

# Campaign for Women's Suffrage In the Highlands

By Susan Kruze

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Photograph captioned:

'A J Ryle - Club Captain with John Sutherland - Secretary  
escorting a suffragette off the course for molesting Mr Asquith  
- Prime Minister while playing golf - 1913'

(Historylinks Archive Cat No. 2012\_036\_06)

*A transcript of the audio recording of the talk on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2016. It will be apparent that images from the speaker's PowerPoint presentation, apart from the Historylinks Archive Cat No. 2012\_036\_06, have not been available for inclusion in this pdf file. Where necessary there has been minor editing of the script to overcome the absence of a complementary image.*

This is a 2009 project that I started with a commemorative march. This is Edinburgh, Princess Street in 1909 and it was a march for women's suffrage. For those of you who know Edinburgh and Princess Street it was absolutely packed out. The project then was to try to recreate the march and to get people involved and to know more about the campaign.

So, in 2009 we got a number of people together in typical WEA [Worker's Educational Association] fashion and I thought this was going to be quite easy. As our part of this re-enactment, I decided to find out what was happening in the Highlands at this time and take it from there. And so, we went to look for a book and articles and there weren't any. There was just absolutely nothing published on women's suffrage in the Highlands. Lots on Scotland, lots on the UK, nothing on the Highlands.

So, I then went around and asked the local historians who were in the area, and I said I'm trying to find something about women's suffrage, and they said 'Oh, I don't know if it actually happened here.' So how do you find out. Well, what we did then, we went and looked in the local newspapers.

We started in Inverness, basically looking at newspapers and any other sources that we could find to create a timeline of events. As that gradually led us on to more and more people, we then started to chat about the people. Well, to cut a long story short, not only did it happen here, but it was also incredibly active in the Highlands. It was incredibly vibrant and the reasons why we haven't heard about this is something I'll come back to.

So, we found lots, in fact there was just no way we could possibly finish, we looked at most of the Inverness newspapers but there were still a lot of gaps. We tried to do a bit of Ross-shire and we still didn't have time for that. And so, we put together a funding bid and came up with another project for the WEA called 'Breaking the Mould', which was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It had a Highland group which was looking at suffrage, another group

in Fife which was looking at working women and another group in Inverness which was looking at inspiring women over a hundred years.

We committed to doing Inverness and maybe one other, well in the end we just kept going, so we looked at Inverness and we had a group in there and we had a group in Brora and the group in Brora is the one, primarily I'll be talking about the findings from the results of that project.

Unfortunately, none of my group members were able to make it here today but it was very much a collaborative effort. We were all going through newspapers and other archive material to see what we could find. Our sources for this are primarily the newspapers and in addition, what we found incredibly useful were suffrage journals. These were the weekly newsletters published by the suffrage organisations and the two main organisations I'll be talking about are the National Union for Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), which was very much a non-militant group. Constitutional change was what they campaigned for, and their newspaper was called 'Common Cause'.

The other one you'll more likely have heard about is the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) led by Emmeline Pankhurst. That was militant and they went over to militant tactics. Their newspaper and suffrage journal were 'Votes for Women' and then latterly, at the end, was another one called 'The Suffragette'. So, what we found was the journals would often alert us to reports which would tell us certain dates and we could then follow them up in the newspapers. These are just examples of some of the newspaper quotes that we could get, sometimes as short as this, sometimes it would be column after column. What we found, this is the results cutting there, was basically here in the Highlands there were two periods of women's suffrage activities.

One was 1868 to 1874, on the map here these are in green. The green circles are places where we know that a meeting took place, and a green square is where a society formed. So, for here. the closest place for a society was Invergordon with a society formed there in 1874 but that's the last we hear about it in the Highlands, until 1907. In 1907 there was another wave of activity and between 1907 and 1914 there is a huge amount of suffrage activity.

In both these periods what would tend to happen is that a suffrage society would send up a charismatic speaker, somebody who would travel up there, would give a good talk, would know how to deal with hecklers, would know how to deal with issues and would know how to basically convince or try to

convince people about women's suffrage. They were incredibly good at their PR; we could learn a lot just by looking at what they did. The week before they would send a notice, an advert, into the local papers, then they would have the talk and they would always follow it up with a report, either from themselves presumably, or by making sure that the local newspaper was there.

