

# **Suffrage and Suffragettes in the Hartlepoons, 1869 to 1919**

## **The early years**

The organised fight for the right of women to vote in the United Kingdom goes back to the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when popular movements began to directly criticise the traditional and often corrupt system of selecting the all male Members of Parliament. While partially successful through winning the 1832 Reform Act, which extended voting to 1 in 7 men based solely on their ownership of property, the same Act explicitly banned women from voting.

There was slight progress in 1869 when the Municipal Reform Act doubled the number of eligible male voters in local elections, and allowed a very small proportion of richer women to vote as the head of their household. The Hartlepoons had supported this act, submitting a local petition requesting suffrage on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1869, and directly benefitted through gaining the right to elect its own MP for the first time.

In 1872 the fight for women's suffrage became a national movement with the formation of the National Society for Women's Suffrage (NSWS), and later, the more influential National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).

On the 12<sup>th</sup> March 1872 the corporation of West Hartlepool submitted a petition in support of a second attempt by Jacob Bright, the MP for Manchester, to get a Women's Suffrage Bill adopted into law. His bill was supported locally at a meeting at the Temperance Hall on the 8<sup>th</sup> April where the leading campaigner Lydia Becker, the founder of the *Women's Suffrage Journal*, Isabella Stewart and the Rev. Benjamin Glover spoke in support of women's suffrage. Despite the bill being rejected, active campaigning for women's suffrage and the rights of married women continued to take place in the Borough, with Becker leading public rallies in West Hartlepool during 1874, and again in 1878.

## **The rise of the WSPU**

In October 1903 the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed during a meeting of six women at the Pankhurst family home in Manchester. It rose to become the best known organisation campaigning for women's suffrage. Tightly controlled by its leadership, Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia, the WPSU would become more militant in its approach as it lost faith in passive and non-violent protest.

Disagreement within the mainstream of the Edwardian feminist movement over the right tactics to take to win the vote is often described today as the difference between "Suffragists" and "Suffragettes". Suffragists, numerically more prevalent, tended to believe that passive protest would win the argument, and focused on debates, open air speeches, and letter writing campaigns. Suffragettes, by contrast, had a focus on direct action, including physically confronting politicians and

interrupting meetings, carrying out hunger strikes when imprisoned, and eventually, by breaking windows and arson. This modern view is simplistic, as individuals tended to move between organisations as these developed different approaches, or due to quarrels and personality clashes, or as the person changed their mind over the right course of action.

The first mention of the presence of the WPSU in the Hartlepoons is in the *Northern Daily Mail* newspaper of 28<sup>th</sup> November 1906, when a Mrs Amy. B Norman wrote to the editor on “The Women’s Suffrage Movement”. The newspaper printed her letter in its entirety. In this she outlined her thoughts on the release of four leading suffragettes from prison, and after outlining the reasons for the movement moving towards more direct protests, stated that,

*“The remark that Bernard Shaw made four weeks ago – You remember that he said that Mrs Cobden-Sanderson, one of the imprisoned suffragettes, was “one of the nicest women in England” – applies to all the rest, at least to all the leaders of the movement. Knowing them all personally and having a pretty wide experience of women, I, too, would say that, in my humble opinion, they are to-day some of the nicest women in England..”*

*May I add in conclusion, that a branch of the Women’s Political and Social Union exists in West Hartlepool, and we shall be glad if any of your readers, both men and women, but particularly women, who wish to see justice done, will join with us, and help on the time when man truly shall be free because woman is no longer a slave”.*

Amy B. Norman signed herself off with the title “*Hon. Sec Women’s S. and P. U.*”

The four imprisoned suffragettes referred to by Amy Norman were Anne Cobden-Sanderson, Mary Gawthorpe, Charlotte Despard, and Emmeline Pankhurst, all leading members of the WSPU, who were arrested on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1906 during a demonstration outside the Houses of Parliament. They were sentenced to two months in Holloway jail, only to be released early as a political gesture.

That Amy knew all four personally demonstrates a strong personal connection between the West Hartlepool branch of the WPSU and the leadership of both the WPSU and the WFL during the period 1907 to at least the outbreak of the First World War.

Two days later on the 30<sup>th</sup> November the paper published an offensive letter in response to Mrs Norman from a writer using the pseudonym “Anti-Suffragette”. This belittled the suffrage movement compared to the 74 year fight for universal male suffrage by “the British workman”, and suggested that the ladies go and see Shakespeare’s play “The Taming of the Shrew” for direction on how to behave.

Amy replied at length on 4<sup>th</sup> December:

*“I was very much amused and just a little surprised at the letter in your paper signed “Anti-Suffragette”... it is an expression all through of antiquated, unjust, selfish, merely male theory, viz., that the world and all that is therein (including woman) was made for the pleasure of man... I would ask “what about the working-woman?”... He grumbles because in 74 years the men have not got the whole loaf: we women are impatient because in 40 years we haven’t even got a crumb”*

After noting that women were too busy at present fighting for the vote to go theatre-going, and that in any case people now lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century rather than the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and “*knew things not dreamt of in Shakespeare’s philosophy*”, Amy turned to the rights of women workers;

*“What about the women chain workers at Cradley Heath... whose bodies... have lost semblance of womanhood owing to their degrading toil? ...What about the sixty-nine thousand women cotton operatives... working every day in the Lancashire cotton mills? ...What about the women in the sweated industries who slave day and night for the princely sum of 5s a week? And, worst of all, what about the women who sell their bodies nightly in all our large towns, for the mere sake of keeping body and soul together? ... It is of these women that we think when we demand the vote which will give them industrial and political freedom. What we shall do with the vote when we get it is another matter, and does not in the least invalidate our claim. One thing we shall do which the working man has failed to do up to the present time, and that is to use it properly. – Yours Truly, Amy B. Norman”.*

She reiterated this same argument in another letter published on the 8<sup>th</sup> December in response to another critic, this time including her full postal address with her signature.

Amy Beatrice Norman (1874-1937) was born Amy Beatrice Middleton on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1874 at Kimberworth, Yorkshire. Her father Thomas Middleton was a railway goods agent, who died during Amy’s teenage years, leaving her mother wife Louisa to raise the family. In April 1901 Amy was recorded in the Census as working as a schoolteacher in Rotherham, and described herself as such when she married railway clerk Fred Norman in the City of York on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1901. Within a few years they moved to Seaton Carew, probably due to Fred’s work, as they lived in NER properties in Station Lane and later at 3 Queen’s Terrace. Both Amy and Fred were politically active, as the evidence shows that Fred was an active socialist, and a member of the local Independent Labour Party.

Amy’s first child, born in 1906, was named *Christabel*. Her second child Margaret *Sylvia* was born 1908, and her third child, a son in 1910, was named Robert *Francis* Fredrick. The intention behind the choice of these names was clearly to honour her

friend Emmeline Pankhurst, whose own children were, in order, named Christabel, Sylvia and Francis Henry Pankhurst.

