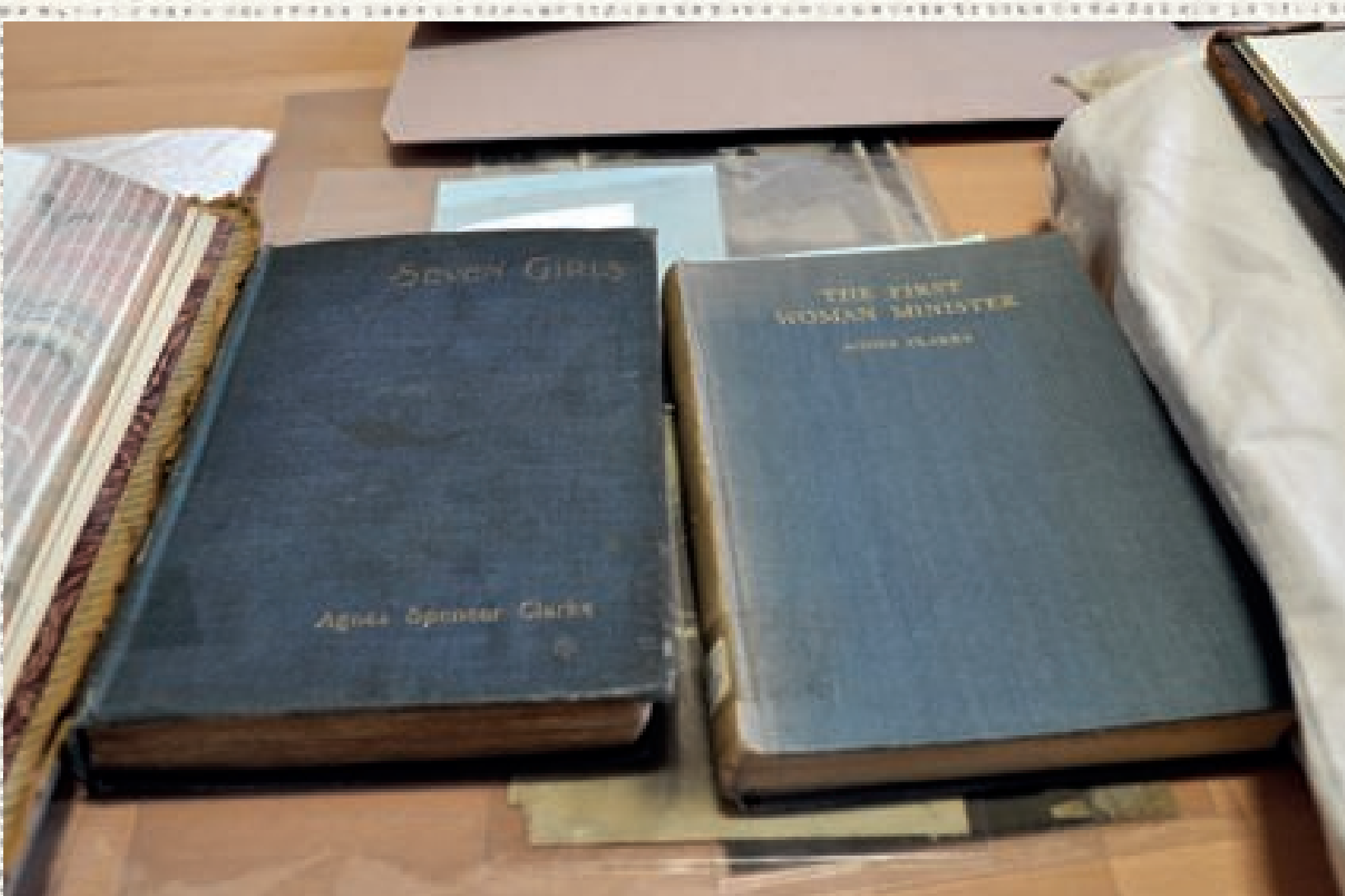


# Agnes Spencer Clarke (1870-1965)



When Sylvia Pankhurst described the Leicester branch of the WSPU in her memoirs (1931), she recalled: ‘The members were then almost all working class. One of them was a collector of laundry accounts, struggling to support a younger sister and brother. She had published a first novel, and was casually employed by a local newspaper, which obligingly permitted her to give good reports of our work.’

