

Dorothy Cheesley

A proud mother, grandmother and great grandmother, Dorothy Joan Heaps was born on the Wirral in September 1927, living there most of her life. After matriculating she left High School in 1945, joining Lever Brothers at Port Sunlight as a laboratory assistant. Whilst at school she joined the Women's Junior Air Corps (WJAC), which later became the Girls' Venture Corps (GVC). This organisation introduced girls and women to the world of flying, then a somewhat glamorous occupation. The Corps even owned its own aircraft, which travelled the country giving air experience flights.



Through the WJAC she won a scholarship to learn to fly with Wright Aviation at nearby RAF Hooton Park, qualifying in September 1948. For three years she was a member of 19 Squadron RAFVR, flying Chipmunks based at RAF Woodvale, and became the first woman to fly the new RAF trainer, the Chipmunk, on 1st April 1951. Such was the interest, it made the press.

Whilst attending a WJAC training camp in the south of England she met George Cheesley, an RAF Sergeant Pilot, who later became her husband in 1952. Tragically, he died in a flying accident when Dorothy was pregnant with their daughter, Pam Cheesley-Hollinshead.

Dorothy's passion for flying continued and she was one of the founder members of the British Women Pilots Association in 1955, an organisation founded for women pilots by many of those women who had served as ATA (Air Transport Auxiliary) pilots during the war.

Realising that she would need a larger income to support herself and her child, Dorothy embarked on further education, gaining a BSc in Physics externally at London University. She taught Physics for over 16 years at Wirral Grammar School for Girls, where in 1963 she was invited to join SI Bebington by Miss Winifred Ashton, Headmistress. This was the beginning of many years of service locally and globally which became a large rewarding facet of her life and one to which she introduced both her daughter and her granddaughter. She served as President of SI Bebington, going on to become Divisional Union President, now known as Region President.



Her career blossomed and she became, in succession, headmistress of two girls' grammar schools, Cowley Girls in St Helens then West Kirby Grammar School for Girls on the Wirral. After retiring in 1985 she took the opportunity to visit Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir State, NW India, to open the school there, having been instrumental in its development.

Dorothy continued to be a Soroptimist as her health failed, and she was delighted and felt privileged to be made an Honorary Member of SI Bebington in recognition of all her work with young women over the years, via education and her involvement with the WJAC, later the GVC, through which The Duke of Edinburgh's Award was offered. Dorothy took great pleasure seeing the less academic girls gaining recognition in ways where formal education failed them.

Dorothy was a force for change for women and girls all her life.