

## **DR. DOROTHEA W. SINTON M.B., Ch.B.**

Dr. Sinton was a founder member of Soroptimist International Newcastle upon Tyne in 1937. She was a Senior Medical Officer 1929 to 1966 of Newcastle's Women's Advisory Clinics. She was also the second Club President from 1939 to 1941.

During the late 1920's there was extensive public debate about the rights and wrongs of birth control. Voluntary clinics consolidated their positions, and the fight centered on seeking to remove an official ban which prevented Local Authorities from providing contraception services. In 1929, Dr. Sinton was a brave pioneer who was instrumental in starting women's advisory clinics in Scotswood (the poverty-stricken area of west Newcastle). Later she opened clinics in Ashington, Northumberland and Sunderland. She passionately believed that poorer women who already had large families to raise, needed much support when they took on all the family responsibilities and often paid work as well. The loss of so many men in both Wars, together with high unemployment, was keenly felt in the poorer parts of the City. She asked her medical colleagues to "look at past and prevailing social and economic conditions in order to discover the causes of the declining birth rate. The reasons for the existence of contraception services was to enable motherhood, not to degrade it. There is nothing dignified in a diseased woman bringing a sickly child into a poverty-stricken household."



The Newcastle clinic was established at 670 Scotswood Road, and started in January 1929 with gifts of £100 each from Lady Denman, and the Durham Miners Welfare Committee. It was uphill work to establish the Centre. Doctors and the clergy had to think of their bread and butter before linking their names to birth control. Those who did help the clinic "felt brave and somewhat wicked and immoral". Dr. Sinton struggled to form a Committee of local and influential women to run and raise funds for the "Women's Welfare Clinics", and most of her supporters appeared not to tell their husbands what they were really engaged in. Dr. Sinton was fortunate in finding Mrs Murray Brooks who worked with her for over 20 years as her Nursing Superintendent. Mrs. Brooks also was a founder member of Newcastle Soroptimists. In 1934, the clinic was able to move to improved premises at 24 Shieldfield Green. The women came for all kinds of gynaecological conditions, as well as for birth control, as they had never had a woman doctor in the area before. They also came for infertility, which Dr. Sinton describes as surprisingly successful given the resources that she had.

Dr. Sinton fought publicly for the equal rights to education for women, and the recognition of the role of women doctors. In April 1943, she had a letter published in the British Medical Journal advocating the role of women doctors to work alongside their male colleagues.



Dr. Sinton resigned from S.I. Newcastle upon Tyne club in 1966 due to pressure of work. She died in Newcastle in 1987 aged 88 years. Her contribution to the improvement in the health and welfare of the women on Tyneside will not be forgotten.