



## **Helena Brownsword Dowson 1866-1964**

### **Leading Suffragist, City Councillor and Magistrate**

Helena or Nellie as she preferred was born at Chestnut House on Chestnut Grove, the only daughter of Alderman Anderson and Jane Brownsword, both active in charity and social works. She married Will Dowson in 1894, first son of Benjamin and Alice Dowson and from 1906 lived in Felixstowe in the Park – before they lived at 10 Mapperley Road. They also had a bungalow on the Trent. She worked with her mother and sisters in law on various issues including women's suffrage. Nellie took over the lead secretary role from Alice in 1895 affiliating to the National NUWSS and attending the executive meetings in London. She attended and organised demonstrations and meetings, held garden parties and stalls to fundraise, went on marches and events including some organised by the East Midlands Federation of NUWSS as well as some WSPU events; she also worked in Nottingham's suffrage shop in Regent's Chambers at 54 Long Row - now gone. In 1911 Nellie was at home and complied with the April 2<sup>nd</sup> Census recording her occupation as secretary of the women's suffrage society. In 1913 Nellie and Maud, her sister in law joined the Great Suffrage Pilgrimage as it passed through Nottingham, on route to London. Nellie picked up Millicent Fawcett and took her to speak at Chesterfield and Southwell; the only region in which Mrs Fawcett spoke. They returned home after the East Midlands events and then re-joined at the final Hyde Park event on 26<sup>th</sup> July.

Helena's work was commended with an illuminated address once the vote was won, by fellow suffragists in Nottingham.

## NOTTINGHAM SUFFRAGE LEADER HONOURED.

“To mark their appreciation of her services to the cause, the object of which has now been secured, friends of the women's suffrage movement in the city and county yesterday [18th July 1918] presented Mrs. W. E. Dowson, of Nottingham, with two large volumes of Japanese painters, with an illuminated address suitably inscribed, and a bronze statuette entitled “Sorrow.”

“The ceremony took place at the residence of Mrs. W. R. Hamilton, Eastdene Alexandra Park, Nottingham, was witnessed by a considerable gathering.”

'Nottingham Evening Post', 19th July 1918

During WW1 she organised various fundraising and support for women; she was the Hon Sec of Queen's Work for Women, a member of the Anti-Profiteering committee, set up 2 Baby Welcomes and a day nursery at the request of the Ministry of Health

She became the **first** woman JP in 1920 after the Sex Disqualification Removal Act and inaugurated the women's police court work – being Chair and secretary she stood unsuccessfully as a Liberal candidate in 1919 and then became the **first** woman Liberal Councillor in 1920-24 representing the Meadows Ward campaigning for improved housing and sanitation and the extension of the vote to women over 21 on an equal footing to men and for their access to representation on civic bodies. The NUWSS became the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) in 1919 and in 1924 it became the Nottingham Women's Service Association which in turn became the Townswomen's Guilds – Nellie remained in membership. She was also related by marriage to Eleanor Rathbone, who started the first TG Guilds. She maintained her house in The Park throughout her life but from 1961 bought Northfield, a house in Newby Bridge, Ulverston now in Cumbria in the Lake District on the edge of Lake Windermere. It is here that she died at the age of 98. Felixstowe was demolished after her death in 60's

A plaque celebrating her as the first Liberal woman Councillor was unveiled on 8.03.20 on the Council House and on 20.07.20 on the Justice Centre as one of the first 3 JP's. And in November a blue plaque will celebrate all of her achievements at the Justice Centre