

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story is one of a series that relate to women and girls who were associated with The Mount School, York, as pupils, teachers, or other members of staff. This project began in June 2023, as part of the York Festival of ideas.

Jane Atkinson Aldridge: A Biography

On the 19th day of the 4th month 1868, prominent Lancaster Quakers George and Sarah Aldridge welcomed their first child. Six days later, George attended the registry office some 500 yards away from their large Georgian townhouse on Church Street, Lancaster. There he registered his daughter with the first name Jane after her maternal grandmother, and with her mother's maiden name of Atkinson as a middle name.¹ Jane was accompanied by a sister Liliias three years later,² and the girls were joined at regular intervals by five younger brothers - George, Reginald, Percival, Harold and Arnold.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

3

A few years before Jane was born, her father had been appointed headmaster of the Lancaster Friends' School, which is said to have thrived under his guidance.⁴ Jane will have had a comfortable upbringing; their home at 91 Church Street had a well-stocked library and fine oak, walnut and mahogany furniture.⁵ The family had a cook and a housemaid in 1871,**Error! Bookmark not defined.** as well as a kitchen girl, and a nurse for the growing family in 1881.**Error! Bookmark not**

defined. Their home could also accommodate up to 28 pupils from the Friends' School, and the family often had boarders aged 10-16 living with them.^{5 6}

In the 1881 census, 12-year-old Jane and her younger sister 9-year-old Liliias were entered as scholars. However, there was no Friends' School equivalent in Lancaster for girls, and there was no governess living in their home. As Quakers, it's not likely that their parents sent the girls to the National School in which their daughters would have been taught according to the Church of England. Jane and Liliias may have been privately educated at home, or attended one of the private schools for girls in the area, such as Miss Hodgson's ladies boarding and day school a few minutes' walk away.

In 1883, 15-year-old Jane and the rest of Aldridge family were embroiled in a public scandal when Jane's father could not find enough money to pay his creditors. The full extent of George's debt was uncovered at a meeting at the Law Society's Rooms in Lancaster, who totalled up the family's debts and assets. While the family's assets and belongings were worth a little over £1200, George's debts totalled over £2700.⁶ George admitted that he had never kept accounts, and that he must have been living beyond his means.⁷

For any middle-class family, this public display of bankruptcy might have been shameful enough. However, as Quakers, bankruptcy could earn the Aldridge family disownment from Quakerism.⁸ It was arranged that George would go into liquidation, and the *Lancaster Gazette* publicly listed the family's possessions which were to be sold at auction. There were no holds barred; as well as their

91, CHURCH STREET, LANCASTER.
Re GEORGE ALDRIDGE, IN LIQUIDATION.

**IMPORTANT SALE OF HIGH-CLASS
MODERN
HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE
AND EFFECTS,**

Comprising exquisitely carved Drawing-room Suite in Walnut covered in Green Rep, beautiful Walnut Cheffioner with Marble Top and Glass Back, excellent Cottage Pianoforte in Walnut Case (by Greenall) nearly new, fine Dining-room Suite in Mahogany, covered in Morocco, with Dining Table with four loose leaves and extending to 12ft. in length, handsome Mahogany Bookcase, very superior Cottage Pianoforte in Rosewood Case, Mahogany Hat and Umbrella Stand, antique Oak Hall Table, finely carved Antique Hall Chairs, elaborate Skeleton Timepiece, ditto in Black Marble, two antique Cased Clocks, numerous Birch, Mahogany, Half-tester, and other Bedsteads, with Green and Crim-son Rep and Damask Hangings, Mahogany and Birch Chests of Drawers, Wash and Dressing Tables with Glasses attached and Marble Tops and Tile Backs, 28 painted Dressing Chests, a large number of excellent Hair Mattresses, Feather Beds, Blankets, Sheets, Counterpanes, Bed, Table, and Household Linen, Carpets, Skin Rugs and Mats, a very nice assortment of Silver and Electro-plated Goods, exquisite Cut Glass, China Tea Services, Dinner Services, &c., &c.; a very Choice LIBRARY of handsomely-bound Books, a number of well-bred Canaries in handsome and convenient Cages; two well-bred Scotch Terriers and Horse Clothing, Riding Saddle, and a capital Phaeton by Gilchrist.

