

Professor Doreen Warriner OBE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics, 1922)

1904-1972

Profile by Dr Gianetta Corley (Modern Languages, 1958)

Professor Doreen Warriner OBE was one of the very courageous leading women who went to Prague in 1938 to assist Social Democrat and Jewish refugees fleeing the advance of Nazism. For this she was awarded an OBE in 1941.

In 2018 she was awarded posthumously, by Her Majesty's Government, a **British Hero of the Holocaust Medal** which bears the inscriptions: 'In recognition of Doreen Warriner whose selfless actions preserved life in the face of persecution' and 'In the Service of Humanity'.



Photo courtesy of Henry Warriner



Photo courtesy of Henry Warriner

Doreen Warriner was a brilliant young University lecturer who, since 1930, had been studying land reform in Eastern Europe. In 1938 she was awarded a Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship to work in Jamaica. However, as the German invasion of Czechoslovakia unfolded, she decided at a few days' notice in October 1938 to set aside her planned academic work to return to Prague. She wrote of her 'desperate wish to do something'. She was there over the winter of 1938 remaining until April 22nd 1939, leaving a month after the German invasion and military occupation. By arranging visas and transport out of Prague, she saved the lives of hundreds, possibly thousands, of Jewish and Sudeten German Social Democrat refugees and their families, who had so steadfastly opposed Nazism. For her work there for the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia she was awarded an OBE in 1941.

Following her departure from the occupied city she returned to other war time duties in the London Ministry of Economic Warfare and in Cairo. Doreen's private account of her work in Prague written in June 1939 was published posthumously as a journal article in 1984. Like her wartime contemporaries, she never spoke of that work in the post-war decades. However, she kept diaries from 1930 until 1972 which form the heart of Henry Warriner's recently published book about his aunt, with the title *Doreen Warriner's War*.

Professor Warriner's Obituary in *The Times* in 1972, following her sudden and untimely death, describes her outstanding academic career as an economist and world renowned authority on land reform in Europe, the Middle East and South America. She travelled widely and published prolifically. An Obituary also published in *The Times* by a friend who had worked with Doreen in Prague in 1938/1939 adds further insight into the personality of this brilliant, daring and wonderfully engaging woman who was 'good company even in bad times'. 'Doreen was completely realistic about the political situation and took personal risks in her stride. But she also had a quality that is rare today: she believed in the possibility of good news. This long-term optimism is among the many things her friends will miss'.

In February 1973 Professor Nancy Lambton, a colleague and friend, gave the Address at a Memorial Service for Professor Warriner at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London. She described her 'as a person of great wisdom and great compassion, of infinite resource and abundant common sense. ... she had an immense capacity for laughter – but laughter which was always kindly and never frivolous'. This Address is available to read in the St Hugh's Archive and provides a fine account of Professor Warriner's life's work, committed to alleviating poverty through land reform.

Doreen Warriner's own account of her work in Prague in 1938/1939, *Winter in Prague*, is in the St Hugh's College Library, as is also the book published by her nephew, Henry Warriner. These authentic accounts of that tragic period of European history are a lasting record of an inspirational woman and of her many friends and colleagues who worked with her in Prague.

Bibliography:

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