

Wrexham and Votes for Women



Kitty Marion (above) was arrested for heckling Lloyd George at the Royal National Eisteddfod at Wrexham, 1912. For this, and other protests, she was regularly beaten, humiliated and imprisoned. She was force-fed 232 times.

How did we arrive at such gross mistreatment? And why is it still largely unrecognised?

Witness's testimonies from men and women describe "unarmed women rode down by mounted police, driven under buses and horse carriages" (Marlow). Women addressing a crowd stood on grocer's boxes because they were less likely to be pulled from beneath their feet than chairs; they were pelted with eggs and rubbish, cayenne pepper was blown from bellows and rats let loose amongst the crowd. Their clothes were torn, which mattered more to them than physical injuries - often sustained when they were forcibly thrown from their meeting place. Some people were supportive, praising the speakers for their pluck; others less so.

"Don't yer wish yer was a man?" shouted one heckler. "No! Do you?" (Joyce Marlow).

Britain in the early 1800's was not a democracy. Voting was the privilege of men who owned a degree of property and lived in rural areas; voting was not the right of all citizens.

The seeds of the women's' suffrage movement were sewn in 1825 by William Thompson, a political and social reformer. He wrote 'An appeal of one half of the human race' to urge women to overcome "exclusive laws restraining your exertions" (from further education and from the vote) and recognise their oppression "for no vice, for no crime."

Women weren't specifically barred from voting until 1832, when the Reform Act gave just one in five men the vote in a move towards eventual democracy. Married women became *feme covert* in the eyes of the law, her rights and obligations subsumed by those of her husband.

Many Welsh women worked the family farm, unpaid, in addition to caring for their family; women contributing no income to the family had no voice.

How did the seeds of the movement take root, especially when women had few opportunities to organise themselves into a force?

The industrial revolution threw together women who had previously worked alone at home and gave them the opportunity to share their thoughts. Lives were hard; in 1842 women and boys under 10 years old were forbidden to work underground, certainly a loss of valuable income albeit small for women in the quarries and mines of Wales. The 1867 Factory Act restricted women's hours to 10 a day, and in 1878 to a 56 hour week. Women also bore the workload of bringing up a family.

They paid tax, they abided by the laws of the land; they should therefore be expected to vote for them. Kitty Marion was an actress and singer who paid her union fees and voted in union business; why then should she not be allowed to vote for Parliamentary matters?

But, like the married *feme covert*, this straight-forward, fair argument was subsumed by staunchly held beliefs such as, "God created men and women different - then let them remain each in their own position" (Queen Victoria, 1870); women were believed unsuitable for the aggressive political world; it was assumed that the majority of women did not want to be involved in politics and voting.



By the mid 1800's various groups had organised themselves to represent the spectrum of opinions shared by women of all classes and political persuasions. The first was the forerunner of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, started in Manchester in 1865. Florence Nightingale joined in 1868. The most successful of groups had good communication strategies. The NSWSP published a bimonthly journal, 'Votes for Women'. The journal ensured that local Branches felt part of the whole organisation; it allowed opinions to be shared, gave reports of meetings and talks held all over the country, strengthening and uniting the cause. They were supported by The Men's Political Union for Women's Enfranchisement.



In addition to the journal, talks were given in factories during meal breaks and on street corners. Women chalked the times and venues for meetings on pavements; Kitty Marion heard such a speaker voicing opinions she herself shared, she was inspired to join the organisation and began selling the 'Votes For Women' journal, a move which alienated her from some theatres who were unwilling to employ 'that suffragette.'

There were several unsuccessful petitions presented to Parliament seeking votes for women.

But the message continued to rumble on; Suffragettes inspired poetry, plays and even dolls:



Protest marches were held, all ignored. Parliament maintained the belief that the majority of women did not want the vote.

Wales was a staunchly patriarchal society largely unwilling to consider a new opinion. The first Welsh branch of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) was formed in Llandudno in 1907.

