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# These Dangerous Women

A Heritage Lottery Funded project

**Sarah Dickenson**

**1868-1954**

By Alison Ronan

**“women pit-brow workers, barmaids, women acrobats and gymnasts, and women florists were successfully organised”**

Sarah Dickenson was involved with the Trades Council which had been established at a meeting in the Lord Mayor’s Parlour in Manchester Town Hall in February 1895. A group of men and women mainly connected with the Liberal party had the aim of assisting women workers to organise and lobby for the improvement of working conditions.

The most successful women’s union established by Sarah Dickenson and Eva Gore Booth was the Salford and District Association of Power Loom Weavers, set up in April 1902. As well as trade unionism the women workers were also interested in politics and the suffrage campaign, sending a resolution just weeks after their establishment to a meeting at the Free Trade Hall to protest against the imposition of a corn tax.

Over the next few years Sarah worked very hard to encourage women to set up and join unions. It was rarely an easy task. One of the difficulties encountered was getting women to go to meetings. This was solved by starting a Tea Fund in 1902 to buy tea, sugar, milk and cake: “It was found that the tea was a great convenience, as many of the women live in outlying districts, they are naturally anxious to hurry home to tea when their work is over and it is both inconvenient and expensive for them to come back to meetings in the evening. We are glad to say that the tea had good results in introducing a social element that promoted good fellowship and a friendly spirit among the members, and the attendance has largely increased.”

Sarah and Eva were firmly of the opinion that they should campaign for women’s trade unionism and suffrage, and they resigned their posts in 1904 when a motion in favour of suffrage was rejected at a meeting of the Council’s committee. (This tension between socialism and women’s rights was a common aspect of the wider working-class movement at this time.) In September the women set up a new body, the Manchester and Salford Women’s Trades and Labour Council.



According to [Esther Roper](#) the next ten years “were full to overflowing with organisation, writing, speaking at large gathering in all parts of England, deputations to Cabinet Ministers and to Members of Parliament. To this was added a new activity, when well-meant and ill-meant efforts were made to restrict women’s labour in various fields. On different occasions, women pit-brow workers, barmaids, women acrobats and gymnasts, and women florists were successfully organised.”

Sarah Dickenson and her colleagues [Esther Roper](#) and Eva Gore Booth were against the war and as a well-known political local woman she was a natural choice to be sent as a delegate to The Hague in 1915.

