

'That so Ancient a City Should Have Elected a Woman as Mayor Is a Sign of the times': Women and Local Government in Worcester before 1939

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'That so Ancient a City Should Have Elected a Woman as Mayor Is a Sign of the times': Women and Local Government in Worcester before 1939

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ABSTRACT

This article explores women's experiences of local government in Worcester between 1907 and 1939. The city saw a limited suffrage movement, and to date has never elected a female MP. Yet while women in Worcester arguably played little role in 'national' politics, they were active in local government, first through wartime local authority committees, and then, in the interwar years, when seeking election as Labour, Liberal, Conservative or Independent candidates, with Conservative women being most successful. Drawing on city council records and local newspaper reporting, the article considers the ways in which women made an impact on Worcester's government, particularly as elected councillors. Some women were also involved with more ceremonial – and consequently more visible – roles in local government, though these were generally the preserve of elite women. As such, the article contributes to wider debates about the changing nature of women's political activism post-enfranchisement.

KEYWORDS

Women; politics; local government; Worcester; interwar

Introduction

In October 1932, the Prince of Wales – the future Edward VIII – visited Worcester to perform several engagements, including opening both the newly-widened bridge across the river Severn and a wing of the Worcester General Infirmary. Among the dignitaries in attendance were the Worcestershire-born prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, MP for Bewdley, and his wife, Lucy, but at the forefront of many photographs was the first female Mayor of Worcester, Miss Diana Ogilvy (Figure 1), who delivered an address of welcome to the Prince on the steps of the Guildhall.¹ By the early 1930s, Ogilvy was a well-known and well-connected member of local society: her father, Reverend Charles Ogilvy, had been Rector of Hanbury, while two of her grandfathers had been Liberal

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¹For quotation in title see 'Our Women Mayors. Miss Diana Ogilvy', *Vote*, 29 January 1932; 'The Prince of Wales at Worcester', *Illustrated London News*, 5 November 1932, p. 5.

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politicians in the mid-nineteenth century.² Like many unmarried women of her social class and generation, she spent much of her life undertaking voluntary work within her local community. Her particular interest appears to have been nursing: during the First World War, she was a nurse in the Voluntary Aid Detachment, becoming Commandant of Battenhall Auxiliary Hospital, just outside Worcester. She was awarded an MBE for her services in 1918.³ After the wartime hospital closed, Ogilvy transferred her attentions to the Worcester City and County Nursing Association where she was until 1928 secretary, and the Worcester Infirmary Committee, on which she sat from 1919.⁴ She also sat as a Poor Law Guardian, until the office was abolished in 1929.⁵ That year, Ogilvy first stood for, and won election to, Worcester City Council, as an Independent councillor. At a 1933 event to mark the unveiling of her mayoral portrait, at which she was dubbed the ‘Queen of Worcester’ by the Dean of Worcester Cathedral and ‘not the worshipful, but the adorable Mayor’ by the prominent local composer Sir Edward Elgar, Ogilvy claimed that her ‘interest in public work sprang from her experience as a Guardian’.⁶ It therefore appears that this role – and perhaps particularly its eradication – spurred her initial foray into council work; no other evidence remains as to her decision to stand for election.

Ogilvy was not the only woman to be elected in 1929; two Conservatives, Lady Katherine Atkins and Mrs Clare Buckle, and Labour’s Mrs Rosina Palmer were also successful in seeking election for the first time. All served as councillors until the outbreak of war in 1939, and in some cases long afterwards. Nor were these four the first women to sit as councillors: in 1919, Labour’s Mrs Alice Edwards had won election and served for a term, and in 1924, the Conservative Mrs Lucy Clarke was also for one term. Yet it was Diana Ogilvy who was elected mayor in 1931, just two years after joining the council. Shortly after her appointment, *Vote*, the journal of the Women’s Freedom League (WFL), included Ogilvy in a series of profiles of Britain’s women mayors that were published throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The WFL had been established in 1907 to campaign for women’s suffrage and, after 1918, continued to work towards women’s greater political representation, particularly in local government.⁷ The *Vote*’s profile of Ogilvy noted that it ‘said much for her prestige on the Council that, after so short a term of membership, the greatest honour the city has to give should be conferred on her’, suggesting it was a ‘sign of the times’ that such an ‘ancient city’ should elect a woman.⁸

Arguably, however, Ogilvy’s elevation to the mayoralty is indicative of the conditional acceptance of women into local government in Worcester in the interwar years. As this article demonstrates, although this period witnessed the election of women councillors in the city for the first time, this was far from a slow, steady, and perhaps

²Her father’s father was John Ogilvy, ninth Baronet Inverquhar, Liberal MP from 1857–74 and her mother’s father was Charles Ponsonby, second Baron de Mauley, briefly Liberal MP from 1851–52, who then sat in the House of Lords from 1855–96. ‘Our Women Mayors’.

³‘Our Women Mayors’.

⁴‘The Mayor of Worcester’, *Common Cause*, July 1932, p. 89.

⁵‘The Adorable Mayor’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 28 July 1933, p. 5.

⁶‘The Adorable Mayor’.

⁷C. Eustance, ‘Meanings of Militancy: the ideas and practice of political resistance in the Women’s Freedom League, 1907–14’, in *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by M. Joannou and J. Purvis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 51–64.

⁸‘Our Women Mayors’.



Figure 1. Mayor of Worcester Diana Ogilvy (far right) and city dignitaries watch as the Prince of Wales opens the newly widened bridge across the river Severn, 1932. Image ML093 reproduced courtesy of Changing Face of Worcester/Tudor House Museum.

