

VOTES FOR WOMEN: The Common Cause

by Philip Toms

Introduction

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw increasing momentum, both nationally and locally, in the movement to gain the Parliamentary franchise for women. Evidence shows that there was a great deal of interaction between different factions of the movement and proponents of the suffrage in one location would often take their message to adjoining areas.

This article is not therefore restricted to the strict geographical limits of our Society's interest, although Northwood features heavily and Eastcote and Ruislip just about creep into the picture. It draws on a rather wider picture to show how the movement would have appeared to local people.

Proponents campaigned for the suffrage in different ways. *Suffragists* believed that they could win the day through argument and reason, and by applying pressure on the Government by holding public rallies, petitioning MPs and other methods such as campaigning for Parliamentary candidates willing to endorse their cause.

Suffragettes, on the other hand, believed that this approach was failing and turned to direct action in militant campaigns to force the issue. Those who opposed the extension of the franchise were equally vociferous. Men and women took up their particular standpoint on the issue in a plethora of different organisations; some men and women were as vehemently *anti-suffrage* as others were for it.

1907 - Uxbridge

Although Uxbridge had a tradition of seeking the franchise for women - with a petition being presented to Parliament as early as April 1872 'in favour of the removal of the electoral disabilities of women' - a strong local movement developed in the early twentieth century.

A prime mover was Mrs Clarice H.M. Davidson, the second wife of Dr John Davidson, an Uxbridge GP. During 1907 she organised a petition in favour of women's suffrage, arranged a public meeting at the Town Hall, and even tried to galvanise support for Bertrand Russell who was standing at a by-election in Wimbledon on a franchise ticket.

The following year she organised a garden party - with music performed by the Uxbridge Hillingdon Band - at which the principal speakers were Millicent Fawcett and Edith Palliser. Mrs Fawcett had become President of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) on its formation in 1897 and Edith Palliser, who also worked for the NUWSS, had previously spoken at the 1907 Town Hall meeting. Given the status of these two speakers the attendance of 30 - 40 was rather disappointing, but we may perhaps surmise that this was because an entrance fee of 2/6d put some off from attending. Notwithstanding the small turnout the meeting passed a resolution the gist of which was fairly typical of those tabled at many meetings up and down the country: '... this meeting urges the Government to extend the Parliamentary Suffrage to women on the same terms on which it is granted to men ...'

There were, of course, those who were strongly opposed to women's suffrage and so we find the Womens' National Anti-Suffrage League advertising in the Gazette in January 1909 that they hoped to form a branch in or near Uxbridge. Four months later there was a well-attended meeting at Dawley Court (Hayes) when a provisional committee was appointed. But the proponents for the suffrage continued to press their message.

An important meeting was held at the Town Hall in March 1909 presided over by Edith Palliser and with Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs Philip Snowden and the Rev. R. Swann-Mason all putting forward arguments for women's suffrage and seeking to demolish counter-arguments against it. This led to a meeting at Mrs Davidson's house on the 14 April at which it was formally agreed that the Uxbridge Women's Suffrage Society should be started. Lady Hillingdon was going to be asked to become its President¹ while Mrs Davidson would act as Vice-President and Katherine Raleigh as honorary secretary.

Other members of the committee were Miss Showell, Mrs Riches Lowe, Miss Harris (from Hayes), Mrs Whiteman, Miss Stranson, Mrs Budding, and Father Brady.

The new Society was affiliated to the NUWSS² which worked on a suffragist basis, believing that the power of argument and persuasion would bring about the desired change in the franchise. We have seen, however, that the national union had been running for a considerable number of years (and the suffragist movement had a long history before the NUWSS was established) and its lack of success had already fostered an alternative approach - deeds not words - taken by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) formed by Mrs Pankhurst in 1903, commonly known as suffragettes. When, therefore, a snap local election was called in the Uxbridge division of Middlesex in November 1909, the WSPU started a vigorous series of

daily meetings and urged its supporters in the West London area to help with campaigning. All came to nought, however, when the Government decided not to proceed with the by-election due to the nearness of a General Election and the WSPU withdrew its workers from Uxbridge.

