



Hats off to the Past, Coats off to the Future

PTUC History Exhibition Booklet
January - February 2025



Curated by Dr Hazel Perry

PTUC: The Exhibition

The first version of **Peterborough Trades Union Council** was formed in 1872 with Mr Carter as President. The 1870s was a time when the trade union movement in Peterborough was growing in strength and the High Bailiff of the County Council, Benjamin Taylor, was the driving force behind much of this growth. As President of the new **Peterborough and District Agricultural Labourers Union**, Taylor led an organisation which rivalled Joseph Arch's **National Union of Agricultural Labourers**. He was also the election agent for Peterborough's first working class parliamentary candidate, George Potter. Potter was a trade unionist, delegate to **London Trades Union Council** from the builders' union and editor of *The Beehive* newspaper.

Peterborough's trades council did not achieve much during the 1870s and soon folded. The organisation was reconstituted as Peterborough Trades and Labour Council in 1898/99 during the period known as 'New Unionism' when small craft unions joined together to become super-unions.

There were approximately 400 trade union bodies similar to PTUC in major towns and cities across Britain at the beginning of the 1900s. PTUC has been a constantly active body ever since, taking part in Peterborough's most important industrial, political and civic moments during the twentieth century and beyond.

PTUC is still an active body in Peterborough today. As a collective of delegates from different trade unions in Peterborough it campaigns on local and national industrial, political and civic matters. It currently has delegates from local branches of **PCS, UNISON, UNITE, NEU, NASUWT** and **TSSA**.

This exhibition highlights some aspects of PTUC's activities based on the research of Dr Hazel Perry. Dr Perry's 2022 PhD *Peterborough Trades Union Council 1899-1979: A Forgotten Arena for Working Class Politics*, was in turn inspired by former PTUC President, Tom Browning who began collating the organisation's history in the 1990s. **Peterborough Local Archives Service** holds the Tom Browning Archive, and other records relating to PTUC are held in the TUC archives at **London Metropolitan University** and the **University of Warwick**.

PTUC: Like Barnham and Bailey's!

A meeting was held at the Bedford Hotel in Queen Street, Peterborough, in October 1898 to discuss the possibility of forming a trades council. The meeting was chaired by Liberal Councillor Walter Riseley, the owner of a tailor's shop on Westgate. Herbert Charles Parkinson, a signalman from the Great Northern Railway, acted as secretary.

Upon the proposition of Mr. Markley (Bricklayers), seconded by Mr. Reynolds, it was unanimously decided to establish a Trades Council in Peterborough.

Parkinson was a member of the **Amalgamated Association of Railway Servants** (ASRS). Union representatives attended the October meeting (as reported in the *Peterborough Advertiser*, 22 October 1898) from the

Amalgamated Society of Engineers
Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners
Operative Society of Bricklayers
Operative Society of Boilermakers
Operative Society of Basketmakers
Operative Society of Coachbuilders
Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants

Mr. A. C. Taylor, secretary to the Infirmary, had kindly attended at the invitation of Mr. Parkinson, and now read and explained extracts from the rules of the Institution relating to the appointment of Governors. It transpired that for every pound contributed three "letters of recommendation" were issued.—Mr. Parkinson expressed satisfaction that under the new arrangement the working-men of the City were obtaining a share in the management of an institution in whose government and welfare they were so intimately interested.—Mr. Taylor was thanked for his attendance and withdrew.

The very first activity carried out by the new trades council was to put forward the names of trade unionists to join the committee of Peterborough Infirmary (the Infirmary located in the building that is now Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery). Alfred Caleb Taylor, secretary of that committee, actually attended the meeting. It was PTUC's first civic act.

One enthusiastic Amalgamated man summed up the intentions of the various societies in the sublimely optimistic utterance: "We mean to go ahead, like Barnum and Bailey's."

PTUC

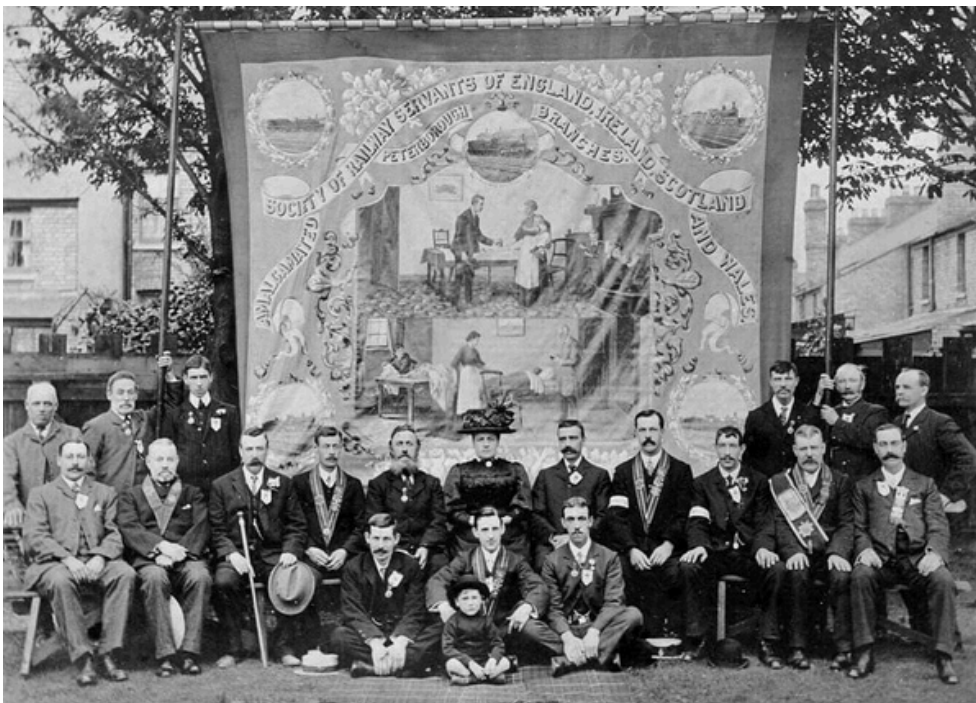
WHAT A CATHEDRAL CITY REQUIRED.

