

## MARY HOWITT FRGS (1888-1983)

SI Sunderland was chartered in 1938 and Mary joined that year and became President in 1944. She became Vice-President of the North East Divisional Union in 1946 and was to become President in 1949. However, Mary emigrated to Australia in that year.

Mary dedicated her life to education and social work. She first taught at a school situated in the East End of Sunderland and it was there that she met Lord Baden Powell who was instructing lads about Scouting. Mary was asked by him if she would consider doing something similar for the girls in the school in which she was teaching. This was the beginning of the worldwide movement 'Girl Guides', inaugurated shortly afterwards by Lady Baden Powell.

Mary soon became a Head Teacher. She was a geographer and was Secretary of the North East Branch of the Royal Geographical Society for 20 years and was accepted as a Fellow of that Society on 18th February 1929.



Mary was very active during both the first and second world wars. In 1914 all schools in Sunderland were on half time as soldiers were billeted in half of the buildings. Mary's free time in the afternoons was given to nursing, she had her St John's Nursing Medallion and volunteered to work at St Gabriel's Military Hospital in Sunderland. Mary was soon commissioned, given her officer's uniform and put in charge of the ward when Matron was absent. At the end of the war Mary was awarded a Bronze Medal and Red Cross Decoration for service during the 1914-1918 war.

When World War II commenced in 1939, Mary evacuated all of her staff and pupils to the country districts of County Durham. She stayed and opened her school as a rest centre for homeless people where she billeted up to 1,000 people each night. Sunderland was a mining and ship building town, and munitions were manufactured in the area. It was therefore a target for the bombers and many homes were lost.

In 1944 Mary was recognised for her work at a ceremony in Westminster Hall where she was thanked by the Queen (Mother) and given an invitation to the Royal Garden Party.

When Mary emigrated to Australia she continued to teach and was influential in forming Soroptimist Clubs in Manly and Randwick. Mary settled in Bowral, New South Wales, and founded the Bowral Club (Berrima District). She was guest speaker at many Clubs including Wellington and Auckland in New Zealand, and Hobart and Launceston Clubs in Tasmania.

Mary definitely broke the barriers of 'A Man's World'. Her dedication to education and community service is a fine example to us all – to give of our time and experience, and to promote Soroptimism wherever it is needed, regardless of class, colour or creed.