

THE SUFFRAGETTE HANDKERCHIEF

at

THE PRIEST HOUSE, WEST HOATHLY.



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SUFFRAGETTE HANDKERCHIEF. HOLLOWAY PRISON, MARCH 1912.

March 1912 saw the second wave of window-smashing demonstrations organised in London by the Women's Social & Political Union (WSPU), when the militant campaign for women's suffrage was at its peak. After the earlier demonstrations of November 1911, 223 women had been arrested for breaking the windows of shops in The Strand & of Government buildings in Whitehall.

The March demonstrations were larger & better organised & timed to coincide with the discussion in Parliament of the Conciliation Bill that would have given the vote to about one million, mainly single, women. Militant feeling had been growing in the country & it became apparent that peaceful protests could never be successful.

On the evening of Friday March 1st, & again on the following Monday, WSPU supporters gathered in the shopping streets of the West End, Knightsbridge, Kensington & Chelsea. They were armed with hammers or stones & at a pre-arranged time they began smashing the windows of shops & offices. Once again over 200 women were arrested.

Following the demonstrations the leaders of the WSPU, Emmeline Pankhurst & Mr. & Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence were arrested & sentenced to nine months in prison, although Christabel Pankhurst escaped to Paris where she remained in exile until the First World War. The Government granted them special privileges, which they refused to accept but for the majority of prisoners there were no such concessions.

Demonstrators were, on average, sentenced to two months imprisonment for refusing to be fined or bound over to keep the peace, or were sentenced directly to two to six months in prison. Holloway was soon full & women were sent to Aylesbury or Winsom Green, Birmingham. Nevertheless the prisons were badly over-crowded & the women were denied the status of political prisoners, which they sought. Hunger strikes were started to reinforce the women's demands & many were brutally forcibly fed. By the end of June most of the hunger strikers were released on medical grounds. They claimed a victory but in 1913 the Home Secretary, McKenna, introduced the "Cat & Mouse" Act, which allowed the police to re-arrest convicted hunger strikers once they had recovered.

The handkerchief, which was probably embroidered in one of the women's limited exercise periods, bears sixty-six signatures & two sets of initials. Most of the women who signed were participants in the March demonstrations. A few were well known as militant members of the WSPU & had been imprisoned many times but the majority were rank & file members of the organisation. They came from all parts of the country & from a variety of class backgrounds & age groups simply to support the "Cause".

The following is a list of the women who signed the handkerchief, with the limited information we have on them:

Mary A. Aldham.

She had been imprisoned after the November 1911 window-smashing demonstrations & was sentenced to six months after the March protest. She took part in the hunger strike & was released at the end of June without being forcibly fed. She was one of the two grandmothers whose names appear on the handkerchief.

Janie Allan.

She was imprisoned in November & sentenced to four months in March. Her trial was notable for her speech comparing the apparent tolerance of child abuse, the white slave traffic (kidnapping of young girls who were forced into prostitution) & the exploitation of women at work, with the outcry over breaking shop windows. She was a member of a wealthy Socialist shipping family from Glasgow, where 10,500 people signed a petition protesting at her imprisonment. In May she barricaded herself in her cell & later joined the hunger strike, which led to her being forcibly fed. She continued with her militant actions after her release & in 1914 she became famous for firing a blank shot at a policeman trying to arrest Mrs. Pankhurst.

Doreen Allen.

Sentenced to four months she was forcibly fed after joining the hunger strike. To pass the time a scene from Shakespeare's "*The Merchant of Venice*" was performed by the prisoners & she took the part of Narissa.

Kathleen Bardsley.

No information available. She may have used a false name when arrested. This was often done to protect a husband or family.

Janet Boyd.

The second grandmother on the handkerchief, she was imprisoned in November & sentenced to six months in March. She went on hunger strike but released at the end of June without being forcibly fed.

Hilda Burkitt.

