



JAMES KEIR HARDIE

120 YEARS

SINCE HIS ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT FOR
WEST HAM SOUTH - THE FIRST LABOUR MP IN
THE UNITED KINGDOM



3

FOREWORD

4

JAMES KEIR HARDIE: A MODEST BEGINNING

6

CAMPAIGNING FOR WORKERS' RIGHTS

7

FOUNDING FATHER OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

8

MP FOR WEST HAM SOUTH: 1892-1895

10

CAMPAIGNING FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

11

LATER POLITICAL CAREER AND LEGACY

FOREWORD: JAMES KEIR HARDIE AND NEWHAM

James Keir Hardie was the first Labour MP to be elected in the UK 120 years ago and was one of the first truly working class representatives in the Houses of Parliament. This was significant for Newham as he represented the then constituency of West Ham South.

Keir Hardie's influence on twentieth century politics cannot be underestimated. He played a key role in the founding of the Labour Party, which would change the face of British politics.

For Newham's residents James Keir Hardie played an important role in highlighting poor working and living conditions – and starting to deliver real change for local people through access to more and better jobs and improved housing – and more importantly giving people hope and aspiration that they can improve their lives.

Hardie was elected on a manifesto which included improved workers' rights, jobs for the unemployed and decent homes. His political views were shaped through his own experiences growing up in Scotland where his family struggled with poverty, poor working conditions and unemployment. These were similar experiences to what many other Victorian people faced in industrial towns and cities up and down the UK – including here in Newham.

Keir Hardie showed true resilience in overcoming these hardships and through self improvement he began a lifetime of fighting for the rights of ordinary people. Hardie has been recorded in history as a true working class hero – who helped shape the political landscape for the twentieth century – both in terms of national politics and here in Newham.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Wales". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sir Robin Wales
Mayor of Newham

JAMES KEIR HARDIE: A MODEST BEGINNING

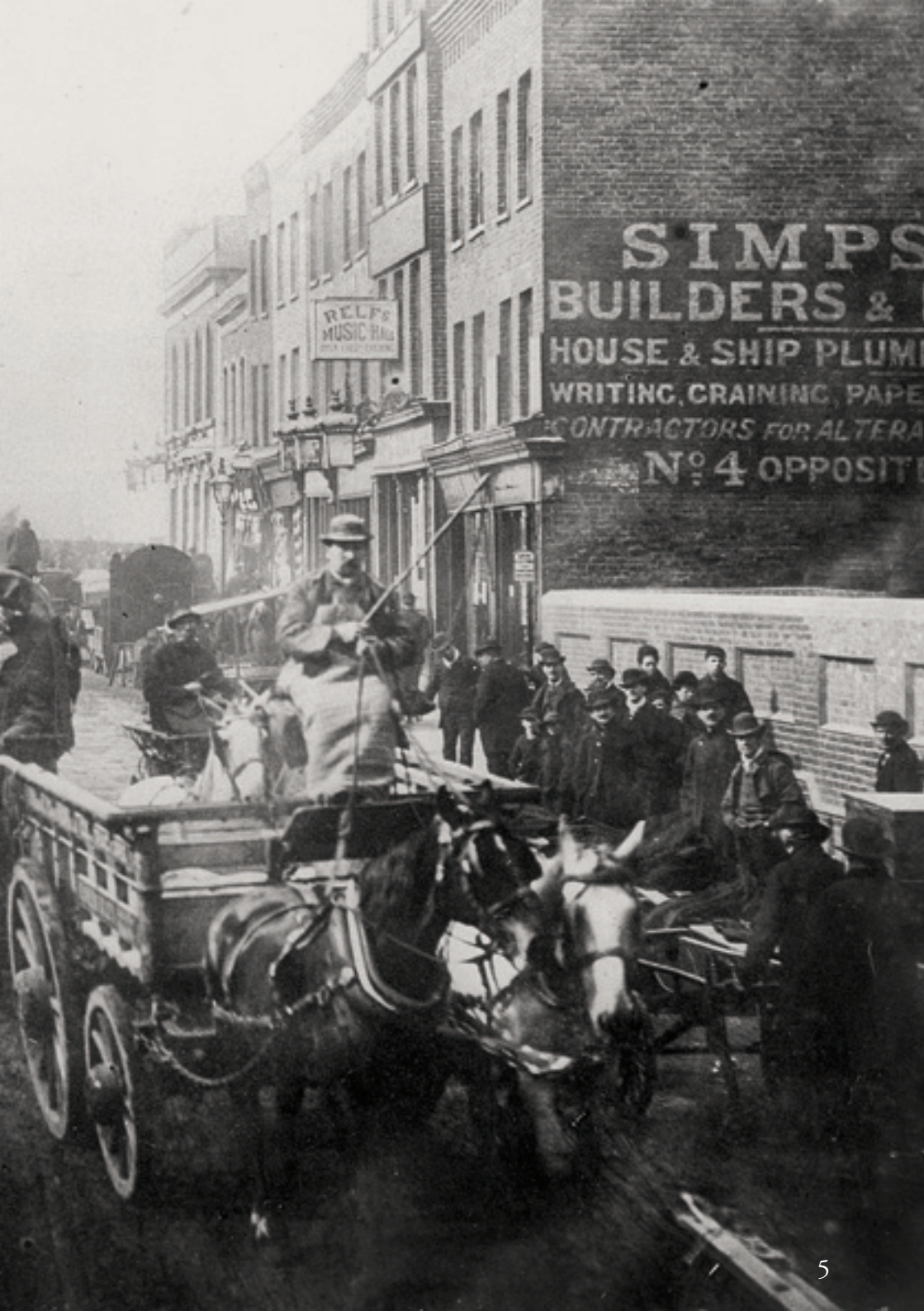
James Keir Hardie was born in a one bedroom cottage in Lanarkshire, Scotland, on 15 August 1856. His father was a ship's carpenter and his mother a domestic servant. The family soon moved to Govan in Glasgow to work in the nearby ship building yards. Like many Victorian working class children, Hardie received no formal education and by the age of seven was working as a message boy for the Anchor Line Steamship Company. Life was financially hard with jobs in the shipbuilding industry often subject to boom and bust. His family also suffered as part of the famous six month lockout of those shipworkers who had joined a trade union. During this time the family were forced to sell many of their possessions in order to buy food to survive.