Caption Sheet for Anna Muggerridge 'That so ancient a city should have elected a woman as mayor is a sign of the times': Women and Local Government in Worcester before 1939

expected progression. While women from a variety of social and political backgrounds were elected, it was largely women from the local gentry and urban elite, like Ogilvy, who were selected to take on more ceremonial roles. Drawing on council records and contemporary newspaper reporting, this article first explores women's activism in Worcester prior to 1919; then examines the roles and responsibilities of the 10 women elected as councillors between 1919 and 1939.⁹ In so doing, it sheds light on an under-researched aspect of women's political participation in the post-suffrage era, demonstrating that this was an area, in Worcester, where women were able to make significant advances into local public life. Finally, the article considers the entry of women into the mayoralty and other such ceremonial roles in Worcester before 1939. Given that such roles were dominated by women from elite backgrounds, the article suggests that there was a partial and conditional acceptance of the roles women might take on within local government in the city at this time. As well as adding to the still limited scholarship on women's experiences in local government after the First World War, the article contributes to the literature on the role of the elite in provincial towns and cities in this period by adding a hitherto overlooked gendered dimension.

⁹Much detail in this article is derived from the city council's yearbooks for the period from 1907 to 1939. These can be found at: Worcestershire Archives and Archaeology Service (WAAS), 496.5 BA9360/Cab22/15/Vol. 23, Council Yearbooks, 1907—1908 to Vol. 57, Council Year Books 1939—1940. Each yearbook contains all council minutes, reports and related ephemera for the municipal year, which ran from November to November. Henceforward the article will refer to a specific yearbook and, where applicable, the date of a meeting.

Women and Local Government, c.1870–1939

While there is now an extensive historiography of women's engagement with national politics after enfranchisement in 1918, their experiences in local government after 1918 have been curiously overlooked.¹⁰ This contrasts sharply with the period before 1914. Ground-breaking research by Patricia Hollis demonstrates that women were active in local government for many decades prior to the awarding of the parliamentary franchise. From 1907, women ratepayers – single women and widows – had the right to stand for election to county and borough councils, such as in Worcester. Women had been eligible for election to smaller urban district councils from 1894, and prior to that had been able to join School Boards or become Poor Law Guardians.¹¹ Indeed, some in the anti-suffrage movement encouraged women to channel their energies into local government as this was – they believed – more concerned than national politics with the kinds of welfare issues for which women were particularly suited.¹²

In 1918, as part of wider electoral reforms, all women were given the right to vote in, and stand for, local elections but this milestone is often overlooked by historians of women's enfranchisement and little research has been undertaken into the post-1918 period. There is no nationwide survey equivalent to Hollis's work. However, important local studies of women councillors in Coventry, Devon and Croydon, as well as the activist Hannah Mitchell's autobiography in which she discusses her role as an Independent Labour Party (ILP) councillor in interwar Manchester, point to a range of different experiences throughout England for the post-1918 period, particularly in what drove women to first enter local government.¹³ Some were influenced by party politics; others motivated by their experiences in the women's suffrage movement, while still others saw local government as an extension of their existing voluntary activism.

These local studies of specific councils focus only on the English experience, though existing scholarship suggests that motivations for seeking election – if not success rates – were similar across Britain. Daryl Leeworthy has recently highlighted the significant contribution that women made within local government in Wales, as co-opted members of councils and as elected officials in their own right, particularly in districts where there was a strong Labour or ILP tradition¹⁴ In contrast, research by Kenneth Baxter into women in local government in Scotland suggests that this took longer to establish than in England, with the first female councillor in Scotland not elected until 1919. Throughout the interwar years, this situation continued, and he notes that fewer women stood for election in local government in Scotland compared to England, and that 'the success rate for female candidates in Scottish cities tended to be

¹⁰There is too extensive a literature to list in detail here; for a recent and thorough overview, see: J. V. Gottlieb and R. Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945* (London: Palgrave, 2013).

¹¹P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

¹²J. Bush, *Women Against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹³C. Hunt, "Success and the ladies": an examination of women's experiences as Labour councillors in interwar Coventry', *Midland History*, 32 (2007), 141–59; J. Neville, 'Challenge, Conformity and Casework in Interwar England: the first women councillors in Devon', *Women's History Review*, 22 (2013), 971–94; R. Davidson, 'Working-Class Women Activists: Citizenship at the Local Level', in *Alternatives to State-Socialism in Britain: Other Worlds of Labour in the Twentieth Century* ed. by P. Ackers and A. Reid (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 93–120; H. Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel* (London: Virago, 1984).

¹⁴D. Leeworthy, *Causes in Common: Welsh Women and the Struggle for Social Democracy*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2022).

significantly poorer' than in England.¹⁵ Diane Urquhart's examination of women in Ulster politics suggests that between 1896 and 1940, only 1.8% of councillors in the province were female.¹⁶

Despite this important work, there is much that is unknown about women's experiences of local government, even in England. Unlike with parliamentary elections, precisely how many women stood for election; how successful they were in winning seats; or the proportion of women who stood under the banner of the three main political parties, compared with smaller parties or as Independents, is unknown. It should be noted that this is equally the case for male candidates, as local government has only rarely been the subject of historical enquiry. Sam Davies and Bob Morley's reference guides to local elections in interwar England and Wales are slowly starting to fill this gap, providing statistical detail for the period 1919–1939, but they only assess county borough councils, and not smaller borough councils, such as Worcester's.¹⁷

What is clear, however, is that in the interwar years, local councillors, male and female, were in positions of significant authority in their communities, as 'local government reached an apogee of coherence and power' which began to decline with the consolidation of the post-Second World War welfare state and the transfer of functions to central government.¹⁸ In the interwar period, there was a mixed economy of welfare provision, with much initiated, managed and delivered at a local level by both municipal authorities and voluntary organizations.¹⁹ There is an extensive literature on women's activism within voluntary organizations in this period, particularly those broadly concerned with 'welfare work'.²⁰ However, these studies tend to focus more on voluntary organizations, rather than local authorities. It is not yet clear how much influence women might have wielded through elected roles compared with voluntary groups. Examining their experiences in local government settings therefore has wider implications, allowing historians to understand more fully what constituted 'women's politics' in this period.

Women and Local Government in Worcester, c.1900–1919

Women had theoretically been able to stand for election to Worcester City Council since 1907, but none did so until 1919. This did not mean that women in the city were not engaging in political activism in the pre-war period, however. Although the city's suffrage movement was small and non-militant, Worcester still supported three branches of suffrage organizations which were formed between 1908 and 1914: the

¹⁵K. Baxter, '“The advent of a woman candidate was seen ... as outrageous”: Women, Party Politics and Elections in interwar Scotland and England', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 33 (2013), 260–83, 274.

