

'The Power to get Things Changed!': Ellen Tooley, Eccles' first woman councillor

Veronica Trick

When we were growing up my cousins and I were all very proud of our famous grandmother, Ellen Tooley, who was the first woman councillor for Eccles although we had only the vaguest ideas about what that meant. 'Gran' died when I was thirteen and then, almost forty years later my mother died too. On sorting through my mother's belongings I found that she had kept a small bundle of papers about her mother, Ellen. All that it contained was a few letters, a couple of poll cards, an election address and a newspaper cutting but it was enough to make me realize how little I knew about my grandmother and how much more I wanted to know.

With the help of Ruth Frow and Alain Kahan at the Working Class Movement Library and Tim Ashworth at Salford Local History Library I began to learn what I could about how and why she became involved in local politics. As I investigated a picture began to emerge of a whole group of amazing women who were determined, against enormous odds, to make their mark on local affairs. This then is my attempt to not only tell Ellen's story but in the telling to touch on some of their stories too.

Ellen Tooley became 'The First Woman Councillor for Eccles' on the 1st November 1933. From that moment on it was her label. She didn't really like it but it followed her everywhere. It appeared as part of the headline for her obituary and was even chiselled into the headstone on the family grave.¹ It was, she claimed, pure chance that she acquired the title that night rather than her friend Mary Higgins who was elected literally minutes later.

There were six wards in Eccles in the 1933 local elections with five of them contested. Two of the candidates were women. Women had been trying, without any success, to get elected to Eccles Town Council since 1919. Finally it looked as if they were going to have, not just one, but two women councillors. One candidate was Mary Higgins who was standing as the Cooperative Party Candidate for Barton. The other was Ellen Tooley, the Labour Party Candidate for Winton. In effect they were two labour candidates. The teams counting their votes began to count as fast as they could, competing to be the first to count a woman councillor in. In spite of having over 500 more votes to count than the other team, Ellen's team finished first so that she became the Councillor for Winton just two or three minutes before Mary Higgins became the Councillor for Barton. So it was purely because her team was the faster one that my Gran acquired that title.

The Eccles Labour Party had its best results ever that night, winning four of the five seats and increasing their total on the council to nine. When all the counting was finished the Local Labour Party assembled outside the Carnegie Library where the winning Labour and Co-operative candidates stood on the steps to address their supporters who had been waiting outside for hours in the cold and the rain. After every candidate had made a speech and been cheered, or perhaps cheered up, the night was rounded off with a rousing singing of the 'Red Flag' before they finally all went home.² Things have changed a little since the '30s haven't they?

Ellen was 58 in 1933 and with five adult children living at home, all in work. She was really comfortably off at last. They had a comfortable council house in Schofield Road with a garden that she enjoyed looking after. I asked myself why she didn't just enjoy some leisure after a hard working life? I needed to go back to see what I could find out about her earlier life and try to understand what it was that drove her, in what the *Eccles Journal* claimed was a particularly cold wet November, to spend her time canvassing and leaf-letting and making outdoor speeches. I needed her childhood to be the starting point but since it was too late to talk to anyone from my parent's generation my only sources were official documents, my great grandfather's army pay book, and what I could remember of family stories.

Ellen Tooley's birth certificate showed that she was born in Plymouth and called after her mother who was a laundress. Her father Michael Riley was a private in the army, born in Galway in 1837 and said to be a Gaelic speaker and an Irish Republican sympathiser. The family story is that he joined the British Army to subvert it but, since he was in it for twenty years and it was still rather intact when he left it to become a railway labourer in Exeter, he didn't really make much of a job of it. He did, however, receive all the latest republican news and this perhaps gave Ellen her first taste for politics. We heard that because he couldn't read himself, she would spend hours reading Republican newspapers to him. She worshipped her father and loved these sessions and so it is hardly surprising that she grew up deeply committed to 'The Republican Cause'.

The family must have been very poor. Five children were brought up on a labourer's wage plus what the mother could earn by taking in washing. Ellen must have been familiar with poverty from an early age. She also seems to have had a rather rebellious streak and this could have been what brought her up to Manchester. Ellen was the oldest of the children and when the 1891 census was taken she was living in as a 'General Domestic Servant', aged 15, with a Musical Instrument Maker on Queen St, Exeter. We were told that she didn't stay long in service because she didn't like the work and she didn't like her employers and when the lady of the house left a pile of money out as a little trap for her – a common practice at the time I believe to test the honesty of servants – it was just too much. She saw red, made her protest and left. Sometime between 1891 and 1898 she ran away from home and came north, probably to stay with relations in Ancoats.

