



## **Clara Curtis Lucas**

Clara Curtis Lucas was the first Lady to become a Councillor for Darlington County Borough in 1915, when Darlington gained County Borough Status at that time. She was one of three persons elected to be Councillors to represent Cockerton Ward.

Miss Lucas was born in Thirsk, North Yorkshire on the 20th September 1853 but spent most of her life in the County of Durham. She was the elder daughter of a Mr George and Ann Lucas and had a sister called Alice Lucas. Mr George Lucas for many years was Chief Stores Superintendent for the North Eastern Railway Company.

Clara resided at Gateshead, Sunderland, and Darlington during her life. She commenced her education at Miss Porter's School, Gateshead, but completed her education at Polam School in Darlington.

Early in life she was renowned for her strong personality with forthright and advanced independent views on political social matters. Essentially she was a pioneer and in her advocacy on Women's rights she had met with a considerable amount of opposition, which only served to strengthen her determination to win for her sex, equal right with those of men. In her later years she had the satisfaction of seeing the fruits of her labours in the conferring on Women the Parliamentary vote and the access to areas that were once barred to all females.

Although having interest in many activities, it was in Education that held her strongest tendency. It had been said that she might have inherited this from her father who was a member for the first School board for Gateshead. Even before the introduction of Technical Education classes, Clara and her sister Alice conducted evening sessions for men and women, and also other educational work that was of great benefit.

Miss Lucas was elected a member on the Darlington School Board in 1894 and when the functions of that board were taken over by the Council she was co-opted as a member of the Education committee for which she gave great service until 1910. Furthermore she was actively associated with the Cambridge University Extension movement since it was extended to Darlington; being also a

founder member of the Darlington Students Association, she had the honour of being elected president for the 1909/10 Session.

Her election to become a Councillor for the Cockerton Ward, served also to confirm the good work that she had previously done for the community of Darlington. In the Council Chamber her presence was appreciably recognised when she resumed her services on the Education Committee, and was also elected Vice-Chairman of the Library Committee during the absence of the Chairman Dr. Fisher during his Military Service, a post, which carried out quite ably.

In 1882 when the Darlington Women's Liberal Association was first formed she became Hon Secretary and held that position for 11 years. Miss Lucas was an earnest and zealous advocate of 'Votes for Women' though she was not a militant suffragist, and was Chairman of the Darlington Woman's Suffragist Society. Again it was acknowledged that no one did more locally to secure the Parliamentary franchise for women, which took many years of her dedication to help secure.

Clara also took after her father in that she was actively involved in the cause of temperance. She was for some time Hon secretary for the local branch of the B W T A and later one of its Vice Presidents; and locally President of the North Road Women's Temperance Society. She was also closely connected with the Darlington Unitarian Church, and in the absence of a settled Minister she often occupied the pulpit.

Clara Curtis Lucas died at her home of Field Head, Abby Road, Darlington at 12.30pm on Monday 14th April 1919, aged 65 years. Although apparently recovering from a serious illness, she died of Chronic Nephritis and Dilated Heart Syncope.

Miss Lucas was cremated at Crematorium, West Cemetery, Darlington on Thursday 17th April. It was said that there was a large attendance, representative of the Civic Authority and also by the many other public bodies that she had been actively associated with because of the high esteem in which she was held.

**Acknowledgements: Many thanks to the staff of Darlington Library, Centre for Local studies.**

*Note: In 1933 a Trust fund called the Alice Armstrong Lucas Award was set up through the Durham County Council, which was transferred to Darlington Borough Council, for use in the Darlington Elementary Schools. The Award was made in Memory of 'Clara C Lucas'*