

Dr Kathleen E. H. Rutherford

Photo credit: Soroptimist International Harrogate and District



Plaque, number 87, is to **Dr Kathleen E. H. Rutherford** by the Soroptimist International of Harrogate District, at her York Road home and surgery, St Mungo. It was installed on International Women's Day, 8 March 2021.

That year was also the centenary of Soroptimist International, first founded in Oakland, California in 1921, with the aim to 'educate, empower and enable opportunities for women and girls'. Kathleen, who was born in 1896 and worked in medical practice with her father and brother, became the Harrogate Club's Founder President in 1933, and five years later Vice-President of Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland. As a committed Quaker and humanitarian, she worked around the world to help women and children. In the 1930s, she helped organise the relocation of Basque children fleeing the Civil War in Spain; she worked with women and children in the slums of Naples; in a Ugandan leper colony; in Biafra; clinics in Algeria and refugee camps in Jerusalem. She was invited to China with other doctors to share medical advances and promote global understanding. She was also a lifelong pacifist. She was awarded an MBE and Honorary Freedom of the Borough of Harrogate.

The women chosen for the plaques represent a huge amount of dedicated work for Harrogate and the wider national and international world. What can we say about these six women? First, they all came from more or less wealthy and privileged backgrounds. Helping others less fortunate and serving the community had always been roles for royalty, aristocracy, and the wealthy generally. But they also show how for middle and upper- middle class women, like Laura Veale or Florence Nightingale, despite all the formidable obstacles, the opportunity for higher education and professional life, and eventually political life too, was opening in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is notable too that four of the six were members of the medical profession. It is also interesting that two were Quakers.

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