

# The Blue Plaque

## Kathleen Ferrier

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Kathleen Ferrier was one of the best-loved British singers of the twentieth century and her early death from breast cancer was a great shock to her admirers around the world.

Her active career as a singer was, indeed, a short one because she started late. Born near Blackburn in Lancashire in 1912, she loved music from an early age and became a very proficient pianist but she was obliged to leave school at the age of fourteen and she began her working life as a telephone operator.

Marrying in 1935, she moved to Carlisle and it was there that she first came to the attention of professional musicians. She had often taken part in local festivals as a pianist and her husband now bet her a shilling that she would not enter the Carlisle Festival as a singer as well as a pianist. She accepted his challenge and won both the piano prize and the choral prize. Her professional career was launched.

One of those who now heard Ferrier sing was the conductor Malcolm Sargent. He advised her to study in London. She did so and, within a few years, had become one of the world's leading concert artists.

During World War II she worked with many of the most famous conductors of the day and was particularly acclaimed for her performances in works by Elgar, Mahler and Handel. She also showed herself to be an enthusiast for English traditional songs, performing many of them in her concerts.

After the war she continued to appear regularly on the concert stage and took the title role in *The Rape of Lucrezia* by Benjamin Britten, one of only two operatic performances she ever gave, but, by the early 1950s, she was already a sick woman. According to her accompanist, Gerald Moore, one of the last things Kathleen Ferrier said, shortly before her death in 1953, was, "Now I'll have eine kleine Pause."

Today the Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Fund awards annual music scholarships in her memory. The blue plaque to Kathleen Ferrier is on her house in Frognal, Hamstead, NW3.



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