The suffrage journals would also let people know what was happening. So, they basically used this to try to get momentum and as momentum built up and people became interested, then tried to form, local groups to promote suffrage activity.

This is a bit out of date, but it is so far from what we know about where meetings have taken place. If you look at Sutherland here, in Dornoch we know of at least nine meetings that took place here. But it's not just the big places. Within areas we have Embo, at least one meeting happening there. Inchnadamph, a really small one but that's a special case which I'll come back to. Rogart, even outdoor meetings that were happening in Rogart. So, these suffrage meetings would happen all over the place.

The very first reference we have to anything suffrage is from 1868 where the Inverness Advertiser wrote that 'we understand that *'The Society for Obtaining the Suffrage for Women'* have sent an agent, a Miss Thompson, to several towns in the north to disseminate information as to the object of the Society and to get signatures for petitions.' This was a time when there was a suffrage bill coming before Parliament and they were galvanising people to make petitions and send them down and Miss Thompson was in Inverness for a day or more. And so, we have our first proper suffrage meeting that we know about.

We're seeing as well at this time, that it's clearly not just women who are involved. We know for a fact that a lot of the suffrage organisations had men, a lot of the suffrage societies had paid up members who were men, not only just attending the meetings. Part of this is that they're going to try to get petitions. For petitions, obviously it holds more weight if the voters are sending it down. So, they're getting a lot of the local people and if you're going to get 14,000 signatures, you're obviously going to have a lot of men participating as well as women.

Of the people who did it, the men don't split down into easy lines, it's not always party political. It's certainly, you would think, perhaps clergymen who might be more against suffrage, but that doesn't happen. Clergymen seem to

be split, with some being very pro-suffrage and some very anti. It seemed to be very much of an issue of conscience.

To put this in context in 1870 the first women's suffrage bill comes before Parliament, and this is why our first wave is in the 1870s. We're starting to now have people who want to try to get petitions sent down to Parliament to promote it but, like all the other ones I'm going to be talking to you about, the bill was defeated.

1884, we have the third Reform Act. Now this is not for women's suffrage, this is for male suffrage and makes us realise that all men don't have the right to vote either. In 1884, any man who had land or property with an annual rateable value of £10 or more could get the vote. But the sting in the tail of this is that it applied to only about a quarter of all men. So, three-quarters of men still could not vote.

In the 1900s, it's suddenly this new wave and lots of bills coming in for suffrage, always slightly different in their variations. In some it is women can vote if they have property or if they are unmarried; there were all sorts of conditions but there was a big wave of trying to get more suffrage.

The person who is at the head of government through most of this time, certainly for the latter part, is the Prime Minister Asquith, who is absolutely and totally against women's suffrage, and he is responsible in many ways for why nothing happened in the second wave. What we see throughout this period is various bills, various alliances, various campaigns being run by lots of different groups, and in their wake local societies form. It was not a successful campaign at this time.

All the bills that went through were routinely defeated and in the end some of the suffrage supporters grew impatient and decided if they couldn't gain success, they were going to be militant, and this is where the WSPU in particular came in. After 1911 especially, we find the rise of militancy. This led to repeated imprisonment, women going on hunger strike in the prisons. On hunger strike they were forcibly fed, and it was absolutely horrific what was done to a lot of these women. Many of them suffered permanent damage because of having metal pipes thrust down their throats. And it was obviously a big issue as well. This is a contemporary poster against the forcible feeding. This clearly was not getting the government very good publicity and what happened was the 'Cat and Mouse Act', which was basically you arrest the woman for being a public disturbance, she goes on hunger strike in prison,

she gets dangerously ill, so you release her and then wait until she fattens up again and then pounce again to put her back in prison! The 'Cat and Mouse Act' went on for a number of years and was obviously incredibly divisive at the time.

So that's what was happening elsewhere, here in the Highlands? Well, our first wave, from 1868 to 1874, the two people who are most influential in getting suffrage really started were Jane Taylour and Agnes McLaren. Jane Taylour was from Stranraer, and Agnes McLaren, from Edinburgh, a daughter of an MP, very well known, and she later trained as a doctor.