Speakers in Wales were roughly treated. Some mining areas such as Wrexham and Ruabon were considered "too rough" for speakers to go into. Nevertheless, there were branches of the NUWSS in Rhyl, Wrexham and Llangollen, whose secretary was a Miss Price of 76 Beechley Road, Wrexham. Regular Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) meetings were held in Wrexham, Ruthin and Denbigh as well as literature circulated in Welsh and English.

On Saturday June 13th 1908 the NUWSS organised a march through London. Many important delegates from around the world would be in London that day; they were attending the International Conference for Women's Suffrage in Amsterdam on June 15th. They would therefore be able to attend the march in London.

The eight blocks show the large number and range of attendees. Hopefully, the contingent from the Wrexham area would have been part of Block 1. They formed part of the West Lancashire, West Cheshire and North Wales Federation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies,
25, Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W.

PROCESSION,
SATURDAY, JUNE 13th, 1908.

**ROUTE:—Up Northumberland Avenue, via Cockspur Street,
Lower Regent Street, and Piccadilly.**

Instructions for those Joining in the Procession.

Punctuality is of the utmost importance.

Please join the Block in which you wish to walk not later than **2.30 p.m.** Your place in the Block will be indicated by your Special Banner.

Form up 6 abreast (except in Blocks 2 and 3, which will march 4 abreast), with each line about a yard apart.

The Blocks will be arranged as follows (see Plan other side):—

BLOCK 1. (6 abreast) **Provincial N.U.W.S Societies,** alphabetically arranged, headed by the **PRESIDENT, Mrs. HENRY FAWCETT, LL.D.**

BLOCK 2. (4 abreast) **Colonials and Internationals. Professions:** Medical Women, University Women, and Education.

BLOCK 3. (4 abreast) **Professions continued:** Business Women, Office Women.

BLOCK 4. (6 abreast) **Professions continued:** Writers, Artists, Actors, Musicians, Nurses, Physical Training, Gardeners, Farmers, Homemakers, &c.

BLOCK 5. (6 abreast) **Societies:** Women's Co-operative Guild, Southwark Working Women, Employment Reform League, National Union of Women Workers, Ethical Societies, &c.

BLOCK 6. (6 abreast) **Political Societies:** Liberals, Fabians, Conservatives and Unionists.

BLOCK 7. (6 abreast) **Women's Freedom League.**

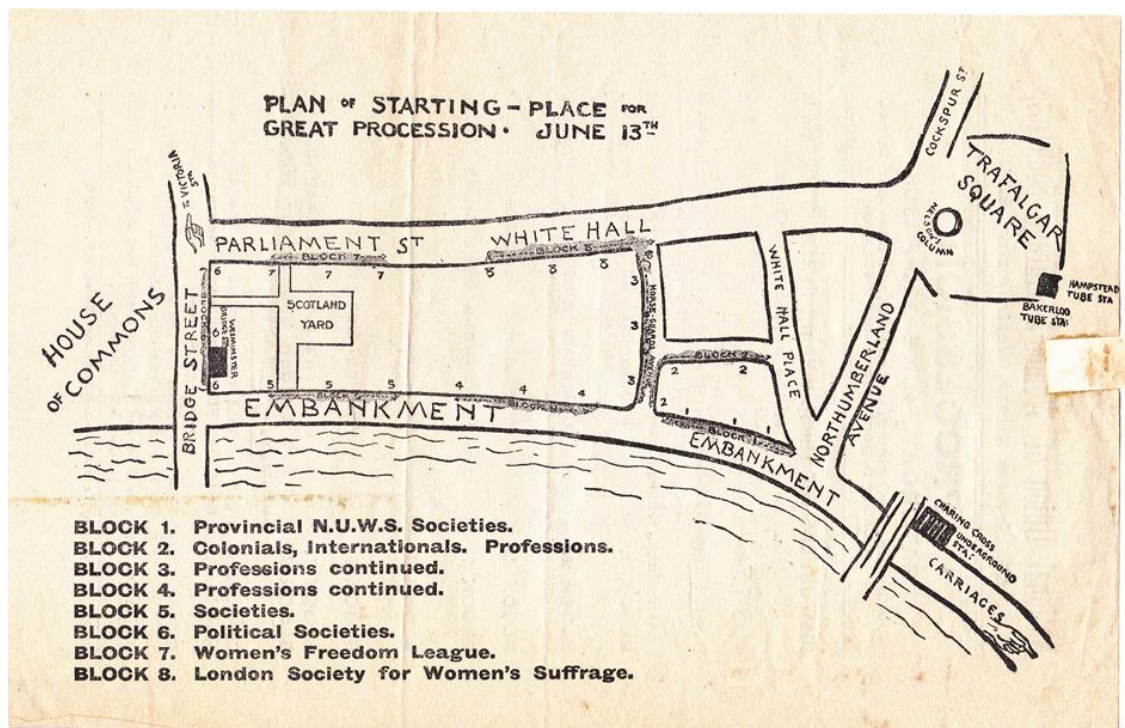
BLOCK 8. (6 abreast) **London Society for Women's Suffrage,** arranged alphabetically in Constituencies.

