

MISS FLORENCE M. KIRKBY MBE

Miss Kirkby joined S.I. Newcastle upon Tyne in 1972. She remained a member for 47 years until her death at the age of 97 years in 2019. She served as Club President in 1983-84 and was later Regional President of Northern England in 2010-11.

Miss Kirkby was born in Manchester in 1921 and had modern thinking and enlightened parents, particularly her father (Thomas Kirkby) who believed in the education of women and who was a supporter of the Suffrage movement and Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst. The family moved to Blackpool and Florence's father died in 1935 when Florence was just 15 years old. She continued her education at commercial college where she obtained a Teachers Certificate for Speech and Drama. She then travelled daily to Manchester University to read English, graduating in 1948. She had a number of teaching posts in the North West but the big change in her life came in 1963 when Florence acquired a position as headmistress of the Rutherford High School for Girls in Newcastle upon Tyne. In 1967 the Girls School amalgamated with the Boys Grammar School to become the City's first co-educational comprehensive school. In an era when many women were overlooked for professional posts, Florence became headmistress of Rutherford School. She earned tremendous respect for her obvious intelligence, commitment and involvement in extracurricular activities and she invested her efforts over half a century in the professional development of women in society.



Florence was invited to become a member of the Court of Newcastle University in 1972 and was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the University in 2005. In 2013 she was honoured with an M.B.E. for services to education. She completed a Masters Degree in 1984 while also serving as National President of the Secondary Heads Association and she continued as a superannuation consultant to the Association until 2000. She served as a member of the Burnham Committee on teacher's salaries from 1974 to 1987 and on the government committee on the school curriculum from 1984 to 1987. She was a member of the British Federation of Women Graduates and became their President from 1997 to 2000. Her focus was not by any means confined to the realm of education and professional women. Florence had a deep commitment to broader issues in society, mainly the care of the less privileged. She was Chair of the Northumberland branch of Carers UK and a member of the board of directors of Shared Interest. She spent 8 years on the Northumberland Community Health Council, chairing it from 1994 to 1998.

In her spare time, Florence Kirkby continued to be an active participant in the fabric of our local society. She was a member of the Public Services Pensions Council, a Lay Assessor for Public Appointments, Lay Assessor for Residential Homes, a long serving Governor of Sacred Heart School and of Chapel House Middle School. She made national headlines in May 2018 when she stood for election as a local council candidate at the age of 96 years.