

Making a Mark



Flora Solomon timeline

- 1895 Flora Benenson is born in Pinsk in Imperial Russia.
- WW1 Flora moves to Germany before making her way to England where she marries Colonel Harold Solomon.
- 1921 Flora's only child – Peter James Henry Solomon is born. Adopting his mother's maiden name later in life, Peter Benenson will go on to found the human rights group, Amnesty International.
- 1931 Flora Solomon's father, Grigori Benenson – a multi-millionaire Russian banker who had emigrated to the United States - loses his fortune in the Wall Street Crash.
- 1931 Harold Solomon dies.
- 1930s Flora helps to find homes for refugee children who have fled to London from continental Europe.
- 1933 Simon Marks meets Flora Solomon at a dinner party – she is interested in the welfare of Marks & Spencer staff.
- 1934 Flora is appointed as the head of a new Marks & Spencer Staff Welfare Service. Under her guidance, the Service will introduce health and dental services for staff, camping holidays, subsidised staff canteens, subsidised hairdressing, sports clubs and staff rest rooms.
- 1934 A Personnel Department is created, with Flora at the head. In an article she writes for the company magazine, Flora asserts that 'training for the job is an essential part of any welfare scheme'. A staff training scheme is introduced in Marks & Spencer the same year.
- 1936 A Marks & Spencer pension scheme is introduced, initially only for senior men in the business!
- 1936 The Marks & Spencer Benevolent Trust is set up, which provides retirement benefits for those people outside the pension scheme.
- WW2 Flora – 'the Lady of the Ladle' is the driving force behind the government-sponsored British Restaurant system, which provides cheap, hot and nourishing meals for people disadvantaged by the war.
- She helps to distribute food around areas – in London and nationally – that are suffering hardship from the blitz; feeding the local population, emergency workers and staff from local businesses that have been bombed.
- 1946 Flora's devotion to solving social problems is recognised when she is awarded an MBE.
- 1948 The British National Health Service is launched – the staff initiatives Flora had introduced had influenced the development of the welfare state.
- 1984 Flora Solomon dies.