1909 - Pinner

The WSPU was spreading out of London and a North-West London branch centred on Kilburn and led by Elinor Penn Gaskell³ was set up in late 1909 with the avowed intention to further extend its work into Willesden, Harrow, Hendon and other places in the Harrow Parliamentary Division. They were active in the Middlesex (Harrow) election of January 1910 and reached Pinner⁴ that March when the first indoor meeting, presided over by Mrs Penn Gaskell, was held at the Cosy Corner Tea Rooms.

A pattern of fortnightly outdoor meetings mixed with drawing room meetings developed over the next couple of years. Venues included Rockstone House (the home of Mrs Janie Terrero, who was the leading light and honorary secretary of the branch), Pinnercote (Mrs Verden), The Hawthorns (Mrs Shaw), the Cosy Corner Tea Rooms, and the Cocoa Tree (some 60 people attended a meeting there in October 1911).

The nature of drawing room meetings is of interest. There was always at least one speaker and entertainment was frequently in the form of songs and recitations, and even plays. Rooms were sometimes decked out in the colours of the WSPU and literature, including Votes for Women, would be on sale. Collections would be taken and fundraising take place, while new members would be welcomed and enrolled. Some meetings were perhaps a bit more special than others. In July 1911 some 140 guests heard an address by Lady Constance Lytton at Rockstone House: 'A large bouquet was presented to Lady Lytton by Mrs Ambrose Heal's little boy and girl, who toddled forward hand-in-hand, the boy saluting in a most dignified manner.'

A garden meeting was held at the Barns, Eastcote, in the August of that year chaired by George Edwards (it is worthy of note that his wife, Alice, later became the first woman member of Basingstoke School Board⁵). Miss Elizabeth Freeman, who spoke on "The inner spirit of the women's movement" apparently made such a tremendous impression that eight new members joined the local union and it is interesting to speculate how many of these might have been Eastcote residents.

A Pinner Branch banner was unfurled at their meeting in October 1910 and members marched in the North West London contingent at the WSPU's Coronation procession in central London during June 1911.

1910 - Uxbridge

A new organisation joined the fray in May 1910 when the Church League for Women's Suffrage held its inaugural meeting in the Town Hall. Miss Cable of Pleasant Place, Uxbridge was the local secretary.

Holiday Campaigns

Suffragists throughout the country campaigned in many holiday resorts during the summer of 1910 and four activists representing various Uxbridge societies cycled to and held informal open-air meetings in Buckinghamshire villages. They finished with a crowded meeting in Aylesbury market place where Mrs Bonwich addressed a crowd of some 200 for more than an hour. Later on, a literature store was set up on market days in Aylesbury and a successful meeting, chaired by Katherine Raleigh, was held at Great Missenden in September.

1911 - Census Resistance

The 1911 Census provided an opportunity for campaigners to press their arguments. The question was covered by Mrs Cobden- Sanderson, the daughter of Richard Cobden, at a meeting at Uxbridge Town Hall in March⁶. She hoped that women would not complete the census: 'it was being taken under an Act of Parliament and the information obtained would be used by the Government to make laws that would affect women, their future, and their labour'.

Some campaigners dodged the census by taking steps such as staying away from their home, or camping out in the garden shed, during census night. *Punch* had declared that "The suffragettes have now definitely decided to take leave of their Census' and the cover of the *Votes for Women* issue for the 3 March 1911 reproduced the Census form with an overprinted ballot paper stating 'No Vote No Census. If I am intelligent enough to fill in this Census form I can surely make an X on a ballot paper.'

There is no evidence that people in our area dodged the Census although we may conjecture that some possibly did. It is certainly true that some names are missing from the census returns but there could be several reasons why this might be the case.

Tax Resistance

Another avenue of campaigning was the payment of taxes. The Women's Tax Resistance League was formed in 1909 to conduct a campaign of constitutional militancy and organised resistance by women to taxation. Its motto was 'No Vote, No Tax'. When bailiffs seized goods belonging to women in lieu of tax the League made the ensuing sale an occasion for a public meeting in order to advocate women's

suffrage and to rouse public opinion to the injustice of non-representation meted out on tax-paying women.

