/92/The-Retreat-York-England>.

¹⁷ “The Retreat, York, England.”

¹⁸ “The Retreat, York, England.”

founder and first editor being Milner, who edited it until her death in 1934.¹⁹ The magazine was aimed mostly at staff and patients, although anyone could subscribe if they wished at the cost of 3/6 annually.²⁰ Harbour Lights was typical of magazines produced by an institution, and the wide variety of topics covered echoed the writing style of many periodicals.²¹ At the beginning of each issue Milner wrote her Editor's Cargo, usually along a similar theme with a focus on congratulations for engagements, the birth of children, and gaining nursing certifications, as well as any important updates she wished to share.²² The cargo was written in a cheerful tone with religion often being mentioned. There were some more unique comments though, such as the long diatribe on the new heating installation and the grave amount of havoc it caused.²³ The rest of the magazine was made up of a range of articles covering the regular entertainment that was available to residents and staff, sports results, poetry, and stories to entertain.²⁴

The Yorkshire Adult Schools Union

Outside of The Retreat, Milner was an active member of the Adult Schools Union movement, a Quaker initiative begun in Nottingham in 1789 with the aim to promote equality and individual development through spiritual and worldly education.²⁵ It was brought to York by the Rowntree brothers in 1856.²⁶ Alongside those of her father and numerous other family members, Milner's name is recorded in the lists of members and attenders of the Yorkshire Adult Schools Union compiled for the years 1920, 1930, 1932, and 1934.²⁷ In this time, she served as president of the James Street School, as president of the local York Union's Women's Committee for several years, and also as president of the county-wide Women's Committee for one year.²⁸ The activities Milner would have been involved with as a member of the

¹⁹ Wellcome Collection, *The Retreat Archive* (RET 1/7), first accessed November 21, 2023, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/watuyyrr>.

²⁰ Retreat Magazines, RET 1/7, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/watuyyrr>.

²¹ Louise Wannell, "Writing the Asylum: Madness, Culture, and Subjectivity at the York Retreat, c.1875-c.1940," (Phd thesis, University of York, 2005), p. 182.

²² Wellcome Collection, *The Retreat Archive* (RET 1/7/1/16), first accessed November 23, 2023.

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ynvkms5m> and Harbour Lights, RET 1/7/1/3, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/kgrr7w2e>

²³ Harbour Lights, RET 1/7/1/3, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/kgrr7w2e>.

²⁴ Harbour Lights, RET 1/7/1/9, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/d7xxk5mc> and Harbour Lights, RET 1/7/1/16,

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ynvkms5m> and Harbour Lights, RET 1/7/1/36, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/x23dv4da>.

²⁵ Carlton Hill Collection, "History of the Adult School Union Movement," in Papers (general), Classmark: MS/DEP/1979/1/YOR/1/71/12, Leeds University Library Archives, Special Collections Research Centre, Brotherton Library, Leeds, accessed in person 30th November, 2023.

²⁶ Carlton Hill Collection, "History of the Adult School Union Movement."

²⁷ Carlton Hill Collection, "List of Members and Attenders of the Meetings Comprising Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1920" (Classmark: MS/DEP/1979/1/YOR/1/23); "List of Members and Attenders. Society of Friends. Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting: List of Members, 1930" (Classmark: MS/DEP/1979/1/YOR/1/24); "List of Members and Attenders. Society of Friends. Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting: List of Members, 1932 (Classmark: MS/DEP/1979/1/YOR/1/25)"; "List of Members and Attenders. Society of Friends. Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting: List of Members, 1934 (Classmark: MS/DEP/1979/1/YOR/1/26)," Leeds University Library Archives, Special Collections Research Centre, Brotherton Library, Leeds, accessed in person 30th November, 2023.

²⁸ Wellcome Collection, "Papers relating to Sarah Hannah Milner" (RET/6/19/1/114) in *The Retreat Archive*, pp. 2-3. Accessed January 3, 2024. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/q6dggp2b/items?canvas=>

Women's Committee are recorded in the Yorkshire Union's quarterly supplement: spiritual activities including Bible lessons and discussion, Sunday classes, and prayer; broader educational classes ranging from literature to handicrafts to current events; leisure activities like choir practice and dramatic groups; and charity work, providing material and spiritual comfort to Poor Law inmates, the elderly, people with disabilities, and women prisoners.²⁹ Through her work with the Adult Schools Unions, Milner actively contributed to the education of women and the assistance of the destitute and marginalised beyond the walls of The Retreat, across York and Yorkshire.

Sarah Hannah Milner's story is one of a York woman who overcame marginalisation to advance the health and education of other women; an inspirational story that deserves the attention of the public.

250 Word Journalistic Summary

Sarah Hannah Milner was born in Sheffield in 1864 to Isaac and Sarah Milner. Her father was a merchant and a banker. Milner experienced a variety of mental health conditions and received care at the Retreat over several decades. The Retreat was founded in 1792 and operated under the principles of treating patients with respect and dignity, as well as Quaker philosophy. Milner loved spending time outdoors, and dedicated her life to helping other patients. She attended University lecture courses, as well as Quaker schools and meetings. Following her time as a patient at the Retreat, she continued to live there as a volunteer until her death in 1934. She provided care to female patients, worked as the librarian, and edited *Harbour Lights*, the Retreat's magazine. She was the first editor of the magazine, writing an editor's column at the beginning of each issue and covering wide-ranging topics, including religion, sports results, and congratulations on engagements. Outside of the Retreat, she was a long-term member of the Yorkshire Adult Schools Union, serving as president of both the local and county-wide Women's Committees. The charity's work included the education of women of all ages, as

²⁹ Carlton Hill Collection, "One & All: Yorkshire Supplement, Vol. II, No. 233, March, 1927" and "One & All: Yorkshire Supplement, Vol. II, No. 221, March, 1926" in Papers (general) (Classmark: MS/DEP/1979/1/YOR/1/71/12), Leeds University Library Archives, Special Collections Research Centre, Brotherton Library, Leeds, accessed in person 30th November, 2023.

well as the provision of care to the poor and women prisoners. Sarah Hannah Milner's story is that of a York woman who overcame marginalisation to advance the health and education of other women; an inspirational story that deserves the attention of the public.

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