Everyone is urged to take their Tickets for the Albert Hall beforehand, as there may not be any left for Sale at the doors.

Holdes of Brake Tickets will find the Brakes on the Embankment to the East of Northumberland Avenue.

Behind the Brakes will be the Carriages; and, last of all, the Motor Cars near the Temple.

Printed by **VACHER & Son,** Westminster House, S.W.—16298.



The Women's Social and Political Union chose to make the following Sunday 'Women's Sunday.' So on June 21st they held a procession through London finishing in a rally in Hyde Park.

Up until now, a succession of Prime Ministers had all largely ignored the appeals for women's suffrage. But the general election in 1910 gave the country a hung Parliament of Liberals and Conservatives; a Conciliation Bill giving women the vote was passed by Parliament in 1911 with 288 for and 88 against. But the government, led by Herbert Asquith, vetoed the bill. This incensed the Suffrage Movement. Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer feared the Conciliation Bill would "add hundreds of thousands of votes throughout the country to the strength of the Tory party." According to the National Census women greatly outnumbered men at that time, and Lloyd George believed they would vote against him. Whether or not this opinion was in the public domain, the sense of betrayal and desperation felt by supporters of women's suffrage was possibly underestimated.

The newly formed Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU, led by the Pankhursts) made women's suffrage a national issue. They were convinced that it was time for 'deeds not words' and militant action began, reaching its peak in Wales in 1912 and in England in 1913.



The press began to react. The Daily Mirror coined the term 'Suffragette' for militant campaigners. Generally, the press used the same words to describe the 'outrages' as they would for any reign of terror. Suffragettes wore a uniform of purple, white and green, marched to an anthem, and behaved as an organised army attacking what Emmeline Pankhurst said were the things most valued by contemporary society: 'money, property and pleasure.' Windows were smashed.



Walls were defaced, buildings including theatres and sports pavilions set on fire; national monuments, statues or paintings damaged and defaced; golf courses dug and slogans painted on the grass; telegraph and telephone cables cut and post boxes set on fire.

Covert photographs of suffragettes were assembled by the police, without the permission of the women involved; these were the first surveillance photographs of the UK. Funded by the Home Office, they were taken in the exercise yard at Holloway Prison using state of the art equipment. Each prisoner had a file containing photographs, a physical description and surveillance reports. On release, these files were given to officers tasked with maintaining surveillance on the women, and to guards stationed at possible and known targets of suffragette activity.



1. Margaret Scott.
2. Olive Hockin - artist who trained at the Slade and exhibited at the Royal Academy. She was imprisoned for arson and damage.
3. Margaret McFarlane - imprisoned for smashing windows.
6. Rachel Peace - alias Jane Short.
7. Mary Gertrude Ansell – businesswoman.
- 8: Maud Brindley.



10. Evelyn Manesta - guilty of damaging artwork in Manchester Art Gallery. The policeman's arm restraining her was removed when the photograph was used.



