

Largely forgotten today, a remarkable group of some two to three hundred women achieved positions of significant political influence and power in British local government in the period before the Second World War. A substantial number of them were Liberals. This article examines this first generation of Liberal women pioneers, where they came to prominence, what their social and economic background was, what political outlook they had, and why there were not more of them. Their story sheds light on an important issue of women's history in Britain: how far the campaigns of the previous decades for women's political rights and participation bore fruit in the interwar period. It also teaches us much about the character of the Liberal Party at local level during the years of decline. By **Jaime Reynolds**.

MADAM

THE FIRST WAVE OF LIBERAL WOMEN

ELECTION TO THE office of mayor or to the aldermanic bench¹ is taken as the yardstick of achievement of influence and power. Appointment to these offices recognised the status and capacity of the recipients, their acceptance into the local political elite, and their public profile in the community. Typically it went with service as chair or vice-chair of council committees and other important local roles in public and political bodies and organisations.

Details of all the female mayors and most of the aldermen during the period have been collected for the English and Welsh County and Municipal Boroughs, the London Metropolitan Boroughs and the Scottish burghs (which had provosts and bailies instead of mayors and aldermen). The County Councils are not included.² Even if not every prominent female figure in local government met these criteria, the vast majority of them are caught.³

Defining who amongst them was a Liberal is not always simple. Large stretches of local government at this time were non-political, or operated on a Labour-versus-the-rest basis, with candidates standing as non-party or Independents or using some other invented label.⁴ The line between Liberals and Conservatives was often blurred and became increasingly so over time as the Liberal Party declined and entered into alliances with the Tories. Nevertheless the party alignment of most mayors was sufficiently clear for *The Times* and other newspapers to publish details

of the new mayors listed by party every November throughout the interwar years. These lists provide the principle source for determining individuals' allegiance. Some listed by the press as Independents or 'party not specified' have also been counted as Liberals because of their known Liberal links or backgrounds. Of course the degree of Liberal commitment varied – ranging from active officers of the party to others who were only loosely connected – and over time some gravitated to the Tories or Labour.

Female participation in local government

Although women's electoral rights at Westminster level were only conceded at the end of the First World War,⁵ the history of female participation in local authorities goes back a half-century before that. The right to vote and to become a member of different branches and levels of local government was granted piecemeal at various stages well before 1918.

Single women ratepayers gained the vote in local authority elections from 1869 and soon constituted between one-eighth and a quarter of the electorate.⁶ They could vote for county councils from 1888. Women could be elected to the school boards from 1872, until these were replaced in 1902 by the education committees of county and county borough councils, to which women could be co-opted. They could also, from 1875, be elected to the boards of guardians that administered the Poor Law and remained

Top: Ethel Colman, Annie Helme
Bottom: Florence Keynes, Juanita Phillips

W M MAYOR

N IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP 1918–1939



a separate branch of local government until 1930. Women ratepayers both married and single were allowed to vote for urban and rural district councils from 1894, as well as stand for election to them. It is estimated that by the late 1890s some 1,500 women were holding elected local office and probably some 3,000 women were elected to the various bodies between 1870 and 1914.⁷ Many post-1918 women mayors and aldermen first entered local government in this way.

The key breakthrough as far as the subject of this article is concerned came in 1907. Women ratepayers secured the right to stand for election to borough councils in Britain, and thus to become mayor or alderman. Nevertheless shortly before the First World War the Local Government Board identified just twenty-four women out of 11,140 councillors.

It might have been expected that female participation in local government would mushroom after 1918, but in fact progress remained very modest. Only 278 women councillors were elected in the boroughs in 1919.⁸ Anne Baldwin identifies some 950 women who were elected to London and county borough councils between 1919 and 1938.⁹ Perhaps another couple of thousand were elected in the municipal boroughs in England and Wales and the burghs in Scotland. Baldwin estimates that the proportion of councillors who were women rose in London, where it was by far the greatest, from 8 per cent in 1919 to 17 per cent in 1938, but only from about 3 per cent in 1922 to 7 per cent in 1938 in the county boroughs.¹⁰ The proportion of women councillors in the English and Welsh Municipal boroughs and the Scottish burghs was, it seems certain, even less than this.

The number of women who entered the local government elite was much smaller. Six women served as mayor or provost before 1918 and a total of 147 more as mayor during the years 1918–39,¹¹ plus four more as provosts in Scotland. As some of them served more than one year-long term, the total number of terms served by women was greater: 217.¹² For England and Wales this was less than 3 per cent of the overall total.¹³ Furthermore, the trend was only modestly upward. Women served 61

terms in the decade 1919–28 and 157 in the decade 1929–38. Even in the best year, 1937, the proportion of women mayors in England and Wales reached only about 6 per cent.

Some ninety women aldermen who sat between the wars have been identified; about half of them also served as mayors. In addition some twenty Scottish women-bailies have been identified.

Women Liberals in local government

The majority of women active in local government before 1914 were Liberals, but many were Conservatives; very few were Labour. All six pre-1918 women-mayors¹⁴ can be classified as Liberals.

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was the first, in tiny Aldeburgh in 1908, followed in 1910 by Sarah Lees in the large county borough of Oldham, and Miss¹⁵ Gwennllian Morgan in Brecon. Lavinia Malcolm served as provost of the small burgh of Dollar in Clackmannanshire from 1913 to 1919. Mary Alice Partington served as mayor of Glossop in Derbyshire from May 1916 to 1920; and Elizabeth Hannah Kenyon for Dukinfield in Cheshire between May and November 1917, both succeeding their deceased husbands.

Garrett Anderson was the first woman to qualify as a doctor and the first woman to be elected to a school board, and was one of the *grandes dames* of the women's movement. She came from a wealthy Liberal family of corn merchants. Her sister, Millicent Fawcett, was founder and leader of the suffragist movement. Sarah Lees was a fabulously wealthy widow from a mill-owning dynasty. She devoted her very long life to progressive causes and philanthropy in Oldham, where she was a lynchpin of the town's Liberal Nonconformist elite. Such was her munificence and status that her fellow local Congregationalists treated her 'as if of royal blood'.¹⁶ The Partingtons of Glossop and the Kenyons of Dukinfield were lynchpins of Liberalism and Nonconformity their towns, running, respectively, very successful family paper-manufacture and rope-making businesses. Both families were very active in local government. Mary Alice Partington was re-elected mayor

three times after completing her husband's term. Elizabeth Kenyon was mayoress to her husband seven times and to her son again shortly before her death in 1935. Miss Gwennllian Morgan's status derived from 'old wealth', her family being local landowners for more than three hundred years and prominent churchmen and philanthropists in Brecon. Lavinia Malcolm's background was more modest. Her family were tradesmen and she married a teacher. They were heavily involved in the small-town elite of Dollar, with both her grandfather and husband serving as provost before her.

After the First World War, Liberals continued to be prominent amongst the female local government elite, though their numbers declined as the party weakened nationally. As Table 1 shows, almost 30 per cent of women-mayors in the 1920s were Liberals and about 12 per cent in the 1930s. Looking at the terms served (Table 2), almost one-third of terms served by women in the 1920s were by Liberals and 16 per cent of the terms served in the 1930s.¹⁷

Amongst the aldermen, fifteen were Liberal or Liberal-inclined Independents, ten of them also serving as mayor. In all, then, some thirty-plus Liberal women held prominent office in local government between the wars.

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Where did they come from?

One of the most striking features of the entry of women into local government after 1918 is its very uneven geographical spread, and this was particularly pronounced as regards our leadership cohort.

There was a marked divide between southern and eastern Britain, where many more women came to the fore, and northern and western Britain where far fewer did. In fact some 80 per cent of women-mayors came from southern and eastern England including London. Scotland was strikingly under-represented with 35 per cent of the local authorities but less than 3 per cent of the women-mayors. The same pattern is evident among women-aldermen and bailies.