Mr. T. ARMITSTEAD begs to announce receipt of instructions to Sell by Auction, at the above address, on TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, and THURSDAY, November 27th, 28th, and 28th, the whole of the Elegant and Substantial

HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE and EFFECTS. In consequence of the shortness of the days and the very large number of lots, the Sale will commence each day at Eleven o'clock prompt.

For further particulars see posters.

The whole of the Goods will be on view on Monday, November 26th, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. by ticket only, to be had from the AUCTIONER, who will also be in attendance on that day, and will have pleasure in receiving Commissions from any lady or gentleman unable to be present on the days of Sale.

ORDER OF SALE:

FIRST DAY—The Contents of Kitchen, Hall, Drawing-room, and a portion of Bed-rooms.

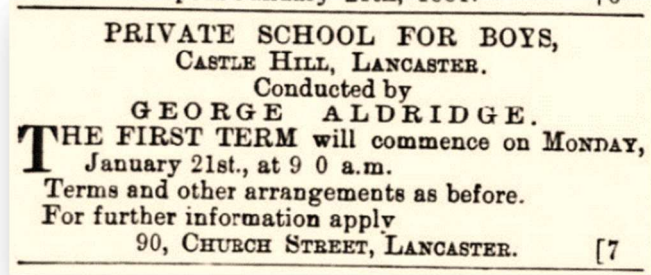
SECOND DAY—The remaining Contents of Bed-rooms, Dining-room, Silver, Electro-plate, Cutlery, Glass, China, Dinner Services, and Library of Books.

THIRD DAY—Contents of Boys' Dining room, Bird Room, Washhouse, Dogs, Dog Kennels, Hackney Saddle, Phaeton, and all other outside items too numerous to detail.

[78]

furniture and household linen, the auction included their books, carriage, canaries and two Scottish Terriers.⁶

As a result of his bankruptcy, George lost his position at the Friends School. Instead, he rapidly established his own school in a house on Castle Hill, and it was probably testament to his reputation that he managed to persuade many of his former pupils to join.⁷



As the daughter of a schoolmaster, it's entirely possible that Jane was always destined for a career in teaching. However, if she hadn't initially had plans to teach, then her father's bankruptcy probably necessitated this. A role as a governess was one of the only appropriate career options available for a girl from a middle-class family, and most were thought to have been from families who found themselves in reduced financial circumstances.

(2) *Lancaster Gazette, Saturday 12th January 1884*
Public domain.

The summer of 1887 marked the beginning of Jane's career, when, at the age of 19, she applied, and was admitted to the Mount School in York for teacher training.⁹ With modern facilities such as hot water and flushing toilets, the Mount School was considered fairly luxurious for the time, and instead of busy dormitories, girls were bedroomed in groups of just four or five.¹⁰



After two years of teacher training complete,¹¹ 22-year-old Jane was not at her family's new home at 15 West Place for the 1891 census.¹² Nor was she located elsewhere. It's likely that she was putting into practice her new teacher training, and working as a governess teaching the daughters of a wealthy family. As a

governess, Jane will have found herself in an awkward position in a household's social hierarchy – considered above that of a servant, but below that of the family themselves. With no social equals in a household, a governess often found herself eating alone, which must have been a stark contrast from Jane's home life.

The second half of the 1890s brought double tragedy for the family. Firstly, the family lost Jane's father George in the eighth month of 1896. He was buried in the burial ground of the Society of Friends.¹³ The family were then struck by another loss in 1899. On a Friday morning towards the end of the school holidays, Jane's 13-year-old brother Arnold was invited to go shooting wild birds on the River Lune with a friend who had borrowed his father's shotgun.