¹⁶D. Urquhart, *Women in Ulster Politics, 1890–1940* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), p. 155.

¹⁷The latest volume was published in 2016: S. Davies and B. Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 4* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁸B. Weinstein, 'Local Government', in: *The Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History, 1800–2000* ed. by David Brown et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 189–204, 191.

¹⁹G. Finlayson, 'A Moving Frontier: Voluntarism and the State in British Social Welfare 1911–1949', *Twentieth Century British History*, 1 (1990), 183–206.

²⁰See for example: A. Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop Journal*, 5, (1978), 9–65; E. Janes Yeo, 'Social motherhood and the sexual communion of labour in British Social Science, 1850–1950', *Women's History Review*, 1 (1992), 63–87; R. Davidson, 'Dreams of Utopia: the infant welfare movement in interwar Croydon', *Women's History Review*, 23 (2014), 239–55.

National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA) and the Anglican Church League for Women's Suffrage.²¹ Worcester was a 'stronghold of clerical suffragism', with both the Bishop of Worcester and the Dean of Worcester, and their wives, taking leading roles in organizing the city's branch in the years leading up to the outbreak of war, though as was common elsewhere, suffrage agitation ceased during the conflict.²² The CUWFA continued to hold meetings, although reporting in its journal suggests it largely undertook charitable relief work for the war effort from 1914.²³ This was not unusual: as Maggie Andrews has demonstrated, the conflict offered a multiplicity of ways for Worcester's women to enter public life through paid and voluntary work, and especially charitable activities.²⁴ The county as a whole supported 'over thirty' convalescent hospitals, funded and staffed by middle- and upper-class women, such as Diana Ogilvy.²⁵

The war also enabled some women in Worcester to enter municipal government for the first time, as certain statutory committees, including the Naval and Military War Pensions Committee (WPC), Food Control Committee (FCC) and Maternity and Child Welfare Committee (MCWC) were established which required a female presence, either from existing women councillors, where women were elected to such roles, or as co-opted members. This was not mere tokenism, however. Rather, it allowed women with specific expertise and experience to bring this to bear on the work of these committees. The lack of women councillors in Worcester meant women from the local community had to be co-opted. These were not the first instance of women being co-opted in the city. In 1908, two women had been co-opted onto the Education Committee: Alice Ottley and Margaret Spurling. The Education Committee co-opted nine members yearly from among the teachers who worked in the city's schools. It is important to note that the two were not co-opted as women, but as members of the teaching profession. Ottley was headmistress of Worcester High School for Girls, an Independent Day school which was renamed in her honour after her death in 1912, when Spurling, who also taught at the school, succeeded her as headmistress.²⁶ Women teachers continued to be co-opted onto Worcester's Education Committee for many years, largely because of the relatively high proportion of women employed in the profession in this period.²⁷

Notably, the number of women in Worcester who were co-opted onto statutory committees that were established as a result of war went above the required statutory minimum. For example, the WPC was established in 1917 as part of wider wartime legislative changes to pay structures within the armed forces

²¹L. Boyce, 'The Worcester Suffragettes' available at <<https://lucienneboyce.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/The-Worcester-Suffragettes-update-July-23.pdf>> [accessed August 2023].

²²R. Saunders, "'A Great and Holy War': Religious Routes to Women's Suffrage, 1909–1914', *The English Historical Review*, 134 (2019), 1471–502, 1498.

²³'Worcester', *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review [CUWFR]*, 1 April 1915.

²⁴M. Andrews, 'Worcestershire's Women: Local Studies and the Gender Politics of the First World War and its Legacy', *History*, 104 (2020), 851–870.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 865.

²⁶J. Senders Pedersen, 'Some Victorian Headmistresses: A Conservative Tradition of Social Reform', *Victorian Studies*, 24 (1981), 463–88.

²⁷For a broader overview of gendered experiences of the teaching profession at this time, see: A. Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

necessitated by conscription.²⁸ Local authorities were obliged to include at least two women on local committees. In Worcester, six were appointed: Miss Alice Martin, representing the Worcester District Ancient Order of Foresters; Mrs Carlton, Mrs Palmer and Mrs Sutton, representing Worcester Women's Labour League (WLL); Miss Davis, representing the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association, and Mrs Christina Eliza Martin, described as the 'dependant of a soldier'.²⁹ FCCs were also established in 1917, to help mitigate some of the challenges of food supply shortages and price hikes, and were obliged to include one female representative.³⁰ In Worcester, two women, Mrs Eleanor Knott and Mrs Florence Sutton, were co-opted to sit alongside 10 men.³¹ Shortly thereafter, following the passage of the 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act which came about because of wider wartime concerns over the health of the general population, local authorities were obligated to establish maternity committees which were to include a minimum of two women.³² Worcester corporation asked local branches of the Women's Co-operative Guild and WLL to each suggest a member to join the committee.³³ These two individuals went unnamed in council records, and local records of both organizations do not survive, so it was not possible to identify who the two women were, but the following year they were joined by five additional women: Mrs Carlton, Mrs Winnington, Mrs Wilson, Mrs Price and Mrs Chichester.³⁴

One of the many challenges facing researchers of women's history, especially at local level and in particular of non-elite women, is the lack of extant records on which to draw. On many occasions women were referred to by surname only in the extant record of specific organizations, leaving them hard to trace further with certainty. Even on occasions where an individual's full name was recorded, the absence of any accompanying personal papers to the archival record means that it is often only possible to trace detail of their private lives using census returns. Although useful in providing background information about their social or family circumstances, these do not allow for a full understanding of their personal motivations for involvement with a specific cause or organization.³⁵ Thus, it is hard to reach firm conclusions from the available evidence. Nevertheless, three general trends stand out. First, as noted, in Worcester, local authorities went above a statutory minimum when appointing women to committees. This is significant, although whether this was at the behest of activist women, or a decision taken by male councillors, remains unclear from surviving minutes. The dearth of research into women's presence in local government elsewhere means it is

²⁸J. Lomas, "'Delicate duties': issues of class and respectability in government policy towards the wives and widows of British soldiers in the era of the great war", *Women's History Review*, 9 (2000), 123–47.

