



Ladies of the Shoe industry:  
Philanthropy, Politics and the social  
significance of the wives and daughters  
in the Northampton boot and shoe  
industry – 1850 to 1950

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# Important Research

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- ❑ Local History
- ❑ Women's History
- ❑ Local studies such as this provide the opportunity to take a more positive consideration of female agency in local and municipal politics. (King, 2010)

# Why Wives and Daughters of The Boot and Shoe Industry?

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- ❑ Sons followed in family business
- ❑ Daughters followed their mothers in participating in activities such as
  - ❑ charitable donations,
  - ❑ public appearances,
  - ❑ fundraising activities
  - ❑ School boards and hospital boards

# Why Northampton?



## □ 1841 Census

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- County of Northamptonshire had 80.4 shoemakers (including wives) per 1,000
- National average of 20.5 per 1,000

# Philanthropy

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“Love of mankind; the disposition or active effort to promote the happiness and well-being of others; practical benevolence, now especially as expressed by the generous donation of money to good causes”

A philanthropic action, movement, or agency; a charity.

(Oxford English Dictionary Online, March 2021, OUP)

# Why is Women's Philanthropy Important?

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- ❑ Half a million women involved in the section in 1893 (Parker, 2009)
- ❑ All women required economic independence and political equality no matter their class or origin of their wealth. (Johnson, 2017)

# Case Studies

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- How the ladies were chosen
  - Wives of prominent boot and shoe manufacturers
  - Religious activities
  - Donations to Organisations
  - Prominent local authority positions

# Case Studies

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- ❑ Lady Manfield
- ❑ Louisa Manfield (Mrs Harry Manfield)
- ❑ Sabina Branch
- ❑ Mary Lewis (Mrs Edward Lewis)
- ❑ Sarah Lewis (Mrs Charles Lewis)



# Lady Manfield

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- ❑ Wife of Sir Moses Philip Manfield
- ❑ Daughter of James Milne, County Surveyor

# Louisa Manfield (Mrs Harry Manfield)

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- ❑ Daughter of Sir John Barran
- ❑ Married Harry Manfield, son of Sir Philip and Lady Manfield

# Sabina Branch

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- ❑ Married to John Branch, owner of John Branch Ltd
- ❑ Daughter of Jonas Smith and Sabina Smith nee Walsh
- ❑ Lived in Old Ford Road area of Bow

# Mary Lewis (Mrs Edward Lewis)

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- ❑ Married to Edward Lewis of Messrs C & E Lewis
- ❑ Worked as a shoe fitter
- ❑ Father, George Leach, was a Leather Dresser

# Sarah Lewis (Mrs Charles Lewis)

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- ❑ Married to Charles Lewis of C & E Lewis
- ❑ Father, John Coombs, was a shoe rivetter
- ❑ Worked in shoe factory from age of 13

# Religion

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- ❑ Either influenced from the church or congregational belief
- ❑ Not exclusive to women
- ❑ All denominations felt philanthropy was important

“each person worked out his or her own salvation was very much in accord with the *laissez-faire* ethos of the secular world”

(Frank Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England*, (Oxford, 1980) p. 8

# Lady Manfield – Unitarian Church

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“only too willing and too anxious to do anything not only that would please and gratify her, but anything that would help to establish their [Unitarians] causes more in the town”

Quote from Sir Philip Manfield *Northampton Mercury*, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1897

# Mrs C Lewis - Methodist

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- Husband was a preacher at the Primitive Methodist Church
- Bequests to
  - Methodist Missionary Society
  - Methodist Ministers Widows' and Orphans Society
  - Methodist Orphanage
  - Methodist Local Preachers Aid Fund



# Organisations

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- ❑ Local School Board
  - ❑ Lady Manfield elected in 1877
  - ❑ First Female on the Board

“she could do quite as well as if she was on the Board, and being there alone perhaps she had not always done her own nature justice, being too timid in saying that which would go before the public”

Quote from Lady Manfield, *Northampton Mercury*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1879

# Political Involvement

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- Mrs Harry Manfield, Mrs Edward Lewis and Mrs Charles Lewis all involved in Liberal Associations
- Mrs Harry Manfield
  - President of the Moulton Women's Liberal and Radical Association

“it was fortunate that Mrs. Manfield was Liberal in principle, because he would not have the pleasure or the reserve of trying to convert her – or, as he suggested, of being converted himself”

Quote from Harry Manfield, *Northampton Mercury*, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1909

# Political Involvement

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- Mrs Edward Lewis
  - Vice president of Women's Liberal Association in 1922

# Sabina Branch - Suffrage



- Regular donor to the £250,000 fund
- Chaired meetings of the Women's Social and Political Union
- Participated in the protest of the 1911 Census
- Was a non-violent protestor and pacifist

## Conclusion

- ❑ Evidence of a variety of examples of women's philanthropy in Northampton
  - ❑ Religious motivation
  - ❑ Political motivation
- ❑ Links to husband's prominence could be a major motivation and significance