Her father, we were told, made several futile attempts to get her back to Exeter until finally Ellen committed the ultimate sin and married a Protestant, a widower called William James Tooley. It was a step too far for Michael Riley. He never contacted his daughter again. Registration certificates show that during the next ten years the Tooley family had six children and at least eleven different addresses, all of them in Ancoats or Greengate. Most of the houses that they lived in were absolutely appalling like Durham Street in Salford, their last house before they came to Eccles. This was a back-to-back house with one upstairs room, one ground floor room and a cellar. Twenty-six families had to share



Vote For E. TOOLEY.

Courtesy of Veronica Trick

a row of six outdoor privies. Jacqueline Roberts found a similar pattern of frequent 'flits' from one house to another for the desperately poor families that she studied in John Street, Irk Town.³ Moving, she reported, "was easy when the total contents of one home could fit on a single handcart. People moved frequently but not very far. When rent arrears became too high evictions or moonlight flit would follow." She calculated that the average tenancy in John Street lasted about two years. For Ellen and William their average tenancy lasted a little less than one year. So it would seem that they were very poor indeed although William was a skilled tradesman. He was a cooper, and coopers were very much in demand. Virtually anything that would flow, from sugar to treacle was put into barrels so in theory they should have been better off than the records would seem to suggest.

The cause of their penury, it seems, was a commonplace one. William James was said to be altogether too fond of 'The Demon Drink'. My mother remembered him as a delightful man when he was sober but as a totally different character when he had been drinking. She recalled her mother ushering the children off to bed when he was expected home from the pub and then lying awake with her sisters listening to the awful sounds of conflict from downstairs. Ellen never forgot these experiences. They influenced everything that she did. Later on she worked tirelessly for better housing conditions and welfare provision for working class families. This quote is from the only election address that survives: "We learn from experience," she said, "that environment plays a great part in the building up of bodies and minds" and "If children are to be allowed to live the life that has been given to them they must be removed from

depressing surroundings and limited opportunities." I am also quite sure that later still, when she became a magistrate, any wife beater who found himself opposite Ellen Tooley on the bench would have good reason to rue the day that he raised a hand to his wife.

Something seems to have happened to improve matters for the family in 1910. In that year that they moved to 131 Ellesmere Street, Eccles. Perhaps William had 'signed the pledge' because, after living in at least eleven different houses in ten years, they were actually to live in the same house for the next sixteen. It was only a two-up-two-down terrace but they had an attic for the boys to sleep in and their own back yard with their own privy. It must have been bliss after Durham Street.

So far I have identified two influences that could have motivated my grandmother to want to become involved in local politics. The first was her father's republicanism that could have fostered in her a readiness to challenge authority. The second was her personal experiences of the damaging effects of poverty. A third factor was quite possibly the fact that in moving to Eccles she was moving into an area which had many splendid role models of women who worked tirelessly to make their mark on local affairs. When the Tooley family moved here in 1910 there was a very strong women's movement for such a small town. Two women's suffrage organisations had active branches here, the non-militant 'North of England Society for Women's Suffrage' and the more militant 'Women's Freedom League'. In April 1910 both held meetings within a week of each other, both in Eccles Town Hall and both well attended, perhaps by some of the same people because the divisions between militants and non-militants were less pronounced here in the north than they were in the south.⁴

One of these splendid women role models was Sofia Roe. In the 19th century Sofia founded an orphanage on Green Lane, mainly out of her own funds. She brought up some rather special children too including the inventor AV Roe and Humphrey Roe who championed the cause of birth control. When her child rearing was over she then took up chess and played in international competitions. Sophia lived at the 'Poplars', close to the orphanage that she founded.⁵ There were many women like her during the Victorian period. They were philanthropists and campaigners and did marvellous work for good causes. However, until the latter decades of the 19th century no woman, however able or well educated, had any actual *rights* to influence the local bodies that governed so many aspects of their lives.

