

A DOVORIAN MAYOR...

...who set a precedent

by Fr Peter Sherred

Kathleen 'Bobbie' Goodfellow was elected the 314th Mayor of Dover in 1972 and in so doing created a precedent for being the first daughter of a former Mayor to be elected as the town's leading citizen. Her father, Alderman Arthur T. Goodfellow, had been Mayor for a number of years immediately after the war (1945 - 1949). He was Dover's first Labour Mayor and had been one of a small group of people whose Defence Emergency Committee, had effectively, run the town in the war. Bobbie was also only the third lady Mayor of the town.

Bobbie was born in Dover on 4th April 1908 a daughter to Arthur and Florence (nee Parton) Goodfellow who had married on Christmas Day 1905 in the new Congregational Church in the High Street. She had one sister, Margaret known as 'Pixie', 5 years younger than her and one brother, Gordon, who was 18 months older. Both were to predecease her, Gordon being killed in 1942 at one of the local coalmines. This event may have influenced her answer to a young nephew when she was asked who the most important person in the country was. Her answer was not the King, Mr. Attlee or Mr Churchill it was 'a coalminer'. She lived variously in Priory Road, as a child, at 22 Leyburne Road, in one of the old houses with her parents, and her final days were spent in her flat number 3, York House Lancaster Road.

As a Dovorian her early education was based in the town as she attended St. Martin's Primary School in Elms Vale and

then the Dover Girls' Grammar School, the first former student elected Mayor. Destined for the teaching profession she rounded off her education at Southlands Teacher Training College in South London. For a brief period it decamped to Dover and the Burlington Hotel before returning to its permanent home near Wimbledon Common.

Her teaching career, which was to last 45 years, began in Folkestone in the late 1920s at St Mary's Higher Grade on Dover Road but during the Second World War she, along with countless others, was evacuated to Wales and Monmouthshire (Mynydd Islwyn) in particular. She returned to Mundella School, off Blackbull Road Folkestone where, during the war years, she was remembered and loved for taking great care of her pupils when doodlebugs were flying and shelling occurred. Her determination to do her job was demonstrated by a time when she took the bus to Folkestone, but due to heavy snowfalls the steep Folkestone Hill was closed so she walked the rest of the way only to find the school was closed - it is not known how she made her return journey.

In 1947 she was appointed the headmistress of Broadlees School on the Dover - Deal road just behind the castle where, very much ahead of her time, she introduced the language that she was fluent in and which she spoke to the time of her death - French, as well as cricket and Marion Richardson handwriting. The school was a village school without any village, a corrugated iron,

verandahed structure with two classrooms, one for infants the other for juniors and little else. It was closed 'temporarily' so that a new school could be built allied to new married quarters for the military so Bobbie, in 1963, found herself directed to East Langdon and the primary school there standing in on a temporary basis for the existing head teacher. In the event Broadlees School was not re-built and as the original Head of Langdon School moved on to another post Bobbie remained at Langdon as head teacher until her retirement. She retired at the end of an academic year, in July 1973, when she was 65½ because she thought it inappropriate to leave in the middle of a school year!

Devoting herself to primary education was not her sole concern, however, because politics played an important part in her life especially since her father was so deeply involved in the political life of the town. Her interest in politics originated in her school days and she was to become a lifelong member of the Labour Party very much in the same vein as her friend, colleague and also Dover Mayor, Marie Hart who was also her Mayoress. Bobbie once recalled, "When I was about ten I used to go out helping the Labour Party to distribute pamphlets". She was a natural born organiser and her involvement in the party meant she served as secretary of the Dover Labour Party and the Dover Co-operative Party as well as being a management member of Dover Co-operative Retail Services Limited. With all this as

background, in addition to having accompanied her father when he was Mayor, it is little surprise that she stood as a candidate for the Borough Council and became a long serving Councillor for St Bartholomew's Ward in Dover.

During her mayoral year in 1973 she spent two weeks on a cultural and educational visit to Split in the former Yugoslavia and Dover's twin town and 48 hours after returning was a participant in a ceremony at Dover Town Hall where Calais and Dover were officially 'twinning'. As the Mayor of Dover she spoke fluently in French while the Mayor of Calais replied in English! She also inaugurated the fully automated telephone exchange making a telephone call to the Mayor of Calais to commemorate the event and being presented with, appropriately, a red telephone with a plaque upon it. With the advent of local government re-organisation Bobbie Goodfellow was expected to serve a second year as Mayor, being the last Mayor of the Borough of Dover, but due to internal Labour Party conflicts and with even numbers on the Council a Conservative, Peter Bean, was elected in her place. 'Twas



The Dynamic Duo. Kathleen (right) with Marie Hart



Kathleen 'Bobbie' Goodfellow as Mayor of Dover

ever thus, the political infighting!

