

About the Artist

Diana Tetlow

Local artist, Diana Tetlow, is internationally known for her oil portraits.

Once the Paget Parish Council knew that they wanted to honour former Paget MP Edna Watson, they had no hesitation in selecting Diana Tetlow and commissioned her to paint the portrait in 2009 as part of Bermuda's 400th Anniversary celebrations.

Diana Tetlow painstakingly researched Edna Watson's history and searched for the best available photographs of Mrs. Watson to create an accurate likeness. The finished portrait demonstrates the artist's professional skill in capturing the strong and determined character of Mrs. Watson.

Learn more about the artist by visiting her website www.DianaTetlow.com

Paget Parish Council

Working for the benefit of the residents of Paget

The Paget Parish council acts on behalf of the residents of Paget. The Council preserves and improves the general amenities of the parish and promotes the well-being of persons resident in the parish.

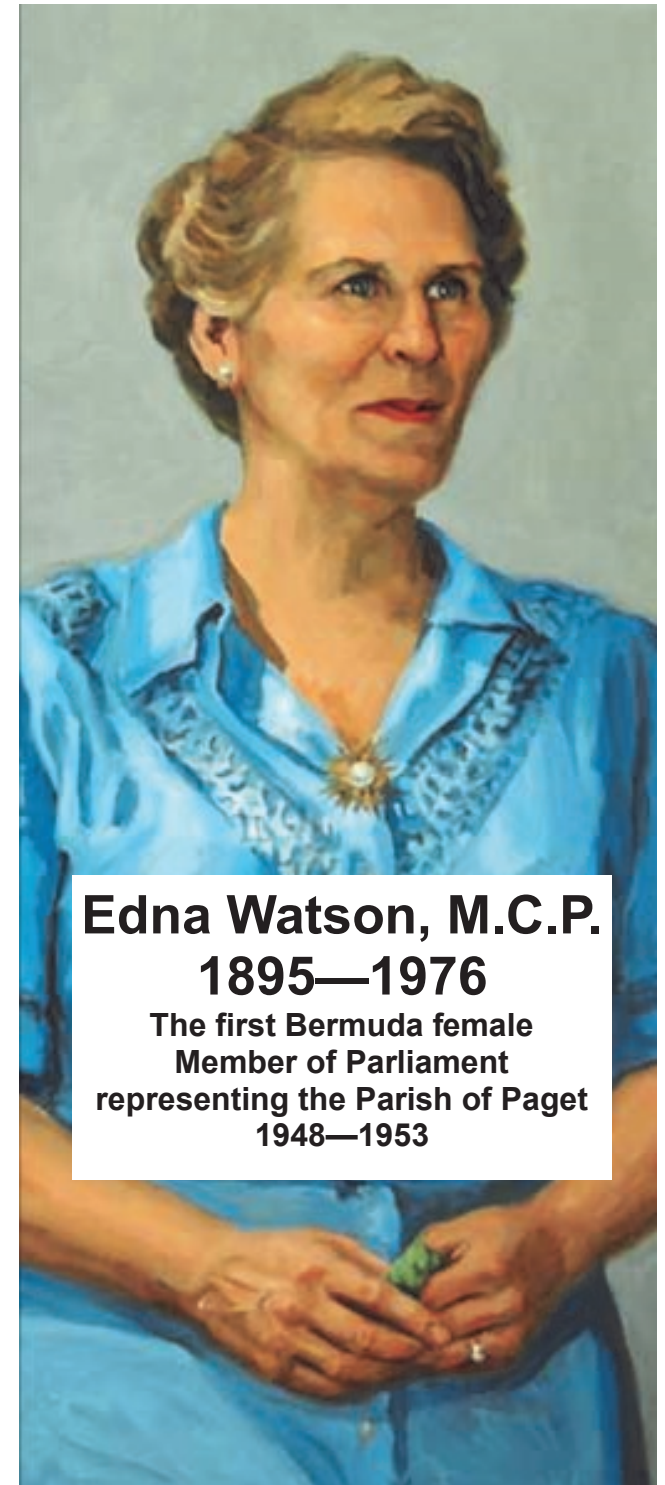
The Council can bring to the attention of the Government Minister responsible for Parish Councils any matter affecting the general welfare of residents of Paget.

The Paget Parish Council manages the Waterlot property at Red Hole, including the dock, the mooring slips at the dock and the Red Hole beaches.

The Council supports Paget students who are college-bound by awarding annual scholarships.



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Edna Watson, M.C.P.
1895—1976
The first Bermuda female
Member of Parliament
representing the Parish of Paget
1948—1953

Wonder Woman

Plane crash heroine, pioneering parliamentarian and world traveler, Edna Watson left an impressive legacy. So why is she one of Bermuda's least remembered figures?

