

Her Honour Judge Myrella Cohen FRSA LLD 1927-2002

Myrella was born to a Jewish family in Manchester in 1927. Her parents Sam and Sarah, wanted to name her after their mothers who were Myra and Ella, hence Myrella. She was educated at Manchester High School for girls and Colwyn Bay Grammar School, then read law at Manchester University. She married Lt Col Mordaunt Cohen MBE TD DL, a decorated Burma veteran, and moved to Sunderland where he was a solicitor. Aged 44, the youngest Judge at that time, she presided over numerous high-profile cases in both Newcastle and London including at the Old Bailey.

In 1992 she became the first person to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Sunderland. In 2001 she starred as a Judge in the TV programme "Trial by Jury". Judge Myrella was highly active in the Jewish community, and she led the campaign in the UK for Jewish women whose husbands would not allow them to re-marry-'agunot'. This campaign took over 10 years working with Gloria Proops, a Soroptimist. However, in 2001 she successfully pushed a law through parliament making it a lot harder for husbands to withhold a divorce. The bill received Royal Assent from the Queen in 2002. She had helped to formulate more sympathetic divorce laws. She was a formidable Judge with a no-nonsense reputation among offenders in the North East, who dreaded appearing before her.

A strict observer in her Jewish beliefs and practices, she was a firm believer in women's education and careers, and castigated the prevailing religious attitude pushing women into early marriage. She also called for women to hold office on communal and synagogue organisations, as she believed they were as experienced as the men.

She was President of the North of England Cancer Research Campaign, a founder of International Family Mediation Services, and Patron of the Sunderland Council for the Disabled. She was also Patron of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and Chairman of the UK branch of the International Association of Jewish lawyers.

After her death a street in Sunderland, Myrella Crescent, was named in her honour

Soroptimist International of Sunderland granted her Honorary Membership in recognition of her many talents, achievements, and service to local, national, and international issues around the status of women, as well as her outstanding contribution to the law.

