



VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Kathleen Riddick - Orchestral Conductor



Kathleen Riddick was born in Surrey in 1907, but her parents were both from the Island. Charles, her father was a keen amateur musician, born and bred in Brading, while her mother, Kate Florence Day, was born in Bonchurch, where she lived until she married Charles and moved to Epsom.

Kate was a professional pianist and started teaching her daughter the piano when she was four, but in 1914 Kathleen came to Bonchurch to live with her grandparents, where she stayed until 1921. She went to school at Ventnor College in Salisbury Gardens, and learned the cello with Maude Kenny. This photograph dates from that time: it shows Miss Petherick with her Orchestra posed outside Ventnor Town Hall during the First World War.



Eveline Petherick was a violinist who also gave lessons from her home in Marine Parade. In the photograph Kathleen is fourth from the left, seated behind the cello, with Miss Petherick sitting on her left. Kathleen's friend Flora Muller is directly behind Miss Petherick, and Maude Kenny is in the front row, at the end on the right. It is a wonderful photograph, and we'd be very interested to identify more of the players - please do get in touch if you have any information.



Kathleen's real love was conducting, not considered a career for women in those days - they were not allowed to study it at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where Kathleen won a scholarship and studied cello, piano and composition. Kathleen got round this by studying privately under Russian conductor Nicolai Malko, who encouraged her talent, and in 1937 she formed the London Women's String Orchestra, the first all professional women's orchestra in Britain.

She won through the prejudice by becoming one of the most distinguished conductors in the country, working with many famous soloists including Kathleen Ferrier, Paul Tortelier, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Jacqueline du Pre. A champion of contemporary music, she gave early performances of works by Benjamin Britten and Vaughan Williams, and paved the way for others by being the first woman to conduct an orchestra in the Royal Festival Hall (in 1951) and the first to conduct the BBC Northern Orchestra (in 1954). She was made an OBE for services to music in 1961, and died in 1973.

Lesley Telford, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](http://www.ventnorhistory.com), using information from our archives and from Kathleen's family. With thanks to Stephen Day for his help and research.