

Hilda Atkinson

Elizabeth Hilda Atkinson was born in c1891 the second daughter of Mr. Charles Herbert and Mrs. Mary Jane Atkinson of Hull. The Family moved to Barton-on-Humber c1898 and lived at White Cross House, Barrow Road (a great three-storey building with front and side walls but little buildings behind - it was demolished in the early 1960s). Hilda's father was manager for 'foreign Sales' at Hopper's Cycle Works frequently sailing to Holland to obtain orders. He later took over the garage which formerly stood on the site of the present Church View, Barrow Road.

In 1913 Hilda went to work in Belgium as a governess though later she moved on to become a teacher of English in a school in Charleroi where she met and became the constant companion of Mile Jeanne Godefroid.

Hilda was in Belgium throughout World War 1 and was arrested for her work with the resistance movement. It was, however, her exploits during the Second World War which are of particular interest. Hilda and Jeanne worked ceaselessly helping RAF personnel shot down over Belgium and France to escape back to England. They were part of an organisation which moved the escapees through France and Spain before their final return to England from Gibraltar. Hilda was unaware of the other members of the group who always acted with code names. On one occasion Hilda and Jeanne stole an aeroplane in which two airmen escaped. They were also active in defacing German propaganda posters. These showed pictures of Winston Churchill with a caption which read - 'Churchill is causing the starvation of our children'. Hilda and Jeanne pasted Hitler's portrait over that of Churchill's but retained the caption. They were eventually betrayed in August 1941 by one of Hilda's Belgian students who was already a German agent. They were arrested by the Gestapo and charged with defacing the posters and helping the 'escapees'. For the former Hilda was sentenced to six months imprisonment for the latter she was sentenced to death. Apparently, when asked if she had any



thing to say before sentenced was passed Hilda replied, 'Could I do the six months first!' The death sentence was commuted to five years hard labour whilst Mile Godefroid was freed.

Hilda spent time in some 17 German prisons - terrible times of cruelty and slave labour which included spells near Cologne and Dresden at times when they were being heavily bombed by the allied air forces. Eventually she was released from Gommern prison by the Russians in May 1945 weighing only 6 stones. At the end of the war she was awarded the Belgian Resistance Medal whilst the student who had betrayed her was tried as a traitor.

In 1946, after spending some 57 years in Belgium, Hilda (along with Jeanne) returned to live in Barton and bought Yuba House on Dam Road where she lived until her death in 1978. In thanks for her efforts the RAF sent representatives to her funeral. These included two of the men Hilda had saved from capture during the war. She was buried in Barton Cemetery.