



## Florence Paton nee Widdowson 1891-1976

### MP

Florence was born in Somerset, lived in Wolverhampton where she became a schoolteacher. She was a Methodist lay preacher and initially was a Liberal but joined the Independent Labour Party in 1917.

She stood for parliament in Cheltenham in 1928 and then in 1929 unsuccessfully contested Rushcliffe. In 1932 when the ILP and LP split she initially stayed in the ILP but joined the LP in 1933. In 1930 she married John Paton himself also a future Labour MP. She won the Rushcliffe seat in 1945 and became the **first woman MP** in Nottinghamshire. She held her surgeries in People's Hall on Heathcote Street and had a particular focus on women's perspectives.

In 1946 she was one of 53 MPs who voted in opposition to conscription being retained during peacetime and was a teller for the anti-conscriptionists. In February 1947 she raised issues about the treatment of women prisoners in Holloway gaol, having been involved in a campaign for improvement of conditions in Holloway along with fellow female MP Barbara Ayrton Gould. The campaign had been set up in 1945 by Cicely Craven, Margery Fry and Theodora Calvert. In November 1947 she spoke in favour of the abolition of the death penalty and was jubilant when it was suspended for five years in April 1948. She was also the British delegate to the United Nations in 1947.

In parliament, she was on the panel of members able to chair parliament and committees and on 31 May 1948 she became the **first** woman to preside over the whole House of Commons, though she didn't sit in the Speaker's chair as when the House is in committee, the chairman sits at the table, rather than in the speaker's chair.

After boundary changes she stood unsuccessfully in 1950 in Carlton. From 1955 – 1958 she was a member of the Royal Commission on common land. Florence died in Wolverhampton on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1976. A sculpture by Hilary Cartmel was installed in Carlton Hill Garden for the Blind in 2019 and a commemorative booklet produced.