

MARY ELIZABETH PICKUP (1881-1938)

SI BIRMINGHAM

**One of the first four women to qualify as a solicitor in England
First women solicitor in Birmingham**

Mary Elizabeth Pickup, eldest of three daughters of Joseph McRobert Snoddy who was a fitter at dockyard, eventually becoming President of the Pembroke Permanent Building Society, and Sarah Ann (nee Truscott), who was born on 14 October 1881 in the village of Pembroke Dock, South Wales.

On 20 November 1903, the degree of BA of the University of Wales (Aberystwyth) was conferred on Mary. It is believed that after graduation, she went to work at Redfern & Co (solicitors, Birmingham), where Thomas William Pickup, whom she married on 30 August 1910, was a partner. The couple had two daughters: Evelyn born 1911 and Margaret born 1914.

Following the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in 1919, Mary became articled to her husband. As a university graduate, she only had to serve three years' articles instead of the usual five.

In December 1922, Mary (achieving highest marks and second class honours) with Carrie Morrison, Maud Isabel Crofts and Mary Elaine Sykes, were the first women to pass the final examinations of the Law Society.

Mary was admitted as a solicitor in January 1923. There is evidence that she was the only one of the four to set up her own practice upon qualification - in the same building as Redfern & Co - rejoining her husband in 1936/7 at Redferns, becoming a partner.

As a consultant, from February 1923 until 1937 at the Birmingham Settlement Centre, founded in 1899, of the Poor Man's Lawyer Association, she attended every week giving free legal advice to the poor. The greatest number of cases concerned 'landlord and tenant', 'husband and wife' and 'master and servant', together with 'hire purchase'. In 1929 she was appointed a Commissioner of Oaths.

Mary was appointed in 1931 by the Ministry of Labour to be Chairman of the Special Court of Referees under the Unemployment Insurance Act, to deal especially with married women's claims to benefit. An honour accorded few women, she was the first woman to be appointed in the Midlands, the only others being in London and Manchester. She acted as local solicitor to the Birmingham Branch of the National Union of Women Teachers. Regarded as an able speaker, she frequently spoke on legislation which had been passed, and how it affected women.

Mary was amongst the signatories to the Women's International League petition to the Government in 1934 concerning the manufacture and international supervision of armaments, as well as being a supporter of a Peace Ballot in 1935 to find out the British public's attitude to the League of Nations and collective security. Mary was president of the Birmingham and Midlands Branch of the Association of University Women (MUFW) in 1936 and 1937.

A founder member of the Soroptimist Club of Birmingham in 1928, Mary was vice-president in 1929-30 and president in 1930-31.

Mary died from breast cancer on 23 March 1938.



<https://first100years.org.uk/mary-elizabeth-pickup/> PHOTO CREDIT