Gradually things began to change. At first, in 1869, legislation was passed which allowed propertied, rate paying women to vote in local elections. Then in 1875 women with property were allowed to stand for election as poor law guardians. Married women were without property and so were not included until the 1884 Married Women's Property Act was passed. Branches of 'The Society for Promoting the Return of Women as Poor Law Guardians' were set up all over the country, including Eccles, and quite a few women became Guardians under the 1875 rules. Then, in 1894 the property qualification was lifted for Guardians elections and the numbers of women Guardians nationally leapt up from 80 in 1890 to 893 in 1895.⁶

Two Eccles women were among them. One of them was The Hon. Kathleen Lyttelton, the wife of the Vicar of Eccles, who was elected for Park Ward. When I first read

her name I formed a picture of a genteel lady doing her duty as a clergyman's wife, but nothing could have been further from the truth. The Lytteltons moved to Eccles in April 1893. Seven months later Kathleen held a well-attended women's suffrage meeting in the Vicarage with Mrs Millicent Fawcett as the main speaker. In 1895 she was a founder member of the Eccles branch of the Co-operative Women's Guild, was elected as its first president and presented an address on 'Women in Trade Unions'.⁷ The other woman guardian was Emmeline Rawson. Among her credentials she could claim work with the Working Women's Restaurant in Ancoats, the Hospital Guild for the benefit of Invalid Children and the Mill Girl's Club in Seedley. She was returned unopposed for Winton Ward.⁸



Mary O'Kane (left) and Ellen Tooley Photograph courtesy of Veronica Trick

Another possible way into Local Government for women was by adoption onto local committees. This is how, in 1904, two women, Grace Mellor and Thurza Potts, became the first women members of the Education Committee. They were both trained teachers and Thurza was, as John Smethurst notes, "one of our leading suffragettes".⁹ The numbers of women committee members stayed steady at two, sometimes three elected women Guardians and two or three women appointed to committees until 1916. There was then a short-lived surge of women serving on welfare committees connected with the war effort. Most of these committees disappeared in 1920 but many of the women who served on them appear again in public life during the '20s and '30s.¹⁰

Ellen Tooley would probably have been far too busy to be involved in any of these wartime committees. I have a photograph of her, taken in 1916 to send to her husband William who had just enlisted in the Manchester Regiment and was in away in France. The baby on her knee is Joseph; the last of their nine children and the three year old at the front is my mother, Nora. 1916 was also the year that Ellen joined the Cooperative Women's Guild. Through her parents she could trace 'a life-long connection with the co-

operative movement'¹¹ and was to remain a guild member and an active co-operator for the rest of her life. Guild meetings gave many working class women opportunities to further their education while developing the confidence and practicing the skills which later helped them to enter local politics. By March 1929 the Guild could claim that their members represented on public bodies included "2 mayors, 18 mayoresses, 24 aldermen, 24 county council members 255 city, town, or urban district councillors and 137 magistrates".¹² With her husband William in France and eight children under the age of 17 at home, I would guess that about all that Ellen would have time to do would be to slip away to the meetings and get back home again as soon as they were over.

I strongly suspect, however, that Eccles Guild may have been where she first met her co-religionist, frequent sparring partner, lifetime colleague and dear friend, Mary O'Kane. Mary was the daughter of a Londonderry carpenter who had come over from Ireland to settle in this area in 1903. She married Dominic O'Kane in 1906 but was widowed three years later. Without any children of her own she became an important presence in the Tooley children's lives and their letters are peppered with references to her. As friends Ellen and Mary often went on holiday together and as colleagues left the Eccles Co-operative Women's Guild to found the Barton Guild in 1921 where they were both awarded 'Freedom of the Branch' 25 years later.¹³

Mary is first referred to in *The Eccles Co-operative Record* in 1913 at a Guild meeting which was a perfect mix of support, education and entertainment. The meeting opened with the secretary, Mrs Nevitt, reading a letter from Mrs Gibbons thanking them for their condolences. Next there was correspondence from Holyoake House about the coming lectures there and then a paper was read from the Fabian Research Committee about 'Women and the Insurance Act' after which they were all given Question Papers to take home, fill in with their own case studies and bring back to the next meeting. Serious business being over, "Mrs Nevitt called upon the 'Eccles Branch Glee Party' to open, and much amusement was caused when the Women's Guild committee took their places on the platform. They sang 'England Arise' so well that an encore was demanded. Mrs and Miss Moreton and Mrs Stirling gave a few songs each and were heartily applauded. Lancashire sketches by Mrs. Bennett, humorous recitations by Mrs. Pimlett, Mrs. Mayall, and Mrs Fyldes so well pleased the audience that only time prevented repetition and Mrs Hornby and Mrs O'Kane entertained with their gramophones. The singing of 'Auld Lang Syne' brought the meeting to a close."¹⁴