Another meeting took place in November 1898 to discuss the finer details of setting up a trades council. The meeting was attended by representatives from the same unions who attended the previous one, plus members of the **Postmen's Federation**. The meeting was reported in the *Peterborough Advertiser*, 9 November 1898. Riseley took the chair again and Parkinson acted as secretary. Also at the meeting was **George Green**, a signalman from the **East Midlands Railway** and secretary of **Leicester Trades Council**, who came to give advice.

At the outset, a letter was read from Mr. Winfrey, in which he regretted that business at Long Sutton prevented him fulfilling his promise to be with them that afternoon. But he was heartily in sympathy with the proposal to form a Trades Council, and he trusted that the power which would be obtained by such a body would be wisely and skillfully used for the progress of Trades Union principles.

Liberal Councillor **Richard Winfrey** sent his apologies for not attending the meeting. Winfrey was also the publisher of the **Peterborough Advertiser** newspaper. The trades council was attracting some people of importance.

PTUC was officially constituted on 1 January 1899. All the previous unions along with the **Cooperative Union** were in attendance at the first formal meeting. James Carr from the **Cooperative Union** was elected as the first official president and Parkinson became the official secretary.



Although many unions were involved in founding PTUC, the **ASRS** had a large number of delegates in the early years of its formation. The **ASRS** became the **NUR** in 1913 and later the **RMT**.

"SOCIAL AND MORAL ELEVATION" OF LABOUR AT PETERBOROUGH.

TRADES COUNCIL MANIFESTO.

The following manifesto has been printed and circulated amongst the members of the various Trade and Labour Societies in Peterborough, in connection with the Trades Council which is being formed. It is addressed by Mr. H. C. Parkinson, secretary *pro tempore*, Jessamine Cottages, Dogsthorpe-road, Peterborough, to his "Fellow Unionists," and runs as follows:—

Guided by strict integrity of purpose, just, equitable, and economical principles, we trust this will meet the end we all desire, and hope will prove a sufficient inducement to all Trade and Labour Societies of Peterborough and District, to send representatives to the meetings of the Council, to watch over and secure by fair and honest means the interests of labour, and to help in the great work of the social and moral elevation of our order. The frequent disputes arising between employers and employed have long been suggestive of the necessity of some plan to prevent, if possible, those social disasters called strikes, which are attended in most cases with loss on both sides. The Peterborough Trades and Labour Council, therefore, is intended to act as mediator in disputes that may be submitted for its consideration, and if possible, to settle them on just and honourable principles. Should their mediation fail, and application be made for assistance to those temporarily unemployed, they will, if approved of, recommend the several cases to the support of the various trades represented in the Council. A Council, then, having such objects in view, must commend itself to the consideration of an intelligent man, since it may prevent and ward off the evils that follow in the track of strikes. We trust that the members of the various Trade and Labour Societies will see the advantage of at once coming forward and joining this Council, which, while it seeks to unite all the Trade and Labour Societies for their mutual protection, desires not to meddle with the internal affairs of any.

PTUC Manifesto

Published in the *Peterborough Advertiser* on 12 November 1898

PTUC in the 1900s

1901

PTUC campaigned for a Fair Wage Clause to be included in contracts to provide work for the Municipal Council. The municipal council agreed to implement such a clause in 1899 but it was not enacted properly. This became a campaigning issue when the contract to provide boilers for the new power station at Albert Place was given to a company from Wolverhampton. PTUC believed the contractor was paying under the union wage and **Will Thorne**, Secretary of the **National Union of Gas Workers and General Labourers Union** helped PTUC in their campaign for fair wages.

1903

PTUC delegates made unsuccessful attempts in elections for the Municipal Council and Board of Guardians Committee.

1905

PTUC published a 'municipal programme' in the year's annual report which included: a rigid adherence to the Fair Wage Clause and full trade union recognition at the municipal council; public ownership of the local gas and electricity companies, and tramways with low fares for workers; slaughter houses to be put into public ownership and one built at the cattle market; erection of a city refuse destructor; compulsory purchase of vacant land for public welfare; working class men to be appointed as Magistrates; to ban Public Officers earning a salary of max. £200 annually from taking on any other paid work.

1907

PTUC delegate **George Samuel Palmer** was elected to Cambridgeshire County Council and served for 18 years.

1909

PTUC condemned enlistment into the Territorial Army being made a condition of employment; the railway delegation from PTUC withdrew due to the Osbourne judgement; PTUC protested the visit of the Russian Czar to Britain; PTUC President, **Sam Digby** attended an enquiry at the Workhouse over the 'scandalous treatment' of inmates.

PTUC: Fundraising Parades

PETERBORO' TRADES PARADE.

BIG PROCESSION ON A BRILLIANT AFTERNOON.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY.

The Peterborough Trades and Labour Council has more than justified its existence on one or two recent occasions, and it gave a voluntary display indicative of its importance and far-reaching influence on Sunday afternoon, when its members paraded behind bands and banners galore.

The function was in aid of the Peterborough Infirmary and Nursing Association.