She was a WSPU organiser in Birmingham & had been arrested many times before being sentenced to four months in March. At her trial she said that she had done nothing malicious & refused to be bound over, saying that she would consider it a disgrace to womanhood. She went on hunger strike & was released before the end of her sentence. She played the part of Shylock in "*The Merchant of Venice*". In 1914 she was imprisoned again for setting fire to a house & some haystacks in Suffolk.

Eileen Casey.

Sentenced to four months, she was forcibly fed after going on hunger strike. She was arrested on at least two other occasions; once in Bradford, when she was sentenced to nine months but escaped dressed in men's clothing & again in Nottingham when she was sentenced to 15 months after being found in possession of explosives.

Isabella Casey.

She was arrested in March but no further information is available.

Kate E. Teresa Cardo.

She was awarded the WSPU medal for taking part in the 1912 hunger strike but little else is known of her.

Grace Chappelow.

From Chelmsford in Essex, she had been arrested in November & was imprisoned again, for four months in March.

Georgina J. Cheffins.

Sentenced to four months. At her trial she said that she was a Suffragist by conviction, because, after living & working among the very poor for more than twenty years, she had come to the conclusion that all efforts to improve their conditions were futile without the benefit of the franchise. She supported the WSPU because she felt that their militant methods gave the best chance of success. She joined the hunger strike & was forcibly fed.

Constance J. Collier.

She was Hon. Secretary of the Hampstead WSPU & was sentenced to four months.

Constance Craig.

She had been imprisoned in November & was sentenced to two months hard labour in March. She later wrote of her first spell in prison; "I was sentenced to three weeks but there were so many of us that the authorities got muddled, & I served only three days – someone else did my three weeks".

Ethel M. Crawby.

No information available.

Nelly Crocker.

One of the organisers of the Nottingham branch of the WSPU she was sentenced to four months in prison for attacking a post office in Sloane Square. At her trial she said that she was there as a result of the brutality shown against women on "Black Friday" (when women marching on Parliament had been attacked by the police). She also wanted to protest against the vindictive sentences given to WSPU supporters.

Alice Davies.

Forty-two years old & from Liverpool she was sentenced to three months. She said at her trial that women were determined to fight for the same human rights enjoyed by men. They were tired of being treated as aliens & would continue their struggle until they had reached their objective.

Edith Downing.

She had been imprisoned in November & was sentenced to six months in March. At her trial she told the jury that she regretted that peaceable & law-abiding women had been forced to do these things. She referred to the brutality of "Black Friday", when she had almost lost her life & to the taunts of cabinet ministers over the women's previous mild methods. She said that women were prepared to die in this "agitation". She joined the hunger strike & was forcibly fed before being released early in June.

Emma Fowler.

She was arrested in March but no further information is available.

Lettice Floyd (1865-1934).

Sentenced to two months hard labour. She came originally from Berkswell, near Solihull where she was a nurse in a children's hospital. She later wrote of this experience; "I was there some years, but as most of the cases seemed to be due to bad housing, bad feeding or immorality, it was not entirely satisfactory work, & it did not go to the root of the matter". With her sister, Mary, she set up a local branch of the Birmingham & District Suffrage Society but after the first militant actions of the Suffragettes this was dissolved & she left the hospital to work for the WSPU. In 1912 she was Hon. Secretary of the Halifax & Huddersfield branch. She was arrested several times, in London, Leeds, Hull & Cardiff.

Katherine Gatty.

A member of the Women's Freedom League & a friend of Emily Wilding Davison, she was imprisoned in November & was given a six-month sentence in March. At her trial she said that men were allowed to break women's hearts & homes without punishment & that for breaking £42 worth of glass she was being sentenced to four months more than an Edinburgh man who had broken his wife's skull. In her opinion property was worth more in the eyes of the law than the person. When in prison for the first time she had seen the misery & poverty &, even though she was peaceable by nature, she would gladly break the law if by doing so she could obtain for women some voice in the making of it. Although Suffragettes were normally segregated from other prisoners this was not always the case & she was initially sent to Holloway's E block, which "was ghastly! The lavatory accommodation was absolutely inadequate. The whole block was infested with mice & co. – there was no heating apparatus at all". She had the privilege of visits withdrawn for refusing to work in prison &, after going on hunger strike, was forcibly fed thirteen times. She was released early, in June, in a very weak condition. She was forty-two years old.