Shortly after joining the Guild, Ellen joined the Independent Labour Party and became an active member of the Trades and Labour Council. Eccles ILP was strongly pacifist at this time. Mr JH Hudson, the official Labour candidate, was a member of the ILP and as a conscientious objector he spent much of the war in Strangeways Prison. In November 1918 in spite of many pleadings on his behalf, he was not released to fight the General election and so Eccles had no Labour Candidate.¹⁵ By 1918 Ellen had good reasons to want to join a party that was anti-war. Her brother in law Joseph Tooley had died at Gallipoli in 1916 and both her husband and her only brother Michael were away fighting in France. Her two oldest sons Edward and Michael became 18 during the war and were promptly conscripted so that by 1918 all four of the men in her life

were in uniform. It is hardly surprising that her first public speech reported in the *Journal* was made as one of the main speakers at an anti-war demonstration organised by the Eccles and district branch of the League of Nations.¹⁶

Everybody in Eccles read the *Journal* and just after the war it had a new weekly column that must have both reflected and influenced the way women's roles in society were rapidly changing. A sort of in-house feminist under the title 'Woman's Outlook' wrote it. I don't know her name but every week she celebrated new victories for women in employment or education or public life and constantly encouraged them to do even better. In February 1919 she urged Eccles women "Get on the council and then you will have the power to get things changed."¹⁷ Fourteen years later she was still urging women on.

The truth is that local government affects women, as it does men, at every phase of their lives. It decides whether the refuse bin remains unemptied too long for health, whether the sewage is faulty or otherwise, whether our water supply shall be plentiful and our milk supply pure. Again we are up against local government when streets are inadequately paved or lighted, with the result that accidents occur and our children are molested.

It is local government which decides under what conditions our children shall be educated, and whether we have sufficient police to maintain order in the streets and protect our property and persons. Whether our curtains require washing seldom or often is ultimately ruled by local government which is responsible for the amount of smoke permitted in the town. In these and a hundred other ways are women constantly under the influence of local government, and it is well that the fact should be fully realized when the elections are at hand.

Women certainly took her advice in trying to get elected to the council in Eccles. In the first post war local election in 1919 Mary O'Kane and Louisa Mathews, both of them Guild members, were the first women to stand. Mary was the Labour Party candidate for Eccles Ward and Louisa was the Co-operative Party candidate for Patricroft. They both came bottom of their poll. In 1920 Louisa stood again as a Co-op candidate for Patricroft with the promised support of the Labour Party. "The only lady candidate had the toughest proposition" was the *Journal's* comment. She lost of course and it was another four years before there was a woman candidate again.¹⁸

The numbers of women who were adopted onto committees however did go up, increasing steadily from 9 in 1920 to 17 in 1925¹⁹ but it was still difficult for working class women to get on to them. My grandmother complained about this in a letter to the *Journal* in 1925 drawing particular attention to the "absence of a working class woman on the Education Committee". "Seeing that it is the worker's children who are affected I think we can reasonably claim representation," she said. "There are women in Eccles amongst the workers who are capable of serving the community equally as well as those already co-opted, with a knowledge of conditions gained by practical experience which is after all 'the best teacher'."²⁰

There was one new committee however that could only get a government grant if it had at least one working class woman on it and this gave Ellen her first entry into local government. The Guild had been campaigning intensively for government support for the public provision of maternity and health care for mothers and their children since before the war.²¹ The 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act implemented many of their proposals including providing grants to Local Authorities to set up 'Maternity and Child Welfare Committees' on the condition that they

included some women on the committee and at least one working woman.²² Eccles council set one up in 1920 and Ellen Tooley was appointed as the working woman. All the rest of the females on the committee were 'ladies' and were referred to as such in the records. The difference was that a 'woman' worked for money and a 'lady' didn't. One of the first things that the committee did was to refurbish the orphanage that Sofia Roe had founded in the 1880s on Green Lane and set it up as a Mother and Baby Clinic.²³ Six years later the Medical Officer of Health was able to proudly report to the committee that infant deaths in Eccles were only 47.2 infant deaths per 1,000 births. The only urban district in Lancashire which had performed better was Nelson with 44.9. Manchester, in contrast, had 83.0 and Salford 103.2.²⁴

