

Jane Henshaw (b.1945)

'An enthusiasm for getting involved'



In 1971, Jane Henshaw arrived in the rather featureless landscape that was destined to become the city of Milton Keynes. The future development of the city had brought Jane's husband, a surveyor, and their two young children, to what seemed to Jane like "*the back of beyond*". Her immediate thought was that she needed to find "*something to do*", a phrase that over the years has proved to be something of an understatement.

The 'something to do' search was shared by other women who found themselves, for all kinds of reasons, in this seemingly empty place. Some were following their husband's employment and others were part of the newly developed Open University. There were women who had stayed on after working at Bletchley Park during the war, and there were women who had always been there, in the villages, the farms, the fine country houses of Buckinghamshire and the communities of Wolverton and Bletchley. But something new was happening and women wanted to be a part of it. They had a lot to offer, although it wasn't always recognised by the city developers.

Jane's background experience and knowledge of town planning were helpful and she became increasingly involved in community initiatives and developments. A branch of the Samaritans was being established, and Matilda Kessler and Margot Kettle were setting up the Citizens Advice Bureau in Bletchley. As innovative plans for creating a hospice at Willen were put into place Jane joined the board of trustees as one of four women on the board. Describing the founders, Marjorie Reid and Dorothy Jell as "*inspirational*", she remained a trustee for 25 years. She clearly recalls those early days when everyone, irrespective of status, supported by doing those jobs that needed doing - producing the newsletter, doing the washing up, making refreshments and generally helping.

Jane came to know this embryonic Milton Keynes well in those early days. She worked with a team of community officers in some of the more deprived neighbourhoods of the city, and she

also worked for the Development Corporation. Though always busy, she was still looking for 'something to do'.

An interesting and challenging opportunity appeared when an innovative new post was advertised. Three headteachers of Milton Keynes secondary schools, together with members of the Chamber of Commerce and local industry, were looking to strengthen the partnership between business, industry and education. They needed someone who knew Milton Keynes well and who could lead a project linking these different areas effectively. Jane was appointed to manage this new venture which was to become the Milton Keynes Education Business Partnership. The key aim was to help teachers to improve their technical and scientific skills through finding work placements for them with local companies. This post involved venturing into previously male dominated industrial and business environments, like Aston Martin, Rank Xerox and Westland Helicopters, and persuading them to accept teachers for substantial and challenging placements. Jane was responsible to a committee and she also reported back to the Milton Keynes Secondary Headteachers. She became a well-known and highly respected figure in the schools as they developed the 'TEC' initiative for business and technical education.

One of Jane's proudest achievements was linked to the early introduction of computers into schools, where BBC machines were being used to teach applications. Working with the schools and the Chamber of Commerce, a syllabus and accreditation were developed. The Chamber had the authority to validate the certificates of achievement and the success of the syllabus was such that eventually it was adopted by BTEC at a national level.

As she worked to establish the Education Business Partnership in Milton Keynes, Jane found herself having to develop new skills, sometimes very rapidly. She worked with the Engineering Council, and in partnership with Rank Xerox she was commissioned to produce a promotional film. This involved working with several different companies, and in her own words she had to "ham it up" when she realised that everyone viewed her as an experienced film director and expected her to behave accordingly.

Just as the computer certification became adopted at a national level, so the work of the Education Business Partnership became a focus of government attention and something that they wanted to develop and control. This, unfortunately perhaps, meant a movement towards shorter teacher placements and with a less local emphasis.

Having achieved a solid foundation for the Partnership in Milton Keynes, Jane, who was still working tirelessly for the Hospice Trust, also joined the Health Authority as an independent member. As the structure of the Authority changed to smaller trusts she became a member of the Committee for Mental Health, spending six years in a role which included checking and safeguarding work.

Jane has lived and worked in Milton Keynes for much of her life. She has worked as a volunteer, as an employee and as a manager. The focus of her roles has always been the welfare and development of human beings. Health and Education, those twin pillars of any thriving community, have benefited immensely from her commitment. Anyone meeting her for the first time will be struck by her detailed local knowledge and her enthusiasm for the initiatives and developments that have enriched Milton Keynes.

Marion Hill, who has known Jane and admired her work over the years, has said of her:

"She became MK's first Education/Business liaison worker, appointed by Geoff Cooksey and Malcolm Brighton who I think were impressed by her nerve. I remember the 'Executive Shadow' project that got some Sixth Formers observing how managers did their jobs ... not dogsbodying as

interns! She did eleven years of that. And one of the things she focused on was encouraging girls to enter accepted male provinces – like engineering. If you know her, you'll have experienced her feistiness, but she had her own life and her own achievements – and all this while partnering the man who arguably had the biggest job in MK. She and Frank have just had their 50th wedding anniversary and she's as sparkly as ever."

In the 1970s Jane had arrived in a new place and felt that she had to find 'something to do'. That 'something' has enriched Milton Keynes immeasurably, and what had seemed at first like the back of beyond is now a city where we can take pride in celebrating the women who have helped to make it so special.

Milton Keynes Education-Industry Liaison Committee was formed as the result of a meeting held in October 1979 between Bucks County Council, local headmasters, local industrialists and Milton Keynes Development Corporation with the aim of facilitating better links between industry and education in Milton Keynes. The need for such bridge-building has been recognised nationally but it is especially acute in Milton Keynes where two-thirds of the industrial and commercial organisations have moved to the City during the last ten years. A similar proportion of families has moved within the same period and in many schools few pupils or teachers have the type of local knowledge which is taken for granted in more established communities.

The opening paragraph of the first edition of LINKS magazine, the Education-Industry Liaison Committee Newsletter

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The photograph of Jane Henshaw comes from Jane, reproduced with permission.

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