

Equal Rights

It was women fighting for their rights as citizens — to be able to partake in everything in society. I can't think of anything else before then really. It was for women's equality in society — all the things that women now are reaping a great lot of benefit from, what they fought for and they fought hard. Now they just take it for granted.

In 1920, I went to work. I was a "tweeny" — that was an upstairs downstairs girl — and when I went there at the time — her name was Agnes Garrett and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, and this was at No.2 Gower Street. Well being 14 years of age it didn't strike me very much, but we used to have meetings. You know, Agnes used to take us up into her room for little pep talks. There was more of them in the family from Saxmundham and they told us about this Guild and these things that they were doing — Lloyd George came along and Mrs Fossett, the Post Master General's wife, as you know, with her sister and they were all very militant.

At the time these pep talks were just talking, and it never sunk in until after I got married, and employment was so hard to find and the children come along. I soon found out what they were talking about!!!

Another important thing that we were working hard on was equal pay — which again wasn't anything new — it was something the Guild had worked for. The Guild showed its belief in equal pay, right back when Eleanor Barton was appointed as Secretary — which must have been in 1920, by setting a salary that was the male salary — and the Guild has always paid its office staff, all through the years ever since then the male rate, although the Unions had two rates — a male rate and a female rate. The Guild office staff were always paid the male rate — and that continues right up to the time of the Equal Pay Act.

Although we fought on maternity, it wasn't really the young mother that would be in the Guild, it was the older one who had been through those problems — so she would be about 30 or 40. Perhaps over 50. And she looked old. I remember only just recently, a friend of mine died — a Guildswoman — she was 90 when she died. And I remember her saying that she went to her first Guild Conference in 1922 — that's 60 odd years ago — and she was a young woman and she told me the first thing she noticed when she walked in was the white hair. Everybody looked old to her.

Half the time the men didn't want them to go out and half the time there was a scene when they got back sort of thing but they were determined to go. A penny a week it was to belong. Well I learned all what I know in the Guild movement.

If you don't agree with the men, you mustn't think you have to be wrong 'cos you may be right and they may be wrong! I was always trying to build up their confidence.

Hunger marches

The Jarrow marchers came along the main road here and they stopped for the night in the Co-operative Hall. Well they slept on the floor in the Co-operative Hall and the Guildswomen and the Labour Party sections cooked meals for them and the Co-operative Society's employees in our shoe repairing factory repaired their shoes overnight while the men slept and I can remember standing at our gate, which was about 100 yards from the Co-operative Hall, and I can remember them marching with Ellen Wilkinson with a stick — she was a cripple who had a club foot — and they were marching along those men with their packs on their backs — coats and bags and things. But I didn't understand the significance of it. My mother said "Here comes the Jarrow Marchers" It wasn't until I was older that I realised that I'd looked on history. Ooh it was a long procession, and they all wore cloth caps as you can understand and they were all wearing boots because boots were more for working men, and scarves round their necks, and there was this little short lady with a stick and club foot and that was Ellen Wilkinson.

I went to look. I'd read about the Jarrow marches and knew they were coming. And I went down to Hyde Park and they were coming into Hyde Park. And as they came, everybody pushed and they pushed me as well. I was with my husband but I lost him. I don't know what happened to him. Those horses pushed. And I was able to dodge right round the back of these two horses, and got under to the front to see them coming. We knew why they were coming and what they were coming for and hoped they would achieve..... I feel that that was the only real hunger march — they really were hungry. They really did come for a better wage.

We did a great deal of work for the Jarrow marchers. We got them tea as they went through. We went to the Wickham Hall to give them teas as they came through. Poor souls, the soles were off their feet with the long march, and we found them shoes — the Guild did a lot for the Jarrow marchers. They had their shoes off their feet, they'd walked all the way from Jarrow — unemployment was so bad — we found them shoes and bathed their feet. It was a sight to see all those men. They did look poor.