The Hardie family's experience growing up in Scotland reflects those stories of many Newham residents at that time. The docks and heavy industry were rapidly expanding. These industries relied on cheap labour as well as child labour and poor working conditions, including long hours and few rights such as holidays and sick pay. In addition many workers lived in poor housing conditions, often with multiple families sharing small cottages with no basic facilities such as running water and toilets.

Keir Hardie's own experiences of these harsh conditions would help shape his own views and lead to a lifetime of campaigning for improved rights and conditions for ordinary working people.



Living conditions in Canning Town, 1880s



SIMPS
BUILDERS &
HOUSE & SHIP PLUM
WRITING, CRAINING, PAPE
CONTRACTORS FOR ALTERA
Nº 4 OPPOSITE

RELF'S
MUSIC HALL
1011 1/2 1/2 1/2

CAMPAIGNING FOR WORKERS' RIGHTS

When Hardie was 10 he went to work in a coal mine near Glasgow. Over the next 10 years he worked his way up, starting as a “trapper” — who was responsible for opening and closing a door for a 10-hour shift in order to maintain the air supply for miners. By the age of 20 he was a skilled and experienced miner.

Driven by a wish for self improvement and encouraged by his mother he learnt to read and write. He became a member of the Evangelical Union Church where he learnt the art of public oratory and soon became looked upon by fellow miners as a natural chair for meetings to discuss working conditions and to represent the workers in raising grievances. This led to the mine owners seeing Hardie as an agitator and both he and his two brothers were black listed from working in the local mines.

This incident was to lead to Hardie becoming a full time union organiser and representative of miners, fighting for improvements to their working conditions and organising a number of strikes in demand of improved pay. He also began to write as a journalist and set up a newspaper called *The Miner*.




Working conditions. Beckton Foundry in 1881.

