

HULL FOLK WHO MADE THEIR MARK

DOROTHY MACKAILL



Image courtesy of Getty Images, Credit Keystone -France

How many girls born in Hull in the early twentieth century went on to become well known Hollywood film stars? You might reasonably guess that the answer is 'none at all', but you'd be wrong, because Dorothy Mackaill, born in Hull in 1903 – the same year as Amy Johnson was born – did just that.

Educated at Thoresby School – which now proudly bears a blue plaque attesting to her time there – Dorothy lived in Newstead St with her parents until they divorced when she was 11. Thereafter she lived with her father who ran a dance hall in his spare time, and the young Dorothy was so keen on the theatre and dancing that she was teaching in the dance hall by the age of 10. But she had something of a rebellious streak and went off to London to seek her fortune, eventually persuading her father to support her financially. She got by with a series of bit parts and dancing in chorus lines before moving to Paris. Here she was spotted by a Broadway choreographer who encouraged her to move to New York where she shortly joined the famous Ziegfield Follies, still aged only 17.

Increasingly she was interested in the cinema and was making movies by the age of 21. Her breakthrough came in 1924 when she starred opposite George O'Brien in *The Man Who Came Back* earning her the first of her two Photoplay awards. Other leading men included John Bowers and Clark Gable with whom she made *No Man Of Her Own* in 1932. In the same year she starred with Humphrey Bogart in *Love Affair*. This was fairly early in Bogart's career, and her name even takes precedence over his in the film's billing!

Dorothy returned to Hull a couple of times and on one occasion was driven round in an open top car and mobbed wherever she went. You can see this on the 1930 pathe newsreel of Dorothy's triumphant return to Hull and also a short clip from the film 'Love Affair' in the 'Want to know more' section of our website.

The movie is a mite sexist for modern tastes!

She retired in 1937 to care for her ailing mother, and in 1955 moved to Hawaii where she lived alone for some 35 years at a beach hotel. She had been married and divorced three times and had no children. She still took occasional acting jobs though, including two episodes of Hawaii Five-O in 1976 and 1980. She died of liver failure in 1990 at the age of 87, and is remembered as 'the first British actress to successfully conquer Tinseltown.'

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