By Meredith Ebbin, excerpts from the original article for *The Bermudian* magazine 2009

Edna Watson was once called “the bravest woman alive”. The accolade came from a fellow passenger, who spent 11 hours floating with her and either other survivors in the waters of the Atlantic, nearly 400 miles off Bermuda, as they waited for rescue following a plane crash in 1939.

Born in Montreal on August 2, 1895, Watson spent the better part of her adult life in Bermuda, where she became a pioneering parliamentarian, and founded the Committee of 25 for Handicapped Children, as well as a hospital for children with disabilities.

A woman with a social conscience, an adventurous streak and vast stores of physical courage, Watson won a bravery award for saving the plane captain's life. Six years later, she survived a ship's torpedo attack while serving with the Canadian Army Medical Corps during the Second World War.

Well into her middle age, she entered a new phase of her life, travelling the world solo., on board cargo ships. That was several years after she and Hilda Aitken made history when in June 1948, they became the first two women elected to serve in the House of Assembly.

But 33 years after her death, Edna Watson is largely forgotten even though the Committee of 25 continues to carry out her mission. A plaque at Child and Adolescent Services at the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Centre recalls its former name — the Watson Ward — where children with disabilities were cared for when their families were unwilling or unable to keep them at home.>>>

Watson was a McGill University-trained physiotherapist who first visited Bermuda in 1924 with her husband of three years, Robert B. Watson, a merchant and Air Force gunner.>>>

In 1927, entranced by the island's charms and more than likely its climate, the Watsons took up residence in Bermuda. They built a home, Scarrington, on land they purchased off Middle Road, Paget and operated it as a guesthouse and a poultry and produce farm.

Robert Watson died in 1938, and Watson spent her first Christmas as a widow with her family back home in Montreal. She flew back on January 21, 1939, boarding Imperial Airways' luxury flying boat Cavalier in Port Washington, New York for the five-hour trip to Bermuda. Two hours into the journey, the first sign of trouble came when an engine failed. The plane, carrying eight passengers and five crew, eventually lost altitude and crashed and sank within 15 minutes.

Everyone on board managed to scramble out of the plane. There was no life raft, no flares and only six life preservers, to which the survivors clung on to for dear life. Within hours, two passengers and crewman Robert Spence died. Rescue for the rest came just before midnight, nearly 11 hours after the crash.>>>

Watson was hailed as a hero for saving the life of the Cavalier's captain Roland “Roly” Alderson. Watson literally helped keep him afloat. She also buoyed everyone's spirits.>>> The *New York Times* reported how Watson had swum among the group, “massaging muscles that had gone stiff with cold.”>>> The Bermuda survivors returned home the following week on a cruise ship and to a hero's welcome.>>> On August 4, 1939, in his last official act as Governor, Sir Reginald Hildyard presented Watson with the Royal Humane Society's Silver Medal for saving the life of the injured captain.>>>

Unfazed by that ordeal, and with the Second World War brewing, Watson prepared to enlist in the Canadian Army. She returned to Canada later in 1939, took a refresher physiotherapy course, and signed up with the Army's Medical Corps.>>> Watson served in England for three years. In 1943, she was sailing to northern Italy in a convoy of ships, when a German torpedo hit the ship on which she was travelling. The hull was damaged and the ship sank but everyone on board was rescued.

The island's female property-owners had won the right to vote in 1944, after a 25-year campaign. They voted for the first time in a 1946 by-election. In the 1948 general election, Watson was one of three women candidates. Nurse Alice Scott of Sandys was unsuccessful, but Watson was elected in Paget, and Hilda



Aitken saw victory in Smith's. Putting themselves up as candidates was a natural progression for Aitken and Scott, who had been members of Bermuda's suffragette movement. Watson made her decision to stand more or less on a whim.>>> She attributed her win to the notoriety of the Cavalier crash. “People remembered the Cavalier and I had just returned from the Army,” she said. “That provided a bit of glamour.”

Male parliamentarians wasted no time in putting Watson to work. Watson, who was the first woman to speak in Parliament, was appointed chairman of the Transport Control Board. It was a key appointment because Parliament had narrowly approved cars for Bermuda in 1946. Cars were a highly divisive issue — Watson said she was given the post of TCD chair because no male parliamentarian wanted it. She chaired TCD during its crucial formative years, laying the framework for regulations governing the use of cars.

In 1949, she was appointed chairman of the Social Welfare Board. That post proved to be a source of frustration, she later said, because Government refused to allocate sufficient funds to address social issues.

Her frustration led her to found the Committee of 25 (“for Handicapped Children” was added to the name later). She invited 12 friends, who were asked to bring other 12 friends to the first meeting.

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