The first local sale of property under distraint for taxes was held at the Chequers Hotel, Uxbridge in September 1911 with a silver and pebble pendant, a silver ring, and a silver brooch all belonging to Miss Raleigh being put on sale. Mr Lea, the tax collector and auctioneer, opened by hoping it would be the first and the last auction of its type to take place in Uxbridge and that the proponents of tax resistance who were present would bid for the articles. The silver pebble pendant was sold for 25/- to Mrs Cobden-Sanderson and this concluded the auction.

Proceedings then followed the League's strategy. Mrs Cobden-Sanderson explained that the League 'were trying, in a very logical manner, to show the illogical attitude of the Government that expected women to pay taxes and then have no word in saying how that money was to be spent' and there then followed a procession to George Street where a wagon was used as a platform from which speeches were made to a crowd of about 70 people. A resolution was passed: "That the women of this country will pay no more taxes until they have the Parliamentary vote and are able to have some voice in deciding how the large sums of money contributed by them shall be spent. This meeting therefore protests against the sale of Miss Raleigh's goods and calls upon Parliament to give immediate facilities for the passing of the Conciliation Bill.'

This was not, however, the only sale of this kind. In May 1912 Katherine Raleigh, Miss Weir, and Miss Lees resisted paying tax and accordingly had goods sold by auction in the Cattle Market, Uxbridge. This time a plated teapot was sold for 10/-, a plated egg stand for 8/-, a brass reading stand for 5/-, a hand-carved stool for 3/6d and an Indian brass bowl for 3/-. Speeches were again made after the auction.

Taxation protests continued for quite a considerable time. Empire Day in May 1913, saw a sale of goods on the green at West Drayton that turned out to be a pretty rowdy affair as eggs were thrown and the police insisted that a cart decorated by suffragists be moved away.

Uxbridge UDC

On the 1 May 1911 Uxbridge UDC met with local suffragists who were asking the Council to petition Parliament in favour of the Conciliation Bill (which had been amended to aid the suffrage). At a specially convened meeting 14 councillors met a deputation from men and women representing five suffrage societies under their spokesperson Miss Gertrude Harris⁷. Discussion between the Councillors centred on whether it was within a UDC's remit to pronounce on national policies or whether

they should stick to strictly local government matters but eventually a resolution 'That this Council is in favour of the Women's Franchise Bill known as the Conciliation Bill' was carried by ten votes to four. A copy was forwarded to the Prime Minister and to C. J. Mills, the MP for the Uxbridge Division.

Interestingly, the meeting led to a bit of a spat between Katherine Raleigh and the Gazette over its leader comments which she claimed were somewhat inaccurate. She pointed out that no opposition to the principle of women's suffrage had been expressed and that the four councillors who had voted against had done so because they preferred not to discuss Parliamentary affairs. Members of the deputation had been termed suffragettes - this was inaccurate - and had not made any insinuations about the good faith of the councillors. The Gazette disputed her assumptions more or less suggesting that she had misread their comments, and rather unusually Katherine Raleigh then apologised for 'a rather strong letter' whilst also taking the opportunity to point out that Urban Councils had Parliamentary Committees whose duty was to not only examine Acts of Parliament after they had been passed, but also to look at draft Bills and note how they would affect the district if they became law. In this connection it is of interest that, in his acknowledgement of receiving a copy of the Council resolution, Mr Mills expressed his surprise at the Council having taken cognisance of the matter.

Harefield Suffrage Week

The Conciliation Bill was still uppermost in campaigners' minds when the Uxbridge suffragists held a suffrage day at Harefield on the 23 September 1911, They arrived at midday carrying flags of their various societies and paraded them around for about an hour.

