

Florence Mary Kirkby

Mr Chancellor,

In 1972 Florence became a member of the Court of Newcastle University, the same year Linda and I married and I joined as a student the department of Human Genetics, which I now lead. So for a third of a century our lives have run in parallel as she has helped to nurture the institution that has become my home. Florence of course was already a figure of authority in 1984, as might be expected from her appointment to our ruling body. She was the head mistress of Rutherford Comprehensive, formerly the Rutherford Girls High School, one of our city's best loved academic institutions.

Miss Kirkby, as she is indelibly known to thousands of former students, graduated with a BA in Manchester in 1948 and earned her teaching diploma the following year. In 1984 she completed her Masters degree while also serving as National President of the Secondary Heads Association. She continued as a superannuation consultant to the Association until 2000. The personal qualities which caused her colleagues to elect her to high office were recognised by government. She served as a member of the Burnham committee on teachers' salaries from 1974 to 1984 and the government committee on the School Curriculum from '84 to '87.

Forty years ago there were many fewer opportunities for a woman to develop a high ranking career. To become headmistress of a girls' school was one of them but most people will have assumed in 1967 when the girls' school and the boys' grammar school merged and became a comprehensive that the headship would go to the male contender. No doubt eyebrows were raised when Florence was appointed and some of the boys may have anticipated a softer regime. They were to be disappointed; the first words of a former pupil from the time were "Mrs Kirkby? A little lady who ruled with a rod of iron". A pupil who became a teacher at the school confirmed her authority which extended to the staff room. She earned broad respect for her obvious intelligence, commitment and excellent choice of appointees. She didn't try to be one of the gang but was held in great affection, illustrated by the turnout 2 years ago to celebrate the 40th anniversary of her arrival in Newcastle. Her weaknesses were so few, any errors were remembered. She tended to rush the reading of notices at the end of assembly. One notable error was made when a goal scored by the school team was attributed to Denise Dixon, much to Denis Dixon's embarrassment.

By example and through her extracurricular activities, Florence Kirkby has invested efforts over half a century in the professional development of women in society. She has been active in the soroptomists, serving as Local

Chairman in 1983, and the British Federation of Women Graduates where she was President from 1997 to 2000. But her focus was not by any means confined to the realm of education and professional women. Florence has a deep commitment to broader issues in society, including the care of the less privileged. She is Chair of the Northumberland branch of Carers UK and a member of the board of directors of Shared Interest, a cooperative lending society which aims to reduce poverty in under developed countries.

She has played a major role in health care; 8 years on the Northumberland Community Health Council, chairing it from 1994 to 1998 and Treasurer of North of Tyne Patient's Voice, a company and registered charity which coordinates the various regional health forums in the North East as well as promoting the interests of patients.

In her spare time, Florence Kirkby continues to be an active participant in the fabric of our local society. She is a member of the Public Services Pensions Council, Lay Assessor for Public Appointments, Lay Assessor for Residential Homes, a Governor of Sacred Heart Comprehensive School and of Chapel House Middle School.

Mr Chancellor, I hope you agree that Florence Kirkby has been an asset to our University, our city, our society: indeed, she has been an icon in the

struggle to allow people to achieve their potential regardless of gender. She has given her time and talent to help develop a fairer and more caring society.

Please sir, can Miss Kirkby have a Fellowship?

Citation by Professor John Burn