The procession was divided into two sections, so that as extensive a route as possible was covered. No. 1 procession left the Triangle, New England, the headquarters of No. 1 Branch of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, at 1.30. It was headed by the handsome banner of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. Then followed the Borough Band, the A.S.R.S. banner, the Farce Band, the Tailors' Union, Boilermakers, etc. The route taken was via the G.N. Houses to the Crown, where a short stop was made, thence up Lincoln Road, Taverner's Road, Gladstone Street, Russell Street, Boroughbury, and Westgate, to the corner of Broadway. The banner of the New England section of the St. John Ambulance brought up the rear.

up the rear.

No. 2 procession also left the Royal Oak, Fletton, at 1.50. The Operative Bricklayers' Society banner was borne in front; then followed in order the New England Temperance Band, the A.S.R.S. banner, the Town Band, the Carpenters and Joiners, Basketmakers, Co-operative employes, coachmakers, etc. These marched by way of Oundle Road, Cemetery Road, Palmerston Road, Orchard Street, Silver Street, London Road, Bridge Street, and Long Causeway.

At this point the two sections amalgamated, and proceeded by Midgate to the Recreation ground, where each band gave a musical selection. A collection was made along the line of route and at the concert, and the appeals of those in charge of the boxes met with a liberal response.

The meeting in the Recreation Ground did not start till nearly four o'clock, and was necessarily curtailed. The speaking was done from a wagonette, the banners being grouped at the back in the semi-circular order characteristic of Hyde Park parades. There was a large crowd in the field, and the bright colours of the dresses harmonised with the brilliant hues of the official sashes, while the sheen of the banners was dazzling in the strong sunlight.

Mr. John Secker took the chair, and opened the proceedings with a characteristic speech, in which he alluded to the attitude of religious bodies towards such a movement as the one in which the several societies were that afternoon engaged. He thought it was an eminently useful and thoroughly christian work, and one with which any religious organisation might be proud to be associated. The reason some people indulged in criticism was because they were not sufficiently in sympathy with Nature's laws.

in sympathy with Nature's laws.

Mr. J. Dobson followed with a brief address on "The Need of Unity among all Workers." He quoted at the outset Mazzini's dictum, "Association is the law of progress," and said that unity was essential to the well-being of all classes. Nothing truly great could be accomplished unless minor differences and prejudices were sunk, and all factions were joined in one bond of unity. If workers were desirous of obtaining reforms, it was first necessary to have association. The men who sought to obtain concessions individually would find that they would receive scant consideration at the hands of Capital. Time and again has this been proved to be the case. In order that the just claims of the workers could be pressed upon the consideration of those by whom those claims should be conceded in the natural and just order of things, it was essential that there should be combination among those who formulated the demands. That was the only way in which Labour could approach Capital. Without unity among themselves, the workers would receive no recognition. A three-fold cord was not quickly broken. One stick was easily snapped across the knee, but the entire bundle resisted the utmost efforts. The speaker eulogised the promoters of the Trades Council in Peterborough, and wished the organisation every success. It appeared to have every bright prospect, and he was convinced that if its efforts were properly and judiciously directed, its establishment in the city would be productive of much good. Speaking of the immediate objects of the day's parade, Mr. Dobson characterised the Infirmary and Nursing Association as two grand institutions. They were worthy of support of every working-man—in fact it was the duty of every working-man to extend that support. He might have to deny himself his pipe or glass, but he would have the satisfaction of feeling more manly for having performed a kind and Christian duty. Going further, if the Christianity of England were what it ought to be, there would be no necessity for private and voluntary support to be extended to hospitals. Everyone who was too poor to obtain medical assistance when overtaken by illness, or who met with an accident, should have a right to demand the assistance of the State. It was the duty of the nation, in a national sense, to support the hospitals.

Remarks in the same connection were made

Remarks in the same connection were made by Rev. Mr. C. Frew and Mr. Black (A.S.E.).

The branch secretaries were held responsible for the marshalling of the several contingents.

Tea was provided at the Bedford later in the afternoon.

The whole of the handsmen gave their services.

From 1899-1904 PTUC organised annual parades of trade unionists with banners and brass bands, to raise funds for **Peterborough Infirmary** and the **Florence Saunders Nursing Association**. This parade was reported in the *Peterborough Advertiser*, 6 September 1899. The parades ended when Florence died in 1904.

PTUC in the 1910s

1911

County Council pressed to insert trade union rates into all tendering contracts.

1913

By now, PTUC represented 3,000 trade unionists in Peterborough; strike marchers from the Black Country (**Chainmakers**) passed through the city and a local farmer lent bales of hay for them to sleep on. PTUC protested to Lloyd George for raising Plimsoll lines on ships.

1914

PTUC was first recognised as an authoritative body by the Municipal Council when 8 delegates were invited to sit on the Mayor's War Committee; deputation sent to **Werner, Pfleiderer and Perkins** (Baker Perkins) regarding making it a union 'closed shop.'

1915

PTUC took on a campaign for increasing Old Age Pensions; **H. W. Kelley** elected as PTUC secretary; the first PTUC band was formed with a loan of £165 from Baker Perkins for instruments; **Margaret Bondfield** spoke at a PTUC meeting.

1916

PTUC affiliated to the **Railway Nationalisation Society** and the **Northamptonshire Federation of Trades Councils**.

1918

PTUC formed **Peterborough Labour Party**; delegates also organised a fete and gala to raise money for a new X-ray machine at the hospital, making £51 in the process.

1919

Election successes when PTUC delegate **George Green** was elected unopposed to the County Council, while two others, **Charles Leonard Fletcher** and **George Samuel Palmer** were the first PTUC delegates elected as Labour Party Councillors, to the Municipal Council.