Two meetings were held. Mrs Budding took the chair at the afternoon meeting and explained the advantages that the state would derive from equal justice for men and women. Miss Lees then spoke on women's work and wages, and explained how the 'cheapness' of women in the labour market led to starvation wages and immorality. In the evening about 200 people had the Conciliation Bill explained to them by two members of the Constitutional Society for Women's Suffrage.

1912 - Uxbridge WSPU

By 1912 the WSPU were conducting a campaign in the Uxbridge district with Mrs Given as the organiser. In February there was a crowded meeting at the Town Hall to hear Mrs Pethwick Lawrence, the joint editor with her husband of Votes for Women, arguing their case. Apparently, the speakers were given a fair hearing and were not often interrupted or heckled from the floor.

The theme of militancy was one taken up in a debate held by the Hayes Literary and Debating Society the following month. Can we detect a bit of dramatics in the Chairman's pronouncement (to laughter and hisses) that 'should there be any of the hammer-throwing sisterhood present, they had two excellent hydrants, six buckets, and 30 carbines' at the ready!

Northwood

That same month, March 1912, a large audience filled Emmanuel Church Hall for a debate on women's suffrage arranged by the rather grandly called Northwood Society for the Promotion of Interesting Events, a new society of which Norman Baynes was the organising secretary and Dr Gregory Foster, provost of University College London, the chairman. The motion welcoming the extension of the Parliamentary Franchise to women was proposed by Mrs F.T. Swanwick (the editor of *Common Cause*, which was NUWSS's counterpart journal to the WSPU's *Votes for Women*) and opposed by Mrs Gladstone-Solomon of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage.

Although the motion was lost by 105 votes to 98 a further meeting was held on the 28 June 1912 at which it was agreed to form a branch of the London Society for Women's Suffrage (this was affiliated to the NUWSS). The committee comprised Mrs E.R. Abbott of Croyland, Dene Road; Miss T.M. Fagan and Mrs S.C. Phillips both of Middlegate, Murray Road; Mrs Gibbs and Mrs Haythornthwaite, addresses unknown; Miss Ramie of Ronceyville/Ronceville, Eastbury Avenue; Mrs K. Street of Endsleigh, Murray Road, and Mrs Waterston of Harlaw, Eastbury Avenue. The officers were Miss Fagan (Hon. Press Secretary), Miss Phillips (Hon. Secretary), and Mrs Street (Hon. Treasurer).

There followed a series of drawing-room meetings in the homes of the committee members. Miss Sheepshanks of the London Society emphasised the entire absence of militancy and, indeed, the NUWSS's disapproval of militant methods when she spoke at the first meeting in October. She emphasised that while societies belonging to the NUWSS were self-governing, the policy of the WSPU was dictated entirely by its leaders and extolled her audience 'If you dislike militant methods, put your back into methods that are not militant'.

A further public meeting was held in the Church Hall in December attended by about 100 people. The chairman's opinion was that the sympathy of the man in the street should be enlisted in the street and he hoped that it would not be too long before Northwood suffragists were carrying on their campaign from tea-chests, this remark causing some laughter in the audience. (There is no evidence that such methods were

used in Northwood although it was the norm rather than the exception to do so and such activities were commonplace in Uxbridge and Pinner and the wider district.⁹⁾

Pinner

Militancy had already come close to Northwood. On the 1 March 1912, Janie Terrero had been arrested after taking part in a WSPU window-smashing campaign in London and was sentenced by Judge Lawrie on the 27 March to four months imprisonment in Holloway. (She took part in two hunger strikes and was subjected to forcible feeding). Mrs Ambrose Heal took over her duties in Pinner in the interim and Mr Terrero was able to update the Branch members of his wife's experiences in Holloway during their June meeting.

1918 - Uxbridge

The indefatigable Katherine Raleigh rose to the bait of fifteen 'incontrovertible arguments' against the grant of the female suffrage being published under the name of Lord Curzon of Kedleston in February 1913. She proposed to quote, and try to controvert, one argument each week in the *Gazette* and hoped that her letters would foster discussion on the suffrage question. Her letters started in March and did not finish until mid June!

