

Annie Townley

Annie Townley moved to Bristol in 1913 from Blackburn with her husband Ernest, a textile worker. She was already an experienced organiser in the campaign for votes for women and familiar with the world of trades unions and socialist politics.

They lived in the same street in Ashley Down as Bertha & Walter Ayles and soon formed close personal and political ties. Annie spoke at meetings across the city as part of the East Bristol Women's Suffrage Society. She was key in winning Labour Party support for the campaign. In August 1914, Annie joined that section of the women's suffrage movement who opposed war. Ernest Townley was imprisoned as a CO.

In Bristol, especially after the introduction of conscription in early 1916, much of the anti-war activity was centred around the Joint Advisory Committee for Conscientious Objectors which had offices in Rosemary Street, now under shops in Broadmead.

The Committee brought together a range of religious, moral and political opponents of war and conscription. Here, Annie Townley worked with Mabel Tothill, the Committee secretary, Bertha Ayles, Annie Chappell and Gertrude Giles. The Committee were in regular contact with COs and their families. Where necessary families received material support; children were given holidays.

At the same time, Annie was taking a more leading role in the Independent Labour Party in Bristol, including doing much of CO Walter Ayles' work after he was imprisoned in 1916. Throughout the war she spoke and wrote widely, linking her arguments against war with the issue of votes for women. She worked to publicise the Women's Peace Crusade in 1917 and attended conferences of the Women's International League (which was to turn into the [Women's International League for Peace and Freedom](#)) on behalf of the Bristol branch.

Annie became Labour Party women's organiser for the South West in 1920. She remained an influential figure in the city throughout the inter-war years, encouraging women to take an interest in political life.

See also the pdfs on this website relating to *Mabel Tothill*, *Walter Ayles*, *Annie Chappell* and *The Women Who Ran CO Support Activities in Bristol*.