11. Mary Richardson - arsonist, one of the first to be force fed. Slashed the Rokeby Venus painting in the National Gallery to highlight the depiction of women and their lack of power. She witnessed Emily Wilding's act at the Epsom Derby.
12. Lillian Lenton - alias May Dennis, a dancer from Leicester responsible for arson attacks in London.
13. Kitty Marion,
14. Lillian Forrester - smashed windows, damaged paintings in Manchester Art Gallery.
15. Miss Johansen.
16. Clara Giveen - set fire to grandstand at Hurst Park, London.
17. Jennie Baines of Birmingham - factory worker from age 11.

Guilty women were imprisoned. By the end of 1912 there were 240 such prisoners. They were punished with harsher sentences than other criminals.

Hampstead Women's Social and Political Union.
178, FINCHLEY ROAD, N.W.

**WINDOW BREAKING
AND
INCITEMENT
TO
MUTINY.**

For Breaking Windows as a Political protest, Women are now in H.M. Gaols serving sentences of Four and Six months imprisonment.

For Inciting Soldiers to Disobey Orders, a much more serious crime, known to the law as a felony, and punishable by penal servitude, the Publishers of the "Syndicalist," were sentenced to nine months hard labour, and the Printers of the paper to six months hard labour.

The Government under the pressure of men with votes reduced this sentence on the Publishers to Six months imprisonment without hard labour, and the sentence on the Printers to One month without hard labour.

**IS THIS JUSTICE TO
VOTELESS WOMEN ?**

The prisoners demanded to be treated as political prisoners and refused food in protest.

The sudden influx of articulate, strong-minded women into the prisons was a problem for the government; the prisoners were writing letters to everyone about the appalling conditions. The King wanted to know why hunger strikers weren't being force fed; this duly commenced, sometimes before women had even been tried for their offence.

Miss Dorothy Pethick wrote to the editor of 'Votes for Women' about her time in Newcastle Prison. She described the dirty state of the equipment used to force-feed her. The nasogastric tube was stored in a basket on a window sill, not in boracic solution; the tube was not lubricated with glycerine to aid its passage until four days before her release, by which time her nasal passages were very inflamed.

116 doctors protested against the policy of force-feeding to the prime minister, to no avail. When members of the public joined in the protest, the government relented by allowing weakened prisoners to be released home providing they reported back each day – the so-called Cat and Mouse Bill of 1913. When they had recovered sufficiently they were returned to prison.

When activists threatened to kidnap Members of Parliament and force-feed them, this was taken seriously; private detectives were employed to protect the targeted men.



Peaceful protests continued from the suffragists of the NUWSS, led by the Fawcetts; talks were held, literature written, the message continued to be driven home. But the ‘deeds not words’ became increasingly violent and sometimes were felt to be detracting from the cause. In 1913, even the action of Emily Wilding at the Epsom Derby, resulting in her death a few days later, was met with rage by the crowd:

“There was an awful silence that seemed to go on for minutes, then, suddenly, angry shouts and cries arose and people swarmed out on to the racecourse. I was rooted to the earth with horror until a man snatched the paper I was still holding in my hand and beat it across my face. That warned me of my own danger.” (Mary Richardson).



The situation in Wales was optimistic when popular liberal Lloyd George became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1908. There were high hopes of women being granted the vote. He was the first Welsh-speaking minister, Welsh being his mother tongue; Welsh phrases were heard for the first time in campaigns for maximum impact: "Plydleiswch I Ferchaid!"

Various Welsh branches of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies maintained a law-abiding, peaceful stance. They felt strongly that the militancy of the WSPU was damaging the cause. They organised tours of prominent speakers, gave out their official newspaper, "The Common Cause," as well as leaflets in Welsh and English and door-to-door canvassing. They organised study classes, debates and various forms of entertainment including whist drives, plays, concerts and dances, seasonal functions and cake sales. Deputations were made to local Members of Parliament and local Councillors to seek their support, and each branch had its own press secretary; press coverage was always sought for events. Both English and Welsh language newspapers held a weekly 'Suffrage News' column and were supportive of the suffragists (as opposed to militant suffragettes) cause.



Wales also had nineteen branches of the National League Opposing Women's Suffrage by 1912, none of which were in the North East of Wales or the southern coalfields.

