

A Pair of Beatrix and Avice: Women Horticulturists in Waterperry

Masami Usui

Ph.D., Doshisha University

Abstract

Now almost forgotten, Beatrix Havergal and Avice Sanders are outstanding women horticulturists who founded and directed Waterperry Horticultural School for Women (1932-1970), near Oxford. Beatrix as a gardener and Avice as a housekeeper encountered each other at Downe House School in the early 1920s, and eventually founded the women's boarding school of horticulture in 1932 at the prime of gardening and horticultural schools in the UK. Waterperry provided both a theory and practice of horticulture especially to middle-class women who were eager to study and establish themselves. Waterperry represents a turning point of women's professional education, suffrage movement, and eventually emancipation. Moreover, the intimate relationship between Beatrix and Avice embodies the same-sex "marriage" since they are husband/wife as well as principle/secretary. Their relationship continued for approximately fifty years until Avice died in 1970, during the period of emerging lesbian activism in the UK. Beatrix and Avice are leading horticulturists, educators, and administrators, and, moreover, pioneering lesbian couple who shared principles of life and senses of values in a male-centered/patriarchal society of horticulture and profession. Beatrix and Avice took an initiative to improve women's social and economic circumstances as well as women's spiritual union, and current Waterperry Garden is a legacy of a challenge for gender and sexual liberation for women.

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