

FORWARD SISTERS!

Local Women in Politics

Charlotte Ellis (1836-1917)

A member of one of the leading Quaker families in Leicester, Charlotte was one of seven sisters resident at Belgrave Hall. It was in their home that the local Women's Liberal Association was founded and in 1891, Charlotte was disappointed not to be selected as a Liberal candidate in the School Board Elections. She was more successful a year later, when she was elected as a Poor Law Guardian for Belgrave. Her most significant contribution was thought to be her fight to secure segregation of the mentally deficient in the workhouse but undoubtedly her most contentious was in supporting the policy of the local Guardians in their resistance to compulsory vaccination against small pox. When in 1899, the Leicester Guardians refused to appoint a new Vaccination Officer, the Local Government Board applied to the High Court for a writ to compel them to do so. Charlotte was the only lady Guardian to travel to London to oppose the application in Court. Although the case was subsequently lost and a new Officer appointed, her willingness to appear in Court clearly shows her courage and strength of character.

At the funeral of one sister, Margaret, in 1923, the Ellis sisters were described thus:

'They were public spirited citizens, beloved and looked up to in Belgrave and Leicester. Their home was one of culture and refinement. Their outlook on the world was wide. Intercourse with them was an inspiration. Their lives taught the nobility of service.'

Sister Mary Foster Coy (1858-1902)

Born in Enderby, Mary Coy was the daughter of a draper with a shop in the Market Place, Leicester. She appears to have spent some time training as a nurse in Nottingham but ultimately to have returned to Leicester to nurse her widowed father. In the 1901 census her occupation was recorded as that of 'Wesley Deaconess' and the title 'sister' seems to have remained with her from this time. In 1901, she was elected as the Poor Law Guardian for the Latimer ward, triumphing over the Independent Labour candidate.

Like many of the female Guardians, she was also deeply committed to the National Union of Women Workers, working with the Prison Aid Society and striving to raise local and national awareness for the need to train and register midwives. It was as a result of the strenuous efforts of Mary Coy, Charlotte Ellis, Fanny Fullagar and Emily Bosworth that the Melton MP, Lord Cecil Manners, took up the cause and successfully piloted the Registration of Midwives Bill through Parliament in 1902.

Mary Bell-Richards (1874-1956)

Mary's family moved to Leicester from Mansfield c1880 seeking work in the boot and shoe industry. She herself started work in a shoe factory around the age of ten, working half time as a shoe fitter. As a keen member of the Independent Labour Party, Mary became deeply involved in the trade union movement, joining the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives in 1892. Unlike many militant women, she resisted joining the Leicester Women's Branch of the Union when it broke away from the men's organisation in 1911 and carried on to serve on the Union's Executive Committee.

In 1904, Mary was selected by the Trades Council as their candidate in the Guardian elections and was duly elected unopposed in the Wyggeston Ward. She was to be elected again in 1907 and 1915 but after this preferred to concentrate on her work as President of the Leicester Branch of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives. Her marriage to Thomas Richards, a local Labour pioneer, around this time would probably also have persuaded her to retire from her Poor Law work.

As the first Labour woman to serve as a Guardian, Mary avowed a strong commitment to improving women's lives and well being. The Leicester Pioneer reported that she had visited every case of child birth in the Wyggeston Ward that involved the Poor Law authorities and had also campaigned successfully for the appointment of a female Relieving Officer in 1906.



Mary Bell seated amongst the other Labour Guardians, 1910



NATIONAL UNION OF BOOT AND SHOE OPERATIVES.

Don't Forget the WOMEN'S MEETING

AT
ROWLEY STREET WESLEYAN SCHOOL,
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3rd, 1912, at 8 o'clock.

Mr. T. F. RICHARDS,
G.P., and
MISS BELL,
Secretary Women's Branch, Leicester, WILL SPEAK.

The following contract for Female Labour in the Boot Trade proves conclusively that only by Trade Union efforts can Wages be raised.

	14 Years	16 Years	18 Years	20 Years
NORTHAMPTON	14/-	16/-	18/-	20/-
LEICESTER	12/-	14/-	16/-	18/-
STAFFORD	10/-	12/-	14/-	16/-

Very few receive 12/- or over.

Your Duty is Plain. Join the Union and do your share to make things better.

150, MARSTON ROAD, STAFFORD. H. SIMMONS, Secretary.

Evelyn Carryer (1861-1937)

Although born in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Evelyn was the grand daughter of Albert Cockshaw, one of Leicester's leading radical dissenters. The family moved back to Leicester before 1884 and when her father died four years later, it is likely that Evelyn took over the responsibility of running the family clothing business.