The variation partly reflected the local strength of the emerging Labour Party and the extent to which it practised positive

Table 1: Women mayors by party in the 1920s and 1930s – individuals who served¹⁸

	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Independent, unspecified</i>	<i>Total</i>
1919–28	16	24	4	10	54
1929–38	11	32	30	20	93

Table 2: Women mayors by party in the 1920s and 1930s – terms served¹⁹ (Figures in brackets give the number of male mayors elected)

	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Independent, unspecified</i>	<i>Total</i>
1919–28	20 (1083)	24 (1673)	3 (321)	14 (466)	61 (3543)
1929–38	25 (683)	64 (1494)	32 (693)	36 (961)	157 (3831)

discrimination in favour of women. The London region, where Labour made big gains in the early 1920s and 1930s, and where George Lansbury, Herbert Morrison and others actively encouraged the advancement of women in the party, provided nearly half of the Labour women-mayors. In the industrial districts of the north of England, south Wales and Scotland, even where Labour was strong, the culture of local Labour parties seems to have held women back. Thus outside the Home Counties, East Anglia and Midlands only two female Labour mayors were elected before the Second World War.²⁰ In many rural areas Labour was still very weak and the party had few mayors, let alone women-mayors.

The Liberals only partly compensated for the uneven Labour performance. In the north-west, where the party remained relatively strong between the wars, it provided seven out of the fifteen women-mayors. But in the north-east and south Wales, Liberal women-mayors were almost as rare as Labour ones. The Liberals provided very few women-mayors/provosts from their strongholds in the 'Celtic fringe': the far south-west, mid- and north-Wales, and rural Scotland.

Apart from the London region, almost everywhere the bulk of female local government leaders were Conservatives or conservative-minded Independents. This reflected the domination by the Conservatives of local government between the wars, even in many working-class towns and cities in the North and Midlands. It also resulted from the widespread participation of middle-class women in the local infrastructure of church, social, charitable and political

activities that flourished in many towns across the Home Counties and beyond. Activism in apolitical women's organisations such as the Mothers' Union, the Women's Institute, the Townswomen's Guild or the Girl Guides was but one step to involvement in local government and overwhelmingly such recruits were Conservatives or Independents.

The Liberal women pioneers also often came from parallel Liberal cultures: the Nonconformist churches; socially improving philanthropy, especially in the health and education fields; temperance work; and the League of Nations Union. They also came from the more political women's movement – from suffragism and the various organisations associated with the advancement of female political engagement such as the Women's Local Government Society (WLGS) and the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) and their post-1918 successors, the Women Citizen's Association (WCA) and the National Council of Women (NCW). Often this culture was closely associated with local economic elites that continued to support the Liberals. Though in decline, where these forces remained resilient they sustained a significant Liberal presence in local government and continued to provide a route for some women to enter local politics.

What was their social and economic background?

The first wave of women that gained prominence in local government was overwhelmingly middle-class. There were also a couple of Tory aristocrats and a handful of Liberal and Conservative

working-class women, joined increasingly from the 1930s by a small but growing number from the Labour Party. But the great mass was middle-class, ranging from the upper middle class with gentry or extremely wealthy industrial plutocratic backgrounds, through a large number of comfortably affluent wives and daughters of professionals, businessmen and farmers, to a growing number of working women in education, nursing, clerical and business jobs often of a lower-middle-class character.

As previously noted many of the Liberal women were connected with local Nonconformist economic and political elites, some of them very wealthy. These families, often from the north of England, were the 'success-stories' of the Victorian industrial boom. Such wives and daughters of this industrial and commercial plutocracy, often driven by deep religious commitment, dedicated themselves to philanthropy and progressive social and political causes. Sarah Lees of Oldham was very much in this mould. Her husband, a mill owner, died in 1894 when she was 52, leaving her the modern equivalent of £0.5 billion.²¹ She dedicated the rest of her long life (she lived to the age of 93) to charitable and public causes, supported by her daughter Marjory who was also an Oldham Liberal councillor.

Mary Partington of Glossop (paper), Ada Summers of Stalybridge (textiles, iron and steel), Miss Christiana Hartley of Southport and Miss Ethel Colman of Norwich (food-processing), Violet Markham of Chesterfield (coal and engineering), Annie Helme of Lancaster, Alys Hindle of Darwen, Ada Edge of Lytham St Annes (textiles), and Miss Edith Sutton of Reading (seeds), were of the same type.

A few Conservatives also fell in this category, though interestingly they often had Liberal connections: Miss Janet Stancombe-Wills of Ramsgate (Wills's tobacco) was the step-daughter of a Liberal MP; Grace Cottrell of West Bromwich (insurance) ran for office as a Liberal Unionist; and Lady Hulse of Salisbury (press) was also from a Liberal Unionist family.

This elite sat above a very affluent if somewhat less plutocratic layer. Although some in

MADAM MAYOR



this stratum were Conservatives, the majority of these beneficiaries of Victorian economic progress inclined to the Liberals. Liberal women-mayors who came from – or in some cases married into – this prosperous business milieu included Mary Duckworth of Rochdale and Phyllis Brown of Chester (both retailing), Miss Alice Hudson of Eastbourne (trade), Miss Maud Burnett of Whitehaven (chemicals, ships), and Miss Elsie Taylor of Batley (textiles).

By contrast, few Liberal women-mayors came from the social classes that were ‘losers’ from the nineteenth-century economic

Margaret Beavan,
Violet Markham,
Christiana
Hartley

transformation. While many of the Conservatives were linked with the declining world of the landed elite and its various offshoots in the Church, Law and Army, and a number of the Labour women-mayors came from poor labouring backgrounds including rural ones, few of the Liberal women clearly belonged in this category. The Liberals are thus pretty much unrepresented in the small army of middle-class wives and daughters of clergymen, local solicitors and doctors and army officers that provided female local politicians in the ‘spa, spire and sand’ and market towns of rural England.

However several came from relatively modest middle-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds. The father of Mary Ann Edmunds (Merthyr Tydfil) was an iron merchant who later worked in various parts of the country as a manager in iron works and collieries. She lived in a large house and was known locally as ‘Lady Edmunds’, but seems not to have been particularly wealthy.²² May George (Swindon) was married to an elementary school teacher, a decidedly lower-middle-class occupation. Lucy Hill (Harwich) was the daughter of a St Pancras auctioneer and married a Harwich coal merchant. The

husband of Mary Hodgson (Richmond, Yorkshire) ran a drapery shop in the town. Miss Mary Short (Eye) lived very modestly, for many years looking after her widowed father, a minor artist dedicated to civic duties whose service she continued. Finally, Elizabeth Smart (Brackley) was married to a Customs and Excise officer.

As a general rule the middle-class Liberals – like the great majority of middle-class women at the time – were not in paid employment. Quite a number of women-mayors had careers but they were almost all Conservative/Independent or Labour. The exceptions were rare. Catherine Alderton (Colchester) qualified as a secondary-school teacher, and Anne Bagley as a certificated schoolmistress, but they do not seem to have continued their careers after marriage, presumably because of the marriage-bar that applied to women in much of education. Miss Dorothea Benoly (Stepney) was a kindergarten teacher. Miss Miriam Moses (Bethnal Green) worked for a time as a nurse and became a leading social worker among poor East End Jewish children and their families.

Only a couple of the Liberal women came from a working-class or at least low-income background. Ethel Leach was the eldest of ten children of a labourer and carter and worked as a servant girl until she married at the age of 19. Annie Bagley was the daughter of a house-painter who died when she was a child. Although her mother remarried she seems to have been left to bring up the children alone and worked as an office cleaner. However they were upwardly socially mobile. Leach married into comfortable affluence and political connexions. Bagley, as already noted, qualified as an elementary school teacher, and she married a successful small businessman.

What was the political outlook of the Liberal women pioneers?