PTUC: Women and TU Dynasties (1)

Prior to the 1970s, women were under represented in trade unions due to their employment status and the marriage bar. Women who were delegates to PTUC were often influenced by close family who were active trade unionists but gave up their positions when they were married.

PEN PORTRAIT

A LIFE which has been devoted to the Labour Party and the trade union movement is that of Mr. Sydney Hart, J.P., of 481 Fulbridge Road, Werrington.

He has been a trade union member since he was sixteen and has served on the committee of the local branch of the amalgamated Engineering Union. A founder-member of the Peterborough Labour Party, he has been a director of the Labour Club for 12 years.

Peterborough-born, Mr. Hart was educated at the Railway school, Walpole Street, and at the Peterborough Technical School. He then became an engineer's apprentice on the old Great Northern Railway, but was discharged in 1924 for trade union activity. In the same year he joined Messrs. Peter Brotherhood Ltd., for whom he still works as engineer fitter's chargehand.

Mr. Hart became a member of the Labour Party in 1918, and since that time he has held every possible office, including that of divisional chairman, secretary and treasurer. It was Mr. Hart who was treasurer when the party contested the last General Election, but after the campaign he gave up these duties.

In 1945 Mr. Hart was appointed a Justice of the Peace for the Soke of Peterborough, and his work in this connection has taken up quite a lot of his spare time ever since.

"Nearly every night of the week there is someone at my house," he says, "for there are lots of papers which have to be signed by a J.P."

He sits on the juvenile bench once a month and at the Soke Quarter Sessions about once a year in addition to being on the rota of magistrates which involves his attendance at petty sessions about once a month.

Another monthly job he has to represent Peterborough on the Visiting Committee of Leicester Prison. This takes him to Leicester on the first Wednesday in each month.

In all his public work Mr. Hart has always been ably supported by his wife, who is also a member of the Peterborough Labour Party and was the first woman to serve on the Trades and Labour Council in Peterborough.

Before the war, Mr. and Mrs. Hart arranged social events at the Labour Club, including dances and whist drives.

They have one daughter, Mrs. Norah Hall, and one granddaughter, Pat.



Although **Mary McArthur** and **Margaret Bondfield** of the **Federation of Women Workers** attended PTUC several times to advise on women and war work during the First World War, the first woman delegate to PTUC was **Mary Hart** in 1925.

This information was not easy to find. The only brief mention in the press related to an article about her husband, **Sydney Hart** (which appeared in the *Peterborough Citizen and Advertiser*, Jan 18, 1955).

Mary was co-opted onto PTUC from the **ASLEF Women's Section** (a group for railway workers' wives and daughters) to take up a seat on the Women's Committee at **Peterborough Labour Exchange**

Mary and Sydney's daughter, **Norah Hart**, also became an active trade unionist. She worked in the wages department of **Baker Perkins** in the 1940s and was secretary of the local branch of the **Clerical and Administrative Workers Union**; she was also PTUC minutes secretary. Norah married into the Hall family, another dynasty in the local post-war trade union movement.

PTUC: Women and TU Dynasties (2)

The Palmer Benstead's were another set of trade unionists where women were staunch trade unionists alongside their husband's and parents.

Kate Palmer and **Gladys Benstead** (nee Palmer) were prominent members of the local **NUR Women's Guild** branch in the 1920s. The branch was founded in 1895 by **Lizzie Parkinson** (among others). Lizzie's husband was **Herbert Charles Parkinson**, first PTUC secretary.

LADY BENSTEAD TO BE NEXT MAYOR Daughter will be Mayoress

WHEN Lady Benstead becomes the third woman Mayor of Peterborough on May 23, her 24-year-old daughter, Winifred, will become the youngest Mayoress in the city's history.

Miss Benstead, only child of Sir John and Lady Benstead, will also be the third woman in her family to wear the Mayoress's chain of office. In 1930—the year Miss Benstead was born—her grandmother, Mrs. G. S. Palmer, was the first to wear the chain, the gift of the 1929 Mayoress, Mrs. (now Lady) Craig.

Lady Benstead, whose father, Mr. Palmer, was one of the earliest of Labour Mayors, wore the Mayoress's chain three years ago, during the term of the city's second woman Mayor, Mrs. Mabel Wood. She has also filled the role of deputy Mayoress—to Mrs. John Mansfield in 1932 and to Mr. J. R. Hall's daughter, Mrs. H. Lee, in 1949.

Lady Benstead was invited to accept the mayoralty at a private meeting of city council members after Friday's monthly meeting—on the 11th anniversary of her co-option to the council.

Labour stalwarts

The council's invitation was proposed by Ald. J. Mansfield and seconded by Ald. H. J. Farrow, and was approved unanimously. It had been widely anticipated, as she is the senior Labour member who has not held the office, and it was her party's turn to nominate the chief citizen.

The Conservatives have

nominated the Mayor for the past two years.

When Lady Benstead joined the city council in 1944, her father, mother and husband had already made notable contributions to local government and the Labour Party.

Her father was the first Labour representative on any public body locally—the Board of Guardians—and he was the first working man to become a magistrate of the Liberty.

He fought Liberals in the North ward several times before winning in 1919 the

seat he held to his death in 1933. He was also the first Labour member of the county council, resigning in favour of his wife.

Mrs. Palmer and then Mr. Benstead became J.P.s in 1934, and the family record became unique in 1948, when the then Mrs. Benstead was appointed to the Commission. Her husband, now deputy chairman of the British Transport Commission, and a former general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, was a member of the city council from 1928-33.

Not complacent

Since her co-option to the council in succession to the late Mr. R. A. (Bob) Watson, Lady Benstead has won re-election three times, and in May—eleven days before Mayor-making—is due to seek re-election again.

