

Agnes Alice Adams

By John Buckell

Agnes Adams was born in Manchester and came to Northampton to teach at Barry Road Senior Girls School in 1903. She relinquished this post on her marriage in 1907, but the welfare of children was always important in her public life.

Agnes was elected to the Board of Guardians in 1925 and co-opted to the Board of Education by the Labour Party the same year. In both these roles she worked with C. J. Scott to maximise financial support for Children. In 1928 she was elected to the Town Council for St Crispin ward. She became a regular speaker at election meetings. Agnes also served on the Housing, Maternity and Childcare and Public assistance Committees, as well as the local Women's Welfare and National Baby Welfare Councils. On the resignation of Labour's defeated parliamentary candidate, Cecil Malone, in 1935, Agnes was among those considered as a replacement. (In the event, the nomination went to Reginald Paget)

In 1929, 20 years before the NHS, she called for the establishment of a municipal hospital, financed from the rates and managed in "proper democratic style." That same year she was appointed by the Minister of Labour, Margaret Bondfield, former MP for Northampton, to report on the performance of statutory bodies in respect of unemployment benefits under the Insurance Acts. In 1930, when socialist shoe manufacturer William Barratt donated money to establish the Barratt Maternity Hospital, Agnes assisted Mrs Barratt in the planning and provision of equipment. Agnes also championed prevention of blindness and provision for the blind. She was instrumental in establishing a number of welfare institutions in the town.

Little wonder that when Agnes died aged 62 in 1940, her obituarist in the Northampton Mercury wrote that she was "inspired by the thought that her fellow citizens should enjoy a fuller life," and blamed her early death on her efforts to achieve it.

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