

## Eleanor Hague

If Mr Watson was regarded as the 'Father of Obstetrics' in Northamptonshire, Miss Hague was surely the 'Mother of Midwifery' in the area.



She was born at Kellamarsh on the Derbyshire-Yorkshire border. Her mother died when she was an infant and she was brought up by her father and stepmother. She left school at an early age and was, to a large extent, self educated. Her tenacity and enquiring mind, not only helped her to the top of her profession, but also provided her with two very important qualities as a teacher.

She did not enjoy the best of health, even from childhood and indeed, this nearly prevented her from entry into her chosen career. She left home to live with her sister and undertook her S.R.N. training in what became the Sheffield City Hospital, qualifying as S.R.N. in June 1932. She later took her Midwifery training and qualified in 1933. Before her appointment to the Barratt, she was a Midwife at Newcastle-upon-Tyne and prior to that she had taken training in Nurse Housekeeping at Bury St. Edmunds. Her certificate states: *'She has had experience in ordering, checking in and issueing of stores, the management of diabetic diets, the*

*servicing of meals and the arranging and ordering of menus, and the management of the domestic staff.'* This training must have been invaluable to her for the many housekeeping responsibilities she had to undertake as Superintendent Midwife.

During the war years, her workload increased considerably, but this did not deter her from undertaking a part-time Midwife's Teacher's course in her off duty at Birmingham and she obtained her Midwife's Teachers' Diploma in 1943. In 1954, on the retirement of Miss C Nelson (Matron of Northampton Hospital) she was given autonomy and became Matron of the Barratt. She held this post until her retirement in March 1965.

For most of her time at the Barratt she was an examiner for the Central Midwife's Board. She was a founder member of the East Midlands Teachers' Group, regularly attending monthly meetings at Leicester. She worked energetically and enthusiastically for the local branch of the Royal College of Midwives holding the office of Chairman for several years. Her appointment as Area Representative and member of the national Royal College of Midwives Council involved visits to many other Maternity Homes. This widened her experience and knowledge, so that she was able to keep Midwifery up to date at the Barratt and at the fore-front of the profession. In recognition of all her work for the College, she was made an Honorary Member of the Royal College of Midwives on her retirement.

Her standards in the practical field were very high and she demanded and obtained the optimum standard of work from each member of her staff. Her warm heartedness, kindness and sense of humour were never over-shadowed by the strict discipline that she maintained.

Perhaps it was her love of people that made Eleanor such a first class midwife, leader and teacher. This love extended to animals and all living creatures and in particular to Smokey, her Siamese cat. Despite his luxurious diet of rabbit and eggs, which he occasionally stole and sucked, Smokey would catch and torment the odd mouse. On one occasion, Miss Hague found a poor half dead little creature, so she wrapped it in toilet paper and flushed it down the loo. However, when the operation was over, the mouse was sitting up on the floating paper. Moved to compassion, Eleanor rescued it and took it out to the garden to a place that she thought would be a happy little home for a mouse and Smokey was confined to barracks for the next hour. For the Sister who took up residence in Matron's flat, when Eleanor went away on holidays, the responsibility of looking after the ever disappearing Smokey was almost as worrying as the responsibility of the whole of the Barratt.

Although the flat was Miss Hague's home, it was structurally and functionally part of the Maternity Unit. As well as being used for coaching classes, it was a haven for any member of staff, who was distressed and in need of Miss Hague's sympathetic and valued counselling. In the night, she would report a constantly crying baby to the night sister, either on the phone or in person, and would invariably add the correct cause which she had diagnosed from the nature of the cry – such was her clinical expertise. Many an ill baby spent the night in her flat receiving her personal undivided skill and care. If a mother was ill, she was there, often sitting at the bedside for long stretches of the day and night. Her administrative work would always get done, but later. It always took second place to the practical work of the unit.

She scored the modern theory of management, little realising that she had been putting the best of this theory into practice for years. She felt that it was her responsibility to keep staff happy and although she shunned socialising, she personally organised a Christmas Dance for all Hospital staff and their friends for many years. She would spend many night time hours wrapping Christmas presents and preparing special Christmas fayre for the hilarious tea parties for the patients and the staff.



She always anticipated a person's needs and was absolutely selfless in fulfilling those needs. She allowed herself little time for hobbies during her working career, but was very fond of light classical music and usually chose loud vivacious records – Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture with full cannon effects was one of her favourites. She preferred to listen to soloists rather than choral music though I have seen her completely absorbed and moved to tears listening to the Dream of Gerontius. She had a wonderful eye for beauty, as could be seen in the way she planned her garden and furnished her delightful thatched cottage at Overstone, which became her home from just before her retirement. She loved the beauty of the countryside and her happiest holidays were spent in the

Lake District, meandering through the valleys and making great efforts to reach the tops, despite the need to make frequent stops to get her breath. In this, as in her work, she overcame all difficulties to reach her goals.

After she retired, she continued to care for people in the village and elsewhere. She worked hard for her Church, helping with a children's play group and with meals for the elderly. For a few years she worked as a part-time tutor to the Enrolled Nurse training course at Northampton General Hospital. Her part-time job as midwife at St. Edmund's Antenatal clinic gave her the greatest pleasure, particularly the practical training of the pupil-midwives, here she was once again in her element.

Eleanor Hague lived to serve and help people and when, in failing health during her last year, she was unable to do this, she gave up the will to live and died sadly on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1984. Her work lives on, not only in Northampton, but in all parts of the world wherever her trainees have practised Midwifery.

**Written by:**

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**With special thanks to:**

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