Evidence of Evelyn's other interests are not difficult to find. At the turn of the century, she was acting as secretary of the local Women's Suffrage Society – although this did not prevent her joining and supporting the local branch of the Women's Social and Political Union when it was formed in 1907. Other concerns included serving on the Ladies Committee of the Leicester Discharged Prisoners Aid Society, acting as secretary of the National Anti-Sweating League and teaching [without remuneration] at Vaughan Working Men's College. In addition to these activities, Evelyn was elected as the Liberal candidate in the Guardian elections for Wycliffe Ward in 1903. She was elected once again in 1910 and was closely involved in the running of the North Evington Poor Law Infirmary [now the General Hospital].

In 1907, Evelyn was the first woman to stand for election to Leicester Town Council. She was defeated by 207 votes.

National Union of Women Workers.
LEICESTER BRANCH.
ELECTION OF GUARDIANS.
MONDAY, MARCH 25th, 1907.
To the Parochial Electors of Latimer Ward.
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
As a Woman only, and not as a representative of any political organisation, I respectfully venture to ask your interest and your vote at the forthcoming election.
I was unanimously adopted at a crowded and enthusiastic meeting held at Syson Street Council School, February 25th.
The policy I propose to follow, should you honour me with election, is as under:—
(1) To urge courteous, prompt and careful consideration of all applications.
(2) To especially guard the interests of the women, girls and children.
(3) To provide skilful medical aid, and kindest treatment for the sick, aged and infirm.
(4) To cater for the welfare of the children in homes not situated in the neighbourhood of the Workhouse.
(5) To advocate adequate Out-Door Relief in aid, in preference to Indoor Relief, whenever possible, because not only is Out-Door Relief less costly, but it enables the home to be kept together, and her home is a woman's place.
(6) To oppose the enforcement of the Vaccination Act.
(7) To replace the system known as the "Labour Test" by a Labor Colony for women as well as for men.
(8) To obstruct the reintroduction of oakum picking.
In conclusion, allow me to state that if my proffered service prove by your votes to be acceptable, I am prepared to give freely of my time, sympathy, and energy for the poor of the town.
I am, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Faithfully yours,
EVELYN CARRYER.

WOMEN MUNICIPAL COUNCILORS.
WOMEN in various parts of the country are being no more in taking advantage of the Act qualifying them to stand as candidates for Local Councils, and in the November Municipal Elections it is expected that several women will offer themselves for Councils. Though it is too early yet to be able to give definite figures, the following will be interesting to readers of Women's News.
In the Wycliffe Ward of Leicester the local Women's Social and Political Union are putting forward Miss Carryer to contest the seat with the sitting Councillor, Mr. Lovell. They are issuing the following election address:—
MUNICIPAL ELECTION, 1907.
Women Electors of Wycliffe Ward, Leicester.
[The first time since you obtained the municipal franchise you have the opportunity of using your votes to elect a woman to the Town Council.
It is most important, in the interest of women of all classes, that you should vote for Miss Carryer, the candidate of the Women's Social and Political Union.
Miss Carryer's platform is to elect a woman to the Town Council, and to elect a woman to the Town Council, and to elect a woman to the Town Council.
Hardly to compel all holders of cottage houses to supply better sanitary conveniences, a bath in every house, hot and cold water supply.
Municipal houses, wherever the private owners fail to meet the needs of the community.
Municipal lodging houses for women and municipal houses for poor widows with families.
Equal opportunities of elementary, secondary, and technical training for boys and girls.
TEACHING.
Equal pay for school teachers. At present women teachers who do exactly the same work as the men teachers, receive much less pay.
An educated woman often gets less money than an uneducated one.
Better schools and cleaner. Every school should have its children in a large central hall, a sufficient number of airy and well-ventilated classrooms. A dining-room for children who cannot eat at home in the mid-day meal should be attached to every school, and a playground should be taken of the Act for the feeding of school children.
TECHNICAL.
Proper provision of playgrounds both in and out of school hours.
To prevent disease the streets should be kept clean and free from refuse.
To better supply of free sanitary conveniences for women is greatly needed.
Control by women of police administration is needed to prevent the danger of tyranny and injustice to poor and unfortunate women.
Suffrage for women.
More women inspectors are urgently needed, and they need to be better paid for the very important work they do.
Municipal Regulation Act.
The work of industry is now controlled by the Corporation, who appoint inspectors. These inspectors should be women, who would give more sympathy for the needs of women, and support such candidates as women.

The policies which Evelyn advocated in 1907 were quite radical