I was in that Jarrow march. There were different Guilds that went, formed up in it. That was a long long trek too that was. It took it out of us a bit. We had a trying time like.... a lot of women fell out on the way — couldn't make it. You moved along and you found women — Co-operative women from other Guilds up there, you found them all out there with cups of coffee, cups of tea for you as you were going along. Mugs like. Paper mugs. You'd grab that. And on you'd go still — you didn't stop. You didn't stop. And you'd have a bun in your pocket — a bit of a bun and perhaps a real meat pie in the other. All the way to Jarrow. There were some wonderful things came out of it, wonderful things came out of it. I saw a lot of things alter after that.



Guild members assembled at a massive pacifist service at Regents Park in London on Armistic Day 1938.

Peace Movement

Very much we worked for peace. We had large gatherings in aid of peace. I was an absolute pacifist and Laura, my daughter, was the same. I brought up both my children as pacifists. And she worked in an office in Newcastle — a big business there, and there were four girls together in this office. When they started to pick out people to do certain work and such like, the other girls didn't get it but she did, because she was a pacifist. And she refused to do anything that had to do with making weapons or anything that would cause suffering. She refused to do anything. I went up to Newcastle for her trial and she stood there while they questioned her and the magistrate was questioning her: "Would you do . . . so and so . . ." and she would say, "I will, I'll do that . . . I'll do anything that will not take life". This was her argument the whole time. Then he said "Would you go into a hospital . . . do hospital work?" And she said "I will do anything that doesn't take . . . I'll wash floors for you if you like", she said to the judge, "but I will not do anything to take life". And I can assure you I was very very proud of her. And I had quite a lot of the peace movement people . . . we were in the gallery attending it. They had come you see, for the conscientious objectors and so they were all delighted with her and they gave her forestry work. She did forest work for her war work. That was what she did.

The Co-op had a Peace movement and I went to the Albert Hall, and in the audience was Gracie Fields and Paul Robeson. It was before the war. We got a coach up from the Guild and we went there and we sat in the box and it was a marvellous afternoon. It was Gracie Fields and Paul Robeson and they had everybody standing on their feet. We all had white poppies. Paul Robeson sang and he brought the house down really, you could hear a pin drop when they were singing, but when they finished, all hell broke loose with applause. Paul Robeson sang his song, *Old Man River*, and Gracie Fields sang all her songs and we all joined in. It was a marvellous performance.

We all met on the Embankment with a big banner saying "Women's Peace Movement" and we all walked up to Hyde Park I suppose it was. The women in those days would embroider banners and this was a big banner that stretched across the road. It had ears of corn on it, the wheatsheaf. It was white and gold, saying Womens Peace Movement. I think most Guild members were pacifists. There was no aggression amongst them. They had lost some sons and brothers hadn't they, in the First War. So I think most Guildswomen were against war. Women are now, aren't they?

THE "PEACE BALLOT"

(THE NATIONAL DECLARATION ON THE
LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND ARMAMENTS).

AT THE
ROYAL ALBERT HALL,

On Thursday, 27th June, at 8 p.m.

The Final Results of the Poll in
Great Britain will be announced.

SPEAKERS:

VISCOUNT CECIL
(CHAIRMAN)
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY
THE EARL OF HOME
Dr. F. W. NORWOOD
Mrs. CORBETT ASHBY
Mr. W. CITRINE
Mrs. PAVITT
Mr. W. J. WILLIAMS

Seats (numbered and reserved) 1/- to 10/6, and a limited number of
free tickets, to be obtained from the National Declaration Committee,
15, Grosvenor Crescent, S.W.1

Doors open 7 p.m. No seats reserved after 7.50 p.m.

At the Organ, Llewellyn Bevan, A.R.C.O., A.R.C.M., L.R.A.M.

