

Kathleen Halpin CBE (1903 - 1999)

Outstanding among the Outstanding

Kathleen Mary Halpin, CBE (1903-1999) was the heart of Soroptimist International of Greater London club, the first Soroptimist Club chartered outside the Americas, in 1924. Voluntary service was the lodestar of Halpin's long and fruitful life.

Kathleen joined the Greater London club for professional and business women, in 1935, and served it well for 65 years until her death in 1999. Other institutions that Kathleen supported from as early as her school-days at Sydenham GDST High School were the British Red Cross Society, the Girl Guides Association, and the Order of St John.

Being practical, Halpin trained as a shorthand-typist. From 1932 to 1935 she was private secretary to Sir John and Lady Simon. This was when Sir John was Parliamentary Foreign Secretary. An invitation to inaugurate a **Women's Gas Federation** to popularise gas for domestic cooking, provided Halpin with the opportunity both to hone her administrative skills and to become a Soroptimist. The Soroptimist 'one member per category per club' rule, (since relaxed), had excluded Kathleen. There were several secretaries on the SI Greater London club waiting list.

At the onset of World War Two, Kathleen was appointed Chief Administrator under Lady Reading, of the new Women's Voluntary Service for Civil Defence (WVS). Halpin's first major task was to oversee the evacuation of children from bomb-targeted London to temporary foster-homes and schools in the countryside. In 1944 Halpin was dispatched by the government to the United States as a member of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), to advise on preparation for the assimilation of war refugees from Europe. Halpin was honoured with an invitation to visit President and Mrs Roosevelt for an informal lunch.

In 1959-60, the silver jubilee year of the SI of Great Britain and Ireland federation (SIGBI), Halpin was elected Federation President and hostess of the Soroptimist International global Quadrennial Convention held in London in 1960. Kathleen founded the Soroptimist (London) Housing Association to provide good, affordable accommodation for needy women. She served as president of the Housing Association from 1963 to 1989. Halpin was also a governor of St Bartholomew's (Barts) Hospital. From 1967 to 1971 Kathleen additionally was chair of the Fawcett Society, championing feminist issues such as pension rights, equal pay and child care for working mothers.

For some years Halpin was chair of the Soroptimist International Extension Committee during which time she chartered around a dozen daughter clubs in the UK. In 1962 Kathleen visited the Caribbean to charter SI clubs in Barbados, Kingston Jamaica, and San Fernando in Trinidad. In 1973 she visited South Africa and Rhodesia to charter SI Durban, East London and Petermaritzberg clubs.

In her 'nineties, Kathleen followed with interest the agendas of international women's conferences. The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women convened in Beijing was hailed as **"the most progressive blueprint to date for advancing women's rights"**. In Halpin's later years, the SI Greater London club was proud to award honorary membership to one whose record of service to society was outstanding even among Soroptimists.



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