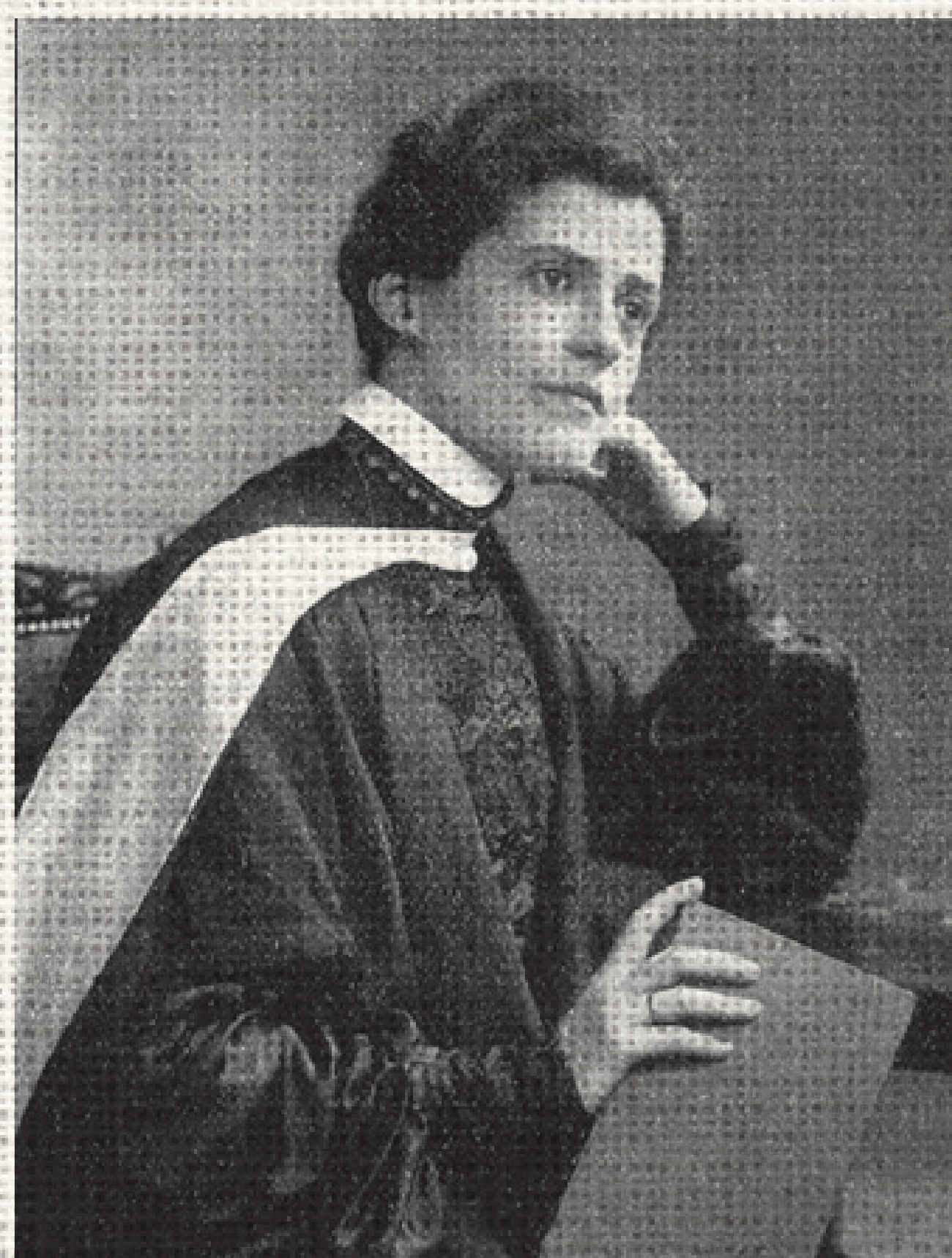
This was Agnes Spencer Clarke and her writing which appeared in the Midland Free Press, The Wyvern and the Leicester Pioneer is an important source for the activities of the local suffragettes.