²⁹1917–18 Yearbook.

³⁰K. Hunt, 'The Politics of Food and Women's Neighborhood Activism in First World War Britain', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 77 (2010), 8–26.

³¹1917–18 Yearbook, 6 August 1917.

³²H. Biggs, 'Maternity and Child Welfare Act', in: *Women's legal landmarks: celebrating 100 years of women and law in the UK and Ireland*, ed. by E. Rackley and R. Auchmuty, (London: Hart Publishing, 2018), pp. 119–124.

³³1917–18 Yearbook, 2 January 1918.

³⁴1918–19 Yearbook, 3 January 1919.

³⁵For wider discussion of this point, see: Andrews, 'Worcestershire's Women', 852–3; Leeworthy, *Causes in Common*, p. 111. Stephanie Ward has also made important points about the usefulness of bureaucratic organizational records to tracing working-class women's activism, see: S. Ward, 'Labour Activism and the Political Self in Inter-War Working-Class Women's Politics', *Twentieth Century British History*, 30 (2019), 29–52, 33.

also not yet possible to suggest whether this phenomenon was relatively common, or somewhat unique to Worcester.

Second, it appears that at least some women were extremely committed to voluntary action on issues broadly related to welfare, becoming involved in a number of council committees. It is extremely likely that the Mrs Carlton who sat on the WPC was the same Mrs Carlton who sat on the Maternity Committee, as both were Labour party members, and that the Florence Sutton co-opted to the FCC sat too on the Maternity committee. Rosina Palmer, of the WPC, retained her involvement with the committee as it became the larger Worcester, Kidderminster and District War Pensions Committee post-war, and in 1928 was awarded an MBE for her voluntary work in this capacity.³⁶ In the 1920s she became a magistrate for the city, and in 1929 was elected a Labour councillor. Eleanor Knott, who was co-opted onto the FCC also sat as a magistrate from 1924.³⁷ While relatively few in number, these women nonetheless made a substantial contribution to local life through their activism.

Third, and perhaps most significant, is the involvement of women from the Labour party and the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG), an organization for left-wing, working-class women on these committees. This is particularly notable in a city where both local and national politics was dominated almost without exception by the Conservatives. The constituency of Worcester returned Conservative MPs at every election from 1885 to 1997, with the exception of 1922 when the Liberal Richard Fairbairn, for many years a city councillor, won election, losing in 1923; the Conservatives also had a majority on the local council every year until 1939.³⁸ Despite this, women from the WLL and WCG were well represented on the committees established during wartime. While across Britain, the WLL and the WCG were involved in campaigning for increased maternity and infant welfare services, the contemporary infant welfare movement was frequently dominated by more elite women from the middle- and upper-classes who could be driven by eugenicist ideologies.³⁹ In Worcester, despite the presence of at least two organizations – the CUWFA and the Church League – which engaged middle-class women with more conservative views, it was to the left-wing WLL and WCG that the largely Conservative male councillors turned when seeking a female viewpoint on this important issue. The activism of this group of Labour women persisted post-war. In 1919, for example, following pressure from Worcester WLL, the council agreed to 'invite three working women to meet the Housing sub-committee when they select the plans for houses to be provided for the working-classes'; among this number

³⁶'No Equal Honours Yet', *Vote*, 8 June 1928, p. 181.

³⁷*Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire*, 1924 (London: Kelly's Directories Ltd, 1924).

³⁸D. Mylechreest, *A Singular Liberal, Richard Robert Fairbairn and Worcester Politics, 1899–1941* (unpublished MA Thesis, Coventry University, 2007). For further discussion on the nature of Conservatism and Unionism in Worcester, see: I. Cawood, 'Life after Joe: Politics and War in the West Midlands, 1914–1918', *Midland History*, 42, (2017), 92–117, 106; N. Beeching, 'The Provincial Press & the Outbreak of War. A Unionist View in Worcestershire', *Midland History*, 39 (2014), 163–84.

³⁹P. Thane, 'Women in the British Labour Party and the Construction of State Welfare, 1906–1939', in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* ed. by S. Koven and S. Michel (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 343–77; G. Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1997). For the dominance of elite women, see: Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood'.

was a Mrs Sutton, who was likely the same individual involved with the WPC and FCC.⁴⁰

Worcester's Women Councillors, 1919—1939

Despite the significant role that these co-opted women played on specific committees, it was not until 1919 that a woman first sat as an elected councillor in Worcester. In Worcester, no women stood in the November 1918 municipal elections – the first to be held since 1914, as elections were suspended for the duration of the war – but the following year, Labour's Alice Edwards became the first woman to stand for, and win, election in Worcester when she was elected to represent St Martin's ward. Between then and the cessation of elections on the outbreak of war in 1939, 12 women stood for election to Worcester City Council, of whom 10, including Edwards, were successful. While three served for only one term before losing their seat at the subsequent election, seven – the clear majority – served as councillors for many years, with some being re-elected beyond 1945.⁴¹

Worcester's local politics was dominated by the Conservative party, which as noted had a substantial majority at every local election between 1918 and 1939, and thus it is perhaps unsurprising that Conservative women were the most electorally successful: all five who stood won election.⁴² Nonetheless, their achievements underscores research into Conservative women's political activism in the interwar years, which has demonstrated that women were able take on official, not merely supportive, roles within the party, particularly at local level.⁴³ The Liberal party remained electorally viable in Worcester's local politics, largely thanks to the efforts of Richard Fairbairn, but the only woman to stand as a Liberal candidate was defeated. Throughout the interwar years, the Liberals were gradually replaced by Labour as the second party at local elections.⁴⁴ The growing strength of the local Labour party was reflected in the fact that four Labour women stood for election, with three being successful across this period. No women candidates in Worcester stood as representatives of smaller, single-issue parties such as Ratepayers' Alliances, but two women stood, and won election as, Independents. Although fewer in number, they had more success than men: 19 men stood as Independent candidates between 1918 and 1938, of which 10 were elected.⁴⁵

Alice Edwards, Worcester's first woman councillor, served one term; she sought re-election in 1922 and 1923, lost on both occasions, and did not stand again. The city was therefore without a woman councillor until 1924, when Lucy Clarke, a Conservative, was returned unopposed, but she did not seek re-election in 1927. Clarke was the only one of the 10 women councillors who did not contest an election. After she stepped

⁴⁰1918—19 yearbook, 6 May 1919.