The great majority of the Liberal women pioneers were born before 1875 and so were brought up in the era of Gladstone rather than of Asquith and Lloyd George. Many shared a traditional Victorian middle-class Liberal outlook, often

strongly influenced by Nonconformism. Deeply concerned about social issues, they generally saw philanthropy and voluntary work, individual effort, temperance and improved education and health as the solutions.

Miss Christiana Hartley of Southport typified this strain of Liberalism. She was born in 1872, the daughter of the self-made jam tycoon, Sir William Pickles Hartley of Colne and Southport in Lancashire. She was brought up in great wealth (Hartley's fortune ran to hundreds of millions in modern values) and fervent commitment to Primitive Methodism and philanthropy. The Hartleys gave away huge sums to social causes and to their sect and the wider Methodist church. Christiana Hartley tried hard to understand the lives of the poor, even spending some time living in a common lodging house to experience their conditions. When she became mayor in 1921 she decided to donate her salary of £500 to the unemployed, and her father matched this sum. However she turned to the Labour Party to arrange the distribution of the money, tacitly acknowledging the social distance that separated her world from the working-class. Her individualistic, religious and backward-looking view of the world was also on show in her welcoming speech to the 1922 TUC conference held in Southport:

Why all this unrest? What ails the workers? It seems that, in the rebound from the anxieties of the war, we are all trying to get something for nothing. Too much selfishness exists; that is the result of all evil. We must not ask for the impossible.²³

Ada Summers was another example. She was born in 1861 the daughter of an Oldham mill owner and married one of the Summers brothers of Stalybridge, ironmasters who were building up one of the largest steel-making companies in the UK. They were Radicals and philanthropists. Her husband, John Summers died in 1910 leaving her a fortune worth about £90 million in today's values. She poured money into local causes such as maternity and child welfare clinics, an unemployment centre, and the Mechanics Institute and founded a Ladies'

Work Society. She was also active in the British and Foreign Bible Society. Such was her generosity that she became known as 'Lady Bountiful'. Ada Summers was one of the early women councillors, elected in 1912, and was the first post-war female mayor in 1919. She was the first woman magistrate to preside in an English court.

Miss Ethel Colman was a third example. She was born in 1863 into the mustard family of Norwich, which in the second half of the nineteenth century had grown into a large food-processing concern with some 2,500 employees in the city, thanks to free trade and buoyant consumer demand. Her father was a Lord Mayor, a Liberal MP, and a leading Baptist. He died in 1898 leaving an estate worth several hundred millions of pounds in modern values. The family became much involved with the Prince's Street Congregational Mission, where Ethel became one of the first female deacons. The mission was the focus of the Colmans' philanthropic activity and also served as the hub for the Nonconformist business and professional elite which dominated the Liberal Party in Norwich.²⁴ Ethel remained a staunch Liberal, unlike her brother Russell, also a Lord Mayor, who switched to the Conservatives.

Barry Doyle, referring to the 1920s, has commented that 'although religion was itself no longer an issue at elections, the cultural world of the chapel still pervaded the Liberal Party and the culture of dissent was still essentially Liberal'.²⁵ As the examples above indicate, Nonconformity loomed large in the lineage and outlook of many of the Liberal women. Catherine Alderton (Colchester) was the daughter of a Congregationalist minister and was educated at Melton Mount College, Gravesend, a school for the daughters of the Congregationalist clergy. The father of Mary Hodgson (Richmond, Yorks) was a Primitive Methodist minister and that of Florence Keynes (Cambridge) a Baptist preacher who became chairman of the Congregational Union. Religion played a central role in the lives not only of Hartley and Colman but also Miss Margaret Hardy (Brighton), who was president of the national Free Church Women's

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MADAM MAYOR

Council and Miss Clara Winterbotham (Cheltenham) who came from a renowned Baptist/Congregationalist family on her father's side but followed in the convictions of her devout Church of England mother.²⁶

Beyond the moneyed elite, there were other Liberal women whose outlook owed less to Victorian individualism and more to the advanced radical and progressive ideas of the 1890s and 1900s. Ethel Leach (Great Yarmouth), though one of the oldest women in the cohort – she was born in 1850 – was among this group. Encouraged by her Radical husband, she had been drawn into local government as an early school board member and Poor Law guardian as well as becoming closely involved in secularist, suffragist, Irish home rule and Fabian circles. Catherine Alderton (Colchester) who was born in Scotland in 1869, was a progressive deeply interested in improving labour conditions for the working class and especially women. She was a strong supporter of the 1920 progressive Liberal Manchester Programme. She twice stood for parliament and was president of the National Women's Liberal Federation in 1931–32. Several of the younger women born after 1875 were progressive and stood for election under this label in London; Miss Miriam Moses (Bethnal Green), Miss Dorothea Benoly (Stepney) and aldermen Frances Warren Reidy (Stepney) and Cecilia Lusher-Pentney (Shoreditch) fall in this category.

The traditional Liberals could come across as old-fashioned and straight-laced. Miss Christiana Hartley, who refused to serve alcohol at her mayor-making celebrations in 1921, was still focused on the temperance battles of an earlier era, and Miss Maud Burnett (Whitehaven) and Miss Elsie Taylor (Batley) were also of this school. But others were more attuned to the times and socially liberal in their outlook. Among the 1930s mayors, Phyllis Brown (Chester) spoke out against corporal punishment, Miss Margaret Hardy (Brighton) poked fun at protests against wearing swimwear in the town, and Miss Miriam Moses supported birth control.

A record of support for the constitutional women's suffrage

movement was common to many Liberal women in local government, whether of the older generation or the younger progressives. Some notable examples include Annie Helme who came from a very wealthy Baptist mill-owning family and was a founder and first chair of the Lancaster Suffrage Society, Catherine Alderton who was a founder of the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union in 1913, and Miss Miriam Moses who was active in the Jewish League of Women's Suffrage.

The Liberals had been less attracted to the militant suffragettes (WSPU) and only Eva Hartree (Cambridge) seems to have been a supporter. Active suffragettes were rare amongst post-1918 female politicians and especially mayors/alderman, although the Tories had one or two and Labour had a handful including some activists of Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation of Suffragettes.²⁷

The Liberal suffragists tended to be critical of the militants. Catherine Alderton described their tactics as 'disgraceful and disreputable'.²⁸ Miss Edith Sutton (Reading), a Liberal until she joined Labour in the early 1920s, studiously avoided giving her support to the suffragettes. Violet Markham (Chesterfield) was unusual, however, in vigorously opposing votes for women as a member of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League, although she reversed her views during the First World War and stood for parliament in 1918.

As the Liberals lost ground in the 1920s and '30s, anti-socialism inclined some towards the Tories. Miss Maud Burnett was a Liberal until the early 1920s, but was classified as a Conservative by *The Times* in 1928, when she became mayor. Christiana Hartley remained a Liberal, but in the absence of a Liberal candidate in Southport at the 1935 general election, she publicly supported the Conservative. Ada Edge (Lytham St Anne's) had an impeccable Radical pedigree and was married to the Radical Lloyd George-ite MP, Sir William Edge. But the family later became Liberal Nationals. Annie Bagley from Stretford where the Liberals and Conservatives fused in the 1930s was also a Liberal National.

Perhaps the biggest loss was Miss Margaret Beavan, who established

a national reputation for her work in the voluntary movement for child welfare and in 1927 became a high-profile Conservative Lord Mayor of Liverpool – by far the largest authority to have a woman as a mayor before the Second World War. She had only joined the Tories in 1924 having first been elected to the council as a Lloyd George Liberal.²⁹

There were also departures to Labour. Ada Salter (Bermondsey) and Miss Florence Farmer (Stoke-on-Trent) made this shift before the First World War, while others such as Miss Mabel Clarkson (Norwich) and Miss Edith Sutton (Reading) joined Labour in the early 1920s. Miss Dorothea Benoly went over in the 1930s.