I don't know if you know it, but I'm a member of the Communist Party and another time when I was in trouble — I can't remember the date, but it was then the Guild conference was held and they passed the resolution prohibiting — we called it the political rule — prohibiting anyone from holding office, from going to conferences at the Guild's expense, who was a member of an organisation other than the Conference or the Labour Party. This removed me. And that very year, I had run for the Guild District Committee which was delegates of all the Guilds in our part of the Western area. And I had won an election and I would have been going to my very first District Committee meeting the following week. I was at that Congress as a delegate when the rule was passed and the then District Secretary, she couldn't wait. I can see her now, come up that aisle in that big hall. I think it was at Southampton and she said, "You won't need to come to the next meeting, because you're no longer eligible". That's the kind of leadership in my opinion that killed the Guild movement and led to the state it's in now.

You had the great white peace poppy thing. In my view one of the most courageous things that ever happened — because in the period between the wars it was absolutely unthinkable not to wear a red poppy on 11th November. Public opinion was such that you were likely to be tarred and feathered and during that two minutes silence — this was a great devotional two minutes — and the women didn't want to affront public opinion so they wrote to the British Legion and said "Look, we want to demonstrate our remembrance — not by remembering war — but by pledging ourselves to peace, therefore will the British Legion make x thousand white poppies which we will buy and which will be good for British Legion funds" — in order that we could wear a single white poppy or a white and red poppy together. The British Legion turned it down flat. The Women's Guild of course never take no for an answer — so they had their white poppies and they made a white poppy wreath for the Cenotaph. And they marched from the Cenotaph to Westminster Abbey, led by the Central Committee of the Guild and George Lansbury.



I knew that in various areas white poppy wreaths were laid on cenotaphs in 1937, '38 and '39. They were immediately taken off and jumped on by irate people who said they were an opposition, a denigration of the dead and yet the Guild had actively tried to get the Earl Haig factories to make the white poppies and they wouldn't do it. There was no question of opposition to the red poppy — it was simply a demonstration of peace and lots of people used to wear the two poppies together, the red and the white, to show that they were pacifists but that they didn't want to deny the fact that a lot of people had given their lives for what they thought was the peace of the world in 1914/1918.

People I mix with now, think there's something wrong with me when I won't buy a Flanders poppy — I've never bought a Flanders poppy in my life. Not that I'm disrespectful to the boys that lost their lives. But we believed in peace poppies. We believed in the white poppy. Never have I bought the Flanders poppy and sometimes when they come up to me, I have a funny feeling that they think "Oh, her, she doesn't care". But I do care — I care because they never should have lost their lives. To me war is just really dreadful. So I never have bought a Flanders poppy. That's my training in the Guild.

Least-Vile
No. 4043
FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 1936

Daily Herald

PEACE BALLOT'S MESSAGE TO THE 11,000,000 Votes For Britain Standing By League

**"GREAT TRIUMPH
FOR COMMON
PEOPLE"**

**Clarion Call For End
Of Arms Racket**

BY HANNEN SWAFFER

OF 11,000,105 people who voted in Britain's
Peace Ballot, no fewer than 10,417,329
declared themselves in favour of the prohibition of
the manufacture and sale of armaments for private
profit.

Some of these voting was 1,127,740.
Only 775,611 would not that the present policy of
the arms trade should continue.

"Two of the ballot papers" showed very interesting
results. One, from the "Daily Herald", showed
"When, at the Albert Hall, Kensington, S.W., last
night, Viscount Cecil, the speaker of the House of
Lords, in a great meeting at which the last 10,000,000 were
present, the result of the Peace Ballot proved that the
"National" Government, in its present attitude towards
peace, disarmament and international co-operation, is

**WIND
WANDSWORTH
ELECTION**

**VICTORY IN VICTORY
STRONGHOLD**

**ONS TO "DRAIN" THE
DISTRESSED AREAS**

The Peace Pledge was "I reject war and I will never fight in another".