The West Hartlepool branch of the WPSU held their first public meeting on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 1907, just over a month after Amy's letters to the newspaper, which reported the meeting under the headline "*Suffragettes at West Hartlepool: Vigorous Speeches*". This was held the Oddfellows Hall in York Road, and attracted a large audience of ladies, with men standing at the back. Miss Mabel Cook presided, and guest speakers Amy Norman, Charlotte Despard, Hannah Mitchell, and a Miss Calvert "*of Hartlepool*". An orange-box was initially provided for the speakers to stand on to help them be seen and heard over the crowd, but proving unstable, they instead stood on a chair.

Mabel Cook spoke first, her satirical comments drawing laughter, before,

*"Miss Calvert, of Hartlepool, then briefly proposed "that this meeting calls upon the Government to immediately enfranchise the women of this country"*

Amy Norman seconded the proposal, and stated that she would not apologise for supporting "*revolutionary tactics*" (i.e. militantism). Hannah Mitchell followed, and keynote speaker Charlotte Despard concluded. Their speeches focused on logical debate and followed the mainstream arguments of most suffragists at the time. The meeting voted to carry the motion, and closed after taking a collection to cover the speakers travelling expenses.

Of the speakers, Charlotte Despard (nee French, 1844-1939) was probably the most notorious, having just been released from jail alongside her friend Anne Cobden Sanderson. Despard was an Anglo-Irish feminist, socialist, anti-vivisectionist, pacifist, vegetarian, and Sinn Fein supporter. She had joined the WPSU in 1906 after becoming dissatisfied with the passivity of the NUWSS, but by the autumn 1907 became disillusioned with the autocratic organisation of the WPSU under the dictatorial rule of the Pankhursts. Instead, she became a founder member of the suffragist Women's Freedom League (WFL), and a leading proponent of the strategy of passive resistance, especially the non-payment of taxes and chaining oneself to gates or railings in as a non-violent protest.

Miss Mabel Cook, "*formerly of West Hartlepool*" was a close friend of Charlotte Despard, as both were active members of the Parliamentary Association for the Abolition of Vivisection, and had given evidence to the Second Royal Commission on Vivisection earlier during 1906. Miss Cook was however better known locally as a social reformer and as the only female member of the Board of Guardians of the Hartlepool Workhouse: soon after this meeting she lost her position as a Guardian due to being de-selected by the town Councillors, allegedly for her feminist and suffragist views.

By contrast, the speaker Hannah Mitchell (1872-1956) was a working-class Lancaster-based dressmaker, a socialist, suffragette, and pacifist who later that same year suffered a nervous breakdown due to overwork and malnourishment. While Mrs Despard went to help her colleague, the Pankhursts seem to have ignored her plight, leading Mitchell to leave the WPSU in 1908 to join Charlotte Despard in her new Women's Freedom League. Mitchell would later serve as a Councillor and magistrate on Manchester City Council from 1924 to 1935.

We don't know what impact these suffragette speakers had on public opinion across the Hartlepoons, but it was probably insignificant. While their words and arguments were reported by the local newspaper, the newspaper itself initially had little sympathy for the cause. Instead, it portrayed suffragists at best as figures of fun, at worst as infantile and dangerous.

For example, in the same edition that reported their speeches was the following joke at the bottom of page 3:

*"Suffragette: The proudest moment of my life was when I was a passenger on an American Liner and fell over the side*

*Friend: The proudest moment? But how do you mean?*

*Suffragette: A sailor called out, "Man overboard!" "*

On the 14<sup>th</sup> February 1907, a month after the first meeting, the *Northern Daily Mail* carried an article by an anonymous journalist reflecting on members of the WPSU's attempt to storm the House of Commons the previous day. Noting that the "attack" had been led by Mrs Despard, and that she had recently spoke in West Hartlepool, the journalist's tone was completely unsympathetic and extremely patronising. The paper stated that,

*"The probability is if a crowd of unemployed men behaved as some of these women do then they would not be treated with half the consideration yesterday's demonstrators received... Now, obviously, women who behave in this fashion ought not to complain if they are hustled by the police... No one wants to see women bludgeoned in the streets of London, but that is what would happen to men if they ran riot as do these women.*

*With the desire of intelligent women to have some voice in the management of their affairs of their country we can fully sympathise. Indeed, on most social questions they have as much right to be heard as men, and many of them would use their votes to much more purpose than do the majority of most men. But the tactics of the suffragettes are all together deplorable".*

The same issue of also carried a separate editorial article entitled "Paid Rioters" on the front page, stating that one of their correspondents had been told by a police inspector that,

*“Many of the rioters in the Suffragette demonstration had been specially imported for the occasion from the North of England”.*

Further, the paper reprinted rumours and innuendo that that some poor working class London women had received a shilling to half a crown to participate in this riot. No evidence is given: this article’s purpose clearly was to prime the reader for the more lengthy and opinionated account of the so-called riot outside Parliament carried inside the paper.

### **Everyday business**

There are only two sources which detail the everyday business of the WSPU in West Hartlepool, both from the *Northern Daily Mail*.

The first is an article about the monthly WPSU meeting held on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 1907 at the Independent Labour Party Club on Lynn Street, West Hartlepool. Their business included deciding to send telegrams to both Charlotte Despard and Sylvia Pankhurst to congratulate them on their release from prison after the “Parliament Riot”, and instructing the secretary to write a letter to the Hartlepool’s MP Sir Christopher Furness to remind him to vote for the Women’s Enfranchisement Bill later that week.

The other reported on a meeting held 3 months later on the 21<sup>st</sup> June, this time hosted by Watson’s Cafe on Church Street, West Hartlepool. This meeting focused on the health of the town and the high infant death-rate, with the attendees unanimously calling for the appointment of a female sanitary inspector by the Council, and the branches decision to affiliate with the national headquarters.

During this time the branch was also active in bringing national speakers to the Borough, including the Yorkshire born working-class suffragette Annie Kenney (1879-1953), the co-founder of the first London branch of the WPSU, who eventually rose to become the organisation’s deputy leader.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> May 1907 Annie Kenney spoke at the Church Square school rooms, opposite Christ Church (now the Hartlepool Art Gallery). Her lecture wasn’t widely advertised, and only attracted a small audience. The meeting was opened by Mr W H Loveridge, who bemoaned the failure of the Council to re-elect Miss Mabel Cook back onto the Workhouse board as the only woman Guardian.

Kenney then spoke about the events since the founding of the WPSU in 1903, the need for women to agitate for the vote free of political parties, the inequality of laws relating to women, and against the argument that equal pay would depress all workers pay, and in summation,

*“She alluded to the desirability of making the Hartlepoons a strong branch in this movement”.*

Kenney returned to the Hartlepoons that July to campaign for a fortnight, but her activities were not reported by the local press.