FOUNDING FATHER OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

In 1888, Hardie decided to stand for Parliament in Mid Lanark as an independent labour candidate. Hardie had already been involved in the founding of the first Scottish Labour Party (and the first socialist party in the UK) and in 1889 he established the first Socialist newspaper "Labour Leader". Hardie was disillusioned by the Liberal Party's economic policies and had come to the conclusion that they could never properly represent the needs of working class people.

While his election bid in 1888 was unsuccessful he was not discouraged. Hardie's first connection with Newham came in 1890 when he addressed a meeting in Silvertown. He continued the theme that unless working men formed a party belonging neither to the Liberals nor the Tories, they would continue to be the playthings of these two political parties. It was agreed at the end of this meeting to work in the West Ham South constituency for the return to Parliament of a genuine representative of working class interests and Hardie was later adopted as the official candidate. In 1892 competing against the Conservative party, Hardie won by 5,268 votes to 4,036 and became the first elected independent labour representative in both Newham and the UK as a whole.

VOTE FOR

| | | |
|------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Home Rule. |  | Temperance Reform. |
| Democratic Government. | | Healthy Homes. |
| Justice to Labour | | Fair Rents. |
| No Monopoly. | | Eight-Hour Day. |
| No Landlordism | | Work for the Unemployed. |
| | | |

KEIR HARDIE.

Printed and Published by F. W. Niles at 41 & 43, (Lancaster) Printing Works, Cannon Street, London, E.C.

MP FOR WEST HAM SOUTH: 1892-1895

On taking his seat on 3 August 1892 Hardie refused to wear the 'parliamentary uniform' of black frock coat, silk top hat and starched wing collar. Instead, he chose to wear a plain tweed suit, red tie and deerstalker. This typical act of defiance was to mark Hardie out from other MPs during his time in Parliament. In 1893 he helped form the Independent Labour Party – the first national party with a specific aim of representing the rights of working class people. Hardie was to cause further controversy in Parliament when in 1894 after an explosion at a colliery in Pontypridd killed 251 miners, he asked that a message of condolence to the relatives of the victims be added to an address of congratulations on the birth of the future King Edward VIII. When this was refused he made a speech in Parliament attacking the monarchy which caused uproar in the House of Commons.



Keir Hardie with fellow MPs including George Lansbury (second left).



CAMPAIGNING FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

In 1892 Keir Hardie campaigned on a manifesto for improving living and working conditions for ordinary people. He highlighted the need for jobs for the unemployed, improvements to housing and shorter working hours, with a call for an eight hour day. This was at a time when many people in Newham continued to work in poor conditions, often working 10 to 12 hours per day, six days a week. Local housing conditions were also poor with many people living in accommodation which was overcrowded with no running water or sanitation.

At this time the labour movement was still in its infancy and it was not unexpected when Hardie lost the West Ham South seat in 1895. However, his manifesto and campaign for improved living conditions and workers' rights in Newham would be taken up by other local politicians across the generations and into the modern day. This would start in 1898 when West Ham Council would become the first Council in the UK controlled by socialists – an event which attracted newspaper coverage not only here in the UK but also across Europe and the USA.



Housing conditions. Open sewer at Wilton Street, Silvertown.

LATER POLITICAL CAREER AND LEGACY

In 1900 Keir Hardie played a key role in organising a meeting of trade unions and socialist groups– who together agreed to form the Labour Representation Committee, which became the modern day Labour Party. He successfully returned to Parliament in the same year representing Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare. He was one of only two Labour MPs elected in 1900 but from these beginnings the Party would grow, forming its first government in 1924.

Hardie spent the rest of his life campaigning for votes for women. He also campaigned for self-rule for India and an end to segregation in South Africa. After a series of strokes Hardie died in hospital in Glasgow on 26 September 1915, aged 59.

Hardie's influence on twentieth century politics cannot be underestimated. He played a key role in the founding of the Labour Party which would change the face of British politics.

In Newham, Hardie's links with the borough are remembered in many different ways – from Keir Hardie Primary School to the Keir Hardie Estate. The borough is also the proud owner of the original bust of Keir Hardie and many different artefacts.



The bust of Keir Hardie by Benno Schotz, unveiled here by Margaret Bondfield and Bob Edwards, was presented to West Ham Council by the Independent Labour Party in 1948.