G. H. Grant.

She was imprisoned in November & sentenced to two months hard labour in March.

Alice Green.

Imprisoned in November & sentenced to four months in March. She refused to be bound over, saying; "Let me tell you what I have gone through lately on behalf of this cause. I have given up my home, my husband & my child, & I shall not go back until women get the vote". She went on hunger strike & by the middle of May was being forcibly fed through a nasal tube. She was eventually released at the end of June. She was forty years of age.

J. L. Guthrie.

No information available.

Louise Hargeld.

No information available.

Mary Granley Hewitt.

Sentenced to four months.

Mary Hilliard.

She was sentenced to two months hard labour & would appear to have written “Votes for Women” on the handkerchief. She may have organised the project & kept the finished article.

Edith Hudson.

She was a forty-year old hospital nurse from Edinburgh & secretary of the Edinburgh & East Scotland branch of the WSPU. She was imprisoned many times, sometimes under her alias, Mary Brown. She was sentenced to two months but was released in June, after joining the hunger strike & being forcibly fed, on payment of a £3 fine by her family. She told the authorities that “it was just like her mother to be so determined”. In April 1913 she attempted to set fire to a stand at Kelso race course & also took part in an attack on the Wallace Monument in Stirling.

Olivia Jeffcott.

She was sentenced to two months hard labour.

Barbara S. Jocke.

No information available.

May R. Jones.

From Birmingham, she had been imprisoned in November 1911 but her sentence in March is not known. She went on hunger strike in May & was forcibly fed with a nasal tube. She seems to have been released at the end of May.

Alice J. Stewart Ker (1853-1943).

A fifty-eight year old doctor born in Banff in Scotland, Alice Ker studied medicine in Dublin & Berne before working as a surgeon at the Children’s Hospital in Birmingham. She moved to Birkenhead & became Honorary Medical Officer to the Wirral Hospital for Sick Children; also becoming involved in the Temperance Movement & the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. In the 1890’s she became active in the Birkenhead Women’s Suffrage Society. She was sentenced to three months in prison for breaking windows in Harrods. At her trial she said that as a doctor in practice, a lecturer in T.B., a mother of daughters & President of the Women’s Society of Liverpool she felt that it was her duty to do all that she could to bring about reform. She quoted cabinet ministers advising women to use force & stated that because of the just reasons for her actions she was not, morally, guilty of any offence.

C. L. & C. E. L.

The two sets of initials are a bit of a mystery. Lady Constance Lytton was well known as a Suffragette & one of the leaders of the WSPU, but they cannot be her initials as she was not in prison at this time. C. L. could be Catherine Lane, who was arrested on March 1st & was eventually bound over & released in Early April. C. E. L., in the bottom left –hand corner, may simply be the initials of the owner of the handkerchief.

Jessie Laing.

She was sentenced to two months hard labour.

Kate Lilley & Louise Lilley.

They were sisters, members of the WSPU in Clacton-on-Sea & the daughters of a “well- known Essex gentleman”. They were both sentenced to two months hard labour.

Lillie Lindesay.

She was sentenced to two months.

Gertrude Lowy.

Sentenced to two months hard labour.

Margaret Macfarlane.

She was the Hon. Secretary of the WSPU in Dundee & East Fife. She had been imprisoned in November & was sentenced to four months in March. At her trial she said that all her life she had been a reformer & had found that the only argument listened to by those in power was inconvenience. She refused to be bound over, saying; “I prefer to agitate in a way that will be successful. If it means six months or six years, I prefer to go on”. She went on hunger strike & by the middle of May she was being forcibly fed by nasal tube. After her release at the end of June she described being forcibly fed by mouth:

“I was lifted into a chair & tied with a strong sheet to the back of the chair. As far as I can remember, my arms were held on each side on the arms of the chair. There was a wardress with a feeding cup & one behind my chair, making a gag for the mouth with her fingers. Another held my knees. I told them that I would not swallow a drop of the gruel voluntarily. When they found that I did not retain any of the food, the one who was gagging me egged the others on to tickle me, to hold my nose to make me swallow, & to grip me on the throat, which to me is the most cruel. The pressing of the throat to make one swallow gives a fearful feeling of suffocation. When they got my feet up, my head was hanging right over the back of the chair, which added to the choking sensation”.