During this period a meeting was held at Mount Vernon Hospital on the 4 April 1913 for members of the hospital staff, during which Dr Kinton expressed his earnest advocacy of the extension of the franchise as a means of combating social and economic evils from which he had seen women and children suffer so much, especially in northern industrial districts. Twelve 'Friends' were enrolled at this meeting.

The Pilgrimage

The NUWSS held a great Pilgrimage during July 1913 whereby supporters from all points of the country converged on London for a major rally in Hyde Park.¹⁰ Starting in Lancashire the Watling Street route ran through Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire taking the Pilgrims through Banbury, Oxford, Tetworth, High Wycombe, and Amersham. On the Princess Risborough to Uxbridge leg Councillor Hutchings, the Chairman of Uxbridge UDC, joined the march at Denham. 'Just outside Uxbridge the local suffragists welcomed the Pilgrims. The streets were full of expectant townspeople as the procession passed through on its way to the Square in George Street. The Square was soon packed with people and it was decided to have two platforms. A large crowd listened to ... speeches delivered by Lady Rochdale, Miss Watson, Cllr Hutchings and Miss Rinder at one side of the Square, while at the other

side an equally attentive audience enjoyed the speeches of Mrs Harley, Mr J.G. Kennedy and Miss Dora Mason. The *Common Cause* was sold out, and a great many Friends Cards were signed.’¹¹

The Pilgrims then made their way to Ealing Common and on to central London. Quite soon afterwards the Walpole Picture Palace in Ealing was showing a Pathe Gazette film of the procession through Ealing and speakers addressing large crowds on the Common.

Force-feeding

Another public meeting was held in Emmanuel Church Hall in December 1913 at which Sir Victor Horsley (an ardent supporter of women’s claims to citizenship) and Miss Sheepshanks discussed constitutional pressure as against militant action under the chairmanship of Norman Baynes. While Miss Sheepshanks showed that, internationally, Britain was behind many other countries in awarding the franchise to women, it was Sir Victor who rounded on the authorities for their use of force-feeding suffragettes in prison. He stated that there was a great difference between political and ordinary prisoners and argued that semi-starvation was contrary to humanity. A small flurry of letters to the *Gazette* ensued. When a respondent pointed out that it was the suffragettes who voluntarily refused to eat so it was in fact the authorities who were behaving in a humane manner by keeping them from starvation Sir Victor responded by saying that the use of torture was disgracing the prison administration.

1914 -Militancy

During 1913 and 1914 acts of militancy became more frequent. February 1913 saw golf greens around Birmingham being damaged, in some cases the turf being torn up while in others “Votes for Women’ were burned into them with a burning acid. There were similar attacks on golf courses in Acton and Bushey Hall. That same month telegraph wires were cut at Wealdstone and a letter box in Harrow attacked with green paint and a black fluid.

1914 saw both a Dramatic Club Hall in Harrow Weald and a furnished house in Tyler’s Green near High Wycombe destroyed by fire. That June also saw Wargrave Church, near Henley, destroyed by fire. Suffrage messages were found at each location.

The destruction of Wargrave Church caused great concern locally. There is correspondence relating to the advisability of setting up a watch on St Mary The Virgin, Harefield to prevent possible damage by suffragettes: ‘Mr Newdigate suggests

a little special night watching at intervals... approach Willoughby Johnson on the subject as he and his sons are practically on the spot...'¹². There was also great concern for the safety of St. Margaret's Parish Church, and the ancient market house in Uxbridge. The *Gazette*¹³ reported on the 12 June that they "have been guarded day and night for the past week by plain clothes officers, owing to the threat by the WSPU to burn down both structures. The information reached the CID of Scotland Yard by means of an intercepted letter, and the local police were immediately informed of the plan. The reason given that the Uxbridge Church was the next (after Wargrave) to be attacked was on account of it being known that the member for the Division, the Hon. C.T. Mills, the Vicar, and the Churchwardens were all opposed to the movement of giving votes to women. From whatever source the WSPU gleaned their information, it is quite evident that they were not altogether well informed. Upon the Vicar of the parish being at once acquainted of the attack, steps were immediately taken to frustrate the movement, and in consequence the buildings have been guarded day and night by plain clothes officers. As soon as the information leaked out, there was of course general excitement in the town, and strangers going into the church have been scrutinised very closely. It is known that some visits have been paid by strange ladies, Thursday in last week (the day before the information reached Uxbridge), the verger noticed several strange faces at the daily services. The police have been keeping a very watchful eye on a strange gentleman who attended public worship on Sunday, but up to the time of going to press, the threat has not been put into operation.'