Others remained Liberal stalwarts. Miss Elsie Taylor and Miss Clara Winterbotham were still active in the party in the 1940s.³⁰

However a common response to the party's decline was continuing commitment to Liberal values and causes but a detachment from active work in the party itself. Florence Keynes came from a Liberal Nonconformist background and continued to mix in Liberal circles, but like her son John Maynard Keynes, the economist, she had only a loose connection with the party. She mostly stood as an Independent in local elections, though with Liberal support. Her fellow mayor of Cambridge, Eva Hartree, was classed as a Liberal by the press but by the 1930s seems to have had little formal involvement with the party and stood for election as a Women Citizens' Association candidate. Nevertheless, she and others like her such as Lady Emily Roney (Wimbledon) were much involved with liberal causes, such as aiding refugees. The ex-suffragette, Juanita Phillips, eleven times mayor of Honiton, seems to have been another Liberal-minded woman who remained outside the party. She was classified a 'no party specified' by *The Times* and no link with the Liberals has been found. However, the Liberals were very strong in the area, she was not a Conservative (she contested an election against a well-known Tory), and her commitment to the National Council of Women and campaigning for working-class housing indicated a progressive outlook.³¹

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Clara Winterbotham, Miriam Moses, Maud Burnett



Why were there not more Liberal women in local government leadership?

The same obstacles that prevented women generally from advancing in local government also faced most of the Liberal women, but with the added factor that the party was losing ground both electorally and in terms of the influence of local Liberal elites. Potential female candidates for top positions were amongst the casualties of this retreat.

Overt sexist discrimination seems to have been largely overcome after the early 1920s. Although much was made of the

novelty of having a woman-mayor, voices against their nomination on the grounds that the office should be reserved for men were very rare after 1918 and very much in a minority. Subtler discrimination remained, but it was offset by the widespread acceptance that women had much to contribute to local government especially in the traditional 'female' spheres of maternity and child welfare, education and housing where many of the women pioneers chose to focus their work. Many of the female mayors accepted this limited view of their role. On becoming mayor of Lytham St Anne's in 1937, Ada Edge commented that 'while men could guide the interests of the town in most matters, women were very necessary to give their advice on matters of vital interest to women ratepayers'.³² Moreover, it became quite fashionable to have a female mayor. Some councils saw it as a way to enhance the forward-looking image of their boroughs. As Miss Clara Winterbotham put it at her mayor-making: 'Why appoint a woman to such a position?' [Because] 'it is an excellent advertisement and it costs you nothing'.³³

The main obstacle was more institutional: the traditional stress on seniority in assigning offices on local authorities and the lack of women coming through the electoral system and building up sufficient years to qualify. Firstly, the pool of female local councillors after 1918 was small. Too few women were nominated as candidates in winnable seats and amongst those who were elected, many withdrew, were defeated or otherwise left politics before they had come to the fore on their councils. Only a few accumulated the years of experience and seniority that moved them up the queue for senior office, and especially in large boroughs with many council members the queue could be very long. For the Liberals, as their strength declined, and for Labour while it was still weak in much of local government, the opportunities to nominate mayors and aldermen were few and far between.

These constraints were relaxed in two main cases. In the London region, as we have seen, there was a larger pool of women councillors and Labour encouraged women to advance in the party and on

councils. Labour was also ready to abandon traditional seniority conventions to promote its councillors not least because the system worked to its disadvantage by enabling Conservative and Liberal veterans to dominate the aldermanic bench and inflate the strength on councils of those parties.

The second case was where individual women because of their status, ability or charisma were allowed to jump to the head of the queue. Such leapfrogging was most common where councils invited 'elite women' to take office. A number of Liberal women, well connected with wealthy and politically powerful local elites, advanced in this way. Thus Miss Christiana Hartley was on the council for only one year before becoming mayor and Miss Clara Winterbotham was mayor within three years of co-option to the council and an alderman within four. Violet Markham was first elected a councillor in Chesterfield in 1924 and was made mayor in 1927. Mary Duckworth (Rochdale), who completed her late husband's term as mayor in 1938, was not actually elected to the council until afterwards.

Ability and charisma shot the ex-Liberal Miss Margaret Beavan to the mayoralty in Liverpool over the heads of her male colleagues thanks to the patronage of Sir Archibald Salvidge, the city's Conservative boss. She was also parachuted into a Tory-held Westminster seat but was unexpectedly defeated in a vicious campaign.

However the majority had to wait their turn, which could be a long time coming in large authorities, as the example of Manchester, which had 140 members and applied the seniority rule rigorously, shows. The city was a cradle of the suffrage movement and the prominent Liberal suffragist Miss Margaret Ashton was elected as a councillor there as early as 1908³⁴ followed by another Liberal, Jane Redford in 1910. During the inter-war period, twenty-six women sat on the council. Ten of these had their potential careers cut short by retirement or death, including Margaret Ashton who stood down in 1921. A further four had their council careers terminated by defeat including three well-qualified Liberals: Jane Redford in 1921, Miss Caroline Herford in 1923 and

MADAM MAYOR

Shena Simon in 1933. Two remaining councillors of the rapidly diminishing Liberal group, Sarah Laski and Mary Gibbons, elected in 1929, lacked the seniority to claim the one turn at mayor given to the Liberals during the 1930s. Other younger, promising Liberal activists – such as Miss Dorothy Porter – several times narrowly missed reaching even the first stage of being elected to the council. It was not until 1947 that Manchester had a female Lord Mayor and she was a Tory, Miss Mary Kingsmill-Jones. The only Liberal women to become mayors of large authorities were in London Boroughs (Stepney and Bethnal Green) where the entire council was re-elected every three years and where the turnover of members was high.

Small authorities offered more opportunities, or perhaps simply less competition for office. Mary Hodgson became mayor of Richmond, Yorkshire (1931 population 4,769) three years after being elected to the council. Miss Mary Short served as mayor of Eye, East Suffolk (population 1,733) eight times between 1924 and 1948.

The waning of the first wave

Mary Short was one of the very few Liberal women-mayors to serve after 1939. The party disappeared in local government in most areas after the Second World War and almost ceased to provide mayors and alderman for the next two decades. The few female exceptions were remnants of Liberal elites of an earlier era. Miss Clara Winterbotham had a final term as mayor of Cheltenham until 1946 and Miss Alice Hudson was again mayor of Eastbourne in 1943–45; they were both in their late sixties. There were also one or two remaining Liberal women aldermen such as Annie Helme in Lancaster until 1949, Mary Gibbons in Manchester until her death in 1949, and in Liverpool Miss Mabel Eills (the daughter of Burton Eills the Liverpool Liberal leader in the 1930s) until 1955. Even where the Liberals had the opportunity to nominate a woman-mayor, as in Leeds in 1942, their choice conformed to the stereotype of an elderly, non-political, elite-woman: Miss Jessie Kitson.

The party had to wait until the mid-1960s for the next generation

of female Liberal leaders in local government, very different in social background and political profile; but that is another story.

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twentieth-century Liberal history. He studied at the LSE and Warsaw University, Poland. He has worked for many years on international environmental policy as a UK civil servant and since 2000 as an official of the European Commission.

Appendix

Women Liberal mayors and aldermen 1918–1939 and some others mentioned in the text – biographical information

Abbreviations used:

Ald: alderman
BoG: member of Poor Law board of guardians
Cllr: councillor
CoE: Church of England
DBE: Dame of the British Empire
Ind: Independent
LNU: League of Nations Union
NCW: National Council of Women
UDC: Urban District Council
WCA: Women Citizens Association
WCG: Women's Co-operative Guild
WLA: Women's Liberal Association
WLGs: Women's Local Government Society
WLF: Women's Liberal Federation.
WW1: World War One
WW2: World War Two

ALDERTON, Catherine (née Robinson) (1869–1951) Colchester. Cllr 1916–28; mayor 1923–24; Essex county cllr and ald 1928–. Born Scotland; came to Colchester 1885 with her father, Congregational minister (d 1915). Educ: Melton Mount School, Gravesend, for the daughters of Congregational Ministers. Secondary teacher (maths) until she married in 1897. Her husband became head-teacher of an elementary school. One child. Active in WLF: executive member 1912–, sec 1920–, vice-ch 1923–, president 1931–32. First woman to sit on NLF executive. Known nationally as a speaker. Parliamentary candidate Edinburgh S, 1922; Hull NW 1929. A founder of Lib Women's Suffrage Union 1913. WW1: Government Reconstruction Cttee, Nation's Fund for Nurses. MBE 1944.