Bobbie was a member of Dover District Council from its inception and remained a Councillor for many years eventually standing down in 1990-91. She was asked to stay on the Post Office Committee which she did until 1993 when she was 85 years old. In her role as a District Councillor she earned herself a reputation as a doughty fighter for the causes she cherished like securing fair deals for council tenants and also for the housing of those waiting on lists. In this she was very much a person who acted in the same vein as her colleagues Marie Hart and Edith Hadden the latter having been the other candidate in the competition for Mayor in 1973 that let the Conservative candidate take the honours.

Bobbie pursued a wide range of activities in her life and did not limit herself to teaching and politics. She was very keen on cricket and was a member of both Kent and Sussex supporters' associations but also followed Surrey and Middlesex. Not only did she like watching the game but also in her time at Broadlees School she had introduced the game there. Summers were a round of county cricket in select Home Counties and she loved to attend the Scarborough Festival. Her wide library of cricket related books are now in the library at St Lawrence cricket ground in Canterbury. She had autographs and signed photographs dating back to 1929 of cricketers from numerous county sides as well as those from touring sides. She was a good friend of the Compton brothers, Denis and the Leslie as well as the Langridge brothers, John and Jim.

Being a lover of France (she flew there in a biplane in the 1930s) and speaking French fluently she was a founder member of the Franco-Britannique Cercle de Douvres. Even late in age she would read novels in



French maintaining her linguistic talent coupled with her love of red wine until her death. She maintained her interest in politics, cricket, French and Dover throughout her life.

In many respects she was a lady well ahead of her time and she had an infectious sense of humour. Lively, intelligent, smoking like the proverbial chimney she would work into the early hours. Trailblazing in the introduction of cricket and French at Broadlees she also was noted for her natty hairstyle when she daringly cut her hair and it was worn in a bob hence the name 'Bobbie' by which she was fondly known for most of her life.

Additionally, although a single lady all her life, she was an auntie and also a mother to her daughter, Nikki, who was born in Walmer in 1943 Bobbie having the courage to see through the birth of her daughter at a time when society was not kind to the circumstances in which she found herself. She was determined her daughter would grow up in a family, and so Nikki was formally adopted by Bobbie's sister, Margaret Binfield. Nikki brought up as a Binfield changed her surname back to Goodfellow when she was old enough to do so. She read a lesson at her mother's

funeral while her 'brother'/cousin gave an address at the subsequent memorial service for Bobbie's life.

Like many people in their senior years Bobbie was challenged by the frustrations of old age. She once said, "For an innately lazy person, I have been very busy all my life; so now I have the right to do nothing - even if it does tire me out". Her ideal day was from 11am to 3am perhaps a hangover from the times when she was an ARP by night followed by a day at school. She loved to watch television and for a purpose - to correct grammatical errors in TV statements! ("under (in) the circumstances") ("If I was"/"If I were") - while knitting, doing the crossword and smoking! She was a true multi tasker. In her heyday she was an accomplished embroiderer.

Kathleen 'Bobbie' Elizabeth Goodfellow died peacefully on 17th December 2004 at the full age of 96. Having celebrated her 95th birthday the year before she was feted by her many friends and colleagues, given a bouquet of red roses and a bottle of House of Commons Champagne by the local Member of Parliament and congratulated by the then Mayor of Dover, Councillor Mrs Diane Smallwood.

Despite the outside appearance of a benign and benevolent Miss Marple, Kathleen Bobbie Goodfellow was no pushover but a person who, over the years, with dogged determination and persistence, represented her constituents' interests to the very best standards

of representative government stating fairly and firmly her case and fighting the corner of those who sought her help. In so doing she, like others before her and since, earned respect that only comes freely from others' awareness of her actions and not simply because of the positions of importance in which she found herself. Bobbie had a saying "Do look after yourself, good people are scarce". She was a fallible human being like the rest of us but she was a scarce good Councillor and Mayor of whom Dover can rightfully remember with pride.

Her funeral service was held in the Church of St Mary the Virgin Dover on 30th December 2004 prior to cremation at Barham. Her ashes were scattered under the five maples at Barham on 4th February 2005 where other family members' ashes had been scattered. There is now a seat in front of the crematorium with wonderful views across the Downs and towards the golf course with plaques for her, her parents and her sister and brother in law.

A service of Commemoration and Thanksgiving for her life was held in the same church on 13th January 2005 at which the then Mayor of Dover, Councillor Bob Markham, read a lesson from Ecclesiastes 3.1-13.

The final irony for this lifelong Labour supporter and one which one feels sure would have appealed to her sense of humour was the fact that her death notice was placed in The Daily Telegraph, not exactly known for its support or encouragement for the Labour Party!



Kathleen Goodfellow outside Wimbledon