

Deborah Kerr and Helensburgh

Written by Donald Fullarton - Last Updated Wednesday, 11 February 2015 18:24



HELENSBURGH people have long embraced Deborah Kerr as their very own film star, but the time she spent in the town was very short.

Countless newspaper, magazine and website articles say that the Scottish girl who became the archetypal movie 'perfect English rose' was born in the burgh.

But she was not Helensburgh-born. A copy of her birth certificate confirmed that her birthplace was Glasgow.

Her parents, Captain Arthur Charles Trimmer and Kathleen Rose Trimmer, nee Smale, who were married at the bride's home town of Lydney, Gloucestershire, on August 21 1919, were living in Helensburgh at the time. Both were aged 28.

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The expectant mum was taken to a private nursing home at 7 St James Terrace, Hillhead, Glasgow, where her first child, Deborah Jane Trimmer, was born at 7.40am on September 30 1921, and her father registered the birth in the city on October 21.

St James Terrace, in W2, has since been renamed Ruskin Terrace.

Her father, known to all as Jack, and mother, known as Col or Colleen, moved to Helensburgh because of Jack's peacetime work as a civil engineer, and lived for three years with Jack's parents, Arthur Kerr Trimmer and his wife Mary Jane, at Nithsdale in West King Street.



According to her biographer, Eric Braun, Deborah's first and only memory of her time in the burgh is of being with her grandmother in a horse-drawn cab at the age of two or three, clutching a bright, shiny penny she had been given.

Accidentally she dropped the coin, which slid down between the seats of her carriage. When her granny explained that there was no way of recovering the lost treasure, Deborah was

inconsolable. Not even the promise of another coin when they got home could stem the tears.

Her parents first met in Lydney early in 1914 and in due course became engaged, but were parted by the First World War.

Jack and his brother Ted were sent to Gallipoli with the East Lancashire Regiment, where Ted was eventually killed by a sniper and a wounded Jack was sent home to recover.

A machine gun expert, he returned to action in France, but was shot through the right kneecap at the Battle of the Somme.

Doctors decided that his leg had to be amputated, and he was so ill that his mother and his fiancée Col were sent for. However the operation was successful, and the long hard road to recovery began.

When he was well enough to be repatriated he had to endure further surgery on his upper leg to halt gangrene infection, but eventually he left Roehampton Military Hospital in south-west London, was discharged from the Army, and travelled to the Smale home at Lydney. There he married Col in St Mary's Parish Church.

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