Apart from Ellen's husband, William James, the entire family seemed to become involved from 1920 onwards. The younger children appear in the Co-op Record getting prizes in co-operative Education Classes. Edward, the oldest son, who had a beautiful tenor voice, is often mentioned in the *Journal* as singing at concerts for the unemployed and in 1923 Eveline, then 17, wrote in a letter to her brother Michael:

I am joining the Co-op Women's Guild this year with mother. There are some fine lectures down in the Syllabus, mostly health lectures. On Saturday there is a social booked in the Co-op Hall and Mr Alexander, one of the Co-op M.P.s is booked to speak.

The family was however entering a very dark period. The marriage of William and Ellen had never been a quiet one. They were opposites in too many ways. William was Protestant while Ellen was a Catholic. He a drinker: she a teetotaler; he a Unionist: she a Socialist. What is more, by 1919 he had just returned from a war that he was so keen to join that he had lied about his age (he was actually too old) to find that his wife had become an active peace campaigner. As if that wasn't enough, by 1921 his two adult sons had returned from army service to the family home as well and they too were becoming more and more involved in left-wing politics. And it wasn't all that big a house!

I have been told that in spite of being less than five feet tall, Ellen was fearless with an abundance of strong red hair and a temperament to match. William and Ellen had always clashed but when William returned from the war he began to become violent towards her, particularly when he had been drinking. One of these incidents, we were told, was interrupted by Edward and Michael, the two older boys who attacked their father and forced him to leave the family home. Michael then reputedly rejoined the army to escape police prosecution and Edward moved out Ellesmere Street for a while. The electoral registers support this showing that William James never lived in Ellesmere Street again after 1921 and that Michael was an absent military voter for the next four years while Edward returned home a year later.

1922 was another difficult year. 16-year-old Eveline was diagnosed with TB and spent her 17th birthday and Christmas 1922 in a sanatorium. At the age of 9 my mother developed a bone disease in one of her knees and was confined to a special bed-chair, to rest and recover. Eveline however was back home again in 1923 and writing cheerfully to her brother Michael who was with the army in India. "There is to be electioneering for Parliament again," she wrote. "We are addressing the envelopes for Patricroft ward. You say you are up to the neck in work

that is nothing to what you will be when you come home if we are to be having elections like this. I missed it all last year but not so this."

Ellen's friend Mary O'Kane however had a very good year in 1922. She was elected to the Board of Guardians as a Co-operative candidate, the first success for the Eccles Co-operative Political Council. She had made an attempt at a by-election the year before but was narrowly defeated.²⁵ Mary served as a Guardian until the institution was abolished in July 1948. Her obituary in the *Journal* said that this was "a turning point in her career" and that the poor people who came to the Board seeking relief "found in Mrs O'Kane a rare battler in their cause – a woman with a purpose – to see that they had their due and all the time fighting for them to have a better share of the world's goods."²⁶

In May 1924 Eveline died of her TB. The Entry in the *Journal's* 'Deaths' column provides a run down of all Ellen Tooley's involvements:

Mrs Tooley and family beg to thank all neighbours and friends, members of the women's section of the Labour Party, Women's Co-operative Guild, ILP, teachers and scholars of All Saints School, workmates of the Barton Bridge Mill ring spinning room and members of the Irish Self Determination League for their kind expressions of sympathy and floral tributes.²⁷

There was also a note from J Toft, the secretary of the ILP, among my mother's papers, dated May 16th 1924:

Comrade

I wish to tender on behalf of the local comrades our deepest sympathy in your sad bereavement and we all regret the passing of so young a flower whose life may have been of service in breaking down the present system, had it not have been a victim,

