

RECORD OF REMEMBRANCE: DOROTHY BIRTLES

Dorothy, who died aged 96 on August 3rd, is remembered with huge admiration and affection for her courage in championing political prisoners at risk of torture, and for her participation in non-violent direct action (NVDA) both at home and abroad. The adored mother of seven children, and widowed at fifty, Dorothy originally was an active member of the Congregational Church where she served as a Deacon. She worked for many years as a secretary for the Hospital Service, then later at home typing medical theses, and subsequently was a typesetter for an American company and a typist at Friends House.

Drawn to the Quakers by their pacifism and political activism, Dorothy was very active in visiting prisoners in Greece under the Colonels' regime (1967-74). Her daughter Fiona recalls being caught up in a demonstration and tear gassed at the age of 12. Later, back in the UK, Dorothy took part in NVDA locally and was quite prepared to be arrested. On one occasion, the police, charmed by her, took her back home to check that she had locked up properly before taking her to the cells overnight! However Dorothy's mild mannered exterior concealed an inner core of steel. She was a committed member of the Chile Committee for Human Rights, Amnesty, the Red Cross and the World University Service. The latter enabled 250 Chileans to find refuge in Oxford-some being squeezed into Dorothy's already crowded house. She visited political prisoners in Chile, at great personal risk, and organized the 'Quaker Scheme for Befriending Overseas Prisoners', members of which wrote to over 1500 prisoners worldwide. This scheme was supported for many years by Quaker Peace and Service and then by Witney Monthly Meeting.

From the 90s, Dorothy enhanced the life of Headington Meeting by her presence and ministry rooted in a deep Christian faith. She was a remarkable person, of great grace and fearless compassion, who embodied the words of Edward Everett Hale: "I cannot do everything but still I can do something. And I will not refuse to do the something I can do". Dorothy was an inspiration to all who knew her, but was far too modest to realize it.

Headington Meeting

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