

## Dame of Rochdale

**OUR GRACIE** by Joan Moules. Robert Hale, 247pp, £9.95. Dame Gracie Fields always had an extra loud voice. "It turned you on," Joan Moules writes in a very pleasant new biography, "it held all the joy and sorrow in the world. It was a liquid voice which soared effortlessly up and up taking you with it until you were floating somewhere above ordinary life, somewhere among the gold and silver of the universe."

Our Gracie was kind, friendly, easily moved to tears and, off the stage, quite ordinary-looking. She could be shy, and for that reason often preferred stage encounters. In Brighton one day the assistant in a clothes shop remarked: "Has anyone ever told you how much like Gracie Fields you are?"

"I am Gracie Fields," she told him.

He glanced towards her uncertainly, then grinned. "You're not."

"I am," Gracie said.

The man nudged her: "Go on with you, you're not. But you do look like her."

Gracie, now enjoying the encounter, began to sing "Sally". . . .

"You are," he whispered. "Oh my goodness, you really are."

Gracie's was of course an operatic voice, yet, because of lack of funds when she was young, she never trained for the opera. By the time she had enough money she was established in a different field.

**John Woodforde**

