



**PRESS RELEASE**  
**BLUE HERITAGE PLAQUE**

**DIANA KENNEDY  
NÉE SOUTHWOOD  
(1923-2022)  
MEXICANIST  
WAS BORN HERE**

Our 50<sup>th</sup> heritage plaque was installed at 19 York Hill, the fourth plaque to be adorned on this particular residence. Current homeowners, Michael and Joanne Burns are delighted to reside at Loughton's most commemorated address and are looking into whether this sets a record.

A dedication ceremony was held on 12 August, with a wonderful tea laid on by Michael and Joanne. Cllr Chris Pond, Chair of the Environment & Heritage Committee gave a brief talk on the subject of this plaque, Diana Kennedy, along with the other plaques installed at this site, two of which (Arthur Bacot, Medical Entomologist and Christopher Cutchey, Loughton's first photographer) were installed during Covid restrictions meaning a ceremony could not be held. (Two of the plaques: Edward Cummings, Clerk of works, St Paul's Cathedral and Christopher Cutchey, were commissioned by the homeowners themselves.)

This latest plaque installation by Loughton Town Council commemorates Diana Kennedy, Mexicanist – an authority on everything Mexican, in particular Mexican cuisine. She wrote nine books on the subject covering her fifty years travelling Mexico, interviewing and learning from different types of cooks from virtually every region of the nation. Owing to her style of work, she was referred to as a "culinary anthropologist" and self-identified as an "ethno-gastronomer".

Diana Southwood was born in Loughton on 3 March 1923, at 19 York Hill, her father was a salesman, and mother, a schoolteacher who loved nature and wanted to live quietly in the countryside. Diana attended South Hampstead High School, then following the outbreak of World War II, in 1941, aged 19 and being unable to attend university, she joined the Women's Timber Corps, a division of the Land Army.

In 1953 she emigrated to Canada. On a last minute trip to Haiti, in 1957, she met Paul Kennedy, a correspondent for The New York Times in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. They moved to Mexico, marrying sometime later. Thus began Diana's love of Mexican food, dedicating her subsequent career to its preservation and promotion, exploring every state in Mexico, travelling to many isolated areas, visiting markets and cooks, researching cooking ingredients and methods.

After settling in Zitácuaro, Michoacán, she built what might be termed an eco-house, establishing a centre of research, teaching and sustainable living, keeping animals and

growing much of her own food organically. All the water used was from tanks that collected wastewater, with a patch of land serving as a filter for it, and much of the energy was solar.

Her interest in the environment was related to food in the sense that when the environment is destroyed, foods disappear. It also had roots in her mother's love for nature and experience with scarcity in wartime England.

She established the Diana Kennedy Foundation to gain tax-free status with the Mexican government to work on projects focusing on the environment as well as food. Kennedy received numerous awards for her work, including the Order of the Aztec Eagle from the Mexican government, the highest honour awarded to foreigners in the country, and was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire.

She died on 24 July 2022 (aged 99) in Zitácuaro, Michoacán, Mexico.

End

**Note to Editor:**

Photo attached:

- Blue heritage plaque and inscription

The plaque inscription reads:

**DIANA KENNEDY  
NÉE SOUTHWOOD  
(1923-2022)  
MEXICANIST  
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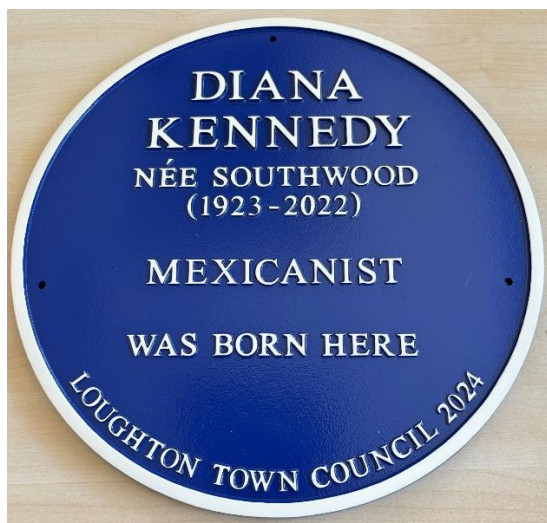
This latest plaque brings the total installed by the town council to 50. More information can be found on the town council's website at [Blue Heritage Plaques - Loughton Town Council \(loughton-tc.gov.uk\)](http://loughton-tc.gov.uk)

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13 August 2024





Cllr Chris Pond with the Burns Family at the Dedication Ceremony



Three of the Plaques on display (the fourth being on the side flank wall)  
The latest plaque dedicated to Diana Kennedy is above the porch.