

# FORGOTTEN WOMEN OF WAKEFIELD

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VISIT ALICE'S PLAQUE AT



NORMANTON TOWN HALL

REMEMBERING

ALICE  
BACON

BLUE PLAQUE PARITY

Dream Time Creative seeks to honour the women who have made incredible accomplishments in the Wakefield area but have been erased from history – until now.



## A LIFE OF SERVICE

Alice Martha Bacon was born on September 10, 1909, in Normanton, Leeds to Charlotte "Lottie" Bacon and her father Benjamin Bacon. Her father was an active councillor and a miner, so Alice saw the inside of working life for the people in her community from an early age. She received an education at Normanton Girls' High School and Stockwell Training College, and became a teacher. Struck by the poverty many of her students had to endure, she helped facilitate local for loans schemes and other endeavours.

Alice always had an affinity with politics though. She delivered her first speech at age 16 at Normanton Railwaymen's Club, and in later life crafted a political career built with one thing firmly in mind: doing the right thing by her community, and by the country as a whole.

In the 1945 general election, Alice was elected as MP for Leeds North East. She spearheaded Comprehensive Schools legislation and was a quiet driving force behind remarkably progressive reforms such as the abolition of the death penalty, the move to legislate abortion, and legislation to decriminalise homosexuality.

Throughout her political life she occupied many high profile roles, including Minister of State at the Home Office, an appointment to the Privy Council, and perhaps most famously her role in the Department of Education and Science.

Alice was awarded a CBE in 1963. In October of 1970 she was created Baroness Bacon of the City of Leeds and of Normanton in the West Riding of the County of York.

Alice did not appear to enjoy the House of Lords as much and instead focused more on local politics. In later life she took care of her elderly aunt. Alice never married or had children, but her legacy lives on in the many social and educational reforms she championed.



Above: Herbert Morrison, a regular visitor to the Bacon household, enjoys Lottie Bacon's cooking.



Above: Alice receives her CBE in 1963. By her side her mother, Lottie, wearing Alice's brooch (left).

## TIMELINE

- Sept. 10, 1909 Alice is born
- Age 12 Went down the coal pit with her dad
- 1926 First speech to Normanton Railwaymen's Club aged 16
- Training and later teaching at various schools including Normanton Secondary Modern
- 1937 Receives degree in Admin
- Prospective candidate for Leeds North East - outbreak of WW's intervenes
- 1939
- 1945 Elected MP for Leeds North East
- 1950-51 Labour Party Chair
- 1953 Awarded CBE
- Labour wins power. Alice Bacon becomes Minister of State at the Home Office
- 1964
- 1970 Retires from the House of Commons
- 14 Oct. 1970 Created Baroness Bacon of the City of Leeds and of Normanton in the West Riding of the County of York
- 1980s Alice speaks out against the SNP as the Labour Party
- Alice cares for elderly family members
- March 24, 1993 Dies aged 83

## A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Dear Ben

Hope you are keeping OK and not wasting away through either worry or slimming. I would like to be heavy one year, two would be better with you.

Wish you were living down here, it would be just alright but these letters would be vanishing all the members of the H of G. To Alice stay strong. My word she has some energy and ability but I still feel she is being restricted in Normanton.

She is too able to become simply a house wife and mother despite your possible desire to be a Grandfather. I hope you will be disappointed for a few years at any rate. Hope Lottie is better. Give my best regards also to Sarah. As Sarah needs a sweetheart to embrace her don't you think? Give my love also to Granny. How now about Ed. Wish you could win but there are so many wise followers, can I do anything Councillor Bacon.

Best wishes Love to all at ... 18



Above: a personal letter about Alice written by a close family friend. Left: the translation of that letter.

FOR A LOOK AT AN EXTENDED COLLECTION OF ARTIFACTS AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT VISIT: WWW.FORGOTTENWOMENWAKE.COM

## REFLECTING ON ALICE'S LIFE

What strikes me about Alice is how tenacious she was, and how ambitious. The few letters we have to her or about her, show she was kind, and generous, charming and funny. Rachel Reeve MP's book, 'Alice in Westminster' tracks her career beautifully and gives a wonderful overview of her place within the Labour Party but throws little light on her as person. It has been the curating of her personal artefacts gifted to the project by David and Valerie Box, which have given a real insight into her personality. Always in positions of social influence, by the very nature of being born into a prominent social and politically active family, Alice was able to pursue her political career with a real support from her family. Her love of nature was clear, with a well thumbed collection of books on flowers. It also seems that from a very early age and her love of strong statement jewellery became clear as I was able to match a few of the pieces in red enamelled box showed. Reading extracts from her speeches in parliament showed her to be quick at the parliamentary game, sharp of tongue, intelligent and deeply passionate about the effects government action (or lack of) would have on her constituents. She was both liked and not liked in Normanton, perhaps because she did not conform to a conventional path but certainly, she dedicated many years of her life caring for her mother's sister, Sarah, because it was the right thing to do. The most intriguing thing for me was found nestled in a separate box of gold jewellery, a locket, with cut out images of two nameless women, worn, I think, close to Alice's heart.

— Sarah Leah Cobham CEO of Dream Time Creative