

Dr. Kathleen E. H. Rutherford MBE

Article by Sandra Frier, President, Soroptimists International Harrogate & District, for the Harrogate Civic Society Newsletter. March 2021

International Women's Day - Forgotten Women.

In 2019 Soroptimist International of Harrogate and District Club received an email from journalist Nicky Harley. Nicky's mission is to increase the number of women recognised by a Blue Plaque by bringing attention to the 'Forgotten Women' - well known during their lifetime but often forgotten since. One of these women was Dr Kathleen Rutherford MBE. A name well known to the Club as one of the founding members in 1933 and first President but there was little known about the person.

Using the information provided by Nicky, Club member Rachel Richardson's research revealed a whole lot more including a Yorkshire Television Calendar programme made in 1970 about her life. Dr Kathleen, recognised as being a 'Legend in her own lifetime' and awarded the MBE, certainly had a great story. She was invited by Hitler to a Nuremberg Rally in her bid for peace, she worked in the slums of Naples and in Leper Colonies in Africa as well as helping refugees in Europe and Palestine. Left a legacy by a grateful patient, she gave most of it away to charities in the UK and Africa. Dr Kathleen was made an Honorary Freeman of the Borough of Harrogate Town.

The Club members certainly thought Dr Kathleen was worthy of being remembered and approached the Harrogate Civic Society. Encouraged and guided by local historian, Malcolm Neesam, who helped support the nomination. In March 2020, just before lockdown the Club held an International Women's Day event attended by Soroptimists from throughout Yorkshire to showcase the incredible story of the Dr Kathleen's life that Rachel's diligence had uncovered including watching the Yorkshire Calendar TV programme where Dr Kathleen spoke about her life. Special guest Malcolm Neesam spoke about the work of the Civic Society and how they were keen to increase the number of women recognised for their achievements in Harrogate.

Dr Kathleen was at the forefront of women taking on leading roles in society to improve the lives of the most disadvantaged. This year, more than 45 years since she died, a Harrogate Civic Society Brown Plaque will be unveiled by Club President Sandra Frier at her former home and place of her medical practice in York Road, Harrogate. Dr Kathleen's memory deserves to live on; and the Civic Society agreed. She was an impenitent idealist, internationalist, committed Quaker striving to make a difference through raising awareness, advocacy and action.

It is apt that the Club will show the full programme made by Yorkshire Television again at a **special zoom event** on International Women's Day (8 March 2021). The Club is delighted that this will be attended by Hugo Wharton, Dr Kathleen's great nephew; Edward Kemp, whose father, Eric Kemp was the Bishop of Chesterfield and treated by Dr Kathleen as a boy when staying in Harrogate. Bishop Kemp remarked about his treatment in his memoirs, 'Shy, but not retiring'.

The event will also celebrate the 100th anniversary of Soroptimist International; a worldwide women's service organisation founded in California in 1921 whose objectives are to improve the lives of women and girls. The Club is pleased that the President of Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland Johanna Raffan, President Elect of Soroptimist International Maureen Maguire as well as the President of Soroptimist International of Yorkshire Linda Davis along with other Soroptimist guests will be joining us for the evening. President Sandra and club members are grateful to Nicky Harley for bringing our attention to such a notable woman - we know there are others out there, lost in time, who also deserve to be remembered.



Sandra Frier, with the plaque.