### **The first opposition**

This silence in the local press about the actions of suffragettes also extended to the first known counter-demonstration against suffrage in the Borough.

During August 1907 the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies held a campaign tour across the North of England, with mixed success. For example, on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> August there was a violent reception to their meeting in Sunderland, which was widely reported in both the National and North East press, including in the *Northern Daily Mail*.

What the paper didn't report was the subsequent meeting in Hartlepool two days later on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> August. Only the *Lancashire Evening Post* carried the full story,

*SUFFRAGISTS MOBBED: The band of women suffragists who are conducting a campaign in the North-east counties received somewhat rough treatment at Sunderland on Saturday, and has a similar experience last night when they addressed a meeting on Hartlepool Town Moor. Despite the noise and interruptions, they managed to hold their meeting, but at the close there was an ugly rush, and a number of police officers had difficulty in protecting the women, who finally took refuge in a neighbouring house".*

This was also mentioned by the socialist-leaning *Shields Daily News* and by the *Bury Times*, but otherwise was ignored.

During the Edwardian period the Town Moor was regularly used by political and community organisations for rallies, speeches and events, and the fact that the Suffragists from the NUWSS had received a violent reception would have been common public knowledge in the town. Why the *Mail* didn't carry this story is therefore a mystery: maybe the opposition, or their supporters, included powerful local figures that the newspaper didn't want to aggravate?

More likely is that the paper remained unsupportive of the campaign for Votes for Women. Despite publishing over 110 articles referring to suffragettes during 1908, not a single one reports on the activity of suffragists in the Borough. The majority merely reprinted Associated Press journalist's accounts of national events involving suffragettes, usually with a negative commentary attached, or were editorial pieces which were critical or satirical of the women's movements or women's rights in general. This isn't unusual, given that national newspaper coverage of militant suffragettes was consistently negative across the country during the period 1906 to 1918.

## **The campaign starts to make ground.**

It isn't until 1909 when we can again see recorded evidence the activity of local campaigners, as during the early part of the year suffragists leafleted the "Parliament of the Hartlepoons", a men's only debating society comprising of the leading political figures across the Borough. *The Northern Daily Mail* reported on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1909 that,

*"One could not disguise the fact that the house was used to-night for the purpose of propagating the gospel of women's suffrage. In the space allotted to the general public, leaflets had been thrown about with a lavish hand, imputing all sorts of unkind things for which mere man was said to be responsible, and members of the house were also plied with them. Advertisement is the secret of success, and the suffragists knew it".*

This leafleting was definitely planned, for Amy Norman's husband Fred Norman, who sometimes spoke in debates for the Socialist Party, had already scheduled the question of women's suffrage for debate during the meeting. His motion or more likely Amy's, as a number of suffragettes were present in the audience, stated that,

*"...the time has now arrived that when the franchise should be extended to women on the same terms as it is granted to men".*

The *Mail* dismissed Fred's subsequent arguments as "*having nothing new to tell us*" and as stereotypical, but the motion received support from the Tory, Labour and Socialist members before some criticism and sarcasm from various other speakers.

The meeting voted 45 for the motion with 47 against, a defeat by just 2 votes: the ground was starting to shift, at least within those men who were most politically active in the Borough.

One of the major problems at this time was the growing division between the various advocates campaigning to widen the franchise: some in the WSPU campaigned for the vote for richer women, equal with the current rights of men with property to vote, others just for married or single women, others for all men, and others for universal suffrage for all men and all women over a certain age. All factions disagreed on both their objectives and tactics, with some in the WSPU worrying that arguing for universal suffrage was too difficult and a step too far, and would block the women's suffrage movement.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1909 this question was debated at the Socialist Club in Charles Street, West Hartlepool, between Amy. B. Norman of the WSPU and Mrs H. Jennie Baker, of Stockton, who represented the Adult Suffrage League. The motion was

*"That it is imperative that to-day we demand votes for women on the same terms as men, rather than adult suffrage".*



Amy Norman spoke for the motion, with Jennie Baker against. Norman's argument focused around her assertion that without the vote women were not free, and that giving women the vote would both improve their legal and economic position. However, when it came to universal adult suffrage,

*"...the speaker said that adult suffrage was too complex and impractical. History and logic were against adult suffrage, and it could not be carried out successfully".*

After Amy concluded her argument to some applause, Mrs Baker countered with an appeal for the rights of the working married women of England. These she stated, were the most deprived, and not even named on the municipal registers. Then she got to the crux of the argument:

*"If the wage earning capacity of a women was only equal to half that of a man, how were they to qualify for a vote on the same terms as men had it at present? The rich women would qualify, but would that improve the wage earning capacity of their poorer sisters?"*

This was met by cries of "hear, hear" and applause. It will come as no surprise that after a discussion and questions, the motion was defeated by a small majority.

### **The letter writing campaign continues**

In early October 1909 the Northern Daily Mail printed two letters ostensibly from Fred Norman supporting women's suffrage. The style and language of the letters are, however, similar to the earlier ones attributed to Amy Norman, and may have been written by her but posted in under her husband's name to maximise the chances of them being published.

The first letter condemned the forced feeding of imprisoned suffragettes, while the other asserted that the actions of the suffragists have "*made votes for women inevitable in the near future*". These stimulated deeply unsympathetic replies a week later by a letter writer using the pseudonym of *Common-Sense*, including that,

*"Votes for women may be right or wrong, but as a plain Englishman I contend that the methods being pursued by the Suffragettes are absolutely childish, and instead of convincing male voters to their way of thinking are simply alienating the sympathy of thousands".*

*Common Sense* further argued that Norman's line of reasoning, that political motivations justify all actions, would just as well validate the actions of bomb throwing anarchists and knife-wielding assassins, and misogynistically ended this last letter with the line "*Women may get things by wooing, but few men will submit to them as bullies*".

## Meetings gather pace under the Women's Freedom League

On the evening of Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> November 1909 the West Hartlepool suffragettes held an open-air meeting in Church Square.

*"An exceedingly large crowd gathered in Church-square... The Audience were much more attentive than on the last occasion of such a meeting, and there were very few interruptions".*

This was chaired by Fred Norman, with speakers Anne Cobden-Sanderson and Alice Schofield Coates, both stated to be speaking across the north on behalf of the Women's Freedom League. This is notable as the suffragist WFL had been formed in late 1907 by members breaking away from the militant and authoritarian WPSU, and theoretically were rival organisations. Maybe Amy's long-time friendship with Charlotte Despard transcended this disagreement?

Fred Norman spoke briefly in introduction and to much applause when he praised the campaigners for fighting their battle with puck and capability.