Ruislip

It was in this atmosphere that Katherine Raleigh tried to calm waters ahead of the first meeting to take place in Ruislip. In her letter to the *Gazette*, 19 June 1914, she wrote 'You will perhaps allow me, as we are holding the first organised suffrage meeting in Ruislip on Saturday evening . . . to state briefly the principles by [which] the Uxbridge Society of Women's Suffrage is guided. [It] exists purely for educative propaganda work. It undertakes no militant protests and no political party canvassing. Members of the society are, however, free to belong to any other suffrage societies in addition. The society is governed by the members, assembled in general meeting, the ordinary business being carried on by a committee whose official address is 7 Park Road, Uxbridge. The London Society . . . has generously permitted the piece *The Ideal Woman* to be performed without fee, and the artists are giving their services. There will be a speaker from London and free discussion. We hope many friends will avail themselves of this opportunity of obtaining true information on the movement.'

Extra police were drafted in before the meeting, which was held at Lyon House in Manor Way, and a close watch was kept especially on unfinished buildings on the Manor Estate, but no incidents were reported.

About 40 people attended and listened to the *Ideal Woman* duologue, which was followed by a number of speeches, with quite a bit of time being given to the history of the militant movement and the pros and cons of militancy.

It was with regard to this that F. Herbert Mansford (of Walden, Kingsend Avenue, Ruislip) later wrote to the *Gazette* that as he and his wife had been responsible for distributing invitations to the meeting they wished to disassociate themselves from one of the speeches that seemed to attempt to justify the militant methods which they deplored.

Harefield

The mood on Harefield Common was a great deal angrier when members of the Chorleywood and District Women's Suffrage Society held a meeting there as part of their 'special suffrage week'.

It was likely to be a boisterous affair as there had been prior rumours that its Chairman was likely to be ducked in the pond but the first couple of speeches passed off peacefully. But when the Rev. Drew Evans got up to speak matters turned nasty with Mr R.H. Whitworth¹⁴, surrounded by 'a crowd of people of the working class' calling out 'Do [we] want to hear any parson ?' and "Do we want to hear these people, or . . . not', his supporters roaring back that they didn't. They then started to sing the National Anthem and followed that by three cheers for the King.

By this time Miss Margesson was trying to make herself heard from the platform - without much success - and an appeal was made to the crowd to allow her to speak. But eggs began to be thrown and then people rushed the platform with a long rope and tried to rope-in the speakers, but this attempt was foiled when a Mr Brown cut it into pieces with his knife.

Miss Margesson continued trying to talk to a more attentive section of the crowd, but after the police had refused to assist the speakers (because no actual violence had occurred) Whitworth's supporters surged forward and overturned the platform, whereupon Miss Margesson got up onto a chair and tried to carry on. But then... 'A section of the crowd were apparently overcome with excitement, and the speakers, realising that it was a hopeless matter to again restore order, betook themselves to

their motors in the crossway. They were accompanied by the crowd, some of whom resorted to stone, egg and turf throwing. The ladies left first, amidst a pandemonium of boos and hisses. The other speakers left shortly afterwards, and Mr McCallum, the Chairman, was left in the company of his daughter. He was made the target for turf and stones.' [His daughter's glasses were smashed].