⁴¹One additional woman, Alice Creese, served as a councillor very briefly. When her husband, a long-serving councillor, died midterm in June 1938, she was co-opted to take his seat but served only until the November elections, in which she did not stand. It therefore appears that she was appointed only to ensure there was no casual vacancy. Given this, she has not been included in this analysis. 1937—1938 Yearbook.

⁴²The Conservative majority was calculated from election returns in local newspapers for Birmingham and Worcester.

⁴³See for example N. C. Fleming, 'Women and Lancashire Conservatism between the Wars', *Women's History Review*, 26 (2017), 329—49.

⁴⁴Mylechreest, 'A Singular Liberal', 183.

⁴⁵Evidence in this paragraph is derived from issues of the *Birmingham Gazette* and the *Worcester Herald* published between 1919 and 1938, which each year published election results following November municipal elections, cross-referenced with the council Yearbooks.

down, the city was again without any women representatives, though the situation soon began to improve. In 1929, four women were elected: Conservatives Katherine Atkins and Clare Buckle; the Independent Diana Ogilvy, and Labour's Rosina Palmer. These four were continually re-elected until the suspension of elections at the outbreak of war, and in 1930 were joined by two other Conservatives, Emily Jacomb and Elizabeth O'Brien. O'Brien, too, served continually though Jacomb stood down after just one term. Labour's Matilda Urry was elected in 1933 and Eveline Cadbury, an Independent, won a seat in 1938.

As Worcester's council was made up of 36 councillors, this meant that for much of the 1930s at least one sixth of councillors were women. At around 17%, this was far from equitable, but was nonetheless significant progress compared to earlier decades and appears to compare favourably with other parts of England at this time, although the dearth of scholarship on women in local government after 1914 means it is challenging to precisely situate this figure within a wider contemporary context. Worcester appears to have had a similar experience to Coventry: Cathy Hunt has found that by the mid-1930s, the city had six women representatives who together made up 15% of total council seats, although all were Labour women.⁴⁶ Worcester also held up favourably against London: in 1934, 150 women councillors were elected to the London County Council, a representation rate of about 20%.⁴⁷ Representation was arguably better in Worcester than in Manchester, where only five women, at maximum, sat simultaneously throughout the interwar years.⁴⁸ From this limited available evidence, there is a suggestion that despite a somewhat inauspicious start, Worcester does seem to have done reasonably well by way of female representation in municipal government. While the overall number of women councillors elected in Worcester in the interwar years was small, proportionally female representation in the city appears to have been comparable to – and in some cases better than – several other English local authorities at this time, although future research into other areas may ultimately challenge this assertion.

Roles and Responsibilities

Once elected, councillors attended meetings in the Shire Hall on Foregate Street. There, heard the reports of all statutory council committees and voted on whether to pass the recommendations of these committees.⁴⁹ Responsibility of these statutory committees was far-reaching and often complex. The Education Committee, for example, had responsibility for the employment and salaries of all teachers in council-maintained schools; the upkeep of school buildings; arranging for the inspection of schools; the provision of school meals, medical inspections and necessary vaccinations to pupils at city schools; the provision of open air schools or other specialist establishments for children with disabilities; and monitoring levels of children's absences from schools, where necessary following up with individual cases. Paid staff who worked in the council's Education Office undertook the administrative work associated with these

⁴⁶Hunt, "Success with the Ladies", 142.

⁴⁷P. Thane, 'The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism 1906–1945' in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* ed. by H. L. Smith (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), p. 140.

⁴⁸K. Hunt, 'Making Politics in Local Communities: Labour Women in Interwar Manchester', in *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918–45* ed. by M. Worley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 87.

⁴⁹Co-opted committee members had as much power on committees as elected councillors, but it was only councillors who could pass or reject motions at full meetings.

tasks. However, it was the role of members of the Education Committee to oversee this and make recommendations to the full council, such as for increases in teachers' wages.

Councillors, both male and female, therefore had to attend the 11 monthly full council meetings each year; any extraordinary meetings of the full council that were called, and the meetings of the statutory committees to which they were appointed.⁵⁰ The regularity of these latter varied, with work being more onerous on some committees than others, reflecting the relative complexities and significance of the issues with which specific committees dealt. The Library and Museums committee, for example, met only quarterly whereas the Health committee met monthly. All councillors were required to sit on a minimum of three committees each year; the women councillors generally averaged five or six a year which was the comparable to male councillors. Assuming that a councillor was did attend the majority of meetings, it is easy to see how this might quickly become quite a significant time commitment and not conducive to those who had to balance such a role with paid employment, unless they worked in a role which allowed them some significant flexibility in their working patterns. For women with domestic responsibilities, the extent to which they might rely on the support of domestic servants presumably also impacted their ability to take on such roles.

Each year, councillors were allocated the committees on which they would sit for that municipal year, which ran from November to November annually, by the Selection Committee. Generally, councillors both male and female served multiple terms on the same committees, perhaps building up a degree of expertise in a specific area. In total 14 council committees saw at least one woman councillor sit on them for at least one year, between 1919 and 1939. Alphabetically, these were the Care of the Mentally Defective; Education; General Purposes; Health; Housing; Libraries and Museums; Old Age Pensions; Profiteering; Property and Cemeteries; Public Assistance; Selection; Smallholdings and Allotments; Streets; and Watch and Lighting committees.⁵¹ The range of committees is particularly notable, and it is important to highlight that not all of these committees had a clearly gendered aspect to their work. Katherine Atkins and Elizabeth O'Brien, for example, sat for several years on the Streets committee, which oversaw management of the streets, highways, footways, bridges and quays within the city, while Clare Buckle sat on the Smallholdings and Allotments committee for her entire seven-year tenure, becoming its chairman from 1932 to 1936.⁵² Generally, however, Worcester's women councillors sat on committees that dealt, in part if not exclusively, with what were perceived to be 'women's issues', which broadly related to women, children and were often welfare-focused.

