

Dover Society Blue Plaque Dr Gertrude Toland (1901-1985)

Terry Sutton

Dover has paid tribute to a local surgeon who saved scores of lives as they arrived at the port from the wartime Dunkirk beaches 78 years ago. The surgeon, Dr Gertrude Toland (1901-1985), never received any official recognition at the time or after the war.

On Friday 13th April 2018 members of her family were at a ceremony when The Dover Society unveiled a blue plaque, where she practised as a GP, honouring Dr Toland's nine days unstinting work in a Dover hospital treating more than 350 wounded soldiers and sailors. Many had limbs amputated.

A Dover Society spokesman said: "Dover people were surprised that there was no official recognition by the nation to mark Dr Toland's tireless work. We are trying, in a small way, to make up for that with a plaque at Clyde House (Five Ways, Maison Dieu Road) where she practised before retirement."

Among the large contingent of her family at the ceremony was Gertrude's son Gordon who said his mother was an unusual person, one of the first women to break through the "glass ceiling" into her branch of the medical profession.

He told that one of his mother's possessions was a bullet she extracted from a German pilot's bottom! His father, also a doctor, was in the Forces during the war from 1939 until he returned to the joint practise in 1945.



Welcoming guests at the ceremony society chairman Derek Leach recalled one occasion when Gertrude travelled in the cab of a steam train to deliver twins at a foreshore property near Shakespeare Halt between Dover and Folkestone.

Dr Toland, after the war, recalled leading a team of surgeons at Buckland Hospital where they worked on two operating tables, side by side, on the wounded, many of whom arrived still wearing their dirty field dressings. She wrote: "Many had to be left temporarily on stretchers in corridors. Those who died were laid out in sacks, together with those brought in dead, and taken to the hospital chapel to await burial." Of the more than 350 wounded operated on in the nine days, some 300 survived.

The Society's would like to express their gratitude to John Hill, of John Hill Building Services, who installed the plaque without cost.



Inauguration of Dr Gertrude Toland Plaque