Helen MacRae.

She came from Edenbridge, in Kent. She was a member of the NUWSS but left to join the WSPU & became a member of the East Grinstead Suffrage Society. On July 8th 1911 she helped to organise the first WSPU meeting in the town at the Queen’s Hall. Soon afterwards she was arrested for breaking windows in Whitehall & was sentenced to four months in prison. In March she was sentenced to another four months & was forcibly fed after going on hunger strike.

Lizzie McKenzie.

She was sentenced to two months. She said at her trial; “I do not wish to say anything at all. I only wish to say that whatever I did, I did as a protest against the Government’s action”.

Frances M. McPhun (1880-1940) & Margaret McPhun (1876-1960).

The McPhuns were sisters & the daughters of a Glasgow J. P., who both gained M. A.’s at Glasgow University. Both were very active in the WSPU. Frances was the Organising Secretary of the Glasgow & West Scotland branch & Margaret acted as

Press Secretary for Scotland. They were both sentenced to two months imprisonment & took part in the April hunger strikes but there is no mention of them in the reports of arrests & trials in "Votes for Women" (the WSPU newspaper). This suggests that they were arrested under false names, although they both received the WSPU hunger strike medal.



Margaret McPhun

E. K. Marshall.

She had been arrested in November & was sentenced to three months in March.

Lillias Mitchell.

Aged twenty-seven, & described as "independent", she came from Aberdeen & was the organiser of the WSPU in Edinburgh & the East of Scotland. She was known for replacing the flags on the greens of Balmoral Golf Course with new ones in WSPU colours. Sentenced to four months in March, she went on hunger strike but was released at the end of June without being forcibly fed. In 1913 she became WSPU organiser of the Newcastle & District branch.

Anne Myer.

She came from Liverpool & was one of a group from the city who travelled to London especially for the March demonstrations. She was sentenced to two months.

Cassie Nesbit.

She was sentenced to two months.

Fanny D. Palethorpe.

Although she was not a member of the WSPU, or any other suffrage society, she was sentenced to four months in prison. She was thirty-nine years of age & came from Ainsdale in Lancashire. At her trial she said that, although she had always worked on constitutional lines, she had come to realise that peaceful protests would be of no avail with the present Government.

Frances Parker (1875-1924).

A niece of Lord Kitchener, she was the WSPU organiser for Glasgow & the West of Scotland. She said at her trial; "If I had thrown a stone as a striker, or even as a man who is intoxicated, I suppose I should have received a very light sentence; for I have noticed that men in Swansea, when they were held up for rioting, got a fortnights imprisonment, & the ringleader of them got only six weeks imprisonment. Of course, I admit that the whole difference is the difference of motive, but I think the long sentences in our case prove that the motive is recognised, & I contend that if you recognise the motive you should also recognise the provocation". She was sentenced to four months imprisonment. In 1914 she was arrested & imprisoned (under her alias, Janet Arthur) for trying to blow up Burns Cottage in Alloway.

Fanny Pease.

Sentenced to two months imprisonment.

Isabella Potbury.

She was a student who had been imprisoned in November & was sentenced to another six months in March. She was released early, at the end of June, after joining the hunger strike & being forcibly fed.

Zoe Proctor.

Sentenced to two months imprisonment. Like many of the women she came from an affluent background & initially had trouble adapting to prison routine. She expected her bed to be made for her, much to the amusement of the other prisoners.

M. Renny.

Sentenced to two months imprisonment.

Helena de Reya.

Aged thirty-one, she was one of the group from Liverpool. At her trial she said that she did not consider that she was morally or legally guilty. The Government, & the Government alone, held it in their power to stop any further scenes of disorder. She was sentenced to four months.

Gladys Roberts.