The North Ward being the Labour stronghold it is, there is little if any doubt that she will be returned, though she is not complacent about the result and the Conservatives are not likely to allow her to go back unopposed.

She is chairman of the council's public library committee, a council representative on the Joint Education Board, a member of the Eastern Electricity Consultative Council and chairman of that council's Pens Sub-Area Committee.

Her long connection with the city's railway community began when she became the first woman clerk on the old



LADY BENSTEAD

(Continued on Page 7)

(Continued from Page 1)

G.N.R. outside London. She was an N.U.R. member of the committee which negotiated wages and conditions for women clerks, and was the first president (1927-30) of the Midland District Council of N.U.R. Women's Guilds.

During the war she served on the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations, and from this went on to the Fuel Advisory Committee which, under Sir



MISS BENSTEAD

William (now Lord) Beveridge, instituted fuel rationing. She has been a member of the Labour party for many years, being a former secretary of the local party, of which she is now an executive committee member.

Miss Benstead, who will celebrate her 25th birthday before mayor-making, went to the County Grammar School, and then to Leicester Domestic Science Training College. For a year she trained at the Middlesex Hospital, before taking a two-year course in dietetics at the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh.

She gained her diploma last May, and shortly afterwards was appointed group dietitian to the Southampton Hospital Management Committee.

She intends to resign this post to enable her to fulfil her duties as Mayoress.

Three generations of Palmer Benstead women were involved in the labour movement in Peterborough as seen in the above article published in the *Peterborough Advertiser*, 1 March 1955.

PTUC in the 1920s

1920

PTUC affiliated to the **Workers Educational Association**; sent a deputation to the Municipal Council re: direct labour for building houses.

1921

PTUC started a campaign for firemen to live closer to the station after a serious fire in Midgate. They also held a collection for the victims; the **Bishop of Peterborough** addressed a PTUC on the subject of 'The Church in Relation to Trade Unionism.'

1923

PTUC had an affiliated membership of 5818.

1925

PTUC delegates drew up plans for Council Housing and presented them to the Municipal Council; the first Woman delegate to join PTUC was **Mary Hart** from **ASLEF Women's Section**.

1926

PTUC acted as the city's main strike committee during the 9 day General Strike, under secretary **Percy Woodall** from the **Typographical Association**.

1928

PTUC assisted members of the Workers Union in the 12 week strike at **Kemil Limited's Celta Artificial Silk Mill** in Fletton.

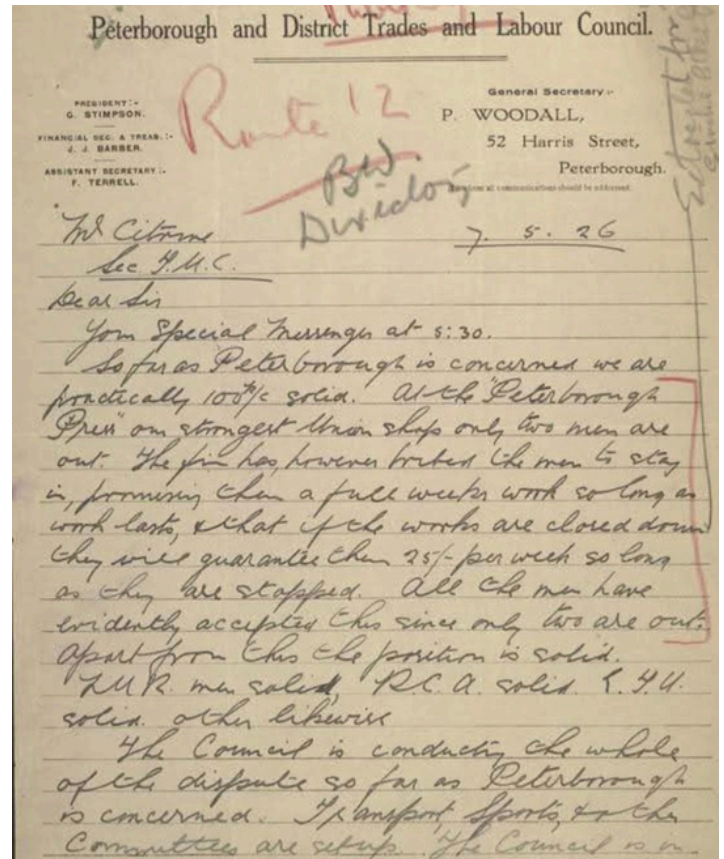


Photograph of the PTUC band banner during a street collection for the **British Red Cross** and **St John Ambulance** in 1915