Mrs Sanderson then spoke for an hour and a half. She touched on housing reform, equal pay, the rights of mothers, divorce law, and even female roles in the military. The last would especially prove ironic in the light of subsequent events in December 1914, when the German Navy bombarded the Hartlepoons,

*"Some men have said that women should not have a vote because they could not fight, and referring to what the suffragettes had recently done during their militant campaign, the speaker humorously remarked "I think when the Germans arrive you might do worse than organise a corps of suffragettes to guard the Hartlepoons" (Laughter)".*

The meeting closed after Mrs Sanderson took a few questions from the audience.

Later that month on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November the Women's Freedom League held a meeting at the Town Hall, West Hartlepool, with Mrs Marion Coates Hansen presiding. The speakers again included Anne Cobden-Sanderson and Alice Schofield Coates, who were joined by Edmee Manning "(BA) Manchester", who had been recently imprisoned in Holloway.

Mrs Hansen welcomed the large audience and spoke about the WFL's political opposition to the Liberal Government, and their increasing influence on by-elections. Edmee Manning followed by questioning why women had advanced in education and work, but not in the right for a vote, before outlining the inequality in the legal treatment of widows and moneyed women when compared to men.

Anne Cobden-Sanderson said:

*“...that when she had arrived at the West Hartlepool station she was greeted by half a dozen wretched-looking men, each one of them trying to get her bag merely to earn a few coppers. In the face of every one of these men was hunger and want, and this was what they had with men’s government. (Laughter)... If it had not been for the militant work of the last four years they would not have such an audience as that she saw before her. (Hear, Hear)”*

During these speeches a number of dissenting voices were reported: one yelled out “Shame” against Manning’s opposition to the Government, while another shouted “What is justice? Breaking windows?” during Sanderson’s speech. The gender of these dissenters was not reported.

Despite these interruptions the applause continued. Mrs Schofield,

*“...a powerful and effective speaker, said she was sure they were educating the people of West Hartlepool in the right direction. “It is a revolution which we women are fighting for”. “*

The meeting ended after questions from the audience, none of which were reported in the newspaper.

Around this time in early 1910 a local branch of the Women’s Freedom League was formed in West Hartlepool. Few records survive to detail its membership, but its secretary in 1913 was Mrs Minnie English (born 1864, Sunderland) living at 23 Carlton Street, West Hartlepool. Mrs English’s husband was an life insurance agent, with whom she had two children.

Later that same year this branch of the Women’s Freedom League held a *Suffragette Garden Party* at Ebenezer Villa, Hutton Avenue, on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> July between 3:00pm and 6:00pm, hosted by the property owner Mrs Elizabeth Eades, with Anne Schofield Coates again as the guest speaker. Such garden parties were a common feature of the suffragist WFL’s softer tactics in convincing people to join in with the campaign for Votes for Women.

Alice Schofield Coates spoke that the fight for women’s suffrage was not new, and outlined the cause’s history since the 1859 Reform Act, before moving on to discuss recent debates. She condemned Winston Churchill and Lloyd-George for saying they supported suffrage and then voting against it in Parliament, calling them traitors and unreliable. She also criticised the Anti-Suffrage Society as it,

*“...did not represent the community - It only represented those who lived on the work of other people”.*

The campaigning year ended on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1910 with a meeting of the Women’s Freedom League at the Town Hall, West Hartlepool. The chair was Mr Meredith Atkinson, with speakers Charlotte Despard and Marion Coates Hansen of Middlesbrough.

Atkinson's opening speech praised the move towards militancy, as it was only now in his opinion that active protest was helping to get the suffrage message across. Marion Coates Hansen spoke next, reviewing progress of the League over the previous year, and the fight over the Conciliation Bill, before giving over the stage to Charlotte Despard, who was clearly the main attraction. Unlike during her previous visit in 1907, when she used the platform to argue for the cause, her reported words this time focused on the current political situation, making this meeting sound more like a political rally than a protest meeting.

Who were these North Eastern suffragettes and their supporters?

Alice Schofield Coates (1882-1975) was an early member of Women's Freedom League, and in 1919 became the first female councillor in Middlesbrough. Marion Coates Hanson (1870–1947) had been one of the founder members of the WPSU before joining the WFL, and had been the MP George Lansbury's agent during the 1906 election. Hanson was a socialist, a member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), and also eventually became a Middlesbrough Councillor. Alice and Marion were sisters-in-law, but ironically, intensely disliked each other, and privately avoided each other's company.

Anne Cobden-Sanderson (1853-1926) was the daughter of the radical politician Robert Cobden. A friend of the artist and polymath William Morris, she was a central figure in the Arts and Craft Movement (personally funding the famous "Dove Bible" artwork). An early core member of the WPSU, she too broke off in late 1907 over the Pankhurst's autocratic rule and helped to form the WFL.

The working class Elizabeth Eades (1856-1937) had been born in South Bank, Middlesbrough, but had become a successful businesswoman. Together with her husband Solomon Samuel Eades they founded S.S. *Eades* musical instrument shop at no. 43 Lynn Street, West Hartlepool, and specialised in selling pianos and organs, both to private buyers and to churches and schools. When Solomon died relatively young in 1903, Elizabeth took over their business and diversified by selling other instruments.

With a keen eye to the future, Elizabeth was amongst the first retailers to stock the new technology of gramophones and records in the Borough. Well known across the Hartlepoons for her charity works, a month after the Suffragette garden party, on August Bank Holiday 1910, Elizabeth gave a free public "*Gramophone Concert*" in Ward Jackson Park, with a collection by the Buttonhole Association for the benefit of the Cameron Hospital.

Meredith Atkinson (1883-1929) was born in Middleton, Hartlepool. Bright and intellectual, he won a scholarship to study politics at Oxford University, where he was awarded three degrees between 1908 and 1911. He married at St Hilda's Church, Hartlepool, in December 1910, and lectured at Durham University between 1911 and 1914. Immigrating to Australia just before the war, he was a major figure in founding

the Workers Educational Association across Australia, became a pacifist and internationalist after the First World War, and made a visit to the Soviet Union in 1921 as an official famine commissioner. He died in 1929 of a heart disorder.

### **Suffragette souvenirs and mementoes**

In November 1909 the Northern Daily Mail carried an article reporting on “*suffragette Christmas firework crackers*” being ordered by the WPSU, which came with their own prison headgear and vote for women badges rather than the usual party hats, mottoes and trinkets. This is not as strange as it sounds as the suffragette Maud Arncliffe Sennett was a confectioner and cracker maker. These suffragette crackers became so popular on both sides of the argument that eventually even Tom Smith and Company, the conventional inventor of the Cracker, produced boxes of satirical “Votes for Women” crackers.

These were even sold locally, as in December 1911 Taylors Drug Company of no. 7 Lynn Street, West Hartlepool, advertised that their own Christmas cracker range at the branch contained “... *the Latest Novelties in Aeroplanes, Teddy Bears, Suffragette Mottoes, Parlour Fireworks and Games [etc] ... from 4 ½d to 5s 6d a box*”.