After the Conciliation Bill was vetoed by the Government, Wales became the scene of some of the most serious incidents outside of London. Supporters of the militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) were ready to make their feelings known to Lloyd George.



Lloyd George drew a large crowd when he attended the National Eisteddfod in 1912. All eyes were on Wrexham, where it was held. The events of September 14th are described by the weekly Welsh Language newspaper *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*:

TRANSLATION: This undoubtedly is the big day of the festival a day which will long be remembered by Eisteddfodwyr of all sorts. Generally called 'Lloyd George day' – and that's what it is in more than one meaning... People turned their faces towards Wrexham from all parts of the country. By two o'clock, the tent was full to its rafters – some sitting, others standing as best as they could. There was at least thirteen thousand within the pavilion walls and outside, thousands more. We are not exaggerating when saying this.

The Eisteddfod was prepared for suffragettes:

TRANSLATION: Strong police officers were placed here and there in the Pavilion to look out for troublemakers, and others had been briefed to serve if needed.

This is what happened:

TRANSLATION: Before Mr Lloyd George had finished a sentence or two, the peace was shattered by a thin shrieking, coming from somewhere in the front seats, undoubtedly one of the 'Women for Votes'. Within a second it caused general excitement, and the next second, a smart young girl was in the arms of two police officers, being hurried away towards the door of the Pavilion. She only said a few words, but this was enough to alienate the crowd. 'Chuck her out' said someone close by, and this is what happened, quite unceremoniously.

Y Brython was a weekly bilingual newspaper established for the large Welsh population living in Liverpool. It reported:

TRANSLATION: The moment the Chancellor opened his mouth, one of the petticoated bandits would scream their inane message, and three or four police officers would rush to fetch them, and on the way towards the door, everyone would shove and push the woman, so roughly that a few of the silly women will be bruised and scarred for the rest of their lives. I saw one witch, when being taken past the centre of the stage in the arms of a policeman, turn to Mr Lloyd George, frothing at the mouth, pulling the most diabolical scowl I ever saw.

More and more women escalated the protest, as described in Baner ac Amserau Cymru:

TRANSLATION: Woman after woman was moved; they were swept past the stage with the greatest speed, and if they were not guarded by police officers they would, undoubtedly have been castigated in the pavilion itself. Their hats were thrown off and their hair pulled before they reached the crowd outside... They were pleased to be guarded in an ante-room, where they were held captive for hours, as a crowd of four thousand awaited them outside. It is said that one of the women was from Glamorganshire and another from Shropshire. The excitement lasted for about half an hour.

The Western Mail, 9/9/12 is cited by Wallace describing the scene outside the pavilion as being even worse. The police were “helpless to protect their charges from the infuriated mass, which had descended into a mob outside the doors. Each of the women were smacked in the face, each one lost her hat, each one had bundles of hair torn ruthlessly from their roots, and each one suffered indignities. Blood flowed from the face of one of the women, the scalps of all of them bled owing to the uprooting of hair, and it was recorded by a credible eye-witness that the knife was used against one of the women, but happily the cut was not serious. The police were helpless, and the assailant was not arrested. The coats, dresses and blouses of the five women were torn more or less badly, and indeed one of them was almost stripped of her upper garments, and she presented a sorry spectacle.”

Another press cutting cited by Marlow describes male supporters being “stripped almost naked, bruised from head to foot, and seemed to have been kicked and struck on almost every part of his body.” A woman dragged from the stage itself was set upon by the crowd, “they tore off her hat and dragged handfuls of hair from her head.” When ejected from the Eisteddfod pavilion protesters were attacked “by a large crowd outside.”

Several sources mention the fact that hair and clothing were proudly taken home as souvenirs by members of the crowd.

Disruptions continued a week later at his home town of Llanystumdwy, Caernarfon. Opening a new village hall, he began to speak and was heckled by suffragettes in the crowd. The women were angrily ejected and roughly treated. Some reports state that a woman was stripped to the waist, another that handfuls of hair were torn from a protester’s head; both torn clothing and hair being given as souvenirs. Some reports mention a woman being thrown into the River Dwyfor and possibly killed, whilst others report that she was thrown into a hedge. The Welsh press were very scornful of the women and their cause, but The Mirror and The Illustrated London News were shocked at the level of violence shown towards the women; they charged the men with destroying the peaceful, Non-conformist, Chapel-going image of Wales.