BAGLEY, Annie Mowbray (née Jeffrey) (1870–1952) Stretford. Cllr UDC in 1920s and borough from incorporation in 1933; ch Maternity & Child Welfare Cttee; mayor 1938–39. Born Manchester; father a house painter who died when she was a child. Mother supported family working as an office cleaner. Certificated assistant schoolmistress (1901). Husband (d 1938) was a master decorator. Liberal, Liberal National in 1930s.

BEAVAN, Margaret (1877–1931) Liverpool. Cllr 1921– (Coalition Liberal); joined Cons Party 1924; Lord Mayor 1927–28. Born Liverpool; father prosperous insurance agent. Educ: Belvedere School and Liverpool High School. Lived in USA 1890–92. Studied maths at Royal Holloway, London, not at degree level; assistant teacher in boy's school. Involved in child welfare and the Invalid Child Association (ICA), sponsored by the Rathbone family. Secretary of ICA and successful fundraiser. Founded Leasowe Open Air Children's Hospital, 1914. Organised Child Welfare Association from 1918. Unsuccessfully defended Cons-held Liverpool seat at 1929 general election. Member WCA, NCW, WCG. Known by her admirers as 'the little mother of Liverpool' and 'the might atom'; and by her opponents as 'Maggie Mussolini' and 'Queen Canute'. Often in poor health, died of bronchitis and pneumonia aged 54. Left £18,500.

BENOLY, Lydia Dorothea (1887–1969) Bethnal Green. Cllr Bethnal Green West 1925–34; mayor 1933–34. Born Clapton; parents Polish/German Jewish,

The party disappeared in local government in most areas after the Second World War and almost ceased to provide mayors and alderman for the next two decades. The few female exceptions were remnants of Liberal elites of an earlier era.

immigrants. Father doctor and East End Progressive leader. Kindergarten teacher. Progressive, Labour by 1940. Moral Re-armament supporter.

BROWN, Louisa Phyllis (née Humfrey) (1877–1968) Chester. Cllr 1920–; ald 1933–; mayor 1938–39. Born Chester; father prosperous manufacturing chemist. Scholarship student University College, London. Husband (d 1936) was solicitor and scion of the wealthy dynasty that owned Brown's department store. He was a Liberal cllr and mayor in 1920 when she was his mayor-ess. They were active suffragists. She was the most prominent woman Liberal in Chester between the wars.

BURNETT, Annie Maud (1863–1950) Tynemouth. Cllr 1909–21, 1926–34; mayor 1928–30. First woman elected cllr in north of England. Father (d 1896) a chemical manufacturer, Liberal and Northumberland magistrate. Her brothers were ship owners. Educ: privately and in Switzerland. Active in voluntary work and taught a CoE bible class. Sec Tynemouth WLA 1895–1910. Founded Tynemouth WLGS 1902. DBE 1918 for her war work. She stood as an Ind but was an active Lib until the 1920s. *The Times* lists her as a Cons in 1928–29. Left £3,200.

CLARKSON, Mabel (1875–1950) Norwich. BoG. Cllr 1912–23 (Lib), 1926–(Lab); ald 1932–50; High Sheriff 1928–29; Lord Mayor 1930–31. Born Calne, Wiltshire; father prosperous solicitor who died when she was three. Thereafter her widowed mother brought up family (one boy, four sisters) on private income. Educ: private school and Reading University. Poor Law guardian 1904–30. Interested in child welfare issues. Joined Lab Party 1924. Left £4,500.

COLMAN Ethel (1863–1948) Norwich. Lord Mayor 1923–24. Father J. J. Colman (d 1898) of Colman's Mustard, Lib MP, mayor of Norwich

and prominent Baptist. Mother a Cozens-Hardy, also of the Norwich Nonconformist elite. Educ: Miss Pipe's School, Laleham, Clapham Park. With her sister Helen was very active in Princes St Congregational Mission, of which Ethel was a deacon and director of the Missionary Society. Liberal and suffragist. Left £125,600.

DAVIES, Sarah Evans (née Morris) (1863–1944) Welshpool, Montgomeryshire. Cllr 1919–; mayor 1928–30. Born Carmarthenshire; father a master mariner. Her brother was Liberal mayor of Birkenhead, 1902–3. Husband (d 1919) was a merchant tailor. Three sons, one killed in action 1916. Commander of Red Cross Voluntary Aid detachments Montgomeryshire during WWI. She was a Welsh bard, writing poetry under the pseudonym 'Olwen', and an educationist. Welsh Presbyterian. The first woman to ride a bicycle in Welshpool. Left £11,200.

DUCKWORTH, Mary (née Petrie) (1872–1942) Rochdale. Mayor Jan–Nov 1938; cllr Dec 1938–42. Born Rochdale; father (d 1897) owned an engineering firm, was a prominent Lib and alderman. Husband was son of Sir James Duckworth, wealthy provisions merchant, mayor of Rochdale, pillar of Liberalism and Methodism in the town and MP for Middleton. Husband succeeded him as manager of the family firm, was a parliamentary candidate twice, and mayor in 1937 when she was his mayoress. She was asked to continue his term when he died suddenly. Left £18,800.

EDGE, Ada Jane (née Ickrington) (1880–1973) Lytham St Anne's. Cllr Apr 1929–; mayor 1937–38. Maternity & Child Welfare (ch) and Health (vice-ch) Cttees. Fifth of nine children of very wealthy Keighley/Bradford mill owner (d 1911) and Primitive Methodist. Family had radical tradition – her great-uncle had led the 'physical force' Charitist revolt in Keighley in 1848.

Husband (Sir) William Edge of a wealthy, Radical, Methodist, dye-manufacturing family in Bolton. He was a Lloyd-George Lib, later Lib Nat MP 1916–23, 1927–45. Died 1948, leaving £48,000. Her son, (Sir) Knowles Edge, was a leading Lib Nat in Bolton and the north-west. Lib, later Lib Nat, stood as a non-political. She described herself as a 'moderate Nonconformist' but was closely associated with the CoE parish church in Lytham.

EDMUNDS, Mary Ann (née Owen) (1863–1934) Merthyr Tydfil. BoG (ch 1919). Cllr 1913–32; mayor 1927–28. Born Llanelli; father (d 1901) iron merchant, later ironworks and colliery manager in Plymouth and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He was active in Merthyr civic life from the 1880s, a cllr and chairman of the council 1899. Husband was a captain (d 1901). They had a son and daughter (d 1927). She began civic work after her father's death. WWI: Merthyr Recruiting Cttee (ch). Lloyd George Liberal. Left £3,900.

FARMER, Florence (1873–1958) Stoke-on-Trent. BoG. Cllr 1919–28; ald 1928–45; Lord Mayor 1931–32; freedom of borough. Father was a printer, active Lib, and ch of the local authority in Longton. She was headmistress of Longton council school, but retired in 1927 to establish a laundry business with her brother. In her youth she was active in the Lib Party. Founder and leading light of Stoke Ethical Society before 1914. Became socialist in 1900s and joined Lab. President of Stoke Lab Party 1929–31. Long-standing member of Education Cttee and on Watch Cttee where she established force of policewomen in Stoke. Unitarian. Left £19,600.

GEORGE, May (née Williams) (1882–1943) Swindon. Cllr 1921–; ald 1931–; mayor 1935–36. Born Craven Arms, Shropshire. Husband an elementary school teacher. One son: Graham Lloyd George. Left £490.