It's also highly probably that shops in the Hartlepoons sold other suffragette mementoes, including postcards, satirical dolls representing Mrs Pankhurst, and maybe even commemorative and parody pottery figures, like the abusive but popular “Saucy Suffragette Cat” forced feeding figurine sold by retailers such as Gamages of London for Christmas 1913.

### **The campaign in the years before the War**

The year 1911 again sees a gap in our knowledge of local campaigning, with the local press not carrying any news items relating to local suffragettes. At some time during this year, or maybe earlier, however, a local branch of the NUWSS was formed in the Borough, and associated itself to the North-Eastern Federation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Its secretaries were: Mrs Mary Ellen Ainsley (b. 1863) of *Langdale House*, 17 Clifton Avenue, West Hartlepool, in 1913 and 1915; Miss Margaret Bulmer Hunter (b. 1874, a School Head Teacher) of 1 Friars Terrace, Hartlepool, in 1914; a Miss Durnwood of 82 Wansbeck Gardens, West Hartlepool in 1915 and 1916; and Mrs Morse of 33 Belmont Gardens, West Hartlepool in 1917.

Alice Schofield Coates returned in early 1912 as the guest of a joint meeting held by the “*local branches*” of the NUWSS and WFL, this time appearing down the bill below the famous suffragette Helena Swainwick.

This meeting was held at the Town Hall, West Hartlepool, at 7:15pm on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> January 1912, and notably was chaired by West Hartlepool Mayor Robert Martin. Admission was by tickets costing 2s, 1s, or 6d, which were sold in advance by A Salton Ltd (stationers) of 27 Church Street, West Hartlepool. It seems to have been a sell-out, which is relevant as ticket prices were relatively expensive at a time when a decent seat at one of the town's theatre's cost 4d.

The suffragist newspaper *The Common Cause* reported on this meeting in its edition of 25<sup>th</sup> January 1912, with the observation that,

*"The first large meeting for women's suffrage was held in the Town Hall on 10<sup>th</sup> January; Mrs Schofield Coates and Mrs Swanwick made able speeches. Songs were sung by the Women's Suffrage Choir, which had travelled from Newcastle".*

Helena Swainwick (1864-1939) was a journalist and feminist writer, and the editor of *The Common Cause*. During the First World War she became a peace campaigner and internationalist. Incidentally, she was the sister of the famous artist Walter Sickert, now unfortunately better known as an unlikely Jack the Ripper suspect than for his artworks.

The WSPU, seemingly quiet during 1910 and 1911, followed up this meeting by holding their own on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1912 at the Masonic Hall, West Hartlepool. This was presided over by West Hartlepool Councillor Robert H. Charlton, who had been invited to officiate, and who was clearly sympathetic to the cause. Charlton thanked the meeting for the honour, before going to say that:

*"He was not going to pretend that he had made a very profound study of the questions of votes for women, but he had the whole-hearted conviction that the only fair manner in which this matter could be dealt with was to treat the women in identically the same way as men (Hear, Hear)".*

Charlton went on to praise the bravery of those women who had gone to jail for their beliefs, welcomed that these days were now passing (*Hear, Hear*), and encouraged women that:

*"...If they could only see their way to drop their militant tactics and be content to match their wits, rather than their muscles, against the Government; he certainly thought the cause would have a considerably better chance of being successful (Applause)".*

He was followed by Dr Alice Burn who spoke about the successful campaign for the enfranchisement of women in her home country of New Zealand. Burn had come to Britain in support of the 1910 Conciliation Bill, and was still working for the WPSU after its rejection.

More warmly received was the last speaker, Mrs Laura Ainsworth, the chair of the Newcastle branch of the WPSU. Born in Blyth, Northumberland, Ainsworth had been a teacher before resigning to join the WPSU. In September 1909 she had been part of a rooftop protest at Bingley Hall (Birmingham), where Herbert Asquith was speaking, during which the protestors threw roof tiles at their opponents. For this she had been sentenced to two weeks in prison. Breaking her cell window, she was placed in the punishment cell, and force-fed on starting a hunger strike.

Ainsworth's fiery speech received a great deal of applause and included the observation that:

*"During the three days she had been in West Hartlepool she had seen sufficient to prove that there was some-thing wrong, or they would not have people living as they were. Personally she was a militant suffragette because she was the third generation of a suffragette family. The suffragettes of the present day had introduced militant methods because they had found it absolutely futile to go on doing what their grandmothers had done".*

Suffragette songs were also sung, accompanied by a Mrs Garbutt on the piano. Laura Ainsworth resigned from the WPSU a year later in 1913, due to disagreeing with the arson campaign.

Although now again reporting local suffrage meetings in full, with details of the speeches and arguments, the *Northern Daily Mail* still wasn't behind the movement. For example, in the very same edition that carried Laura Ainsworth's speech was the following "joke":

*"Tourist: What interested me most in my Egyptian travels was the mummies.*

*Londoner: Wonderful!*

*Tourist: Rather. It's a lost art. They could never get a woman to dry up like that now. If anyone thinks so, let him start on a Suffragette".*

Further, it's clear that a number of other speakers and activities relating to women's suffrage were not reported by the local press at this time.

For example, in the *NDM* edition dated the 6<sup>th</sup> February 1912, sandwiched between a paid advert for a lecture on "*Life in the Navy*" and another for a religious revival at the Mission Hall, was the following classified advert for a meeting on Wednesday the 7<sup>th</sup> at Brougham Hall, Hartlepool, at 8:00pm.

*"Votes for Women! Suffragettes and the Referendum, etc."*

The advertised speaker was the Glaswegian suffragette Anna Munro, who was secretary of the Scottish Council of the WFL, and a member of its National Executive. Unfortunately there is no known detail of what she said, or how she was received by her audience.

The Northern Daily Mail also ignored an interesting incident at the Cleveland Miners Gala held at Stanhope Town Hall later that same summer. Luckily, the *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* of 4<sup>th</sup> July 1912 carried full details surrounding a number of suffragettes interrupting the guest speaker Post-Master General Herbert Samuel, MP. When a steward manhandled an unnamed protesting suffragette out of the venue, one person objected;

*“So forcibly did the steward carry out his instructions that Councillor Sherwood, Hartlepool, who sat on Mr Samuels’s right, rose excitedly and protested at the action. In an instant there was an uproar, and several of the officials on the platform were gesticulating at Mr Sherwood to sit down. He at first refused to do so, and threatened to leave the platform in protest”.*

Councillor Will Sherwood was a leading member of the Independent Labour Party in Hartlepool, and clearly sympathetic to the cause. He would stand for the Borough’s MP in 1918, but fail to be elected.