As we'll see a lot of our pioneering women were very much in favour of suffrage, which of course is no surprise, is it? They were members of the 'Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage', and they came up in 1871 and then again in 1873. They travelled and gave talks at Dingwall, Inverness, Tain, Forres, Elgin, Wick, Invergordon, but not apparently in Dornoch, it seems to have been bypassed. But in their wake a number of societies formed in Inverness, Dingwall, Invergordon, Tain, Wick and possibly Thurso as well. So, we have this first wave which actually led to the formation of societies here.

There was also a woman called Jessie Craigen who also travelled into the Highlands. She was not the daughter of an MP; in fact, she was the daughter of an actress and was quite an unusual speaker. She was very much involved with the temperance movement and the temperance and suffrage often went hand in hand with the people believing in both at the same time. She was the one they sent to working class places. She was the one that they thought had the common touch. So, she spoke to a number of places throughout the Highlands, indeed, mainly down in the south though, Nairn, Auldairn, places like that, that we hear about her working. I've no picture of her. It's funny how there are lots of pictures of some of them, but we have absolutely no record of others.

What happened to these societies is a good question. We have these societies that formed and then after 1874 we just don't hear about them at all. We have not exhaustively looked through all the newspapers, but we have for some of the times, for example in Inverness we've gone through the Inverness Courier from 1874 right through to 1907 and there is no reference of a society, there's nothing in any of the journals that we've found so far. We know that after 1874 Jane Taylour and Jessie Craigen are no longer coming north.

So, this great supporting network is there; there is suffragist movement. In 1897 the NUWSS forms, that's Millicent Garrett Fawcett's and this is the one that's advocating constitutional change, and it is the one that's most important for here in the Highlands.

In 1903, the WSPU founded and led by Emmeline Pankhurst which, as I said went over toward militancy, gained a lot of the press coverage. But she sounds like a thoroughly egotistical and dictating woman. She fell out with almost everybody in the movement at some point. If you did it her way, or you didn't do it, and a lot of them didn't, they went and formed separate societies. She even kicked out her own daughter from her movement because she doesn't militant enough.

In 1907 one of these breakaways was the 'Women's Freedom League' which left in 1907. They were sort of the quasi-militant; they weren't as militant as the WSPU, but they would still advocate some sort of activities. They're said to have been very strong in Scotland, but we found no evidence of them ever having any support or any activities up here in the Highlands. So, it was probably more towards the south.

Which leads us to how do you describe these people? Well, there are two terms, and they were used with a bit of overlap, and they're certainly used now without people really understanding. 'Suffragists' are the ones who advocate constitutional change. 'Suffragettes' are the ones who agree to militancy. Now anybody in the suffrage movement back in those days would have known the difference but the press didn't. They used the terms interchangeably, and today you also find the terms interchangeably.

How many people here had heard of the word suffragist before tonight? Sort of three, three out of us. It's a term that's just gone down and disappeared partly because the suffragettes are so much more newsworthy, they get more of the press.

So, the wave that really clinched it here in the Highlands and did a lot was in 1907 up until about 1917-1918. Helen Fraser is the woman who is responsible for basically bringing the suffrage message to the southern Highlands. She started out with the WSPU and when they started going militant, she just left. She wouldn't have anything to do with it. Within three weeks of leaving militant, Millicent Garrett Fawcett contacted her and said why don't you join us, and she joined and stayed with the NUWSS after that. She did frequent tours in the Highlands. As an NUWSS rep in Inverness in, 1907, 200 to 300

people were turned away at the door. That's the sort of audiences that they were getting at that time. In 1909 she's back in Inverness and Dingwall and travelling between Nairn, Fortrose, Beaulieu 1910, and number of other ones. She really just kept coming up and she obviously was an incredibly good speaker. There are interview cassettes, well they're not cassettes now they're on DVD, made in the 1970s of her talking about her suffrage. I just heard of them earlier this week when I was down in London at the Women's Library, a fantastically interesting woman talking about her suffrage movement and activities. She said she never had notes, she just stood up and started talking because that's what one did after a good Scottish education. She was a wonderfully interesting, charismatic and really important woman. But she was not the only one coming up, there were other groups 'The Scottish University Women's Suffrage Union', which I will talk about in a moment, the WSPU, the 'Men's League for Women's Suffrage', and the 'Scottish Church's League for Women's Suffrage'.