A former solicitor's clerk, she was the joint organiser, with Nelly Crocker, of the Nottingham branch of the WSPU. She had been imprisoned in 1909 & 1911 for breaking Post Office windows. In March 1912 she was sentenced to four months.

Dorothea Herlet Rock & Madeleine Rock.

Both had been imprisoned in November & both were sentenced to two months in March.

Margaret Rowlatt.

She had been imprisoned in November & was sentenced to six months in March. She went on hunger strike & was released, without being forcibly fed, in June.

M. du Santay Newby.

She was the Hon. Secretary & Treasurer of the WSPU in Ilfracombe & Barnstable. She was probably arrested under a false name as there is no record of her being arrested or on trial in March 1912.

Alice Maud Shipley.

She had been imprisoned in November, but at her trial in March she said; "More than half my life I have been doing what lies in me to help the poor & unfortunate. As a member of a Vigilance Society, & as a worker in connection with other societies, I know the condition of our women & girls, & the dangers that lie about them & that they have no power to protect themselves; & that knowledge has made me take up the attitude I have today. I feel our case is a most urgent one, & I feel that only a woman can understand a woman's needs, that women suffer for the want & care of men, & that their salvation lies in looking after their own needs & in demanding the vote". She refused to be bound over & was given a four month sentence. She went on hunger strike & was forcibly fed before being released at the end of June. She was forty-two years old.

Victoria Simmons (1889-1992).

Born in Bristol in 1889 & one of twelve children, she left school at fourteen because her father believed daughters should not receive the same education as sons & spent many years campaigning for equality in education. She was sentenced to two months imprisonment in 1912 for breaking a window at the War Office in Whitehall, the police found eight more stones in her pockets.

Janie Terrero (1858-1944).

She was the Hon. Secretary of the Pinner WSPU & was sentenced to four months. She later wrote an account of her prison experiences of 1912; "I was in close confinement for twelve days, was in two hunger strikes & was forcibly fed in April & again in June. To those who intend to be actively militant, I want to say this; you cannot imagine how strong you feel in prison. The Government may take your liberty from you & lock you up, but they cannot imprison your spirit. The only one thing the Government really fears is the hunger strike. They fear it not because of our pain & suffering, but because it damages their majorities. How strong that weapon made us feel. If they had only dared, they would have put us in a lethal chamber. Some people wonder at the courage of our women, but I believe physical courage is a common human attribute, & I do not see why women should possess it in a lesser degree than men".

Grace Tollamache.

She joined the WSPU in 1910 & was, with her sister, the joint Hon. Secretary of the Bath branch. In 1911 she took part in a Census boycott (on the night of the census count a number of women stayed away from home to protest at their lack of political rights). After the March demonstration she was sentenced to two months. In 1914 she was arrested after smashing a window at Buckingham Palace in the middle of a banquet but the King refused to prosecute.

Leanora Tyson.

She was sentenced to two months. She was the secretary of the Streatham branch of the WSPU & had also been organising secretary of the Lambeth Branch. In February 1912 she had been on a speaking tour of Germany on behalf of the organisation. Her mother & sister were also active WSPU members & were imprisoned in 1912.



Vera Wentworth.

Possibly one of the best known of the women named on the handkerchief, she wrote plays for the Actresses Franchise League & took part in some of the suffrage movements most militant actions; she was one of the protestors who interrupted the holiday of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith by breaking windows, shouting at him in church & decorating gardens with "Votes for Women" badges. At her trial in 1912 she said that smashing windows was very unpleasant. They would not have done it without the incitement of Mr. Hobhouse (he was M. P. for Bristol & had unfavourably compared the non-violent methods of the women with previous successful, but violent, suffrage movements) & as long as the Liberal Government behaved like this they would continue to do it. She would have done a great deal more, had she not been restrained by the leaders, she would do the same thing again & possibly worse. The prosecution pointed out that she had been convicted in 1909, 1910 & November 1911, & she was sentenced to six months. She went on hunger strike & was forcibly fed by nasal tube before being released at the end of June.