Following these incidents, the police forbade all suffrage organisations from holding meetings on grounds of 'public order.' It was stated, "These are mining districts, and have the reputation of being terribly rough and strongholds of Liberalism." At Trevor, a meeting was "made impossible by gangs of roughs, who gathered in force. Our placards were torn to ribands, brick-bats were collected and the uncontrolled excitement of the whole populace was enormous." The suffrage cause was thereby restricted to canvassing and distributing literature.

So far, the degree of force used against protesters appears to be out of proportion to the acts committed. This possibly escalated the situation even further.

Two bombs were placed in a house being built for Lloyd George at Walton Keys Golf Links in 1913. The first explosion blew out the flame of the second bomb; no-one was hurt but Lloyd George was reportedly furious. £500 damage was caused.

The Daily Mirror

THE MORNING JOURNAL WITH THE SECOND LARGEST NET SALE.

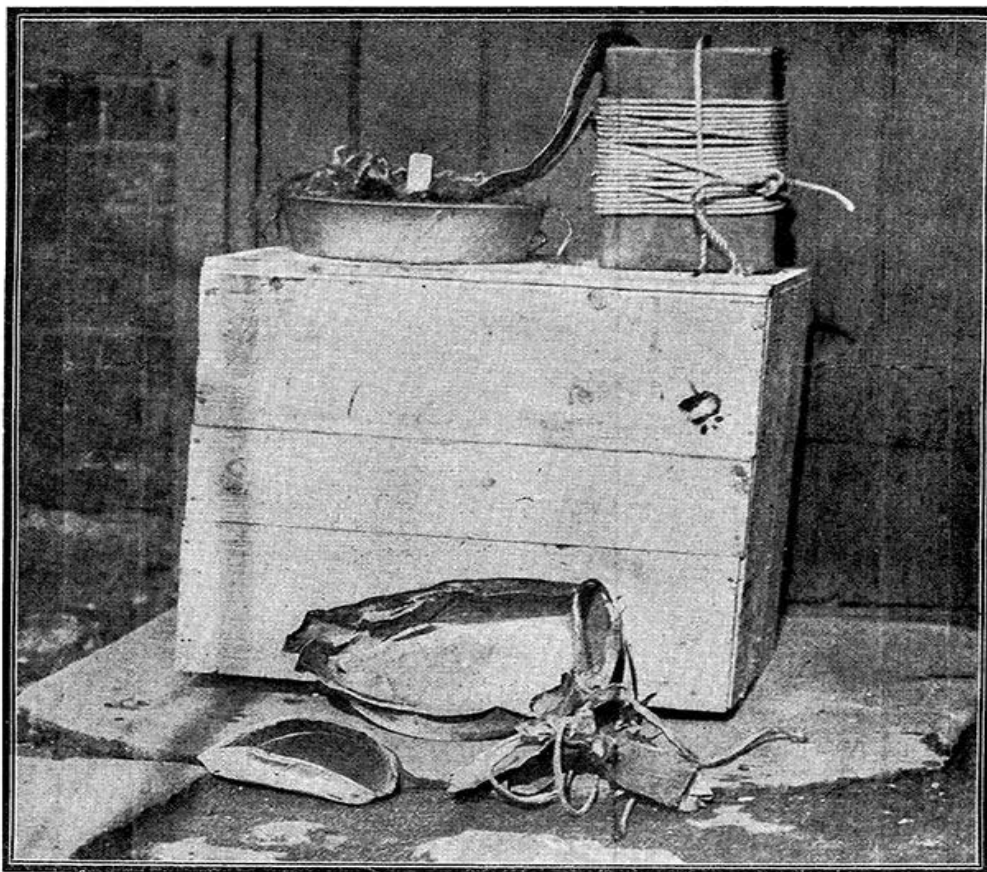
No. 2,910.