HARDY, Margaret (1874–1954) Brighton. BoG. Cllr Hollingbury 1928–; ald 1934–; mayor 1933–34. Born Brighton; by 1890s living with her widowed mother on 'private means'. Well known in the town for her social work especially amongst the young, and identified with many women's movements. MBE for her WWI work with nursing services in France. Lib and Free Church activist, especially in the Baptist Women's Movement. President of the National Free Church Women's Council 1922–23. A Girl's High School in Brighton was named after her. Stood as an Ind and classified by *The Times* as such. Left £91,200.

HARTLEY, Christiana (1872–1948) Southport. BoG Ormskirk. Cllr 1920–32; mayor 1921–22; freedom of Colne (1927) and Southport (1940). Born Colne, Lancs; father Sir William Pickles Hartley (d 1922), wealthy jam manufacturer, philanthropist and major figure in the Primitive Methodist church. Director and ch of family firm. Patron of Southport Mater-nity Hospital (1932) and Nurses Home (1940) and gave Christiana Hartley Maternity Hospital to Colne 1935. CBE 1943. Hon MA Liverpool University 1943. Left £198,000.

HARTREE, Eva (née Rayner) (1874–1947) Cambridge. Cllr c 1921–42; mayor 1924–25. Born Heaton Norris, Stockport; father and grandfather were doctors. The latter was a JP and ald. Husband (d 1943) came from an affluent Cambridge family and was a grandson of Samuel Smiles, the Victorian champion of 'self-help'. He worked as a teacher and lecturer in science and engineering and as a civil servant in the Admiralty Munitions Inventions department in WWI for which he received an OBE. They had three sons, two of whom died young and the other became a noted Cambridge Professor of Physics. She was active in many causes including the suffragette

MADAM MAYOR

movement, the Red Cross, the LNU and especially the NCW, of which she served as president. From the early 1930s she was very active in helping refugees from Nazi Germany and after her husband's death she moved to London, dedicating herself to this cause. *The Times* classified her as a Lib, but in the 1930s she stood for election as a WCA candidate. Left £15,500.

HELME, Annie (née Smith) (1874–1963) Lancaster. BoG. Cllr Castle ward Apr 1919–; ald 1937–49; mayor 1932–33. Ch Health and Education Cttees. Born Bradford, one of thirteen children of Isaac Smith (d 1909), a wealthy mill owner, mayor of Bradford and Baptist. Husband (d 1908) was a doctor and nephew of Sir Norval Helme, Lib MP for Lancaster, ald and leading Baptist figure. One daughter. Ch Lancaster

Suffrage Society and active in WLA. Organised Citizen's Defence Cttee to campaign against the high price of milk for mothers, 1919. MBE. Left £19,300.

HILL, Lucy (née Roberts) (1865–1939) Harwich. Cllr 1921–; mayor 1923–25; 1931–35. Born St Pancras; father auctioneer, and she was living there with her widowed mother in 1901 – no occupation recorded. Married a Harwich coal merchant, twenty years older than her, in 1909. MBE. Listed by *The Times* as Liberal in 1920s and 'no party specified' in 1930s.

HINDLE, Alys (née Lawrence) (1879–1964) Darwen, Lancs. Cllr North-west ward c 1933–; mayor 1937–39. One of ten children of wealthy Chorley spinner who left £204,000

when he died in 1920. The Lawrence family were Independent Methodists, Radicals and active in civic life. Her husband was (Sir) Frederick Hindle (d 1953), a solicitor and leading figure in the Darwen Lib organisation; he was mayor 1912–13 and MP in 1923–24. They had been engaged to marry in 1913 but the wedding was called off and they eventually married in 1928.

HODGSON, Mary 'Minnie' (née Cairns) (1885–1936) Richmond, Yorkshire. BoG. Cllr 1928–; mayor 1932–34. Father was Primitive Methodist minister. Husband (d 1935) ran a family drapery business in Richmond. He was a cllr, ald and mayor 1919–21. They had three children. Party labels were not used in Richmond, but she was listed by *The Times* as a Lib. Left £6,900.

HUDSON, Alice (Alisa) (1877–1960) Eastbourne. Cllr Meads 1919–29; ald 1929–; mayor Dec 1926–28, 1943–45. Ch Finance and Watch Cttee (first woman in country to hold this office in a borough). Born Chorlton, Lancs; father was Irish and made a fortune as an East India merchant based in Manchester. He left £209,000 when he died in 1927. Her mother was German-born. She completed the term of a mayor-elect who died. She was again mayor in the 1940s after deposing the incumbent. Listed by *The Times* as a Lib, but stood as an Ind. Left £56,800.

KENYON, Elizabeth Hannah (née Darlington) (1855–1935) Dukinfield, Cheshire. Ashton BoG (ch). Cllr Dukinfield Central to 1923; mayor May–Nov 1917 in succession to her deceased husband, who

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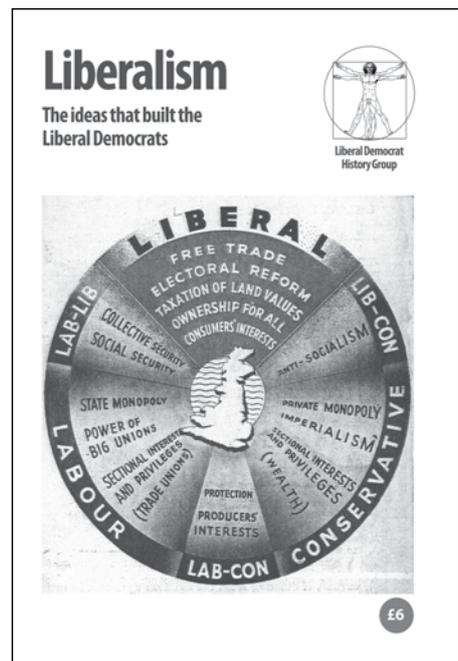
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had a successful rope-making business. At the time she was president of Dukinfield Women's Liberal Association and on the executive of the National Women's Liberal Federation. Freedom of Borough 1919. She was seven times mayoress to her husband, and also once to her son in 1934–35. The Kenyons had Moravian links but were later Methodists. Left £11,200.

KEYNES, Florence Ada (née Brown) (1861–1958) Cambridge. BoG (ch). Cllr 1914–19 (defeated), 1924–; ald 1931–; mayor 1932–33. Born Cheetham Hill, Manchester; father a prominent Baptist minister and ch of the Congregational Union of England & Wales. Married John Neville Keynes, economist. Mother of John Maynard Keynes, economist. Graduate Newnham College. Sec of local branch of Charities Organisation Society. Started an early labour exchange. Poor Law guardian 1907–. A founder of Papworth Village Settlement for TB sufferers. Active in Cambridge Nat Union of Women Workers (forerunner of NCW), 1912–. Ch of its largest section representing cttee members, public servants and magistrates. President of NCW, 1929–31. First elected as Ind, but defeated as Lib 1919.

LANEY, Florence (née Hands) (1865–1935) Bourne-mouth. Cllr Boscombe West Jan 1918–; ald 1933. Ch Mental Health & Pension Cttee. Father a tobacconist. Husband a dyer. They had two sons, one of whom died aged 8 in 1900. Husband went bankrupt and deserted her the same year. Steam laundry manager, later dyer's district manager. Advocate of single women's pensions. Elected as Ind, but supported Lib parliamentary candidate (1918). Left £1,500.