Whether women councillors in the interwar period took on such 'gendered' committees because of contemporary understandings of what were considered suitable roles for women councillors, or whether they did so motivated by their own interests in specific issues or areas of council work, is debated.⁵³ Given that, in most cases,

⁵⁰Ordinary meetings were held every month except in August.

⁵¹Yearbooks, 1919–20 to 1939–40. Council yearbooks include the composition of each committee yearly; not included here are co-opted women.

⁵²Yearbooks, 1929–30 to 1936–37. Buckle was the only woman chair of a committee in this period.

⁵³K. Hunt and J. Hannam, 'Towards an Archaeology of Interwar Women's Politics: The Local and the Everyday', in *The Aftermath of Suffrage, Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, ed. by J. V. Gottlieb and R. Toye (London: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 124–41, 130–33.

individual women councillors left no record of their personal experiences to the archival record, it is hard to state for certain. Julia Neville, in her research into interwar women councillors in Devon, has argued that women there were ‘pigeonholed’ into taking on such roles by more senior male councillors, at the expense of involvement with committees that had little to do with welfare or domestic issues.⁵⁴ There was precedent for this: from the mid-nineteenth century, many women, particularly those of the middle- and upper-classes had been involved in this kind of voluntary welfare work.⁵⁵ Indeed, many early women councillors had made special claims for their presence on specific committees because of their gender, ascribing importance to the ways in which their expertise as women might allow them an important perspective on certain aspects of welfare work.⁵⁶ Thus, while Neville argues that Devonian women were ‘pigeonholed’, there was also a recognition in other areas that a specifically female perspective was useful in local government. Indeed, there are some parallels here with early women parliamentary candidates and MPs, some of whom made claims for a ‘woman’s point of view’ being necessary in parliament.⁵⁷

Understanding this ‘pigeonholing’ becomes even more complex when taking into account the statutory requirement certain committees had for a proportion of female representation. For example, following the abolition of the Poor Law in 1929, local councils were obliged to establish Public Assistance Committees (PAC) which oversaw issues that had previously been dealt with by Boards of Guardians, and which were obliged to have women members. In Worcester, the obligation was for 15 members, of which at least two had to be women. Of the eight women councillors elected after 1929, seven served on the PAC at least once and most years, between a third and a half of members of the PAC were female.⁵⁸ There continuity here with previous decades, as Poor Law Guardianship had also enabled women to gain a foothold in local politics and government since the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁹ In Worcester, four of the 10 women councillors had been Poor Law Guardians.⁶⁰ Likewise, all 10 women councillors were placed on the Health committee, which embraced the Maternity and Child Welfare sub-committee, immediately upon being elected, and served on it for their entire tenure.

Despite these complexities, it appears from the surviving evidence that Worcester’s women councillors had some degree of control over which committees they joined. Importantly, from 1930, Conservative, Labour and Independent women councillors sat on the Selection committee. This met once a year, to appoint councillors to all other statutory committees for the municipal year, but its minutes consist merely of who was appointed to each role, and not any prior discussion or bargaining. In Devon, Neville notes that this committee was populated entirely by ‘senior male councillors, who

⁵⁴Neville, ‘Challenge, Conformity’, 981.

⁵⁵Eileen Yeo articulates this form of public service as ‘social motherhood’: Yeo, ‘social motherhood’.

⁵⁶Hollis, *Ladies Elect*.

⁵⁷L. Berry Waite, ‘The “Woman’s Point of View”: Women Parliamentary Candidates, 1918–1919’, in: *Electoral Pledges in Britain Since 1918: The Politics of Promises*, ed. by D. Thackeray and R. Toye (London: Palgrave, 2020), pp. 47–69.

⁵⁸Yearbooks, 1929–30 to 1939–40.

⁵⁹P. Thane, ‘Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England’, *History Workshop*, 6 (1978), 29–51; S. King, ‘“We Might be Trusted”: Female Poor Law Guardians and the Development of the New Poor Law: The Case of Bolton, England, 1880–1906’, *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004), 27–46.

⁶⁰These were the Conservatives Katherine Atkins, Lucy Clarke and Elizabeth O’Brien and the Independent Diana Ogilvy. Information via *Worcester Herald*.

selected committee membership, [and] determined where women should serve'.⁶¹ She suggests that women councillors there had little input into which committees they were appointed, but this was not the case in Worcester, where women had more autonomy.

While it is impossible to know with certainty why – indeed, if – certain women requested placement on a certain committee, it is notable that the majority of the city's female councillors retained the same portfolio of committees for many years. For example, Elizabeth O'Brien served on the Health, Housing, Public Assistance and Streets committees every year from her election in 1930 to 1939, and in 1932 was also appointed to the General Purposes committee, which she also sat on until 1939. Matilda Urry, meanwhile, sat on the Care of the Mentally Defective, Education, General Purposes, Health and Housing committees from her election in 1933 to 1939, and from 1935 to 1938 also sat on the PAC.⁶² Their reappointment to the same roles repeatedly suggests that both developed an interest in certain aspects of council work. Furthermore, their portfolios again highlight that women councillors were not merely confined to committees – specifically General Purposes and Streets – which did not engage in any kind of 'welfare work' or gendered issues. Similarly, roles connected to the oversight of education had long been a route into local government for women, but while eight of the 10 women councillors did, like Mrs Urry, sit on the Education committee for a time, there was no expectation that they would just because they were women. Neither Miss O'Brien nor Mrs Buckle served here.⁶³ Overall, then, it is clear that Worcester's women councillors actively participated in local politics and government in the city through their roles on various statutory committees, and that, while there was a gendered aspect to some of this work, it formed only part of their role. Indeed, there is little to suggest that, in this, their experiences were much different to contemporary male councillors.