Registered at the G.P.O.
as a Newspaper.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1913

One Halfpenny.

THE LATEST POLITICAL ARGUMENT: MR. LLOYD GEORGE'S NEW COUNTRY HOUSE WRECKED BY A BOMB.



An extraordinary outrage was perpetrated yesterday at Mr. Lloyd George's new country house adjoining Walton Heath golf course, a bomb exploding in one of the bedrooms, wrecking the whole of the upper floor. A second bomb failed to explode. Two harpins were found on the premises, and the general opinion is that it is the work of suffragettes. It is supposed to be the latest "argument" in favour of votes for women, and is summed up by "General" Mrs. Drummond, the well-

known militant suffragette, as "grand." The photograph shows all that remains of the bomb which exploded lying on the floor. On the rocking-case is the infernal machine which failed to go off, tied round with rope. The knot is that of a woman. The fuse leads into a bucket of shavings, in which is a candle. This, presumably, was blown out by the force of the explosion of the other bomb. Other photographs appear on pages 5 and 6.—(Daily Mirror photographs.)

One newspaper report of 1914 states that two young men were investigated for setting fire to Coedpoeth Station, along with several other 'copycat incidents' in Wales, but most other local newspapers attribute it to suffragettes.

WREXHAM (Wales), June 20.—Militant suffragettes set fire to and destroyed the station and several adjoining buildings at Coedpoeth, near here, last night. An attempt also was made to set fire to a train.

The First World War broke out in 1914. Women served as nurses, ambulance drivers and volunteers on the battlefields; at home, they took on male employment and proved as able to do the work as men, although paid less. This factor helped to start change Parliamentary and cultural perception of women. The photograph shows women hauling coal, possibly for a gas company.



In 1918 women over the age of 30 who were householders or wives of householders, who lived in property with rent of £5 per year or were graduates of British universities were given the vote. Full enfranchisement was given to women over the age of 21 in 1928, giving them the same terms as men.

Kitty Marion's autobiography has never been published, but the journal she left has important documentary evidence of the campaign. Typescript copies are held in the University of London, the Museum of London and The New York Public Library. Although never convicted, she probably bore responsibility for the pipe bomb that exploded in Alexander Park, Manchester in 1913; and for the fire that almost destroyed the train of empty carriages at Teddington Station.

Her campaign ended when she was imprisoned three years for setting fire to the pavilion at Hurst Park Racecourse with Clara Givens. It was the most extreme response of all to the death of Emily Wilding beneath the hooves of the King's Horse at the Epsom Derby. Church services were disrupted by shouts for her release.

She served 7 terms in total. After the sinking of The Lusitania she was granted permission to be deported to the USA; born Katherina Shafer in Westphalia, Germany she came to live with an aunt in England at the age of 15. In the USA, she campaigned for birth control to be made available to women.

Herbert Jones, Anmer's jockey at the Epsom Derby, attended Emily Davidson's funeral and presented a wreath. He reported being "haunted by that poor woman's face" and committed suicide in 1951.

I am continuing to search for information about the Wrexham branches of the NUWSS and WSPU. I am currently waiting for a response from The Women's Library at the LSE where their records are stored. They also keep a copy of Kitty Marion's autobiography, which I would like to see.

Bibliography

The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928: Ryland Wallace

Suffragettes: The fight for votes for women: Joyce Marlow

Votes for Women: The North Wales Suffragists' Campaign 1907-1914: Barbara Lawson-Reay

The Weaker Sex? Violence and the Suffragette Movement: History today: Fern Riddell

Our Mother's Land: Angela V John

Photographs from the Museum of London

People's Collection, Wales: Baner ac Amserau Cymru

Pathe footage of Suffragettes Campaign: Youtube

<http://www.notbored.org/england-history.html> A history of surveillance in England

Buzzfeed: The Most Powerful Photographs of World War I

National Library of Wales, Department of Pictures and Maps

The Daily Mail online archives

The Daily Mirror online archives

Oldbaileyonline.org

The Women's Library: London School of Economics.