LEACH, Mary Ethel (née Johnston) (1850–1936) Great Yarmouth. BoG. Cllr c 1919–; ald 1929–; mayor 1924–25. Born Great Yarmouth; one of ten children of a carter and general labourer (d 1896). She worked

as a servant in her youth and 'received most of her education after she married'. Married an affluent Yarmouth oil merchant and ironmonger, of Irish origin, in 1869. He was twenty-four years older than her (d 1902). They had one son. Her husband was a Unitarian involved in Radical, Irish home rule and Fabian politics and with his encouragement she became involved in these circles, who met at their house. She was a pioneer suffragist in Yarmouth and nationally and one of the early women elected to a school board. In 1883 she visited the USA with the daughter of the secularist G. J. Holyoake and published a short book about her impressions. She was Helen Taylor's agent when she stood as a parliamentary candidate in 1885. An active Liberal into late 1920s. Left £18,500.

LILE, Annie (1864–1951) Hastings. Cllr St Mary-in-the-Castle Upper 1919–31 (defeated); ald 1931–46. Ch Health & Mental Deficiency, Maternity & Child Welfare Cttees. Father affluent advertising contractor with house in Bloomsbury. She lived with her younger sister (d 1930). Stood as Ind. Supported by WCA 1919. Active in Lib Assoc and WLA. Active in NCW. Methodist. Left £9,100.

LUSHER-PENTNEY, Cecilia (née Snelgrove) (1875–1939) Shoreditch. Progressive cllr, Hackney 1920–31; ald 1935–. Born Stoke Newington; father a foreman. Husband (d 1936) dispensing chemist, Progressive. Left £580.

MARKHAM, Violet Rosa (married name Carruthers) (1872–1959) Chesterfield. Member Education Authority 1899–1934; cllr 1924–; mayor 1927–28. Writer, social reformer and administrator. Father was a very wealthy owner of mining and engineering companies in Derbyshire. He was a Lib Unionist from 1886. Her mother was a Paxton, daughter of the man who built the Crystal Palace. A large inheritance in 1901 enabled her to live an independent

life with a house in London. Though feminist in many of her views, she vigorously opposed women's suffrage and was active in the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League. She became a supporter of votes for women during WWI and stood as Ind Lib candidate for Chesterfield at the 1918 general election (where her brother had been the Lib MP until 1916). She married an army officer in 1915 but continued to use her maiden name. She held a host of important public appointments between the war including vice-ch of the Unemployment Assistance Board in 1937. She published a number of books including her autobiography *Return Passage* in 1953.

MOSES, Miriam (1886–1965) Stepney. Cllr 1921–34; ald 1934–37; mayor 1931–32. Father was a German Jewish immigrant who had a successful business as a tailor and clothing manufacturer in Spitalfields. Her mother died when Miriam was in her teens and she helped bring up the family of ten children (four others had died). She worked as a nurse and youth and social worker in the East End. In 1925 she established the Brady Girls' Club which helped impoverished East End Jewish families, and she served as warden until 1958, establishing a national reputation (she was known as 'the Angel of the East End'). She succeeded her father as cllr for Spitalfields. Active in the Jewish League of Women's Suffrage and the Zionist movement. Supported birth control clinics. Ch Whitechapel & St George's Lib Assoc and considered for parliamentary candidate at the 1930 by-election. Anti-Semitic remarks were made by some Labour members and spectators at her mayor-making. Stood as Ind and Progressive. Left £7,200.

MUSPRATT, Helena (née Ainsworth) (1870–1943) Liverpool. Cllr Childwell 1920–34; ald 1934–. Father was 'gentleman of private means'. Husband (Sir) Max Muspratt (d 1934) chemicals tycoon, director ICI, Lib MP and Lord Mayor of Liverpool 1917 when she was

mayoress. He left £208,000. Lloyd George Lib to 1926 when she and husband joined Cons.

PARTINGTON, Mary Alice (née Harrison) (1868–1950) Glossop. BoG. Mayor May 1916–1920; freedom of borough 1926. Father was a Glossop licensed victualler, later mineral water manufacturer and coal merchant. She married into the very wealthy Partington family who owned paper mills in Glossop and Manchester. Edward Partington (1st Baron Doverdale 1916) had revolutionised the industry by introducing the use of wood pulp. She married Herbert Partington (1871–1916) who ran the business in Glossop and was three times mayor of the town. His brother Oswald was Liberal MP for High Peak and later Shipley. He left her £142,000. They were Unitarians. She declined an invitation in 1921 to stand as Liberal candidate for High Peak but continued to be very active in the local Liberal organisation. She left £45,000.

PHILLIPS, Juanita (née Comber) (1880–1966) Honiton. Cllr 1920–; ald 1929–; mayor 1920–24, 1925–26, 1936–39, 1945; Devon county cllr. Born Chile; father (d 1896) a wealthy merchant. Husband a Honiton solicitor, grandson of very wealthy Birmingham wine merchant and mayor in 1840s. Actress. Organised suffragettes in Honiton. WWI: War Office. OBE. Campaigned for working-class housing. President of Devon NCW. Active in WVS. Elected as Ind and classified by *The Times* as 'politics not specified'. Appears not to have identified with Lib Party but contested Devon CC election against well-known Cons. Most frequent woman-mayor (eleven times) and only one in the far west of England between the wars.

REIDY, Frances Warren (née Dawson) (1881–?) Stepney. BoG. Cllr 1919–22, 1928–31; ald 1922–28, 1931–. Ch Gen Purposes and Education Cttees. Husband Jerome Reidy was Irish, an East End

MADAM MAYOR

doctor, Progressive cllr and mayor of Stepney 1917, when she was mayoress. Eight children, including Frankie Reidy, actress and wife of Michael Powell, the film director. Stood as Progressive; ratepayer.

RONEY, Emily (née Jones) (1872–1957) Wimbledon. Cllr 1922–; mayor 1933–35. Born Birkenhead, father an insurance officer. Husband was (Sir) Ernest Roney (d 1952), a solicitor's clerk and later successful City solicitor and yachtsman. She was known as Lady Roney. They had four children. She was particularly interested in assisting the unemployed and refugees during WW2. Listed by *The Times* as a Lib. Left £25,800.

SALTER, Ada (née Brown) (1866–1942) Bermondsey. Cllr (ILP) 1909–12, 1913–; first Labour woman mayor 1922–23; member of LCC 1925–. Born Northants; father farmer and staunch Wesleyan Methodist and Gladstonian Liberal. Educ: progressive ladies boarding school in Bedford. Left home to work in West London Methodist Mission, 1896 and Bermondsey Settlement, 1897. 1900 married Alfred Salter. Their only child died in 1910 aged 8. They were Progressive Liberals and he served as an LCC councillor 1906–10. She became increasingly involved with the Labour movement and was a founder of the Women's Labour League, 1906. The couple became Quakers and joined Bermondsey ILP in 1908. She was the first woman councillor in London. Supported Suffragettes and left-wing causes: No Conscription Fellowship and Women's International League in WW1, and Socialist League in 1930s. She refused to wear the mayoral chain on the grounds that such display was out of place in such a poor borough as Bermondsey. Dr Alfred Salter was Labour MP for West Bermondsey 1922–23, 1924–45.

SHORT, Mary (1872–1953) Eye, Suffolk. Mayor 1924–26, 1931–33, 1947–48. Her father was a minor artist, trained at

the Royal Academy, and served as mayor of Eye, magistrate and county councillor. She looked after him until his death in 1921 at the age of 92. He left her £1,200. She was a keen amateur painter and published books about Eye. She served as a magistrate and county councillor also. Listed by *The Times* as a Liberal.

SMART, Elizabeth (née Bisset) (1879–1950) Brackley, Northants. Mayor 1937–38. Born Midlothian. Husband (d 1953) was a Scot also, and a Customs and Excise officer. They moved to Brackley in 1906. Six children. Listed by *The Times* as a Lib. Left £119.