There were lots of other organisations too, there's a list about that long of suffrage organisations and actresses for suffrage. It's a bit like so much of what we were doing during the referendum. So many things the same. Think of all the groups that formed, either pro or against. You get groups that form for the different causes, depending on what your interests are. Sometimes they travelled in quite novel ways, the picture at the bottom is one of the campaigns, I think that's Aberdeenshire, as they took their caravanette around giving the message.

Chrystal Macmillan is another very interesting woman. She has a building named for her at the University of Edinburgh. She was part of the Scottish University Women's Suffrage Union and in September and October of 1909 she travelled north, she went up to Dingwall, Ullapool, Lybster, Halkirk, Wick, and Wick where it was standing room only in the hall there which seated 800 Onward to Thurso over to Orkney, then on the way back down she was in Helmsdale, Brora and Golspie, Dornoch, Cromarty, Alness. 20 meetings, 16 of them indoors, audiences between 100 and 1,000 she said. Okay there may be a little bit of exaggeration but obviously they're getting huge numbers of people turning out to see them. She was so well known in fact that when people came later up into Sutherland they talked about how two, three years ago they'd heard Chrystal Macmillan and what a wonderful experience that was.



So how did these work? Well you had formal meetings, meetings where the newspaper advert would appear something like this: *'The National Society for Women's Suffrages is going to have a meeting in Tain Wednesday the 8th of December at 8pm,' list the speakers, in this case it's a Miss Mair who's the President of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage, Mrs Hunter who was the President of the Inverness branch and Elsie Inglis who some of you may have heard of who was the Vice President for the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage and, although she wasn't born here in the Highlands, her family certainly had roots here'*.

So, we'd have an advert and then as I say afterwards you would have a report, here's a, this is basically talking here, 'eloquent and convincing addresses were delivered by Dr Elsie Inglis, Vice President of the Society,' and it gives us a bit of information. It also crucially, for those of you who can read the bit on the right can see it starts to give us names. When we get reports like this, we start to see who the local people are, who is participating, who's chairing the meeting, sometimes who's even turning up, so it starts to give us our first insights into who's participating.

Those were the formal meetings, gradually we've discovered there were lots of informal meetings as well. We started reading in the, especially the suffrage journals would talk about chalking, 'we went to such and such a place, but the pavements weren't suitable for chalking,' or 'there was no time to do our chalking.' Well, what it turns out chalking is basically if you haven't put your advert in the paper, you go around the town with your chalk and you write on the slates on the pavement and say, 'suffrage meeting today 8 o'clock at such and such a place.'

I couldn't find a picture of that but the best I can come up with is here some suffragettes chalking on a wall, telling where the meeting is, that's down in England, so the idea was that you chalk. You might also hire a bell ringer, somebody to go around locally, just ring the bell saying there's a suffrage meeting today at such and such a time at such and such a place. We know this because we have an account about trying to find a boy at Boat of Garten who would ring his bell and go around and even for a shilling he wouldn't do it, which is quite unusual.

And then this wonderful account which is of a campaign in 1909 by Alice Low and I've forgotten the other person who went with her, who travelled everywhere from starting, first ones are in Fortrose, then they go to, well after

the meeting they cycle, they bicycle over to the Kessock Ferry where they have to wake up the ferryman to get across and then they have meetings there and then they bicycle over into Aviemore, Kingussie, in that area and then eventually they'll continue their bicycle trip down to Pitlochry. Even at the time that must have been considered incredibly unusual. But 'We bicycled 12 miles to Aviemore and interviewed the station master who suggested that we should hold an evening meeting at the station.' So, you get your local advice, where's the best place, when should you hold it, because that's when the last train stopped.

So, they went to a shop and printed up a number of bills in large sheets of paper and pinned them to fences and walls around the village. How on earth did they manage to do that? I mean there were no Xerox machines in those days. They managed to get somebody to set type and print off these bills so that they could go out and put them up.