PTUC: 1926 General Strike

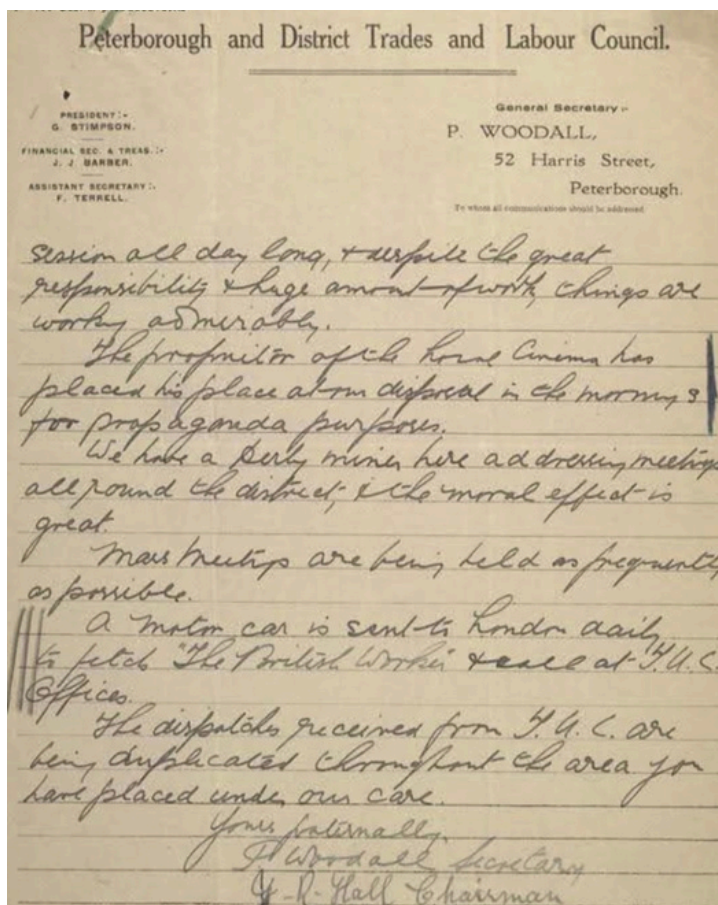
Over 9 days in May 1926 the only official General Strike of the twentieth century took place in Britain. In Peterborough, PTUC took charge as the city's main strike committee, as seen in these documents from the Trade Union History website, *The Union Makes Us Strong*.

The strike was called in support of industrial action by coal miners. Strike committees were put in charge of propaganda, the movement of food and goods, and the orderly conduct of strikers.



The TUC took groups of workers out on strike in waves. Transport workers went first causing the almost complete shut down of railways across the country, including Peterborough. But the government fought back recruiting non-unionised volunteers to drive trains and trams. In Peterborough this caused some friction with tram workers.

PTUC kept the strikers occupied by securing the use of sports pitches in local public parks and organising strike meetings and entertainment. Peterborough's engineering workers were keen to join the strike, but the action was called off by the TUC before they were officially granted permission



2026 will be the centenary of the General Strike. How would you like to see PTUC commemorate it?

PTUC: 1928 Celta Mill Strike



In 1928 PTUC supported workers from the **Celta Artificial Silk Mill** in Fletton who went on strike for 12 weeks in late 1928 over the suspension of a colleague. The strike led by the **Workers Union** turned into one over trade union recognition and led to a series of meetings where high-profile speakers such as **Ellen Wilkinson MP** and **Walter Citrine**, General Secretary of the TUC, attended from across the country. Matters of health and safety at the mill were discussed in Parliament but the unions were not victorious and the strike ended in the prosecution of 16 employees for breach of contract.



Some of those in the crowd at the mass meeting in connection with the silk factory strike, in the Stanley Recreation Ground on Sunday.

The artificial silk mill opened in 1924. It was run by a German company, **Kemil Limited** and many of the 1000 employees were women. The mill was located where **Hotpoint** is today and closed down after the 1929 Wall Street Crash led to the Great Depression.

PTUC in the 1930s

1931

John Edward Swain was elected as PTUC President and stayed in post until 1947. He stepped down to take up the position of Mayor on Peterborough's Municipal Council, where he was a Labour Councillor. Swain was involved in many community initiatives and was acting chairman of **Peterborough United Football Club** when it was formerly established in 1934.

1932

PTUC helped organise a public meeting against the implementation of the Means Test for unemployment benefits. This was at the height of the Great Depression when unemployment was at its worst in Britain; PTUC helped to form the **Mayor's Unemployed Committee** which put the unemployed to work, making shoes.

1933

PTUC delegates visited the new **Town Hall** on Bridge Street and attended the opening ceremony in October; as the threat of international fascism grew delegates sent a motion to the **Federation of Trade Unions** warning of the possible threat from Hitler after his appointment as Chancellor of Germany. Closer to home, delegates supported the **AEU's** campaign for a 40 hour week.

1934

PTUC arranged for a special service to be held at Peterborough Cathedral for victims of the **Gresford Colliery** disaster after an explosion and underground fire killed 261 workers at the mine near Wrexham. PTUC also organised collections and donations for the victims families.

1936

Men marching from Jarrow in the North East to London, stayed at the **Barrass Hall** in Park Road and were assisted by PTUC delegates. A number of hunger marches, and marches for jobs passed through Peterborough during the 1920s and 1930s. The first was a group from Tyneside in 1922.

1938

Former PTUC delegate **Harold Laws (AEU)** was killed in fighting as part of the International Brigades in the **Spanish Civil War**.

KILLED AT TERUEL¹

Mr. H. Law, of Rock Road

IN INTERNATIONAL COLUMN

Mr. Harold Laws, a former resident of Peterborough, was killed while fighting with the International Brigade in Spain, when the Insurgents recaptured Teruel from the Government forces on February 17th.

A Southampton man and aged 25, Mr. Laws came to Peterborough from Worcester in 1935 to work as a turner at Baker Perkins'. He held very advanced political views and, after a short time with the Labour Party, he joined the Communists, with whom he had been associated at Southampton. He also joined No. 5 branch A.E.U., and was elected to represent that body on the Trades and Labour Council. Mr. Laws left Peterborough for Stratford, London, in 1936, and, before leaving for Spain in October, 1937, he worked at Birmingham.

3

COURAGE OF CONVICTIONS.

His father and mother live in Southampton and we understand that his father is employed by, and is a prominent member of, the Southampton Co-operative Society. Mrs. Barber was informed of his death by his mother. He is the only son, and there is also a married sister.

Mr. R. A. Watson, agent of the Peterborough Labour Party, told the "Standard" that Laws had done a good deal of work for the Party. "Never mind his political views," he said, "he was a good boy and he had the courage of his convictions."