The Guildswomen were great advocates of pacifism to stop, to prevent war for the whole of 1938/39. The main issue was prevention of war and the fact that we wouldn't co-operate with the Government with their war plans. We were all pacifists you see. And the earliest I can remember, it would have been the Yarmouth Congress, all the resolutions were on pacifism. Secondly, when I came back, you always gave a report to your Guild. I remember coming back and giving them a report — that was almost the time of the starting of the calling up of the young men. And I remember coming up the main street at Edmonton, walking home with all these women in great anxiety. I'd got a little boy but they'd got some of calling-up age and they were adamant that their son wasn't going to be called up. They were saying, "They are not having my sons", "They are not going to have my son". And they were really upset. And really worried. Almost in tears . . . because although they were saying that, they knew there was no chance of preventing it unless the sons were strong enough to become conscientious objectors. But strangely enough the sons wanted to go and the mothers, being pacifists, didn't want them to.

My two boys had these white poppies on and went to school. Red hot were my two boys. And the headmaster took them off, threw them down — Carlton Road School — so they both came home crying and I said, "What's the matter?", and they said that he'd taken their poppies and threw them down. I said "right", so I put on their coats and took 'em round and I said, "I understand you've taken off my son's flowers and threw them down. Do you realise, he's a peacemaker as well as being a Co-operator's son". Well they said, "We're not going to have those things la la la". I said, "Well I'm sorry if you don't like it — you must go to the council and tell them". So he said "We won't do that". So I said, "You'd better not, or I shall go and tell *my* piece, what it's all about". And in the end they realised they had to accept them.



About 25 of us in Watford got together from the various Guilds. We all dressed in black and Renee Short (this was after the Hiroshima bomb and the Nagasaki bomb) and we said "This has got to stop here and now, this has got to stop. People have got to realise what it means." We condemned America for what they had done and we dressed in black and we had our banners and we went up to No 10 Downing Street. We told the police from here that we were going and when we got up to



Downing Street there was a line of police ready to keep us from going up to No 10. We, twenty-five of us women, you know, tummies turning upside down, all Guildswomen. Then the police said to us, "Oh no, you're not all going up into Downing Street. You wait at the bottom. Two of you can go." So Renee Short and I went up and knocked at the door. We weren't allowed in, we just had to hand over our petition — we had got a petition of hundreds of signatures against the bombing. Then of course when we came out and got back to our friends, at the bottom of 10 Downing Street, the Police said to us, "Where are you going now?" "Lobby at the House of Commons", which we did. We were all very strong stuff then, more than what we are now, a lot of us. And so they said, "You're not to show any banners outside the House of Commons, or any placards or anything". So we said, "Oh yes". We'd all got banners and placards and one dear friend of mine, she's dead now, she said, "That's not going to stop me showing my banner". As soon as we got outside the House of Commons, she marched up and down — "Ban the Bomb, Ban the Bomb", she was shouting, "Ban the Bomb". They hauled her inside and anyhow she spent the night in prison and she was delighted. We were called the Women in Black. And there was quite a stir in Watford when we did this — because it is still a man's world, we're still fighting for equal opportunities — we haven't got very far.

Peace was predominant in the WCG because at the end of the war — the 1914-1918 war — the bereavement of the millions of soldiers that died, the mums — the mum's sons who had not come back. And so the tremendous surge of these women "never again, never again". The men had a certain amount of patriotism — there was a certain amount of military bands and this kind of thing. Tottenham beat West Ham and we beat the Germans. But for the women — sadness, only sadness. And determination that — "OK no grandson of mine has got to go through this. No daughter of mine has got to see her children taken off into khaki".