Yours Fraternally

J. Toft
Secretary

In the local elections that year the Labour Party initially nominated three women: Mary O'Kane for Eccles, Ellen Tooley for Irwell and Margaret Madden for Monton and Park. Nobody from the Labour Party had the least chance of winning Monton and Park. It was the most difficult of all the six seats for Labour to win. That contest, however, was cancelled because Margaret Madden's opponent, Councillor Ogden died in the run up to the election. The way that the seats were allocated does however indicate the difficulties faced by women. According to the *Journal*, "It is now generally recognised that Mrs Tooley has the hardest task of any of the nominees." So the Labour Party gave the two most difficult wards to women. Speaking at Pendlebury Town Hall for an ILP 'Women's Sunday' Ellen tackled the men. "They blamed the women for losing the election," she said but, she wondered, "who was to blame for all the elections that Labour lost before women got the vote?"²⁸

1926 was another tragic year for the family. On May 5th Ellen's 18-year-old son James died of TB and on May 21st her husband William James died in Hope Hospital of bronchitis and a cerebral oedema. The Trades and Labour Council Report for that year shows that in 1926 Ellen was a member of the local Strike Committee, the President of the Women's Section of the party, a member of its Executive Committee and one of the party's listed speakers for public meetings.²⁹

Michael was home from the army by this time and he too plunged himself into the work for the party, attending a 'National Council of Labour Colleges Summer School' in Scarborough. Even Joseph, the youngest, who was ten, seems to have caught the family atmosphere. Ellen kept this

piece of his writing:

My aim in life is to be a great author and poet. I would write good books that would be both useful and educational to the people. Like Moor's [*sic*] *Utopia* my books would be about Peace and a Happy Republic. My books would never be like some books, they would contain proper English. My poems would be of flowers and trees. I would never write about anything that never existed.

He didn't become an author and poet. He became an engineer and was a Labour Councillor himself for several years.

In November 1927 Ellen was a delegate to the Labour Party's annual conference in Blackpool and stood again, without success, for Barton ward.³⁰ In 1930 she was the Labour candidate for Winton while Mary O'Kane was the Co-op candidate for Patricroft.³¹ In 1931 and 1932 there were no women candidates and then, 1933, was the year that Eccles at last got its women councillors. I wondered how typical Eccles was. I had a look through the *Directories* for Manchester and its suburbs to see just how many women councillors there were in the area. There were 18 councils in those directories and only five of them had any women councillors. 27 years after women became eligible to become local councillors there were 445 councillors in total and only 15 women among them, a little over 3% of the total.

Once elected, Mary Higgins and Ellen Tooley formed an energetic alliance. Both became members of the Education, Health, Libraries and School Medical Service Committees while Mary became a member of the Sites and Building committee and Ellen was still on the Maternity and Child Welfare and Juvenile Employment committees.³² Again and again the *Journal* reports one proposing while the other seconds resolutions on issues such as feeding necessitous schoolchildren during the holidays as well as in school term time, providing work for the local unemployed, favouring municipal trading, giving female local government workers the same pension rights as their male colleagues and providing portable shelters for outdoor workers. They were even reported as inspecting Eccles Recreation Ground together and sharing a ride on the children's roundabout.³³

They both supported the resolution that Eccles should 'go dry' by voting that "In future, no refreshments in the form of intoxicating liquors be served at any function connected with the council." To the horror of her friend and ILP colleague Will Hughes who had publicly teased Ellen for her teetotal views it was carried. "Manchester," he said indignantly, "kept one of the finest wine cellars in the country for their councillors and it was disgraceful if all that Eccles could provide for theirs was tea."³⁴ One of Ellen's concerns was the need for public washhouses. Her reported statement has a ring of authenticity. "Mrs Tooley said that she had personal experience of keeping a house comfortable when everything had to be done in one room. For a man to come home after a day's work and find that because of the weather clothes were having to be dried in the living room did not tend to make for harmony in the home."³⁵

After the 1933 election the full town council was made up of 11 Conservatives, 9 Labour and Co-operative, 2 Liberals and two Independents. Labour's gains caused some anxiety. Dr. Sturrock warned of the "danger of a socialist majority on Eccles Town Council leading to a crisis in the history of the government of the town". To ward off this dreadful prospect the 'Eccles Citizens Organization' was formed, an alliance of all those who were prepared to oppose the nomi-

nees of Eccles Trades and Labour Council.³⁶ In March 1934 two new wards were formed creating six vacancies on the town council to be filled by a special election. There were no Conservative or Liberal candidates just six 'Citizens' candidates (including three women) opposing six Labour. The Citizens took two seats one of them being won by Mrs Nina Eleanor Hayes but the other four seats went to Labour so that half the councillors were then Labour although they were still the minority party since only one of the six aldermen was Labour.³⁷