SUMMERS, Ada Jane (née Broome) (1861–1944) Stalybridge. Cllr 1912–; ald 1919–; mayor 1919–21. Father (d 1896) was an Oldham mill owner. Husband was a wealthy ironmaster in Stalybridge. Later the firm expanded to Ellesmere Port and Shotton, becoming one of the largest steel manufacturing companies in Britain. He was a cllr and left £192,000 when he died in 1910. They had one daughter. His brother was Lib MP for Flint. Ada was an active suffragist, Lib and philanthropist (maternity and child welfare clinics, clinics for the poor, unemployment centre, Mechanics Institute). She founded the Ladies' Work Society and was known locally as 'Lady Bountiful'. OBE, freedom of Stalybridge, 1939. Active in the British and Foreign Bible Society. Left £66,000.

TAYLOR, Gertrude Elsie (1875–1957) Batley. Cllr 1927–; mayor 1932–34. Born Batley; father mill owner. Her half-brother Theodore C. Taylor (1850–1952) was a Radical MP until 1918 and lynchpin of Liberalism in the district for many decades. Lived on private means. Inherited a large fortune in 1928 when the man she was engaged to marry – Sir Henry Norman, a former Lib MP – died suddenly. Congregationalist. Active in temperance movement and sec of Batley

Nursing Association. President of Batley WLA but stood as Ind in local elections. Left £57,200.

SUTTON, Edith (1862–1957) Reading. BoG. Co-opted to Education Cttee in early 1900s; cllr 1907–; ald 1931–; mayor 1933–34. Born Reading, eleventh of twelve children. Father built up Suttons seed business, leaving £114,500 when he died in 1897. She lived with two elder sisters, on 'private means'. She was the first woman borough councillor as she was declared elected unopposed in October 1907 before the contested elections. Active in Guilds of Help, an off-shoot of the Charity Organization Society, 1910. She was elected as a Progressive or Lib-supported Ind until 1921. She joined the Lab Party in 1922. Left £24,600.

THACKERAY, Anne Wynne (1865–1944) Oxford. BoG. Cllr 1919–; ald 1932–38. Born India; father Sir Edward Thackeray, VC, a cousin of the writer, William Makepeace Thackeray. She worked with the poor in Whitechapel, then lived in Oxford with Prof. A. V. Dicey, the political scientist, and his invalid wife. With Miss Mary Venables, a fellow suffragist, she established Cumnor House a 'home for the feeble-minded' in 1907 and they lived together in Cumnor Hill in a house designed for them by Clough Williams-Ellis. She gave her occupation as 'private secretary' (1911). She was an accomplished musician and craftswoman and mixed in composing and artistic circles. Left £6,200 to Venables.

WINTERBOTHAM, Clara (1880–1967) Cheltenham. Cllr 1918–; ald 1922–52; mayor 1921–23, 1944–46; freedom of borough 1943. Her family were wealthy and long-established local solicitors in Cheltenham and surrounding districts. They were active in civic life and were staunch Liberals. They were Baptists by tradition: her great-grandfather was a noted Baptist preacher who was imprisoned in the 1790s

for sedition. They later became Congregationalists, but Clara followed her mother, who was born in Australia, as a strong Anglican. Educ: Cheltenham Ladies College and in Europe. Her father left £90,000 when he died in 1914. He had been president of East Gloucestershire Lib Association and her brother was selected as prospective candidate in 1913, but he was killed on the Somme in 1916. WW1: was a nurse in London and Cheltenham, becoming the hospital's quartermaster and a member of the town's Food and Fuel Control Cttee; awarded MBE. She was active in the Missionary Society, the NCW and the Lib Assoc (ch in 1920s, vice-ch 1930s). Invited to be parliamentary candidate for Cheltenham in 1922, but declined.

- 1 Aldermen made up one-quarter of the membership of a council and were elected for a term of six years by the councillors, who were elected for three-year terms.
- 2 There is information on the counties, including the London County Council, in Anne Baldwin 'Progress and Patterns in the Election of Women as Councillors 1918–38' (PhD thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2012).
- 3 Notable exceptions not caught by the criteria are Henrietta Adler (LCC) and Shena Simon (Manchester).
- 4 The four women-provosts in Scotland were 'Moderates', i.e. members of the Unionist–Liberal grouping which opposed Labour in most burghs.
- 5 From the age of thirty. Women aged 21–30 received the vote in 1928.
- 6 P. Hollis, *Ladies-Elect, Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Clarendon, 1987), p. 31: about 17 per cent of the electorate overall, but 25 per cent in 'spa, spire and sand' towns.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. ix, 2.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 486: 78 county borough, 142 London borough and 58 municipal borough. In addition, 46 women served on county councils.
- 9 Baldwin, 'Progress and Patterns', p. 141.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 109 and 136.

- 11 Excluding mayors elected in Nov. 1939 after the Second World War had already started.
- 12 Including two cases where women completed terms of male mayors who died in office. Provosts in Scotland had three-year terms and these have been counted as three terms.
- 13 Calculating some 350+ authorities in England & Wales x 20 years = 7000+ mayoral terms of office.
- 14 Two other women, Miss Frances Dove in High Wycombe in 1908 and Ellen Chapman in Worthing in 1914 were nominated for the mayoralty by the council leadership, but unexpectedly voted down by the full council. Dove was non-party and Chapman was a Conservative and became the first Tory woman-mayor in 1920.
- 15 A significant proportion of inter-war women-mayors were single women and they are identified as 'Miss' throughout the text.
- 16 P. Catterall, 'The Free Churches and the Labour Party in England and Wales 1918–39' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1989), pp. 263–64.
- 17 Liberals accounted for 31 per cent of the terms served by men in the 1920s and 18 per cent in the 1930s.
- 18 Calculated from lists of new mayors in England and Wales published in *The Times* on 10 or 11 Nov. each year with the addition of a Conservative and a Liberal in the 1930s who completed the term of an incumbent who died. One Labour mayor in the 1920s was incorrectly listed as no party specified and this has been corrected. Four Scots provosts not included.
- 19 *The Times*: as above from the lists of new mayors each Nov., with the same adjustments. Scots provosts not included.
- 20 Mary Mercer (Birkenhead 1924) and Mary Hart (Newport, Monmouthshire 1937).
- 21 See <http://www.measuring-worth.com/ukcompare/> for information and discussion on the conversion of historical wealth data into modern values.
- 22 M. P. Jones, 'Mary Ann Edmunds', *Merthyr Historian*, 15, 2003.
- 23 Quoted in W. Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919–1936* (London, 1977), p. 79. Nevertheless the Congress gave her a gold medal.
- 24 See B. M. Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism and the "Lost Generation": Politics and the Middle Class Culture of Norwich 1900–1935' (PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 1990).
- 25 B. M. Doyle, 'Business, Liberalism and Dissent in Norwich 1900–1930', *Baptist Quarterly*, xxxv (5), Jan. 1994.
- 26 J. Courtenay, 'Clara Winterbotham 1880–1967 – Cheltenham's First Lady', *Cheltenham Local History Society Journal*, 14, 1998.
- 27 Notable Conservative suffragettes were Elizabeth Rowley Frisby, Lord Mayor of Leicester in 1941, who was involved in attacks on property including burning down Blaby Station, and Lucia Foster Welch (Southampton 1928). Labour suffragettes included Miss Alice Gilliatt (Fulham 1934), Daisy Parsons (West Ham 1936) and Dorothy Thurtle (Shoreditch 1936), the latter two being active in the East London Federation.
- 28 *Essex Newsmen*, 16 Mar. 1912.
- 29 I. Ireland, *Margaret Beavan of Liverpool – Her Character and Work* (H Young, 1938).
- 30 On Taylor, see J. Reynolds and P. Wrigley, 'Liberal Roots – the Liberal Party in a West Yorkshire Constituency 1920s–1970s', *Journal of Liberal History*, 80, Autumn 2013.
- 31 J. Neville, *Viva Juanita – Champion for Change in East Devon Between the Wars* (Honiton, 2014).
- 32 *Lancashire Evening Post*, 21 Sept. 1937.
- 33 *Gloucester Citizen*, 10 Nov. 1921.
- 34 Four women had been co-opted to Manchester council's Education Committee in 1902.

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