The friend got distracted, and accidentally fired the trigger, lodging the contents of the gun into Arnold's left thigh. Arnold was taken to the Royal Infirmary where he was prepped for amputation, but an hour and fifteen minutes after the accident, he died from shock and loss of blood. Given the nature of his death, Jane and her family had to undergo an inquest, which deemed his death as accidental. The family buried Arnold alongside his father George at the Friends' Meeting House.¹⁴

By 1901, Jane, her mother and brothers had moved to 26 Beechfield Terrace, Milking Stile Lane, where Jane would remain for the rest of her life. Number 26 was an end stone terraced house, and typical Lancaster housing stock.¹⁵ She worked as a governess until at least 1911.¹⁵ ¹⁶ It might have been her mother's death in 1921 that necessitated Jane gave up her work, and instead keep house for her unmarried brother George, a surveyors clerk and by now in his forties.¹⁷ The value of Jane's mother's estate after her death in 1921 demonstrates the reduction in the family's circumstances; in contrast to household belongings worth about £700 upon her father's bankruptcy, Jane's mother Sarah left effects worth £135.¹⁸

Given the lack of public records post-1921, little is known about Jane's life after this point. Given the large value of her estate upon her death, it is likely that she worked and saved, which then afforded her some kind of retirement. By 1939, after several years working as a lady's companion, Jane's sister Liliias joined her

at 26 Milking Stile Lane. Jane and Liliias, aged 71 and 68 respectively, also had a 31-year-old schoolteacher lodging with them.¹⁹

2. I GIVE all my property of what nature or kind soever and wheresoever situate to my sister Liliias Mary Aldridge and Appoint her sole executrix of

Perhaps due to the brewing tensions in Europe, or as a practical acknowledgement of her own mortality, Jane made her last will and testament on the 26th day of the 5th month 1939, witnessed by two cashiers at the Lancaster District Bank.²⁰

THIS IS THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT of me JANE ATKINSON ALDRIDGE of 26 Beechfield Terrace in the City of Lancaster Spinster .

1. I REVOKES all Wills and testamentary instruments heretofore made by me

2. I GIVE all my property of what nature or kind soever and wheresoever situate to my sister Liliias Mary Aldridge and Appoint her sole executrix of this my Will. IN WITNESS whereof I have hereunto set my hand this twenty sixth day of May One thousand nine hundred and thirty nine.

SIGNED by the said Jane Atkinson Aldridge as and for her last Will and Testament in the presence of us present at the same time who at her request in her presence and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses.

W.R. DENT District Bank Limited, Lancaster Bank Cashier
FRANK S. JOHN , District Bank Limited Lancaster, Bank Cashier.

2 folios
On the 26th May 1939
Probate of this Will was granted at Liverpool
CERTIFIED TO BE A CORRECT COPY.

(4) Jane's will, written in 1939

After over 45 years at 26 Milking Stile Lane, it was here where Jane died at age of 78.²¹ She was buried at Scotforth Cemetery, and her headstone gave her date of death in the Quaker style – the 11th day of the 3rd month 1947. ²² Jane left everything she owned to the value of £481 to her younger sister Liliias,²⁰ who was buried alongside her a few years later. Photographs of her gravestone can be found on Find A Grave www.findagrave.com.²²