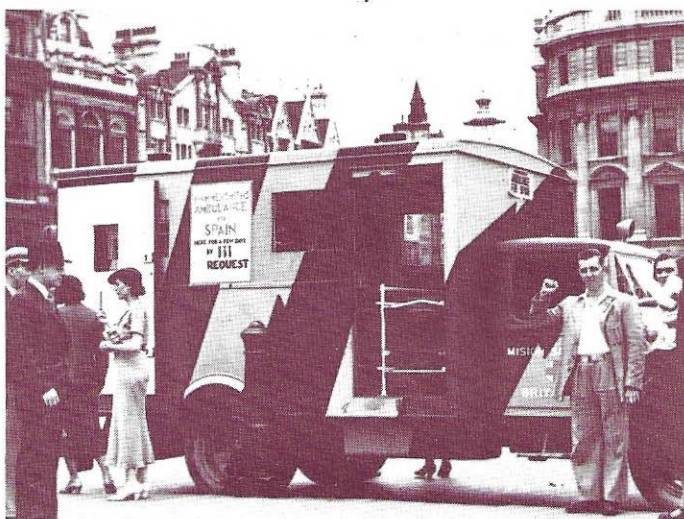
Spanish Civil War

I didn't go to Spain but when they brought the Basque children over to Southampton a friend of mine that was active, she said "Well, we've offered to go down to look after the children." So I said "Alright I'll come with you". So we went down to help and when we got there a whole crowd of nuns came to take over the children. I suppose they thought — well they were more concerned about setting up a hut to save their souls, than they were about saving their sores. And we had to put them in Dettol baths.... and they screamed and screeched these children. And I remember saying to these nuns — "Never mind about saving their souls....let's save their sores first and we'll see what happens." It really was dreadful.

So my earliest memories about world affairs in particular were of the Spanish Civil War, because Southampton was at the forefront of this as being one of the ports that supplied some of the Republican bastions that were holding out against Franco. There was a ship I remember, I think it was Potato Bill's ship which was breaking the Franco blockade carrying potatoes into Bilbao, to save the starving population, as the Franco troops came in closer and closer. And a lot of those children were evacuated from Bilbao and came to Southampton and my mother was one of the members of the Committee that helped to set up the camp. And I went to help. I was very young — about eleven or twelve something like that. And I was very moved by all these children — absolutely frightened — you saw in their eyes that they were very very frightened. And then as the camp was run down, children were farmed out to various families and two Spanish children came to stay with us.

On the question of Spain, I can remember saying in the Guild one day, I suppose this must have been probably in 1935-36, that unless we supported the Spanish people and their war against Franco it would be our turn next. And I was laughed at. And you see it was only a question of another two or three years before we were involved in the war. Munich, you see, in 1938. And it was quite frightening to see those women — (not all of them, a jolly good base of some very good ones), — they thought I was just talking nonsense. This was just Communist propaganda that there was likely to be another war. They just couldn't see it!

That was the ambulance that went from Hammersmith to Spain. It was on show in Hammersmith before it went to Spain. It was a Trades Council initiative but the Guild participated — we raised money, we done all sorts of things, gave donations towards the ambulance.



I had some friends at Barking, they took several Spanish people in during that time and looked after them. They kept them. They used to go out once a month and let the Spanish man and his wife have their friends in — so that they could have a little meeting together. She was a good Guilds woman of Barking Co-operative Guild.



At the camp, things were fairly well organised I remember, with the Women's Guild and others taking on responsibility for helping to get those poor children into some sort of shape. To feed them, wash them — and I think the women felt they were really doing something to help the world system.

Some of the things we were told the Spanish people needed — we were told they needed cottons, pins, day to day things. We got a collection up amongst us and the members bought them and we took them to the International Brigade you know — their headquarters.

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(Linnart by Yuki)

THE GUILD DURING THE WAR

I was away at Congress in 1939 and they disbanded Congress because they gave it out over the thing that war had been declared, so they abandoned Congress so we all came home — all the delegates came home. And of course the first six or seven months of the war it was quiet, very quiet down here (Southend) — I closed the Guild because everybody went away — ooh we had a lovely Guild — grown from three to about seventy — and after I closed the Guild I sent all the documents up to Head Office.

