

## Carrie Morrison (1888-1950)

Club: Unknown, likely to have been SI Greater London, which met at the time at 115 Wigmore St, W1.

Carrie Morrison was the first female solicitor in England. She was one of the founding members of the 1919 Club, which became the Association of Women Solicitors. She was also a Soroptimist. Carrie was a real trailblazer for women and still an inspirational role model for Soroptimists, and other women today. SI East London are very proud of the work that she did with disadvantaged residents of the East End of London.



Carrie Morrison was born in Surrey in 1888. She graduated from Girton College, Cambridge with First Class Honours in medieval and modern languages, but she was not allowed a degree because she was a woman. The ten years between her time at Cambridge, and entering into articles with a well-known law firm in The Strand in London were spent variously as a teacher, in the Military Permit Office of MI5, the Ministry of Munitions and in Constantinople with the Army of the Black Sea. In 1922, at 34, she and Mary Pickup, Mary Sykes, and Maud Crofts became the first women in England to qualify as solicitors. Morrison was the first of them to finish her articles, and was the first woman admitted to the role of solicitor, reportedly by winning a race down London's Chancery Lane, finishing ahead of the other three women who had passed the same exams.

As a lawyer, Carrie Morrison objected to the idea that she should focus on family law just because she was a woman. She's reported to have said in 1922: "Some of the solicitors tell me that I shall have a big divorce practice, but that is just what I do not want. Another solicitor said, however, that women do not mind going to a man with divorce cases so that they will not necessarily flock to me. I like common law best – litigation in the king's bench. I like the knotty points in commercial cases. Men say the law is too rough and tumble for women but I've had that in the Permit office. I like crime also; I think a woman solicitor would be useful in crimes which come under the Children Act." (reported by First 100 Years). A believer in a woman's right to her own independent professional identity, she refused to use her married surname.

Morrison was also a strong advocate of divorce law reform, but had an equitable attitude to the relative positions of the petitioning parties, whether men or women. She worked out of various east London premises, including Toynbee Hall in Aldgate and Charles Booth House in Whitechapel, both of which still exist today in different forms. Throughout her legal career, it is said that her "focus was on social fairness and equality" and she was not afraid to stand up for those less fortunate than herself. She represented prostitutes in court, was the solicitor for the Women and Children's Protection Society and defended the Becontree Estate protesters in 1932.

Her biographer states that "Morrison is significant because she demonstrated how a woman could combine a professional career with a public persona. and yet, even while arguing for the extension of women's rights, could also contend that a better society involved treating men with equal fairness in terms of marital and inheritance rights." and "At root, Morrison believed in justice and fairness. Not all women lawyers have concerned themselves with the betterment of society, but it is noteworthy how often Morrison's name appears in accounts of campaigns and litigation, and how often she attracted the admiration of clients and colleagues of both sexes for her determination that the law should be used as an instrument of fairness and not oppression." She died while residing at Frogscroak cottage, Broxbourne, Hertfordshire on 20th February

1950. Recently, The Law Society announced that they would be naming a room at their London headquarters in Chancery Lane “the Carrie Morrison Room” in her honour.

Carrie Morrison’s biography written by Elizabeth Cruikshank can be found in “Women's Legal Landmarks,” ed. E. Rackley & R. Auchmuty, Hart Publishing 2019.