Mr Whitworth left accompanied by his wife, amidst the cheers of a section of the crowd. 'The evening was close, and the people congregated in sections on the Common, conversing on the events of the evening until the hour of ten struck, and then gradually betook themselves to their respective homes.'¹⁵

Ruislip

Ruislip provides a footnote to these scares of militant action although the particular incident was not treated with much seriousness. In July it was rumoured that a suffragette outrage had been committed in Ducks Hill Road. The window of Horsens belonging to Joseph Conn was broken, possibly by a stone, and a ginger beer bottle containing paraffin together with a copy of *Votes for Women* found on the lawn.

First World War

One month later, the *Gazette* ran a report that several Territorials and army reservists had left Ruislip for their respective regiments. The Great War was upon the country and the normality of peace-time life interrupted. Both the NUWSS and the WSPU stopped their activities to concentrate on the war effort and this letter from Miss Phillips, the Hon. Sec. of Northwood Women's Suffrage Society must have been one of many published in newspapers up and down the country:

'The NUW's Societies wish it to be known that it has suspended its ordinary political work for the time being and is preparing to use the entire organisation of the Union for the help of those who will [be]the sufferers from the economic and industrial dislocation caused by war. The societies of the National Union throughout the country are authorised to offer their services to the local authorities of every area, and to assist in any scheme for the relief of unemployment and distress which may be found necessary.

The London Society's office... is now a registration bureau for all voluntary workers, suffragist or not. Names and qualification will be received and transferred to the relief organisations requiring their services and to which they are most suited.'¹⁶

The London Society thus became a clearing house for information and a labour exchange for voluntary workers. The roles women played during the war and how this shaped the future fabric of society, and their future political enfranchisement, is well known. It may not, however, be apparent how the pressures and the stresses on women affected the continuation of work for the suffrage.

The case of the Northwood Society may or may not have been typical. Throughout the war the London office had maintained contact with the secretaries of the local branches and called them together on a regular basis. It was a rather dispirited Miss Phillips who wrote back on the 3 July 1917:

'I am very sorry I was unable to come to the meeting this afternoon or send anyone. The circumstances of our Society are that all this Committee are either doing other work all day, or have left the neighbourhood. I am quite unable to revive the Society's work just now. Mrs Street our Treasurer is leaving, Mrs Waterston, Mrs Haythornthwaite and Mrs Gibbs have left Northwood, Lady Rose is doing government work which leaves no time . . . to attend a meeting. Mrs Abbott is doing hospital work. Miss Fagan cannot do anything and I am sorry to say I cannot find any time to work up the local interest again, though I fully realise the importance of activity now.'

Notwithstanding the gist of her letter the London office continued to invite her to meetings and to participate in activities. Eventually, she wrote back in exasperated tones in November 1917 that she was unable to help with a jumble sale: 'Perhaps the best thing to do is for me to resign from the London Society and inform local members that their subscriptions are payable to [you].' To which she received the following reply: 'Please do not find me unreasonable when I beg you not to resign just now. I do ask you not to withdraw your name until the National Union sees its way past the present crisis, for it is so essential we should not lose members like you at such a critical time... When the fate of the Bill is declared I am confident the schemes undertaken by the National Union will quickly revivify and our moribund societies and hardly tried Secretaries will reap the benefit of their good work.'

This exchange of letters seems to have seen the demise of the Northwood Society as no evidence of further activity has been found.¹⁷

Emily and Christobel Pankhurst dissolved the WSPU in November 1917, but the Uxbridge Society continued to hold meetings into the early 1920s.

1918 - Victory

The Bill referred to in the correspondence with Miss Phillips was The Representation of the People Bill which was then passing through Parliament. There were several

attempts to strike out the important Clause 4 covering Women's Parliamentary Franchise but eventually it was passed without a Division in January 1918. The Bill received the Royal Assent on the 6 February 1918.

It was not long before they were able to exercise their new right. Polling was held on the 14 December 1918 in the 'coupon' General Election which resulted in a coalition government which retained Lloyd George as Prime Minister.' Before voting took place observers thought that women would be found to be apathetic on the day, but in practice women voters were in the majority at many polling stations. A few days after polling The Times observed ¹⁹ 'whatever the motive which brought women to the polling booths, they demolished at one blow one of the stock arguments of the proponents of women's suffrage. This was that women did not want the vote, and would not exercise it if it were given to them... Mrs Fawcett and other pioneers in this field can fairly claim that the position they defended with such courage and consistency has been amply vindicated.'

