

Harriett Nicholls

The first woman to become Mayor of Northampton

By Julie O'Beirne

In 1884 Sarah Clements and her husband Charles were living in Little Bowden, Market Harborough. They were both members of the co-operative society and believed in the possibility of the betterment of the working classes.

Charles worked on the railways while Sarah cared for their 10 children. The youngest child, Harriett, would grow up to be involved with the Labour Party for almost 50 years.

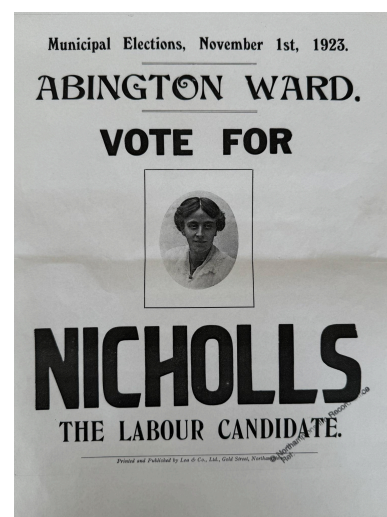


Sadly, Charles died while Harriett was still at school leaving Sarah a widow. When family members living in London heard that Charles had died, they sent Sarah a gift of a black wool cape along with their condolences. Sarah remarried some years later.

Harriett

May Clements (1884 -1965) grew up in Little Bowden and at the age of 21 married Mr Frank Nicholls and moved to Northampton, setting up home in Far Cotton.

Harriett was first elected to Northampton Town Council in 1932. Over the course of her political lifetime, she was President of the Northampton Labour Party and served as Ward Secretary for 25 years.



In 1945 Harriett became Northampton's first woman Alderman and in 1947 she became Mayor of Northampton serving for two years. Harriett and Frank had one daughter who following the death of her father served as her mother's Mayoress.



Harriett Nicholls, like her parents, was concerned with social progress for the working classes. A strong advocate for women's health she played a major part in the establishment of a maternity ward at St Edmunds Hospital. Another of her achievements was in securing the provision of old people's homes in Northampton.

In January 1965, Harriett was made an Honorary Freeman of the Borough in recognition of her "devotion to the welfare of the people of this town".

Harriett died in September of that year aged eighty.

In 1982, Harriett's daughter, by then Mrs LM Vorse, gifted her grandmother's black wool cape to Northampton museum where it still remains today.

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