

BLUE PLAQUE TO COMMEMORATE FIRST FEMALE MAYOR

Newbury Town Council is pleased to announce the unveiling of its eighth blue plaque which will commemorate Elsie Kimber (1889-1954). In 1932, Kimber was elected to serve as the first female Mayor of Newbury since the Borough was created in 1596.

The plaque will be located at 64 Bartholomew Street, now Hillier & Wilson Estate Agents, but formerly Kimber's Grocery and Provision Merchants, informally called "Kimber's Corner", which she ran from 1939 until her retirement in 1953.

The plaque will be unveiled by the Mayor of Newbury, Cllr Margo Payne, at 11am on Monday 17 September.

Cllr Anthony Pick, Chairman of the Newbury Town Council Heritage Working Group said, "Elsie Kimber was a pioneer in our local government. She was elected the first female Newbury Town Councillor in 1922 and was appointed its first female Alderman in 1943."

He continued: "Her interests included housing, slum clearance, public health and education. She taught swimming to children, and her reputation was of 'one who had an infinite capacity for taking pains' and we are very pleased to be able to honour her memory in this way."

It's fitting that we commemorate her life in this centenary year of female suffrage, though full gender equality was only granted in 1928. Even so, the road ahead was still steep - the next female Mayor, Ethel Elliott, was not elected until 1953, and it was not until 1993 that female Mayors were addressed as "Madam Mayor". Until then, the term "Mr Mayor" was so ingrained that it was used even for women.

There have now been a total of 20 different female Mayors of Newbury, including the present incumbent, Cllr Margo Payne.

PRESS RELEASE

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Cllr Margo Payne, said: "In this year of all years, I am delighted we are acknowledging Elsie Kimber, the first lady Mayor of Newbury. Her service to Newbury spanned many years as a Councillor from 1922, as Mayor in 1932 and finally an Alderman in 1943. A fine example to us all as one of the first women in local politics."

Elsie Kimber was born at 64 Bartholomew Street and was one of the first intake to the Newbury County Girls' School when it opened in 1904. She joined her father, Ernest Kimber, in his grocery business and ran it after his death until she retired. She was also the first woman delegate to the All England Grocers' Conference. During the Second World War she served as an ARP Warden.

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