



Florence Boot nee 1862-1952

Business Woman, founder of Boots Booklovers libraries

Florence was the daughter of a stationer and bookshop owner from St Helier in Jersey. In 1886 she met Jesse Boot in Jersey where he was convalescing. They married and she moved to Nottingham where she was an equal partner in the business. She took a keen interest in Boots No 2 Dept ie stationery, books and fancy goods. She also was involved in the welfare of the workers establishing a continuation school so that young workers could gain their matriculation. It was her idea to open lending libraries inside the shops and in 1898 they started this in a dozen branches. The initial library was no more than a revolving bookcase containing secondhand books bought by Florence and placed at the back of the shop so that people had to walk past all of the forsale goods. The libraries became very popular. The first of these libraries was in the “wonderstore” on Pelham Street (now Zara). The majority of the members were women, and the libraries became important social hubs. Boots’ famous green labels were found all over the world and they developed an organised distribution system, uniquely offering an inter-store exchange of books. In the early twentieth century annual membership was 10/6d a year to borrow 1 volume at a time, 16/6d for 2, 21 for 3 and 42/- for 6. Alternatively borrowers could pay a deposit and 2d for a book for a week. By 1910 there were Booklovers libraries in 230 branches. The most popular subject was light romance, then detective fiction and travel writing. During WW2 membership was over 1 million but membership began to fade thereafter with the Boots libraries finally closing in 1966. Florence also was involved in ensuring sport and leisure facilities and introduced social outings for workers. Welfare officers were employed and breakfasts and tea and food for workers before they started work were introduced as well as surgeries and schools for the youngest employees. When Jesse relinquished control of Boots in 1920 they both became philanthropists investing primarily in Nottingham. She campaigned for Higher Education for women and provided £50,000 for the **first** university women’s hostel on Raleigh Street. the University relocated to University Park a female hall of residence was named after her which opened in 1928. After her husband Jesse died she continued to run the business before she retired to Jersey and is buried there – though her mother and sister Dorothy Rowe are buried in the General Cemetery.