### **Did Mrs Pankhurst visit West Hartlepool in 1912?**

Edited by Christabel Pankhurst, *The Suffragette* was the official publication of the WPSU from 1912 to 1918 (albeit retitled as *Britannia* in 1915 as a patriotic gesture). Despite a total run of 222 issues over these six years, the publication only mentions Hartlepool a total of six times, once twice in one issue.

In a roundup of news in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne region, which was preparing for a forthcoming speaking appearance by Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst at Newcastle Town Hall, *The Suffragette* of the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1912 reported the following,

*“West Hartlepool. Help of all kinds in needed in advertising this meeting. An open-air campaign starts today. Tickets can be obtained from Messers. Saltons, Church Street. The West Hartlepool I.L.P. passed the Lansbury Resolution.”*

Note that Saltons the Stationers were again selling the tickets for this meeting, as they had done for the NUWSS and WFL meeting earlier that year.

The campaign was advertised elsewhere in the same issue, and was planned to commence with a “Poster Parade” on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November at 11:30am. This is the first mention of the classic image of suffragettes marching with placards in the Hartlepoons. The campaign continued on Tuesday November 5<sup>th</sup> with picketing at the “Works Gates” at 12:30pm, probably the entrance to William Gray and Sons’ shipyard, followed by an open air meeting in Church Square at 7.30pm.

George Lansbury MP was a leading campaigner for women’s suffrage. Sympathetic with the WPSU, he had been imprisoned for protesting, and had carried out a four day hunger strike. He later became the leader of the Labour Party during the years



1932 to 1935. The Landsbury Resolution of May 1912 to the Independent Labour Party (ILP) condemned the Liberal Government for refusing to progress on Votes for Women, and sought withdrawal of the party from co-operation with the Government, including on the Home Rule Bill. It was supported by only one vote: that of Landsbury himself, who then resigned his seat to unsuccessfully fight a by-election purely on the suffrage question. 19 local branches of the ILP subsequently voted to support his resolution, mostly in industrial working class areas in London, Scotland, and the North of England, including West Hartlepool. This example again shows that women's suffrage was supported by the Independent Labour Party in the Borough just before the First World War.

*The Suffragette* of the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1912 also carried a list of Mrs Pankhurst's future speaking engagements during November, which included Hartlepool on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> November.

While Emmeline Pankhurst spoke at Harrogate Spa Rooms on the 12<sup>th</sup> November and at Newcastle Town Hall at 8:00pm the following day the 13<sup>th</sup> November, there is no newspaper report of her visiting or speaking in the Hartlepoons as advertised. Potentially she stopped off during her train journey between major engagements to privately speak to local supporters, including her old friend Amy Norman, but this remains speculative until further evidence is uncovered.

### **Examples of satirising the Suffragettes**

Regrettably the majority of local newspaper sources relating to suffragists and suffragettes between the years 1906 and 1914 relate to examples of satire and even abuse towards the movement, and towards women in general. A small selection is presented here to give the reader a flavour of this invective, and to show the sort of prejudice that local campaigners faced on a regular basis.

Men and women dressing up as suffragettes in parody of their activities was a regular feature during these years. Cross dressing in the theatre was seen by most Edwardians as comic rather than sexual, and this extended to public mocking of suffragists.

The first known anti-suffragette performance in public was on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1906, at the popular *Porpoise Water Gala* held the South Pier. The male-only swimming races and contests were concluded by a "SCREAMING COMIC SKETCH, Entitled, *THE SUFFRAGETTES*". This performance consisted of male members of the club dressed as suffragettes "...in the most grotesque costumes, and many of them showed distinct artist skill in the matter of make-up". Carrying banners, including one proclaiming "*Down with Men*", the clubmen held a meeting on a raft in mid-stream, which was eventually broken up by other members dressed a policemen causing "...most of the *Suffragettes*" to swim for their lives".

Another good example occurred in November 1912 around the same time as the potential visit by Mrs Pankhurst. This concerned a one-act farce called "*Women's One Weakness*", performed by a local amateur dramatics club at the "*Ye Old Cricket faire*" at the Queen's Rink. Written by the privileged son of canon Barradell-Smith of Greatham Hospital, the performance featured two "*man-hungry*" suffragettes scared by a male burglar hiding under their bed, played by R. W Trechmann, who just two years later as an army Captain commanded the Lighthouse Battery during the Bombardment. On his discovery the female leads assaulted the intruder in a mock Jiu-Jitsu fight, a parody of what was popularly known as "*Suffrajitsu*". Such parodies of the suffragette Edith Garrud's promotion of this martial art to suffragettes as a self-defence measure were common in the popular press.

Dressing up as suffragette to enter a fancy dress contest was also popular. In May 1909 a Mr Percy Watson won the best *male* fancy dress at a carnival at the Olympia Roller Skating Rink dressed as a suffragette. This fashion also tended to women. In November 1909 amongst the fancy dressed participants at a contest at The Imperial Rink were a fisherman with a monkey hung on a pole, a person dressed as "*Sambo*" in blackface, and a Miss Emmeline Turnbull dressed as "*The Suffragette... who, fittingly, describing herself as "a Cabinet Minister's nightmare", [who] endeavoured to conduct a campaign on behalf of her suffering and voteless sisters*". On this occasion Miss Turnbull won a special prize. A week later she entered another contest at the Pavilion Rink, and won the best costume in the prize category "*lady's comic character*" for the same suffragette costume, complete this time with a "*useful looking forcible feeding tube*".

Even children got in on the act, although clearly influenced by adults. A number of examples exist where children dressed as suffragettes for public, school or church performances of songs and plays. One example in November 1909 at St Joseph's Catholic Church's annual tea and concert at the Town Hall, held the day after the large WFL meeting in Church Square, comprised of,

*"A really first-rate programme... One of the most interesting items was a sketch entitled "Coming thro' the rye," by the children of Hart-lane school. The children, who were prettily dressed, and who sang nicely, caused much fun. The study little policemen dealt in very summary manner with the suffragettes, who they hustled off the stage amidst hearty laughter."*

*The Newcastle Journal* of 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, the day Britain declared war in on Germany, reported on a meeting of the "Northern Cyclists" clubs at Durham City, which included the West Hartlepool branch,

*"Much interest was taken in the decorated and fancy costume parade in the afternoon. The South Shields contingent, representing policemen in charge of suffragettes of the militant variety, were "forcibly fed" at intervals, caused a good deal of laughter"*.

The South Shields club won the prize for the “*Group creating the most fun*”, while, ironically, the West Hartlepool cycling club won a prize for “*having the largest number of ladies in the parade*”, and a Mrs Bowman won the ladies prize for “*best decorated bicycle*”. What the Hartlepool ladies thought of the Shields club’s anti-suffragette performance is not recorded.