Gender, Class and Civic Ceremony

Despite this, there was one aspect of Worcester's local government which remained harder for women councillors, and particularly those who did not come from elite backgrounds, to enter: ceremonial roles which held little authority, but much prestige. Worcester appointed three ancient offices of government, mayor, High Sheriff and City Chamberlain, annually. Only two of the 10 women councillors in Worcester were appointed to the mayoralty: Diana Ogilvy, for 1931–32 and Katherine Atkins, for 1936–37.⁶⁴ Lady Atkins was also Worcester's first female High Sheriff, in 1935–36 and was succeeded in this role by Clare Buckle for 1936–37. Mrs Buckle was Worcester's first female City Chamberlain – the title was used for women who occupied the role – in 1934–35 and 1935–36, while Rosina Palmer held this role for 1938–39, and 1939–40. Ogilvy and Atkins both had connections to the local elite and the gentry, and it is notable that only the two women with such connections were selected as mayors: perhaps the most prestigious of the three roles.

⁶¹Neville, 'Challenge, Conformity', 981.

⁶²Yearbooks 1930–31 to 1939–40. The Housing committee was subsumed within Health from 1935 onwards.

⁶³Yearbooks, 1919–20 to 1939–40.

⁶⁴Council yearbooks note the ceremonial appointments for each year, which were affirmed at the November council meeting. Unless otherwise stated, detail of all appointments which follow were derived from the relevant Yearbook.

Given the lack of authority that came with such ceremonial positions, this may appear at first appear trivial but, although these roles lacked any real power, they did form an important part of local civic society and public life. As David Cannadine has demonstrated, in the period from the 1890s to 1939, appointment to mayoralties in provincial towns and cities across England and Wales offered an opportunity for those from gentry and land-owning backgrounds whose political power was otherwise waning to retain a role in the local public sphere, and thus the appointment of specific individuals to the mayoralty is perhaps less inconsequential than it might first appear. Cannadine refers to these as ‘Ornamental Mayors’, noting that the town or borough also benefited from the prestige of having a member of the local elite associated with the local council.⁶⁵ Nick Hayes, too, has highlighted the ongoing influence of urban elites in civil society in provincial cities through the interwar period in a detailed study of Nottingham, in which he also notes how much remains unclear about ‘the postulated decline of social and economic elite participation in the management of political, charitable and voluntary activity after 1914’.⁶⁶ Analysis of the decision, in Worcester, to appoint only women from elite backgrounds to the mayoralty thus has wider implications for our understanding of women, politics and public life in the post-enfranchisement era, and also helps to gender the literature on the supposed decline of elite participation in civic society in the interwar period, which, to date, has largely focused on men.⁶⁷

In Worcester, the three offices were appointed annually in November by sitting councillors and aldermen. Each office was held for a year, although some individuals served multiple terms, such as Councillor Arthur Carlton, who was Mayor of Worcester in 1916–17, 1917–18, 1918–19 and 1922–23.⁶⁸ Well before the inter-war years, the responsibilities of each office had largely been relegated to dressing in formal regalia and performing ceremonial duties on civic occasions, such as Diana Ogilvy’s speech of welcome when the Prince of Wales visited Worcester in 1932.⁶⁹ The Mayor was essentially a figurehead for such occasions; he or she was also entitled to an honorary seat on all council committees. Following the Sheriffs Act 1887, the duties of the High Sheriff were limited to acting as a returning officer at parliamentary elections; attending royal visits and proclaiming the accession of a new sovereign. Lady Atkins did so on the accession of George VI in 1936, and was noted by the press to ‘have the honour of [being] one of the few women’ to participate in these ceremonies nationwide.⁷⁰ Indeed, so unusual was it to have women in these roles that, ahead of her appointment as Worcester’s first female High Sheriff, the Town Clerk wrote to 13 other town clerks across England and Wales, enquiring whether ‘your council has ever appointed a lady to act in this

⁶⁵D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 557–72.

⁶⁶N. Hayes, ‘Counting civil society: deconstructing elite participation in the provincial English city, 1900–1950’, *Urban History*, 40 (2013), 287–314, 288.

⁶⁷Hayes, ‘Counting civil society’; see also: W. Rubinstein, ‘Britain’s elites in the inter-war period, 1918–39’, in *The Making of the British Middle Class?* ed. by A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999); B. Doyle, ‘The structure of elite power in the early twentieth-century city: Norwich, 1900–35’, *Urban History*, 24 (1997), 179–99; J. Smith, ‘Urban elites and urban history’, *Urban History*, 27 (2000), 269–74; T. Hulme, ‘Putting the City Back into Citizenship: Civics Education and Local Government in Britain, 1918–45’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 26 (2015), 26–51.

⁶⁸Yearbooks, 1916–17 to 1922–23.

⁶⁹The Prince of Wales at Worcester’.

⁷⁰‘King George VI Proclaimed’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 15 December 1936.

capacity, and if so, what regalia she wore upon Civic occasions'.⁷¹ He received negative responses from all in answer to his question.

Exactly how the appointment process worked is unclear as council minutes simply record the names of those appointed to the role, not the decision process. Generally, councillors chose a candidate from currently serving councillors or aldermen, though not always – the candidate could be someone who was otherwise known for their contribution to public life. In Worcester, this was typically someone with a connection to local government specifically, rather than public life more broadly, in contrast to what Cannadine suggests was the case elsewhere.⁷² For example, when a currently serving councillor was not chosen, the role of Mayor of Worcester was given to: the Town Clerk, Samuel Southall, in 1921; Colonel Livingston Wood, a city magistrate whose father and grandfather had been Mayors, in 1924; and Colonel Albert Webb, who had sat as a councillor for many years prior to the First World War, in 1928.⁷³ During the rest of the period, the role went to sitting councillors or aldermen; the roles of High Sheriff and City Chamberlain were appointed to men who were not current councillors or aldermen at a similar rate. Thus, while theoretically these ceremonial roles could be taken up by any citizen of the borough, in practice they were almost always given to those who were current, or had recently been, members of the council. As such, it perhaps acted as a kind of reward for, or at least recognition of, their longstanding service.

