

WILPF and The Clapham Film Unit present

These Dangerous Women

A Heritage Lottery Funded project

Ada Salter

1866-1942

By Elisabeth Bourn

“the first female Labour councillor in London before being elected as Mayor in 1922”

Born in Raunds in Northamptonshire to a Wesleyan Methodist family, Ada moved to London in 1896 and soon began work at a girls' club at the Bermondsey Settlement. Here, she worked with factory girls, rag pickers, wood choppers and tin-smiths, trying to improve their home lives and working conditions.

In 1900, Ada married Alfred Salter, a socialist doctor with revolutionary ideas and they became members of the Religious Society of Friends. They loved nature and Ada dreamed of transforming Bermondsey. She established a 'Beautification Committee' and organised the planting of trees, shrubs and flower beds in the area. Ada and Alfred were fully committed to their community, sending their only child, Joyce to the local school on Keaton Road. Unfortunately, Joyce died at the age of eight, from scarlet fever, leaving her parents completely devastated.

Ada and Alfred were committed pacifists and World War I was a challenging and difficult time. Ada worked for the No-Conscription Fellowship and they allowed their new home at Fairby Grange in Kent to be used as a convalescent home for conscientious objectors who had been badly treated in prison.

In 1915, Ada was one of the founder members of the Women's International League (WIL) and had planned to go to The Hague for the Peace Conference, but was unable to take part. At the end of the war she represented the British Section of the WIL at conferences in Zurich and Vienna.

Ada was the first female labour councillor in London before being elected as Mayor in 1922. She declined to wear Mayoral robes and preferred to begin Council Meeting in the



Quaker style without formal chaplain-led prayers. During local strikes and the general strike in 1926 she organised free meals for women and children.

Concerned with public health in the 1920s, she was elected to the London County Council in 1925 and became Chair of the Pasko Committee in 1934, working on the introduction of a Green Belt.

A statue in honour of Ada was unveiled in 2014 in Bermondsey. This was a very special occasion with civic and church dignitaries, local M.P. Simon Hughes, as well as many peace activists (including Bruce Kent and Valerie Flessati), local residents, and family members being present for the unveiling. The statue depicts her standing, holding a garden spade in her right hand and the sculptor – Diane Gorvin – has made her left hand curled to make space for her to hold a bunch of fresh flowers. This statue was unveiled by her grand-nephew and grand-niece Nick Hudson and Janet Kendall.

