

SILVERTHORNE, THORA (1910 - 1999), nurse and trade unionist

Name: Thora Silverthorne
Date of birth: 1910
Date of death: 1999
Spouse: Kenneth Sinclair-Loutit
Spouse: Cameron Nares Craig
Child: Christina Ruth Sinclair-Loutit
Child: Tina Craig
Child: Lucy Craig
Child: Jonathan Craig
Parent: George Richard Silverthorne
Parent: Sarah Silverthorne (née Boyt)
Gender: Female
Occupation: nurse and trade unionist
Area of activity: Medicine; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: Bryan Boots

Thora Silverthorne was born at 170 Alma Street, Abertillery, on 25 November 1910, the fifth of eight children of George Richard Silverthorne (1880-1962), a coal hewer, and his wife Sarah (née Boyt, 1882-1927). Her father was an active member of the South Wales Miners Federation and a founder member of the Abertillery branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Her younger brother Reginald John (1913-1961) also became a trade union activist.

Thora attended Sunday school at the Blaenau Gwent Baptist Chapel and was educated at Nantyglo Primary School before gaining a scholarship for Abertillery Grammar School. She joined the Young Communist League at the time of the 1926 General Strike, and chaired many meetings at the institute including those addressed by the miners' leader Arthur Horner.

After the death of her mother in August 1927, Thora moved to England where she worked as a nanny to Somerville Hastings, who was MP for Reading and also the founder and president of the Socialist Medical Association (SMA). Hastings encouraged her to train as a nurse at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, where her sister Olive was already a senior nurse. She rejoined the Communist Party in Oxford, making lasting friendships with leading communists such as historians Christopher Hill and Chris Thorneycroft. Thora was one of a team of medical staff from Oxford who attended to the needs of the hunger marchers (many from Wales) that passed through the city. After qualifying she moved to a sister's position at the Hammersmith Hospital, London, teaming up with Dr. Charles Brook of the SMA and his nursing wife Iris.

On the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 it was decided to form a Spanish Medical Aid Committee and Thora volunteered her services. She was democratically elected Matron of a 36-bed British Hospital in a primitive farmhouse near Huesca, Aragon, where she cared for wounded soldiers of the International Brigade under extremely challenging conditions.

Whilst in Spain Thora began a relationship with Dr. Kenneth Sinclair-Loutit (1913-2003), and she returned to England to marry him in 1937 and set up home at 12 Great Ormond Street in London. They had one daughter, Christina Ruth (1940-2009), but the marriage ended in divorce with Thora moving to High Wycombe. She continued to help raise money for Spain and was on Victoria Station to welcome the painter Picasso when he arrived in London. She then became sub-editor of *Nursing Illustrated*, and her concern about the pay and conditions of nurses impelled her to help establish the first nurses union, the National Association of Nurses in 1937, much to the disapproval of the nursing hierarchy and the establishment. The National Association of Nurses was eventually transferred to NUPE led by another Abertillery native, [Arthur Bryn Roberts](#), whom Thora greatly admired.

After the Second World War Thora became Assistant Secretary of the SMA, contributing to the establishment of the National Health Service in 1945, and meeting both Clement Attlee and [Aneurin Bevan](#) to discuss the SMA plans.

In 1946 she married Nares Craig (1917-2012) from Clitheroe, Lancashire, a fellow communist party member, engineer and architect. The marriage was a long and happy one, and they had three children, Tina, Lucy and Jonathan. Thora became a full time union official for the Civil Service Clerical Association, and after her retirement in 1970 she and her husband lived for 25 years at Lletyreos near Llanfyllin, Powys. They returned to London in 1995 and Thora suffered with Alzheimer's disease until her death.

Thora Silverthorne died on 17 January 1999 and was buried on 25 January at Marylebone cemetery, the coffin being draped with the International Brigade Banner.

A Purple Plaque commemorating her was placed outside Abertillery Museum in 2022.

Author

Bryan Boots

Sources

John Simkin, [Thora Silverthorne](#)

Nares Craig, [Memoirs of a Thirties Dissident](#)

Daily Express, 12 March 1937

The South Wales gazette and Newport news, 16 April 1937, p. 11, 27 August 1937, p. 10

Reading Evening Post, 17 July 1986, p. 10, 24 April 1989, p. 5, 8 May 1990, p. 5

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Thora Silverthorne](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q24845234](#)

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