GLYNNE, MARY DILYS (1895 - 1991), plant pathologist

Name: Mary Dilys Glynne
Date of birth: 1895
Date of death: 1991
Parent: John Glynne Jones
Parent: Dilys Lloyd Glynne Jones (née Davies)
Gender: Female
Occupation: plant pathologist
Area of activity: Science and Mathematics; Nature and Agriculture
Author: Gareth W. Griffith

Mary Dilys Glynne was born at Glyndyl, Menai Avenue, Upper Bangor on 19 February 1895, the youngest daughter of the five surviving children of John Glynne Jones (1849-1947), solicitor, and his wife Dilys Lloyd Glynne Jones (née Davies, 1857-1932). Her father's family home was Tyddyn Isaf (Cymryd) in the parish of Y Gyffin near Conwy. Her mother was one of the London Welsh, daughter of the sculptor and musician William Davies (Mynorydd) and sister to the singer Mary Davies.

Mary attended Bangor County School for Girls, which her mother had played a prominent role in establishing in 1897 and served for a long period as one of its governors. Her father was a councillor on Bangor City Council and registrar of the County Court. Her sister Eryl became a doctor and botanist, and her brother Ioan a solicitor.

At the age of sixteen Mary went to North London Collegiate School in Camden Town, (her mother's former school), and from there to the University College of North Wales, Bangor to study Botany. Soon after graduating in 1917, she went as a volunteer to the department of Mycology at the Rothamsted Research Institute in Harpenden, Hertfordshire. She was subsequently appointed as a researcher, in the Plant Pathology Department and remained there until her retirement in 1960. Whilst at Rothamsted she gained an MSc in 1922 and DSc in 1943, both degrees awarded by the University of Wales. She was awarded the OBE on her retirement, and was made a Fellow of the Institute of Biology (FinstBiol).

She began her career at Rothamsted by studying the black scab or wart disease in potatoes caused by the fungus Synchytrium endobioticum, assisting in breeding potatoes able to withstand the disease. Later, she was the first to discover that the practice of crop rotation exacerbated the 'take-all' disease (Gaeumannomyces graminis var. tritici) in wheat. Her interest in pathology continued long after her retirement and her last paper was published in 1985.

As well as being a leading scientist, Mary Glynne was also a distinguished mountaineer. Despite opposition from her family, she climbed a number of very challenging mountains, including Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn, and she was elected a member of the Ladies Alpine Club. Her scientific work enabled her to travel widely, and she took advantage of this to climb several mountains in the Antipodes. She was the second person and the first woman to climb Mount Spencer in New Zealand. She continued to climb after retirement, e.g. Mount Fuji (3776 m) in 1963. Her nephew Cymryd (C.M.G) Smith was also a well-known climber, but 'Cym' died in a motorcycle accident in 1952 at the age of 27.

Mary Glynne died at Field House nursing home in Harpenden on 9 May 1991 aged 96. A conference room at Rothamsted is named after her.

Author

Gareth W. Griffith

Sources

Geoffrey Salt, 'Mary Dilys Glynne (1895-1991)', in Jean Beagle Ristaino, *Pioneering women in plant pathology* (APS Press 2008), pp.87-98

Carrie de Silva, 'Glynne, Mary Dilys', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

Michael Westmacott, 'Mary Dilys Glynne OBE, DSc 1895-1991', *Alpine Journal* (1992), pp.329-330

Autumn Stanley, *Mothers and daughters of invention* (Rutgers University Press 1995), p. 40

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: Mary Dilys Glynne

Additional Links

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