Laws was a keen cyclist, and almost as soon as he came to Peterborough he joined the Clarion Club and the Peterborough Club. Besides taking part in their runs he also went off alone or with one or two friends on excursions of his own. In his last year at Peterborough he was a member of the Liberal and Social Club.

The Clarion Club are thinking of purchasing a silver cup in his memory, to be known as the "Harry Laws Cup," for competition among the members.

PTUC: International Causes

PTUC delegates have always been keen supporters of international issues, highlighting the causes of trade unions in places such as South America and Palestine.

During the run-up to the Second World War, delegates supported trade unionists in Republican Spain after General Franco's right-wing coup led to conflict between 1936 and 1939. PTUC delegates raised money for refugees through the **AID Spain** initiative and several people with Peterborough connections went to assist the Republicans in Spain, including former PTUC delegate, **Harold Laws**.

2

LETTERS FROM SPAIN.

During his stay at Peterborough he lodged with Mrs. E. A. Garner, of 2, Rock-road, and became great friends with the family of Mrs. G. Barber, of 7, Rock-road. He wrote to Mrs. Barber after leaving Peterborough and whilst in Spain he sent her several letters. One was sent from a hospital in Albate, Plaza del Alta-zona, where he spent some time after a wound in the right arm received in a Franco assault on Teruel in December, 1937.

"I only fired five shots," he wrote, "and I can't recollect hitting anything. Franco got me. So the first round goes to Franco."

He went on to say that he was anxious to get back to the front line.

Another letter from hospital spoke of the amazing country. "It appears to be bang up against the sky," he wrote. "It is thousands of feet above sea level and the mountain tops are quite close, about two or three hundred feet away. They are usually immersed in clouds."

On February 17th—the day that he died—Mrs. Barber received a letter dated January 5th. "We have had a hard time lately," he said, "but I have enjoyed it. This is a wonderful army and the morale can only be compared with the troops of Republican France when they conquered half Europe."



The **Harry Laws Cup**, mentioned in the above article published in the *Peterborough Standard*, 25 March 1938, is still awarded annually by the **Fenland Clarion Club** to the 50 mile champion.

PTUC in the 1940s

1941

Delegates sent financial support given to **Peterborough Famine Relief Fund**; during the Second World War, PTUC delegates sat on the Municipal Council's war committee again.

1943

John Benstead appointed as General Secretary of the **National Union of Railwaymen** (NUR).

1944

Vic Feather (TUC Organising Department) spoke at a trades council meeting on the 'TUC in Wartime.' **Krishna Menon** of the **Indian Independence Movement** booked to visit Peterborough on behalf of **Indian Famine Relief**. PTUC name changed to **Peterborough and District Trades Council**.

1945

Focus on education with a proposal to form a Joint Education Board, visits of education and discussions on education and future prospects in Peterborough.

1947

Trades Council delegates visited **Sibson Colliery** at Coalville, Leicestershire, following the nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947.

1948

PTUC contacted the **Ministry of Health** to ask 'why can't we have a larger hospital?' There was a focus on after the passing of the **National Health Service (NHS) Act 1948**, after which delegates were elected to local committees administering NHS services.

1949

PTUC campaigned for improvements to council housing and celebrated a Golden Jubilee by holding an anniversary dinner attended by **Sir Vincent Tewson**, General Secretary of the TUC.

PTUC in the 1950s

1950

E F Grunow elected 18th PTUC secretary; delegate **G A Smith** became Mayor of Peterborough in 1958. Took part in campaigns for better bus service.

1951

Trades council had question asked in Parliament on local building contractor's payments; contractor withdrew application for payment. Campaigned to remove 'penny tax' on public toilets.

1952

Supported workers in dispute with printing firm **D C Thomson**. Meeting organised with **Harold Wilson** (Labour Party) as speaker. **Unity Theatre** performed in the city, still going today as the **Banner Theatre**.

1953

Grunow selected to tour the USA as part of the TUC's team to report on how factories improved productivity there. PTUC delegates Smith, Hughes and Grunow took part in the municipal council inquiry into proposed changes to Ward boundaries.

1954

First trade union week took place. PTUC campaigned successfully for a telephone kiosk to be installed on Queen's Road, Fletton. Five PTUC delegates sat on their union's National Executive Committees at this time.

1955

PTUC successfully campaigned for repairs of Moys End at the football ground. Organised a meeting at **Woodcock's Cafe** with **BBC Listener Researcher**; PTUCs campaign for better television reception resulted in the opening of a new station in Morborne in 1959.

1956

Successful campaign with the **National Council of Civil Liberties** (now Liberty) to have woman wrongly admitted to a mental health institution released. Campaigned successfully for a new post box for Dogsthorpe Estate and new road signs in 1958. Secretary invited to the enthronement of the new **Bishop of Peterborough**.

GREETINGS FROM OUR TRADE UNION COLLEAGUES IN BOURGES, FRANCE



THE PROVINCIAL TRADE UNION ASSOCIATION OF CHER PROVINCE IN SESSION
AT THEIR BIENNIAL CONFERENCE IN 1957.

The platform—left to right :—

- M. AUROUX (Secretary of the Provincial Trade Union Association).
- M. TROCHET (Member of the Aircraft Union).
- M. GEOFFRION (Treasurer of the Provincial Trade Union Association).
- M. FRUTOS (Secretary of the Provincial Spanish General Workers Union).
- M. MARTINEZ-PAREIRA (National Secretary of the Spanish G.W. Union).
- M. VEILLON (Secretary of the General Confederation of Labour).
- M. THOLONAIT (General Secretary of the Provincial T.U. Association).