## Published Works, 1898-1941

Agnes' first novel 'Glenroyrst' published in 1898, was a historical romance and her second 'Seven Girls' a year later, depicted the lives and loves of a group of girls working in a steam laundry. One of her characters declares 'If we don't stand by one another, the world's wrongs will never be righted.' This tells us a lot about Agnes' character.

In 1941, Agnes' final work 'First Woman Minister' was published. In this autobiography, thinly disguised as fiction, Agnes recounted the story of Gertrude Von Petzold's ministry in Leicester. The book is interesting in that it contains several incidents which occurred during the author's career as a militant suffragette.



# Gertrude von Petzold (1876-1952)

Born in East Prussia, Gertrude came to Britain to study. In 1904, she was appointed minister at Narborough Road Free Church in Leicester, becoming the first female minister in England. She left in 1908, having caused considerable controversy in her open campaigning for women's suffrage. She was still in contact with Agnes after the Second World War.

O' thred, some deep Socratic dream.

Many anecdotes were told which moved the listeners to mirth, and some to tears. Religion (the watchword of the Women's Social and Political Union) is "God and the millstone and one thing in which women's quiet and unobtrusive work keeps the race moving." I had walked four miles to the rendezvous, no train being available on Sunday night, four miles of country lane through a night of such intense darkness that I could not see my feet, and I had rolled backwards through the centuries, and only primal nature remained. Slumber took me as I walked, and I was wrapped in a travelling rug.

The slow night waned away, and dawn with its promise of a new day stole into the room. There was a pleasant clatter of tea cups and a renewed briskness of movement of women. A nurse sat beside me at breakfast, the perfect illustration of womanly beauty, with her hair dark-haired, with an intellectual forehead, and a mouth with the charm of mystery in its curves. The chief banner was taken down from the window and a policeman's beaming face looked in upon us. The people passing by to their work were full of cheer and good-will, and the goodwill of our leader and hostess whose unremitting efforts for our comfort deserved our deepest appreciation. We walked our way through the falling snow towards the town, and the motorcade swiftly towards home and long, long, blessed hours of sleep. And so ended census night.

# Census Night, 1911

One of Agnes' most vivid accounts of her suffragette activities appeared in Midland Free Press in April 1911 when she described how she had evaded the census.

All the women's organisations had agreed to protest against the Government's refusal to give women the parliamentary vote, by refusing to be counted in the national census, due to be taken on 2nd April 1911. Women householders were advised to mark the census form 'No Vote, No Census' and others to avoid being counted by attending all night parties and other suffrage events.