I got a job at Grange Park Road Co-op Grocery Shop and I worked there for over five years until the boys came home. And while I was working there they had a flying bomb right opposite the shop on a garage and it blew it all up and our Manager was injured — our Grocery manager. We were all trapped in the cellar underneath the shop. The ARP had to come out and dig us out.



During the war, we used to have our Committee meetings in this lady's dug out. Her house was bombed down afterwards, so we were very fortunate. And so the Guild kept going. You might have to run home if you were near to the shelter, but we still carried on.

The Cricklewood Guild kept open all the war. If there was going to be of course the lights used to go out. The railway line was right at the back of us and we peeped out the window and we'd say "Ooh the lights are out" or "Don't you think we had better pack up now as the lights have gone out and we used to go home..."

On the lighter side of Guild activities, although limited through the second world war, we had some lovely afternoon tea parties, in spite of rationing, we enjoyed salmon sandwiches, home made cakes etc., which members contributed from their store cupboards. My own contribution being scones and Victoria sandwiches. I was able to do this through keeping a hen who gave an ample supply of eggs. The said hen was won in a raffle by my husband at his works, about Christmas time. We did not have the heart to kill the poor thing but it paid for its keep when it started to lay.

The Guild did this feeding of troops in the deep shelters, but I wouldn't take part in it. It caused a family row because my mother-in-law was the District Secretary and she undertook to do it thinking I was going to help, but I refused it because I said it was part of the war effort and it caused a big hullabaloo.

I refused to do it, but Cecily Cook got the OBE for it — but everyone said she didn't deserve it — the OBE should have gone to my mother in law which it should if you look at it in that way — because she did all the work and Cecily Cook didn't have anything to do with it, other than saying the Guildswomen would do it.

When the war came it disrupted everything, as you might guess. The war really started and we had to pack up, because the hall was needed for one thing. Ours was needed for a food office, or something.



Then we'd have meetings in the Midland Institute that belonged to the Railway and they blacked us all out and put up big notices "Be Careful" and we never closed.



The Society store in Commercial Road devastated by a direct hit by a flying bomb.

One outstanding thing I remember. We went to see Priestley's play during the war years with my Guild. "They Came to a City" Do you know it? Its lovely. Its beautiful. And after the play had started the Manager, the Stage Manager came on and said "There is an air raid on directly overhead. If anybody wants to go out. You know the curtain came down — the lights went off. Not a soul moved, and he told us that they were directly overhead, which meant that any minute you know we could be bombed. And nobody moved and the play went on.

Immediately after the war, the Guild helped with rehabilitation. As soon as the war was ended, the Guild was involved in helping people in Germany. The National President of the time and Cecily Cook actually went to Germany and they saw the desolation in Berlin and we had the Guild members knitting things and collecting clothes for the dispossessed in Germany — for the women and children who were living in the ruins and the rubble. I remember in the early conferences after the war, we had representatives from Germany who were terribly frightened of appearing on the platform, but they got the warmest possible welcome. We were in touch with them in Yugoslavia and the Eastern European countries and we were trying to re-establish the International Women's Co-operative Guild which

had carried on during the war with an office in London but of course couldn't do very much. I think everyone, especially the leaders of the Guild felt "This has never got to happen again". And the way that it won't happen again is to have real international contacts at the lowest level and real international friendship.

After the war we found that the young people hadn't the same interest in national affairs or local politics or anything. They hadn't got the same interest and it was very difficult to get them interested, As a matter of fact, we very nearly always got the wrong kind of people in — those that wanted to take over and run it their way. We have rules in the Guild that no one other than Labour Party or Co-operative members can take office and that's been kept on the books as long as I can remember.

After the war, women had a different outlook. They went into munitions and they earned money, this is the thing that did it. They were no longer dependent upon their husband's money. They were free to do what they wanted to do. That freedom came that was never there before, things were changing: their men's money was better, they didn't have to go out to work. The National Health service came along. There wasn't the need for the fight to be put up.