To Monsieur Grunow, Secrétaire Général, Peterborough

The Departmental Union of the General Confederation of Labour, Workers Force, sends friendly greetings to all the Workers of the Peterborough and District Trades Council, and takes advantage, with great pleasure, of this opportunity to enter into closer relationship with their sister organisation.

In the name of our Union, I thank you for having made it possible for our two organisations to be in contact and thus be of mutual help to the workers of our two countries.

I write these few lines with great joy and am very proud to be given the opportunity of sending them to you. The Departmental Union would like to express its admiration of the wonderful organisation which you represent. We wish you success in your development and action for the benefit of those concerned.

In these present times, when humanity is so divided, it is essential that the voice of the free Unions is strong so that a better society will result from our international relations from a point of view of peace, freedom and friendship.

Friendly greetings and good wishes.

M. ANDRE THOLONAIT,
General Secretary, Bourges.

In 1957 Peterborough was twinned with Bourges, France. At the same time PTUC made links with the equivalent trade union body in Bourges and they communicated through tape recorded messages. The first message from Bourges was translated and reprinted in the *Diamond Jubilee Booklet* in 1959.

PTUC from the 1960s

From the end of the 1950s PTUC delegates were involved in anti-racism, actively campaigning against the 'colour bar' and delegates joined the Executive Committee of the **Peterborough Community Relations Council** (later known as **Peterborough Racial Equality Council** or PREC), when it formed in March 1974. Delegates took a practical interest in the development of Peterborough as a **New Town** in the 1960s and 1970s and new employers moving into the city as part of the project, such as the Passport Office, resulted in new trade union activity. In the 1980s delegates raised money for the victims of the **Battle of Orgreave**, and striking communities during the 1984/85 **Miners Strike**. These are of course, just a few highlights of PTUCs activities during this period.

Due to confidentiality the exhibition ends here, however, a selection of posters and photographs from recent events are displayed on the walls and the television.

Many thanks to everyone who donated photos and to Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery for making this exhibition happen.



Monday, February 23, 1998 THE EVENING TELEGRAPH news & advertising 01733 555111, classified 956222

WRITER: Retired official busy researching book on Trades Council

Union stalwart's history passion

by ANN MOLYNEUX
NEWS REPORTER

MOST people slow down and take it easy when they retire but Tom Browning, a stalwart of the trade union movement in Peterborough is as busy as ever.

Far from hanging up his boots after his retirement from Red Ring in Woodston, Peterborough in 1988, Mr Browning has swapped them for a word processor.

And for the last nine years he has spent his spare time at his home in Thorney researching a history of the Peterborough Trades Council, which he hopes to publish by 1999, in time for its centenary.

The Peterborough Trade Council's backing of the print dispute at Wapping and their support for the miners during the long dispute in the early 1960s are among the recent events Mr Browning will chronicle in his book.

Mr Browning (75) said: "I have been in trade unions all my life. It started off when I was working as a fireman on the railway. I joined the AEU when I worked at Baker Perkins and was a shop steward for 20 years at Hotpoint and Redring."

The Peterborough Trades Council would meet in the front room of a house in the city's Fitzwilliam Street in the years after the organisation was formed in 1899 before moving to the AEU Hall in Lincoln Road.

It has met at the GMB Office in Broadway, Peterborough since 1993.

For more than 60 years, the organisation met on Sunday mornings before dropping the tradition and opting for evening meetings instead.

Mr Browning has been connected with the trades council for more than 40 years and in 1979 he was awarded the British Empire Medal for service to industry.

His research has not been without its problems as many old records were destroyed for being too tatty and delapidated. But it makes Mr Browning's life easier when researching more recent events that members of the trade council have compiled year books from 1966 onwards.

And many documents salvaged when the Peterborough Trade Council left its meeting place at the AEU building in Lincoln Road have been lodged in the archive section at Peterborough Central Library.

HARD WORKER: Tom Browning, busy researching for a book on the history of Peterborough Trades Council. (9802629/2A) Picture ROWLAND HOBSON

Insatiable appetite for work

TOM Browning has an insatiable appetite for work, which has only accelerated since his retirement.

He was president of the Peterborough Trade Council for three years, secretary until 1991 and has been Cambridgeshire Association secretary since 1974.

Mr Browning was its delegate to the TUC annual conference for 24 years.

But as well as his tireless trade union and trade council work, Tom still manages to fit in numerous other commitments.

He has spent time as a magistrate, an industrial tribunal member, a governor of the city's technical college, secretary of an access committee for the disabled and he helped to start the Step One Centre in Broadway.

Every Railwayman's Almanac

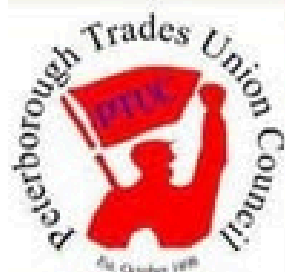
1942 AUGUST 1942

One of the GRAND OLD MEN of Railway Trade Unions. Fisher of a 100% Trade.

This is how he looked 20 years ago when he established a Record by having enrolled 12 of his

RESEARCH: Some of the material Tom has looked at.

DEDICATED: Tom in his younger days.



**“Hats off to the past,
Coats off to the future...”**



DISCOVER 125+ YEARS OF PETERBOROUGH TRADES UNION COUNCIL

Exhibition at Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery,
7 January - 15 February 2025

Explore the rich history and contributions of Peterborough Trades Union Council to the industrial, cultural and civic life of Peterborough through this fascinating exhibition.

Opening hours at <https://peterboroughmuseum.org.uk/>

 **UNIONS**