The first task of the newly elected council was to elect two Aldermen for the new wards. By custom this simply meant that the council voted in the two longest serving members irrespective of their allegiances. After that they remained aldermen as long as they wished being routinely voted back every three years. The Labour Party broke with this tradition and was successful in getting two Labour aldermen elected: JK Walker, who actually was the longest serving member, and Ellen Tooley who had been a councillor for a mere five months!³⁸ Letters of protest poured in to the *Journal* complaining that the Labour Party had used unfair tactics, had been dishonest, had had a 'dress rehearsal' and had "acted in a most discreditable manner, substituting party interests for a fair deal."³⁹

By-elections and changes to the Aldermanic bench reduced the Independents and Citizens to a majority of two by September 1935 but in the elections that took place shortly after there was a serious set back for the Labour Party when there were two gains for the Citizens Association including Mrs Kemball. This brought the number of women on the council to four. The *Journal* reported rumours that at least one Alderman was to be deposed.⁴⁰ A week later the paper reported that the rumours were true and the deposed Alderman was Ellen Tooley. The Eccles Cooperative Record claimed that she was thrown off the Council by a manoeuvre on the part of the opposition and the *Journal* said that "there were those who regret that such a course was deemed necessary. Mrs Tooley's criticisms in debate were always constructive", which could be a coded reference to someone's ruffled feathers. It was an almost unprecedented move and the *Journal* had to search back to 1907 to find another deposed Alderman.⁴¹

1936 saw the tide really turn against Labour. "Most of the Labour members who came in when there was strong feeling against the means test have been unseated," the *Journal* reported, but Mary O'Kane was elected at last.⁴² It was not until after the Second World War that the tide again turned in favour of the Labour Party. Ellen tried to get re-elected in 1938 but the war then intervened and local elections were suspended. By the time the war was over she was 71, her health was beginning to fail and she was not able to stand for election again.

During the war she was the vice-chairman of the Food Control Committee and President of the Prisoners of War Relatives Association. This was personally important to her since her second son Michael had been captured in Hong Kong and remained a prisoner of the Japanese until his death in 1942 when the Lisbon Maroo, the ship that he was being transported in to the mainland, was sunk and most of its cargo of prisoners was lost. After the war her oldest son, Edward, who had had TB for many years, died, and her own health began to fade. She continued to work for the Co-op and the Labour Party however but asked to



Ellen Tooley in later years Photograph courtesy of Veronica Trick

be placed on the retired list of Magistrates in 1948 (She had become a magistrate in 1935).

She died in April 1955 at the age of 79 and was buried on May 2nd, my 13th birthday. In encouraging me to do this work Ruth Frow referred to her as "Your remarkable grandmother". What was truly remarkable about my grandmother was not that she became Eccles' first woman councillor, but that she overcame so many obstacles to do it. Personal tragedies seemed to spur her on to somehow manage the workload of running a home, bringing up a large family and going out to work to support them as well as carrying on the fight for social justice for working class people. I am now prouder than ever to be her granddaughter.

Notes

- 1 *Eccles and Patricroft Journal*, May 6th 1955.
- 2 *Eccles and Patricroft Journal*, November 3rd 1933.
- 3 Jacqueline Roberts, *Working Class Housing in Nineteenth Century Manchester*, Neil Richardson, Manchester.
- 4 *Eccles and Patricroft Journal*, April 15th & 22nd, 1910.
- 5 An anon. extract from LJ Ludovici, *The Challenging Self, The Life of Sir Alliot Verdun Roe*, Herbert Jenkins, 1956
- 6 Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women*, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- 7 James Haslam, *A History of 50 Years of Progress: A Souvenir of the Society's Jubilee, 1857 - 1907*, Eccles Provident Industrial Society, 1907, p162-163.

- 8 *Eccles and Patricroft Journal*, November 16th and December 5th 1894.
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