Frances Williams.

She was sentenced to four months imprisonment. At her trial she said that it was a political protest against injustice, made in her old age, & not with any malice. She went on hunger strike & was released in June without being forcibly fed.

Eva Wilson.

Sentenced to two months imprisonment.

Alice Morgan Wright (1881-1975).

She was an American sculptress & member of the National Association of Women Painters & Sculptors. She also campaigned against animal cruelty but little is known of her involvement with women's suffrage in this country.

Of the 66 women whose full names appear on the handkerchief, 61 are known to have been arrested on the window-smashing demonstrations; 25 are known to have received sentences of two months, 3 of three months, 18 of four months & 8 of six months. Sixteen held positions in local branches of the WSPU in 1912 & 18 had previously been in prison for activities linked to the suffrage movement; at least four are known to have been arrested again in later years. Twenty-four took part in the hunger strikes of 1912 & fifteen were forcibly fed.

Text transcribed from the original research & writings of Barbara Miller with additional research by Antony Smith.

After the demonstrations of March 1912 the WSPU stepped up its campaign; smashing windows, digging up golf courses, attacking exhibits in museums & art galleries (in March 1914 "Slasher Mary" Richardson became notorious by attacking the Rokeby Venus in the National Gallery), firebombing Lloyd George's country house & even planting a bomb at Holloway Gaol. But the increased militancy alienated public opinion & caused divisions within the suffrage movement. The Pethick Lawrences, who were the business managers of the WSPU & co-editors of the newspaper "Votes for Women", deplored the methods advocated by Emmeline & Christabel Pankhurst & were purged from the organisation.

The most famous protest took place at the Derby on June 4th 1913, when Emily Wilding Davison stepped in front of Anmer, a bay colt belonging to King George V. She suffered massive head injuries & died four days later in Epsom Cottage Hospital, having never regained consciousness, surrounded by an honour guard of WSPU members.

One of the most committed of all WSPU members, often acting alone & without the approval of the leadership; Emily Davison threw iron balls labelled “Bomb” through windows, regularly set fire to pillar boxes & was a committed hunger striker. She had been in Holloway in March 1912. At one point she barricaded herself in her cell & the prison governor had to authorise the use of water cannon to end the protest. However, she was seriously injured when she threw herself down a prison staircase & would have been in hospital when the handkerchief was produced.

She tried to kill herself twice in Strangeways prison in 1912 but her supporters claimed that she could not have intended to die at the Derby (suicide was still illegal at the time) as she had a return rail ticket in her pocket. However, it was generally accepted that “she had given her life for the Cause”. Inscribed on her gravestone was the suffragette battle cry “Deeds Not Words”.

Anmer, in spite of somersaulting & landing heavily on its jockey, emerged from the collision unscathed but Bert “Diamond” Jones, one of the top jockeys of his day, was not so lucky. Although his foot was caught in a stirrup & he was dragged for several yards, he walked away with concussion & an injured shoulder, refusing to be taken to hospital, but he never fully recovered from the incident, later saying that he was “haunted by that woman’s face” as he ran her down. His career was interrupted by the Great War, where he lost three brothers on the Western Front, but he kept riding until he was forced to retire in 1923 after suffering a pulmonary haemorrhage. When Emmeline Pankhurst died in June 1928 he travelled to London to attend the funeral with a wreath reading: “To do honour to the memory of Mrs. Pankhurst & Miss Emily Davison”. On July 17th 1951 Bert Jones’ 17-year-old son found his father in a gas-filled kitchen; the coroner recorded a verdict of “suicide while the balance of his mind was disturbed”.

With the outbreak of the Great War in the autumn of 1914 the WSPU called off its campaign. The crucial role played by women in wartime Britain was recognised & was largely responsible for the introduction, in 1918, of the Franchise Act, giving women over the age of 30 the right to vote. But it was not until 1928 that women won full electoral equality & all women over the age of 21 were eligible to vote.

THE MEN'S LEAGUE FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

In March 1913 Rev. Rupert Strong of Hammerwood & Rev. G. B. Riddell, a retired minister living in East Grinstead formed the East Grinstead branch of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage.