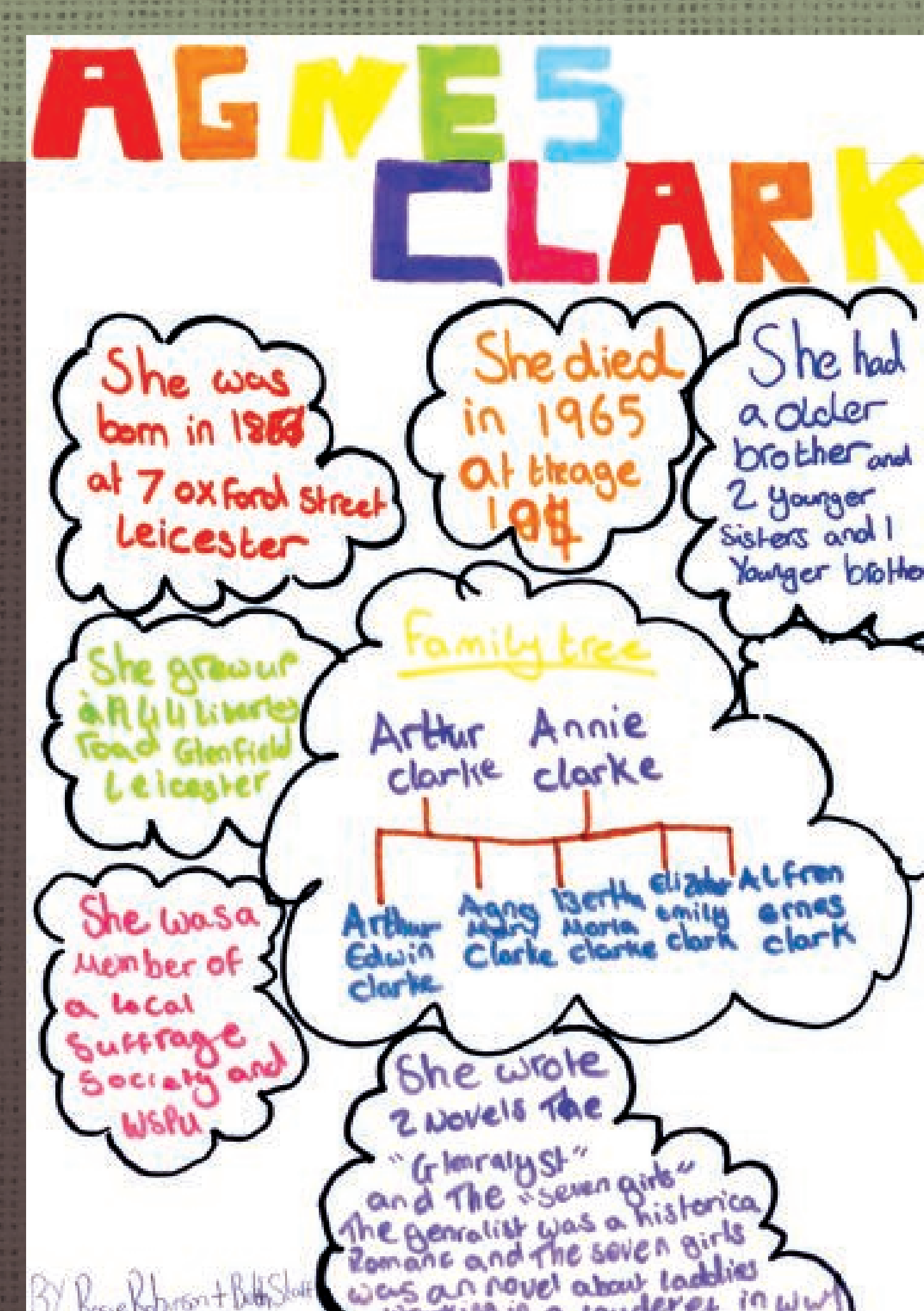
Agnes described a party she attended: 'Within the house women of varying class and of every shade of political opinion were gathered together in the camaraderie of a common cause.... It was worthwhile living to be admitted to such company..'

## Bertha Clarke (1874-1962)

Agnes' sister, Bertha was also committed to the cause of women's suffrage and wrote for local newspapers. In January 1910, she described cycling to Loughborough, dressed in Suffragette colours, to help campaign in the general election against the local MP. At a meeting at the Town Hall, she welcomed Emily Pankhurst as speaker and handed out 'leaflets guaranteed to raise the flame of revolt in a dormouse.' She recalled one new recruit who said of Mrs Pankhurst: 'I can understand women being ready to die for her.'



Agnes and Bertha Clarke in Leicester, selling copies of 'The Suffragette', the newsletter of the WSPU.



Bethany Wallis  
on Agnes Clarke

"She has inspired me by expressing her opinion in public so powerfully."

Rosie Robinson  
on Agnes Clarke

"Agnes was quite amazing as she worked hard as a writer and still found the time to fight for women's rights."