Suffragettes also appeared in local advertising. A regular newspaper advert during 1909 for men’s clothing sale at Bennison Brothers, Lynn Street and Murray Street, was headlined by the tame ditty:

*“Hark, the little kiddies sing  
Bennison’s clothes are just the thing;  
Nothing for women, Suffragettes wild,  
All for Daddy, lads, and the child.”*

More abusive and misogynistic jokes, however, were more frequently printed in the newspapers. One reproducible example appeared in the Northern Daily Mail of 29<sup>th</sup> September 1909, in a column entitled “From Today’s Papers”,

*Forcemeat.  
In jail a Suffragette spinster  
Refused the cold meat they had minced her;  
Said she, “You’ve no right.  
To compel me to bite.”  
But a stomach pump quickly convinced her.  
-“Truth”*

Mocking the suffrage movement also extended into local theatres and cinemas, whose programming frequently included parodies and films about Suffragettes.

For example, in August 1911 the popular Music hall act “*The Menzies*” performed a “*cleverly contrived*” sketch called “*The Suffragette*” at the Palace Theatre which according to the papers “*was brimful of humour, and much appreciated by last night’s audiences*”.

Films shown at cinemas between 1907 and 1914 included such titles as the “*new humorous picture*” the “*Suffragette’s Wife*” at the Town Hall, Hartlepool, “*A Suffragette’s Dream*” at the Empress Theatre, Hartlepool, and “*A Husband’s Trick*” at the Oddfellows Hall, which was described as “*...a good comedy, in which the Suffragettes are amusingly introduced*”.

Northern Pictures Limited seems to have even specialised in such material, including showing the racist and sexist film “*Coontown Suffragettes*” in support of a more highbrow five reel (90mins) adaptation of the novel “*The World, The Flesh, and The Devil*”. *Coontown Suffragettes* was an American film version of the Ancient Greek

proto-feminist comedy “*The Lysistrata*”, twisted to make fun of modern women and Black people, played by a cast of white actors in blackface. It’s now a lost film, which is probably for the best.

### **Court cases relating to suffragettes: not what you might expect**

There are no known cases of suffragettes being arrested for protesting, breaking windows, interrupting meetings, or for carrying out arson attacks in the Hartlepoons. In addition, no known Hartlepool suffragette appears on the 1950s “Honour Roll” of those imprisoned or force fed for their beliefs, although this list is incomplete.

What there is, however, are two local court cases where suffragettes are mentioned within the evidence, and one potential link to an alleged fire-bombing of a house in Ireland.

In the *Northern Daily Mail* of 18<sup>th</sup> August 1913 was the following report,

*“Called Her Mrs Pankhurst”,*

*“At the West Hartlepool police-court today, before the Mayor (in the chair) Mr J Hardy, and Mr J. P. Fea, Mary Jane Chapman was summoned at the instance of Mary Anne Taylor for having used obscene language. Defendant denied the charge, and said that the complainant had called her Mrs Pankhurst. – Mr Smith (The Magistrates’ Clerk): That’s quite complimentary, you know. – The complainant alleged that the defendant had called her foul names. – The defendant stepped into the witness-box and reiterated her statement that the complainant had called her Mrs Pankhurst. “I told her”, she exclaimed to the court, “that I was not Mrs Pankhurst but that it was the Honourable Mrs Chapman.”. (Laughter). – The Case was dismissed”.*

A few months later on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1913, the newspaper reported on an arson case. Mr Alfred Woods, alias Jennings, alias Roberts, stood accused of setting a hay stack on fire at Glebe Farm, Hart. The owner’s *hind* (a skilled farm worker) had found the stack blazing in three places, and despite his efforts, the entire stack had been destroyed at a loss of £60. Soon after the fire two policemen walking towards West Hartlepool looking for clues came across Woods, and noticed hay on his hat and his clothing. Interrogating him further the accused reportedly said:

*“If it’s a job you want, I set the stack on fire, and if you had not got me then you would have blamed the suffragettes, and I am sure to get five years for it”.*

Despite calling the evidence a pack of lies, including rejecting that he had said anything about the fire to the police witnesses, the Judge found Woods guilty due to his long history of similar criminal offenses, and sentenced him to 18 months in prison.

While there had been an escalation within the militants of the WSPU towards a fire-bombing campaign, generally blaming suffragettes for fires was, at the time, becoming a common explanation for many fires, both accidental and deliberate. In Woods' case, he was probably commenting on his bad luck in being spotted before the finger of suspicion moved on to the populist cause.

The *Belfast News-Letter* of 1<sup>st</sup> July 1914, however, does report on an arson case blamed on Suffragettes with a connection to the Hartlepoons

The County Courthouse, Belfast, had heard a number of compensation cases in late June that year where deliberate arson attacks, where the cause was thought to be due to a "*Burning Outrage*" carried out by suffragettes. One case dealt with was that of Annandale Hall, Belfast, owned by Mr John Hartley of 31 Town Wall Street, Hartlepool, and family members, including relatives in America. A window had been broken so that the arsonist could gain entry to the empty house, and, according to the police witnesses, "*...after the fire a considerable amount of Suffragette literature was found*". The Judge agreed with the arson verdict and awarded Hartley £170 in compensation for the fire and smoke damage. This remains the only suffragette arson case identified with any connection to the Hartlepoons. John Hartley worked as draughtsman in the engineering trade, and has no known connection to protesting against suffrage or known political affiliations. It's probable that the suffragettes responsible, if they were really to blame, had no idea who owned the property.

### **Suffrage during the First World War**

Reports during the period 1913 to 1914 in the North East press again focused on the reporting of national events, especially the "Cat and Mouse" Act where the government would release imprisoned suffragettes on hunger strikes when they were weak and close to death, and then re-arrest them when they had recovered.

On the outbreak of the First World War many suffrage organisations decided to forgo their activities as a sign of their patriotism. Only a few militants continued with their activities. Public thoughts in the Hartlepoons turned to other matters, including raising new Kitchener battalions of volunteers for the Army, and collecting for Belgian refugees displaced by the Germans. These thoughts were completely overwhelmed by the Bombardment of the Hartlepoons on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1914, and its aftermath.

The fear of militant suffragette outrages, especially the firebombing of churches, was however still a worry during the first year of the war. On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915, the Northern Daily Mail reported on St Hilda's church and churchyard being reopened for the use of the general public,

*"For many years the public have had the use of St. Hilda's Churchyard, a convenience which they have greatly appreciated because of the "short cuts" it provides to different parts of the town. The church was also open to visitors, but the suffragette outrages necessitated precautions being taken to preserve*

*the ancient fabric, and therefore both church and churchyard were closed except at such times as services were being held”.*

The article went on to note opening times, to exhort people to help prevent children from damaging gravestones and the stained glass windows, and to remind people that looking after the church was the best way they could show their defiance to the Germans, who lightly damaged the roof during the Bombardment.

