

WILPF and The Clapham Film Unit present

These Dangerous Women

A Heritage Lottery Funded project

Margaret Ashton

1856 - 1937

By Alison Ronan

“worked tirelessly for the improvement of the lives and education of women and girls in Manchester”

Born into a wealthy mill-owning family, Margaret Ashton was a Unitarian with a strong sense of duty, she described herself as having a “tiresome conscience” which led her to achieve a huge amount in the name of women’s rights and the votes for women campaign.

In 1908, Ashton was elected as the first woman councillor for Manchester where she stood as an independent candidate. She was also President of the local constitutional Suffrage Society North West Federation and part of the executive committee of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).

She worked tirelessly for the improvement of the lives and education of women and girls in Manchester, establishing Ashton House in 1910, a hostel for working women in Manchester. On top of this she was a governor of Manchester High School for Girls and was on the City Council’s Education Committee. In 1914, she founded the Manchester Babies’ Hospital and was a member of the Council’s Sanitation Committee.

In 1915, Ashton was one of the women who resigned from the NUWSS. She set up a peace education campaign and established the Manchester branch of the Women’s International League. She was a founder member of the Manchester Women’s War Interest Committee in 1915 and lobbied for trade union rights and pay for women in the munitions industries.

Towards the end of the war Ashton joined the Council for Adult Suffrage arguing for universal suffrage. At the same time, she was part of the radical, pacifist Women’s Peace Crusade.



Because her views on the war began to be seen as “unfit” for a person in authority, she was removed from the Education Committee in 1917. She resigned from the Council of her own accord in 1920.

Margaret Ashton worked tirelessly her whole adult life, and continued her work with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom until her death.

