

Stella Jane Reekie (1922-1982)

Stella Jane Reekie (1922-1982) from Gravesend, Kent was an interfaith worker, missionary and later Deaconess whose compassion and determination helped shape modern interfaith work in Glasgow. Stella volunteered with the British Red Cross in Germany from 1945 to 1949. Her first assignment between 1945 and 1946 was in Belsen concentration camp finding survivors, and later at a Belsen camp school caring and teaching children suffering from malnutrition and disease. After this period, she was in charge of Pymont Hospital for refugee children with Tuberculosis (TB). Though she rarely spoke of this time, it is clear that it shaped her lifelong commitment to equality, interfaith dialogue and refugee support.

After returning home, she was a candidate for Church of Scotland's Mission field at St Colm's College Edinburgh (1949-1951). Shortly after she travelled to Karachi Pakistan aboard the *Caledonia* on missionary service, remaining there for seventeen years before returning to the UK in 1968. Glasgow then became her permanent home, where she worked with Cala Sona (Gaelic for 'Happy Haven'), an organisation in Wishaw supporting refugees with TB and later volunteered in the Gorbals with the Iona community team, assisting overseas families. In the 1970s, alongside Liz Holland, she co-founded the 'international flat' in Hillhead in cooperation with the Scottish Churches Council and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The flat offered practical help and advice for immigrants in Glasgow with housing, employment and social services, as well as language, cooking and sewing classes. It also acted as a welcoming meeting space, open to people of all faiths and none, where conversation, understanding, and friendships grew. Stella learned Punjabi and Urdu to be able to help many families directly.

Stella later founded the 'Sharing of Faiths organisation', the only interreligious organisation in Glasgow at this time, where she organised conferences across the UK and spoke in schools about the importance of interreligious understanding. In 1971 she was commissioned as a Deaconess at the Woodlands Church of Scotland. Stella's selfless devotion to supporting others and promoting equality, shaped by her experiences in

Germany and Pakistan, has extended beyond her lifetime. She laid the foundations for wider faith groups including interfaith Glasgow, established in 1999, and exemplified the YWCA's commitment to challenging intolerance and supporting a diverse, multicultural Scotland. At her funeral in October 1982, Balwant Singh Saggu, then leader of Glasgow's Sikh community, captured her legacy. Stating 'Stella died for us. She suffered for us up to her last breath, so that we the Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Baha'is, Jews, Christians and others could get together, enjoy ourselves together and learn to live in love, peace and harmony.'¹ Her work within the International flat and wider community initiatives as shown within the archives, reflected and developed the YWCA's mission of fostering inclusion, empowerment and the building of relationships across cultures and faiths.

References

Interfaith Education Scotland, *Testimony Religious and Moral Education, Stella Reekie (1922-1982)*

Tributes, Stella Jane Reekie, Deaconess and Missionary 1922-1982 'A' to 'L', TD. 3553 Box 2, National Library of Scotland

¹ Interfaith Education Scotland, *Testimony Religious and Moral Education, Stella Reekie (1922-1982)*.