There were several prominent men in the East Grinstead area supporting women's suffrage, principally Charles Corbett, the Liberal MP for the town. After his election in 1906 Corbett made several speeches in favour of women's rights in the House of Commons but failed to persuade the Liberal government to pass a "Women's Suffrage" bill. After being defeated by the Conservative candidate in 1910, he continued to campaign for women's rights. His wife, Marie Corbett & his two daughters, Margery Ashby & Cicely Fisher, were all members of the East Grinstead Suffrage Society.

Thomas Buckley of the Grange, Crawley Down, was another member of the Liberal Party who supported women's suffrage. His wife, Jane Buckley & daughter, Florence, were also members of the East Grinstead Suffrage Society. Edward Steer, Liberal Party agent & the most radical member of East Grinstead Urban Council, was a passionate advocate of equal rights. On July 23rd 1913, Steer was one of the main victims of the East Grinstead riot that took place during a meeting of the Suffrage Society.

John Godwin King (founder of The Priest House Museum) of Stonelands, West Hoathly, Chairman of the local Liberal Party & a member of Sussex County Council for forty-nine years, was another important supporter of the cause. His daughter, Ursula, was a member of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) in the East End of London.

Robert Cecil, who lived at Chelwood Gate, was one of a small group of conservatives in the House of Commons who supported women's suffrage. Although he spoke in support of the NUWSS, he was totally opposed to the activities of the militant WSPU.

THE EAST GRINSTEAD RIOT, JULY 23RD 1913.

Although the NUWSS had nearly 100,000 members in 1913, it was claimed by many that the cause of women's suffrage was in decline. To demonstrate that the organisation was alive & well, the NUWSS decided to hold a Women's Pilgrimage. In the middle of June 1913 thousands of women set off on a peaceful march to London & over the following six weeks held a series of meetings all over the country.

There was only one violent incident during the six weeks of meetings. On July 23rd the pilgrimage was due to reach Crawley & the East Grinstead Suffrage Society decided to hold a public meeting in the High Street before joining the pilgrimage on the way to London. However, they were met by a hostile crowd & the meeting broke up in chaos.

Extract from The East Grinstead Observer, July 26th 1913:

“The main streets of East Grinstead were disgraced by some extraordinary proceedings on Tuesday evening. The non-militant section of the advocates of securing women's suffrage had arranged a march & public meeting on its way to the great demonstration in London. The “procession” was not an imposing one. It consisted of about ten ladies who were members of the Suffrage Society. Mrs. Marie Corbett led the way carrying a silken banner bearing the arms of East Grinstead. The reception, which the little band of ladies got, was no means friendly. Yells & hooting greeted them throughout most of the entire march, & they were targets for occasional pieces of turf, especially when they passed through Queen's Road. In the High Street they found a crowd of about 1,500 people waiting for them.

Edward Steer had promised to act as chairman, & taking his stand against one of the trees on the slope he began by saying, “Ladies & Gentlemen”. This was practically as far as he got with his speech. Immediately there was an outburst of yells & laughter & shouting. Laurence Housman, the famous writer, got no better than Mr. Steer. By this time pieces of turf & a few ripe tomatoes & highly seasoned eggs were flying about, & were not always received by the person they were intended for. The unsavoury odour of eggs was noticeable over a considerable area. Unhappily, Miss Helen Hoare of Charlwood Farm was struck in the face by a missile & received a cut on the cheek & was taken away for treatment.

Some of the women were invited to take shelter in Mr. Allwork's house, but as they entered the crowd rushed the doorway & forced themselves into the house. The police arrived & the ladies were taken out the back way & escorted them to the Dorset Arms Hotel, their headquarters, & this was for a long time besieged by a yelling mob... Mrs. Marie Corbett slipped away & took up a position lower down the High Street on the steps of the drinking fountain. A young clergyman who appealed for fair play was roughly hustled & lost his hat. Mrs. Corbett had begun to speak from the fountain steps but the crowd moved down the High Street & broke up her small meeting”.