There are, therefore, two notable aspects to women's service in these roles in Worcester: women were able to enter these roles after only a relatively short period of service, but only women from the local elite. The case of Diana Ogilvy, Worcester's first woman mayor, is instructive: she was appointed in November 1931, only two years after she had first won election. The local press, in reporting on the council meeting at which she was appointed, noted councillors' comments on her 'many years public works' in connection with nursing and the Board of Guardians in Worcester were noted in the local press, but also noted their remarks that the city was fortunate to appoint 'a lady of high distinction' to the role.⁷⁴ Ogilvy was one of four women to win election in 1929, with further long-serving women councillors joining the council in 1930 and 1933. Yet, as noted, only one – Katherine Atkins – was appointed to the mayoralty. Atkins came from a similar background to Ogilvy: born in 1870 at Llangoed Castle, she married Ivor Atkins, from an upper-middle class Welsh family in 1899, two years after he had been appointed choirmaster and organist at Worcester Cathedral.⁷⁵ Through her husband's important role at the cathedral, the couple became well-known throughout Worcester. Ivor was knighted for services to music in 1921, so when Katherine became a Conservative councillor, in 1929, she used the title of Lady Atkins.⁷⁶

Arguably, it was the fact that both Ogilvy and Atkins were members of the local elite which secured their appointment as mayor relatively earlier in their local government careers. The next female Mayor of Worcester was Labour's Rosina Palmer, appointed in 1943; she held the less prestigious roles of City Chamberlain in 1938 and High Sheriff

⁷¹He wrote to Clerks in Bristol, Exeter, Gloucester, Lincoln, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Lichfield, Chester, Haverfordwest, Hull, Coventry, Oxford, Poole, and Carmarthen. WAAS, 496.5 BA9360/C14/Box 6, Council Appointments.

⁷²For example, in Dudley, where the Earl of Dudley was appointed to the mayoralty. Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, p. 559.

⁷³It is notable that Worcester, with its military links, appointed men of significant rank within the armed forces. *Worcester Herald*, 12 November 1921; 15 November 1924 and 10 November 1928.

⁷⁴'Mayor's Day', *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, November 1931.

⁷⁵J. Moore, 'Atkins, Sir Ivor Algernon (1869–1953)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-30493>> [accessed 18 August 2023].

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

in 1940.⁷⁷ Palmer had first been elected to the council in 1929, the same year as Ogilvy and Atkins, but was not a member of the local elite – her husband, Thomas, who was elected to the council in 1918 as a Labour representative, worked for the Co-operative Society, becoming a clerk for the organization by 1939, while Rosina did not give an occupation on any census after her marriage.⁷⁸ It is hard to judge the relative financial stability of any family with such sparse evidence, but this does suggest that the Palmers were perhaps at the upper end of the working-classes. Clearly, however, they were not members of the local elite – and neither were any of the other long-serving women councillors elected around the same time, who were not appointed to such roles.

Relatively little research into women's appointments to these roles currently exists, and it is therefore hard to make comparisons with other places. Cathy Hunt's research into Alice Arnold, an outspoken, working-class, socialist councillor in interwar Coventry, details how Arnold was snubbed by councillors in the city when, by seniority, it was her turn to be elected Mayor in 1936. Her period of office would coincide with the coronation of George VI and Hunt notes that Arnold was 'not consider[ed] respectable enough to represent Coventry' in the coronation year. Arnold's lack of respectability, she contends, was not tied to her party – councillors in Coventry indicated that they would be happy with the nomination of a male Labour councillor – and was also not solely because she was a woman, but rather was 'because she was the wrong *type* of woman'.⁷⁹ Although the evidence is very limited, this does suggest that social class and elite status could play a significant role in the appointment, or otherwise, of women to ceremonial roles. Future research, into other areas, might well complicate these findings, but will nonetheless further contribute to the gendering of the debate surrounding the decline of the urban elite in politics after 1918.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that women were able to play an important role in Worcester's local government in the early twentieth century. The First World War, and the creation of statutory committees, enabled women to begin to work their way into certain aspects of municipal governance as co-opted committee members. It is particularly significant that Labour women were able to make such a contribution here, given that Worcester's politics was so dominated by the Conservatives throughout this period. After enfranchisement, women slowly began to be elected as full councillors, though it is notable that eight of the ten – the clear majority – were not elected until after 1929, and it was the 1930s which perhaps saw the clearest entry of women into local government. As councillors, they appear to have been fully accepted both by the men they sat alongside, and by the voting populace. While largely confined to committees which dealt with what were broadly defined as 'women's issues', they were not exclusively confined to such, and there is some suggestion that these women chose to take on roles on such committees. Furthermore, the work they did here was extremely significant.

However, as the article further demonstrates, there was a conditional acceptance to women's presence in local government. Generally, it was women from the local elite who

⁷⁷WAAS, 496.5 BA9360/C14/Box 6, Council Appointments.

⁷⁸The censuses of 1911 and 1921, along with the 1939 National Register were consulted.

⁷⁹C. Hunt, "Everyone's Poor Relation": the poverty and isolation of a working-class woman local politician in interwar Britain', *Women's History Review*, 16 (2007), 417–30, 426.

were appointed to ceremonial roles. While, as noted, the actual power these roles had was negligible, this is nonetheless significant. This conditional acceptance may offer one explanation for why the proportion of women in local government remained low throughout the twentieth century, as, indeed, it does today. In Worcester, following the May 2023 elections, 13 of the 35 councillors are now female.⁸⁰ At 37%, this figure is marginally higher than the national average for England as of 2022 (36%).⁸¹ It is an increase on the figure of 17% for the 1930s, but not as much as might be expected. Indeed, as recent research by the Fawcett Society has demonstrated, local government remains an area of very significant underrepresentation for women in politics. They estimate that it is not until 2077—170 years after women were first granted the right to stand for local council elections – that gender parity will be achieved.⁸² Understanding the history of women’s experiences in this form of politics may, perhaps, help this goal to be achieved earlier.

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⁸⁰Worcester City Council, ‘Your Councillors’, <<https://www.worcester.gov.uk/councillors-democracy/your-city-councillors>>, [accessed 12 May 2023].

⁸¹The Fawcett Society ‘All People Deserve to See Themselves Represented at Every Level of Government’ <<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/new-data-from-fawcett-shows-95-of-local-councils-are-male-dominated>> [accessed 12 May 2023].

⁸²*Ibid.*