

Rhoda Bennett (1896-1985)

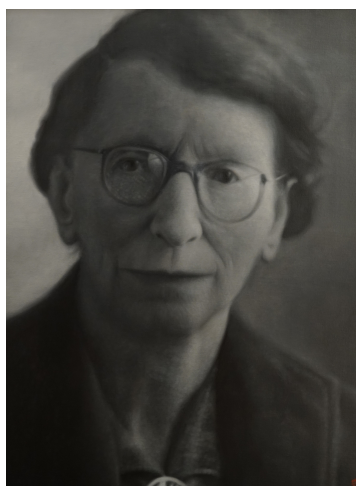
Rhoda was one of the daughters of Dr F W Bennett, one of the earliest supporters and benefactors of the new University College and member of College Council. She grew up in Leicester and attended Collegiate School. Although she secured entry to St Hilda's College, Oxford, she felt that she could not leave Leicester so immediately after the First World War. Instead, she became one of Leicester's first students and one of the first Treasurers of the Students' Union. She entered in October 1921 and gained a BA Hons History in 1925, going on to study Librarianship at London University and to work at the Guildhall Library. Rhoda Bennett was recommended by the Honorary Librarian, F B Lott, to a professional post as Assistant Librarian for the University College in September 1931. She was our first full-time paid Librarian, and remained at Leicester for 30 dedicated years.



After their father's death in 1930, Rhoda and her sister Hilda made donations to the College amounting to £5,500 (in 1931). They also donated their family home, 104 Regent Road, and had founded an £8,700 'Frederick William Bennett' lectureship that was intended for the Geology Department. Rhoda was a significant member of the University community, playing a crucial role in making new members of staff feel at home at Leicester. She would only accept a nominal amount as salary, preferring to make her librarianship a gift to the new University College. It was largely her work that transformed the library's early collections of books into a fully-functioning, professionalised library, servicing the University and its members.

During her time at Leicester, she employed the poet Philip Larkin between 1946 and 1950, and continued her correspondence with him for years. She achieved an MA in History in 1936 and remained as University Librarian until retiring in 1961.

Before the Second World War, she helped to settle Jewish refugees in America and the UK, often housing them temporarily in her own home. She continued to be a donor to the University, making a contribution to the new Medical School in 1977, her donation going towards the setting up of the Clinical Science Library.



She was a Soroptimist, a member of the Association of University Women, and a supporter of the local RSPCA. She also remained lifelong friends with several of the first students of the University. The Bennett Building is named after her father Frederick, sister Hilda, and also after herself. There remains a Frederick W Bennett lectureship in Geology, and an annual Rhoda Bennett Prize within the Geology Department. Rhoda died on 21 June 1985, aged 89.

Photo credit Elizabeth Tooth

Sources:

Annual Report for 1924-25. ULA/P/AR4, p. 7 (lists her exam results)

East Midlands Oral History Archive, Rhoda is recalled in [memories recounted by Nora Waddington](#) in this c.7 minute sound clip

Leicester Evening Mail, 21 November 1931, '£10,275 Gifts to University College: Further help by two sisters'

Leicester Mercury special supplement, 04 October 1971, 'Leicester University Golden Jubilee,' pp.4-5

University of Leicester Archives, Student Records, Careers of Old Students book, ULA/SR4/1

University of Leicester Archives, Library History boxes. Box 2, Folder H (includes clipping from unidentified source, dating to c.1970, mentioning a dinner given in her honour when the Bennett Building was named).

University of Leicester Archives, Press Cuttings Books

University of Leicester Archives, Personalia, obituary from Convocation Review 1986 (ULA/PER3/18)

University of Leicester Archives, Student Records, Careers of Old Students book, ULA/SR4/1