Conclusion

Votes for women was most certainly a common cause for many during this period but they had to fight their corner against an intransigent government, some politicians, and other members of the public who were as much against the extension of the franchise as the proponents were for it. While the Representation of the People Act 1918 enfranchised women over the age of 30 who were either a member or married to a member of the Local Government Register it took a further 10 years for them to receive the vote on equal terms as men (over the age of 21) as a result of the Representation of the People Act 1928. The efforts made by men and women in our local area helped to achieve equality and they deserve to be remembered.

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- ¹ The Women's Library holds NUWSS correspondence dated June 1909 regarding possible approaches to Lady Hillingdon, possibly through the Duchess of Bedford. They indicate that NUWSS officials were wary of Katherine Raleigh approaching the Duchess as KR "has not a very pleasing manner. Do you know if the Duchess is a sufficiently strong suffragist not to mind this?"
- ² The obituary of Katherine Raleigh (see Sources) states that Mrs Davidson was setting up the Society as a branch of the WSPU but they were clearly affiliated to the NUWSS in 1910.
- ³ I have not been able to find a family connection to Major Penn-Gaskell who died in 1916 and is buried in St. Martin's churchyard, Ruislip.
- ⁴ Pinner, like Uxbridge, had petitioned Parliament much earlier. Mr P A Taylor presented a petition "in favour of the extension of suffrage to women" on 4 March 1869.
- ⁵ The Local Government Act 1894 allowed women who owned property to vote, become Poor Law Guardians, and act on School Boards. Alice Edwards was also a founder member of the Ruislip Manor Cottage Society.
- ⁶ Held under the auspices of the Tax Resistance League: tax resistance was also covered at this meeting.
- ⁷ The deputation consisted of Gertrude Harris, Mr & Mrs Masters, Rev W T Gill, Miss K Raleigh, Mrs Davidson, Rev H Chelley, Miss E Weir, Miss Gertrude Lees, Miss Olive Masters, Miss C A West, Mrs Clara Budding, Miss Helen Pierrepont, Mrs Alice Hesketh, and Mr James Cochrane.
- ⁸ Uxbridge UDC Minute Book.
- ⁹ Could social class have anything to do with this? The 1911 Census returns of the members of the Northwood committee show that many of them employed servants.
- ¹⁰ Margaret Lees recorded the progress of the Watling Street pilgrims from Oldham to London in a diary which is held by the Women's Library.
- ¹¹ Common Cause 8/8/1913.
- ¹² London Metropolitan Archives DRO/080/A/11/001 and DRO/080/A/11/002.
- ¹³ In this article the *Gazette* refers to the Middlesex and Buckinghamshire Advertiser: Uxbridge and/or its other local editions.
- ¹⁴ RH Whitworth was chairman of the Harefield District Conservative and Unionist Association. He disputed that he disrupted the meeting in his capacity of chairman of the Association and that opposition to the "militants" [my inverted commas] was organised by the Conservative Party in Harefield. In his letter to the *Gazette* 27/4/1914 he wrote "The opposition was, I believe, perfectly spontaneous on the part of the inhabitants. All parties, classes, and creeds were represented at the meeting, and determined that those who attempt to advance their views by burning our churches and other infamous acts should not be heard." It seems to have eluded him that the speakers were suffragists — those who had always been against militant action!
- ¹⁵ *Gazette* 4/7/1914.
- ¹⁶ *Gazette* 7/4/1914.
- ¹⁷ The correspondence is held by the Women's Library.
- ¹⁸ Constance Markievicz, a Sinn Féin candidate, became the UK's first ever woman MP when she was elected in the Dublin St. Patrick's constituency, but she never took her seat in the Commons.
- ¹⁹ 16/12/1918.

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Women's Library, London Metropolitan University which has an extensive suffrage archive

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