References

- ¹ Births (CR) England. Lancaster, Lancashire. 25 April 1868 (Birth: 19 April 1868). ALDRIDGE, Jane Atkinson. Vol. 8e. p. 685.
- ² Births index (CR) England. Lancaster, Lancashire. 2nd Q. 1871. ALDRIDGE, Liliias Mary. Vol. 8e. p. 683. <http://www.gro.gov.uk> : accessed 19 June 2023.
- ³ Census records. England. Lancaster, Lancashire. 05 April 1891. ALDRIDGE, George (Head). PN 3467. FL 66. ED 18. <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 June 2023.
- ⁴ *Lancaster Gazette* (1864) Friends' School, Lancaster. *Lancaster Gazette*. 09 January. p. 9a. <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 18 June 2023.
- ⁵ *Lancaster Gazette* (1883) Important Sale of High-Class Modern Household Furniture and Effects. *Lancaster Gazette*. 10 November. p. 4b. <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 30 June 2023.
- ⁶ *Lancaster Gazette* (1883) Meeting of Creditors - Re George Aldridge. *Lancaster Gazette*. 03 November. p. 5d. <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 19 June 2023.
- ⁷ Betts, Robin (1999) *Dr. Macnamara, 1861-1931*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. p. 13.
- ⁸ Fry, Elizabeth (2005) *A Quaker Life: Selected Letters and Writings*. Oxford: AltaMira Press. p. 7.
- ⁹ Mount School. *Mount Scholars, 1833-1906*. 1887-1889. ALDRIDGE, Jane A., p. 64. Collection: National School Admission Registers & Log-Books 1870-1914. <http://www.findmypast.co.uk> : accessed 30 June 2023.
- ¹⁰ Chrystal, Paul (2021) *Rowntrees: The Early History*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Limited.
- ¹¹ Mount School. *Mount Scholars, 1833-1906*. 1887-1889. ALDRIDGE, Jane A., p. 64. Collection: National School Admission Registers & Log-Books 1870-1914. <http://www.findmypast.co.uk> : accessed 30 June 2023.
- ¹² Census records. England. Lancaster, Lancashire. 05 April 1891. ALDRIDGE, George (head). PN 3467. FL 66. ED 18. <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 19 June 2023.
- ¹³ Burials (PR) England. Lancaster, Lancashire. 18 August 1896. ALDRIDGE, George. p. 33. Collection: Lancashire, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813-1986. <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 19 June 2023.
- ¹⁴ *Lancaster Standard and County Advertiser* (1899) Three Boys and a Gun. *Lancaster Standard and County Advertiser* 15 September. p. 6a-b. <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 18 June 2023.
- ¹⁵ Census records. England. Lancaster, Lancashire. 31 March 1901. ALDRIDGE, Sarah (Head). PN 3990. FL 41. SN 1. ED 22. p. 1. <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 June 2023.
- ¹⁶ Census records. England. Lancaster, Lancashire. 02 April 1911. ALDRIDGE, Sarah (Head). RD 479. PN 25539. ED 15. <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 June 2023.
- ¹⁷ Census records. England. Lancaster, Lancashire. 19 June 1921. ALDRIDGE, George (Head). RD 479. PN 20863. SN 13. ED 15. [Transcription] <http://www.findmypast.co.uk> : accessed 30 June 2023.
- ¹⁸ Probate. 09 April 1921 (Death: 24 February 1921) ALDRIDGE, Sarah. Collection: England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1995.. <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 June 2023.
- ¹⁹ 1939 Register, England. Lancaster, Lancashire. ALDRIDGE, Jane A., 29 September 1939. Schedule 1/2. ED NVNA. RD 479-1 B.1. National Archives (Great Britain), Kew, England. Collection: 1939 Register. <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> : accessed 30 June 2023.
- ²⁰ Will. 06 May 1939 (Proven 23 April 1947). ALDRIDGE, Jane Atkinson.
- ²¹ Death announcements (1947) *Lancaster Guardian*. 21 March. ALDRIDGE, Jane Atkinson. p. 1a. <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 19 June 2023.
- ²² Monumental inscriptions. England. Scotforth Cemetery, Scotforth, Lancaster. 11 March 1947. ALDRIDGE, Jane Atkinson. Photo added by John Gedge. Find A Grave Memorial: 197182773. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/197182773/jane-atkinson-aldridge> : accessed 19 June 2023.