

A Tribute

Doris Littlejohn



Dr Doris Littlejohn, a founder member of SURSA and a tireless supporter and friend of the University of Stirling, died on 16 October 2023.

From Angela Smith

Doris was a distinguished lawyer, and served for many years as the University's Chairman of Court. She joined SURSA as soon as it was formed and remained a member of its steering group. As an active supporter of the MacRobert, with characteristic imagination and attention to detail, she offered to run our Theatre and Concerts Group. She met her small team each season to select events in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth or Stirling and book tickets for members and venues for dinner before the performance. She particularly loved the lively atmosphere in Café Gandolfi in Glasgow and told intriguing stories of her professional encounters with enterprising Glaswegian villains. She could be relied on to respond to a challenge; she was a vigorous member of our Walks Group and took her grandchildren on enterprising camping holidays. She was helpful in suggesting people we might interview for the Oral History, remembering staff who were creative in its early days, for instance she interviewed Dr Ian Thomson who was the first director of physical education at the University, appointed in 1969.

She was intelligent, wise and totally dependable. Her colourful presence, quick wit, sympathetic insight and observant advice will be sorely missed by SURSA which she did so much to guide and shape.

From Jim Valentine

Doris Littlejohn had an amazing ability to make you feel positive. She approached life by focusing on what could be done that was worthwhile and supportive. Her interest in the arts made her an ideal choice to coordinate the SURSA Theatre and Concerts Group. I remember her, in the years before SURSA, being an esteemed member of the MacRobert Committee. In among all the discussion of income and expenditure at the MacRobert Arts

Centre, she focused on the value of the dramatic and other performances being offered, and demonstrated her knowledge of the wider context of the arts in Scotland, giving impromptu reviews of those performances she had attended. She was inspirational.

From Richard Bland

I first met Doris Littlejohn when she became Chair of the University Court (she insisted on 'Chairman' as the proper title of the role). At the time I was a member of Court representing the Academic Council. In due course I was on some Court sub-committees that she chaired, including those that selected two Principals of the University. Later I knew her as convenor of much less formal groups: one in Bridge of Allan for reading and speaking French, and also the SURSA group organising outings to theatres and concerts.

She performed these various roles with great skill: but it was a skill that was almost invisible. She was unlike anyone else I've known because she remained the same person in any role. Normally, people become different when they exercise authority and judgement (sometimes disastrously different). Doris was unchanged in manner. Always friendly, welcoming, mild, and courteous, whether chairing the University Court or greeting diners at a pre-theatre supper. Not only was she unchanged in manner: she was always effective, organised, and well-prepared. Anyone mistaking her politeness for weakness was making a mistake: her mild manner concealed her ability to be firm when occasion demanded.

From Christina Sommerville

I first encountered Doris when I became a member of the University Court. The Court, being the governing body of the University has up to 25 or more members consisting of representative academics and students along with service directors, senior admin staff, and up to 11 lay people from a variety of backgrounds. During my membership, Doris was Chair of Court, a challenging position given the diverse membership, major responsibilities, and wide remit. Managing such a body could sometimes be akin to "herding cats" (in common parlance) and this is where Doris's great skill as a lawyer was called into action. I came to admire Doris's ability to be such an effective chair, even more impressive given her small stature. More than that, I came to see Doris as an inspirational and positive role model for women of my generation. From very humble beginnings, she forged an illustrious career where she was highly respected amongst a very male dominated Legal profession, sometimes breaking barriers as "the first woman to...". Indeed, the Law Society described her as a "pioneering woman".

After a very distinguished legal career, Doris continued to be very influential on numerous bodies representing many facets of life in Scotland and the UK in general. We were very lucky in SURSA, therefore, that she took such an interest in SURSA activities and gave so much of her time to many SURSA pursuits. I saw that she participated in many of the garden visits organised by Stephanie and was a key figure in organising the Theatre Group. I joined the Theatre Group for a period and visiting Glasgow and Edinburgh theatres for concerts and plays was always an adventure – especially when Doris was driving!

I was awed by the sheer power of Doris's personality and zest for life contained within her small frame. She was described by the Saltire Society as an " 'extra' ordinary woman who continued to contribute to the community using her life experiences and professional skills selflessly for the benefit of others".

An exceptional role model, indeed.