

Nora: Lifetime of service

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Judaism teaches us that to help others is a privilege and an obligation, a sacred duty embodied in the unique and untranslatable word "Mitzvah".



If an example was needed in our community to illustrate how that duty was carried out we need to look no further than Nora Hirschel, whose death at the age of 95 brought to an end a lifetime of service to the Synagogue and other organizations.

Nora died on January 8th this year at the Bradford Royal Infirmary and at her funeral at Nab Wood on January 18th, Synagogue Chairman Rudi Leavor, who conducted the service, explained that her association with the Synagogue went back to the time when her father Joseph became a Life President in 1922. Although she had never been on the committee she was honored by being elected a Life President in 1989 in recognition of her involvement with the Synagogue which for many years included explaining the rituals, festivals, prayers and meaning of Judaism to visiting groups.

As the oldest member of the Synagogue she was given, for many years, the honor of reading the Prophets – the whole book of Jonah – on Yom Kippur. Her greatest concern when she spent the last few weeks of her life at the Cottingley Nursing Home was that she could no longer attend her beloved Synagogue because there were a few steps from street level which she could no longer manage.

When she was given a small presentation on her 90th birthday she said in her reply that her family name of Hirschel came from the German. Hirsch was a deer and Hirschel a little deer. "Can I remind you that deer can be spelt in two different ways and that she will have fitted both spellings" said Rudi.

Nora was born on August 26th, 1911 at Cleveland Road, Heaton and later lived in Altar Drive, Rossefield. Eventually she had to give up her home there and then spent many happy years in Abbeyfield House where the manager, Heidi, made her life comfortable and homely.

Thanks were due to Heidi and to Bill Pearson who had been Norah's guiding hand in many ways for many years, said Rudi. It was a comfort to know that she had spent the last days of her life in a lovely room at the nursing home.

Rudi said Nora had heard him sing the mourning song many times and had said that she was moved by it. Now it was her turn to have it sung for her. "She will have known that I would sing it for her on this occasion" he said. "Although death is always infinitely sad, Nora's life was well spent and we can all be extremely grateful for that."

An appreciation of Nora was given by her long-standing friend Fay Kramrisch who said that Nora's father Joseph had been born in Germany but had moved to Switzerland and came to Bradford as a young man, setting up the business concern, Slingsby and Hirschel. Her mother Jeanne had lived in Switzerland until her marriage and Nora's late brother, Laurie who was educated at Bradford Grammar School and Cambridge University had qualified as an accountant and had lived in London.

Nora had been educated at Bradford Girls Grammar School and the Froebel Education Institute in Roehampton and had intended taking up a teaching career but that was stunted by her mother's early death and subsequent management of her father's household. However she did do some infant teaching in various local schools as well as secretarial work for firms of Bradford solicitors.

Over the years she pursued many voluntary activities including: The Girl Guides Association as County Trainer, County Commonwealth and International Adviser and leader of two brownie packs; the Ramblers Association, leading walks and being concerned with footpath preservation; home tutoring for

"Literacy and English as a Second Language" schemes; Interfaith, promoting understanding between people of different religions; Association for the Elderly; Meals on wheels; and programming a multi-handicapped boy.

She served on a number of voluntary organization committees and was honored by organizations such as the Synagogue, the Girl Guides Association and the Ramblers Association. "Via all these activities she made her mark and contributed to community welfare, earning much well-deserved respect" said Fay.

Her other interests and leisure pursuits were numerous and wide ranging including astronomy, Braille, computer studies, country dancing, geology, Heaton township, Hebrew and the National Trust. She gave talks to Church, Probus and women's groups, to schools and disabled people.

Fay added, "As a contributor to Bradford's Heritage Recording Unit she is now officially part of Bradford's history."

The Star joins with Rudi and Fay in extending our deepest sympathy to Nora's niece, Dr Ruth Whitfield and her husband Professor Philip Whitfield and family.