Later that year, on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1915, General William Booth, the founder and leader of the Salvation Army, and his wife Catherine visited West Hartlepool. The General spoke at the Empire Theatre to two packed houses on the subject of the work of the “*Salvation Army in Other Lands*”,

*“Speaking of the work of women in connection with the Army, he mentioned that when he went to see the King, his Majesty asked him, “What would you do with the Suffragettes”.*

*“I was not quite prepared for this poser”, said the General, “but I said “I don’t know what I would do in your Majesty’s place, but we in the Salvation Army have all sorts of women in our ranks, of all nationalities and temperaments, and we have solved all the difficulties by giving the women plenty of work and plenty of responsibilities”.*”

Historians widely accept that the war was a factor in accelerating the pace of change in women’s traditional roles in both the home and the workplace, especially as women took up roles in lieu of men away fighting in the war. In the Hartlepoons women joined the VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) as nurses in local hospitals, working as porters and ticket sellers on the railways, and became tram drivers and conductors. Young women also worked in heavy industry, including in shipyards where they worked in electrical fitting and pattern making, and from 1916 in the National Shell Factory, where over 80% of the workers making artillery shells were women. The latter was the second most productive in Britain, and won plaudits for its female workers.

This upsurge in working women increased the number of local young women with disposable income for the first time, although their pay rates were in general not the equivalent of the same male roles. Working hard during the day or in shifts, these working women increasingly wanted to relax in their spare time and spend their money on leisure activities. During 1917 the government, worrying that increased alcohol consumption by industrial workers, including by women, was negatively affecting wartime industrial output, increased the tax on alcoholic drinks and encouraged tighter restrictions on licensees. Many working people saw this as unfair, especially as the extra duty had been put on beer and spirits, but not on the more upper class wine and champagne. In some places women were even excluded from drinking.

These restrictions contributed to an unusual suffragette campaign by the local members of the Women's Freedom League during 1917 against excluding women from pubs and hotels across old Hartlepool.

The fully story of their fight against the exclusion of women from public houses was reported by the *Northern Daily Mail* on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1917, and carried by many other North East papers the following day:

*“WOMEN IN PUBLIC HOUSES: SUFFRAGETTES PROTEST AGAINST HARTLEPOOL ACTION: A Tour of the Hotels:*

*“Members of the Women's Freedom League – Miss Harrison, Miss [Dorothy] Ellis, and Miss Evans – called upon the Chief Constable of Hartlepool this morning to enquire on what authority the licensed victuallers of that town refused to serve any women. They were told that it was by agreement among the publicans themselves. Miss Evans questioned the legality of the proceeding, and claimed that women were by far the more sober sex, the cases of men drunkards being seven times as numerous as women. This restriction was, she said, a slur on women.*

*Mr Bladon, of the Police Court Mission, was also present. He admitted the restriction to be unjust in principle, but it was for the protection of women, just as a parent put a guard around the fire to protect his children.*

*The suffragettes protested against women being treated as children. “They would never tolerate being penalised on account of a few drunkards. Women meant to stand up for themselves”, they asserted.*

*The women then set out to visit a number of public-houses in Hartlepool. The Fleece, the Lawrenson, the Sir Colin Campbell, and many others were visited. In all cases alcoholic drinks were refused. In all but two instances lemonade was also refused.*

The newspaper report goes on to state that the publicans of every establishment they visited themselves agreed that the restriction was unnecessary, and that they thought it to be insulting respectable women, often visitors to the town. They also doubted that the restriction was legal. This response goes at odds with Chief Constable Winterbottom's earlier statement that the publicans had themselves agreed on the restriction.

The Suffragists had their own way of protesting,

*As they left each hotel they chalked one of the following legends on the pavement outside: - “Public traders must serve all the public, even the women,” “Seven men get drunk to one woman,” “Women protest against being regarded as drunkards.*

*The men in the bars all agreed that such a restriction on men would not be tolerated for a moment, and that their members of Parliament would protect their interests. Women's rights, as part of the public, can, say the suffragettes, be encroached upon with impunity as long as they are unrepresented politically".*

The issue, then, was that by being excluded some women felt that they were being wrongly labelled as drunkards or worse, and that a double-standard was in operation. Professor Claire Eustace's doctoral thesis "Daring to be Free" (1993, University of York), sums up the issue, and reminds us that not everyone in the WFL was on the side of their sisters in Hartlepool,

*"The other response to denying women access to social venues was to demand absolutely equal treatment. This was favoured by branches in Portsmouth and Hartlepool whose members were apparently not so concerned with temperance, and instead demanded, and in Hartlepool won, some concessions. By 1918 their efforts proved a source of amusement as delegates at the Annual Conference were told of:*

*"...Those terrible drunken women at Hartlepool that were a scourge to the town because they were drinking beer that the men wanted..." "*

## **The Vote**

While Hartlepool members of the WFL were campaigning for equal treatment the cause of women's suffrage was finally making ground in Parliament. Without going into the full details, in essence politicians could no longer ignore the injustice that a vast majority of the men who were fighting for their country could still not vote, while women had clearly demonstrated that they had contributed to the Nation through work and their efforts on the Home Front.

The bill for a new Representation of the People Act was passed by a majority of 385 to 55 in the House of Commons on 19 June 1917.

The Representation of the People Act of 1918 granted the vote to 8.4 million women over the age of 30 who held £5 worth of property, or who were married to a man who did. The same Act gave the vote to all men over the age of 21, increasing the number of men who could vote by 5.6 million. This tripled the electorate, but also deliberately ensured that women would not outnumber men in the electorate, which would have occurred if universal suffrage had been passed.

Activity within the WPSU now turned to creating a political party of their own, entirely for women. *The Suffragette* of 17<sup>th</sup> May 1918 published an editorial which encouraged women to vote for "The Women's Party" (actually the WSPU's own political party) as they mistrusted the Labour Party, calling them Bolsheviks.



More relevant to the Hartlepoons however was that on the front cover of this edition was a “Black List” of mainly Liberal MPs who had voted against the Prime Minister and his Government and sided with Mr Asquith against women’s rights on 9<sup>th</sup> May that year, “...*who will be opposed by Women Voters at the next General Election*”.

The list includes Sir Walter Runciman, the Liberal MP for the Hartlepoons from 1914, who was reputedly unsympathetic to the cause of women’s rights. This criticism, right or wrong, seems to have had an impact, as he was not selected by the Liberal coalition to stand at the next election.

This is the last mention of suffragettes in connection with the Hartlepoons in any media source. We don’t know if the local branches of the WPSU, WFL, and NUWSS remained active after 1919; hopefully future research may shine new light on their member’s subsequent activities.

It was another 10 years before women gained equality with men in Parliamentary Elections. The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act of 1928 allowed all women aged 21 or over to vote, adding 5 million more women to the electorate, finally ending the long struggle for universal suffrage.



**Researched and Written by Mark Simmons,  
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