

Plan to restore clock in memory of Minnie Lansbury, Jewish activist who died at 32

Timely reminder of a suffragette

BY RACHEL FLETCHER

A PLEA has gone out to the Jewish community to help fund the restoration of a memorial to a Jewish suffragette, councillor and socialist.

The East End Jewish Celebration Society and the Heritage of London Trust have also produced a BBC podcast to raise awareness and funds for the Minnie Lansbury Memorial Clock on Electric House in Bow Road, Tower Hamlets. The clock no longer works.

Minnie was the first wife of Edgar, the non-Jewish father of actress Angela Lansbury, who has donated to the project and has been invited to unveil the restored timepiece. The trust is donating £2,000, but a further £10,000 is needed for the clock to be repaired, repainted and have a plaque set by it. Renowned clock restorers Smiths of Derby have agreed to take on the repairs.

"It is a very important Jewish memorial," East End Jewish Celebration Society chairman Clive Bettington told the JC. "Minnie was one of the most important suffragettes, along with Emmeline Pankhurst's daughter Sylvia. "We need recognition and support from the Jewish community. It would



be tragic if the clock disappears and no trace is left of this part of Jewish communal life."

An elected alderman on Poplar's first Labour council in 1919 — before women had the Parliamentary vote — Minnie was the daughter of well-known coal merchant Isaac Glassman and daughter-in-law of Labour leader and Poplar mayor George Lansbury.

Initially a teacher, she joined the East London suffragettes in 1915, who had



The Lansbury memorial clock and (left) Minnie Lansbury being hailed as she makes her way to prison for refusing to levy full rates in Poplar, East London

been renamed the Workers' Suffrage Federation. She also became chairman of the War Pensions Committee, fighting for the rights of widows, orphans and wounded from World War I.

In 1921, she was one of five women on Poplar Council who, along with their male colleagues, served six weeks' imprisonment for refusing to levy full rates in the poverty-stricken area. As a result of her imprisonment, she developed pneumonia, dying on January 1 1922 at the age of 32. She was buried

in the Jewish cemetery in East Ham. The Women's Library, the local council and feminist groups are being approached for help with the project. Diana Beattie of the HLT described the clock as "an important part of our heritage in East London. If it is lost, people will just forget about people like Minnie, a young Jewish woman who made her mark on the nation. "I would like it if the podcast helps people to donate. I am worried about funding. We don't know where the

money is coming from." Mrs Beattie was delighted by Angela Lansbury's support. "Minnie was not a blood relative of hers and it is wonderful to feel that the family is supporting the things Minnie held dear. She was such a heroine of her time."

Agreeing, Mr Bettington noted that Angela Lansbury had "on many occasions said she's proud that her father and grandfather were both mayors of Poplar and that her grandfather was leader of the Labour Party".