Then at 8 o'clock they went to the station. They found a crowd of about 50, mainly men waiting their arrival. 'We mounted by turns upon a table,' you can just picture this can't you, set up the table and put them up there. 'And by the time the meeting was over there were about 200 or 300 people. There were a few rather tiresome people who frequently made loud remarks. The people at the place were most interested and the interruptions came as usual from the summer visitors.' That's published in *Common Cause*, the journal for the NUWSS, as part of their wonderful account of this campaign that they did.

In the wake of these speakers coming up, the local societies start forming. We have a society by 1909 in Inverness with Mrs Hunter, the President, who becomes very much of a local catalyst for the Highlands. She gives talks throughout a number of different societies including up here. In Dingwall it was Mrs Macpherson who was the President, in Nairn Mrs Ellis who is a hotel keeper of one of the poshest hotels in Nairn which got a lot of rich people coming. And gradually over time we find more societies forming and even a federation because so many societies formed in the UK that the NUWSS had to group them into federations. So, Dingwall, Nairn, Fortrose, Beaully, these became the North of Scotland Federation for the NUWSS.

Only later did I realise that there's also a Scottish Federation that covered everything from the Borders up to Wick. Now why didn't Wick and Thurso and Dornoch and all of these join the North of Scotland Federation? I don't know.

It can only be personalities. I can't think of any other reason why they would not have been included. So, on our map here, every place with a blue dot is where we know of a meeting. Every place with a blue square is where there is a society formed.

Now I'm an archaeologist by training. I look at that map and the first thing that comes to my mind is, that's the railway network, aside from obviously a few outliers here which I can explain.

It is precisely that, it's how they got around. It was the railway that allowed them to go from place to place for their meetings. And of course, here in Dornoch you had a railway. You were also connected into this so Dornoch is our first society that we have here in Sutherland. It starts up in 1909, as a result of this, Crystal Macmillan's visit up here, and then just seems to die.

We have no other information because when we next hear about a new society forming in Dornoch it is 1912 with Mrs Arthur the President. Golspie, Brora, Helmsdale, also have societies in 1913 and that is primarily due to an organiser who was sent up who was dedicated to the Northern Highlanders, a woman called Mary Bury and she not only helped set up these, but she nurtured them and made sure they kept going. There was briefly a branch in Bonar Bridge and also sub-branches in Lairg and Ardgay.

So, we have a set up here that's gradually filling in for a lot of the southern, Sutherland. The reactions they got were very mixed. John O'Groats Journal is always worth reading, certainly for this second wave and very, I could say anti. We're warned of the approach of political strife by the presence of two suffragettes, they're suffragists, but anyway, suffragettes. 'The women of Wick and Pulteney Town have never aspired to air their grievances other than on the stairway. The suffragettes have come to educate them.' So, we see the sort of very downplaying what they're doing.

Inverness Courier is quite interesting because the editor of the time was against suffrage, but his wife and his daughter were very pro-suffrage. And this is a pattern we see elsewhere as we saw it in the referendum of families that could be split over an issue.

Ross-shire journal, I used to say on my slides that it was sympathetic though I've been going back to the Ross-shire Journal now for the latter part. Once militancy struck, that was it. The Ross-shire Journal editorials are routinely very anti. So, before that, it seems to be a bit more, here we go 'The

suffragettes are in the Highlands, not the militant ladies.' Always careful to say that's what we have here in the Highlands, not these militants. But these militants with their sensational methods of appeal, 'shrieking sisterhood' is how they're also called. But representatives of the NUWSS, which since 1867 had been advocating women's enfranchisement in peaceful, abiding ways. Very important in all these messages that here in the Highlands, what we have is non-militant, non-party approach.

Northern Times is very interesting. Of course, your paper here, it's extremely anti until 1913 when it flips. And it probably is just simply due to a new editor. An editor who not only was pro-suffrage, but he was also a paid-up member of the NUWSS. And so suddenly after 1913 and 1914, much more sympathetic coverage. There's probably no accident that we have more information about suffrage up here in the latter part there.

This is the sort of reaction that people who were pro-suffrage would have to cope with. There was huge press. I mean, the details about the militancy were constantly reported in the paper. It's what you filled in. If you have a little bit of space, you wrote about what Mrs. Pankhurst had done. Even when Mrs. Pankhurst's father died, that got press in the Inverness Courier.

And there were these postcards that could be sent. 'A Suffragettes home,' there it is, the votes for women. She's left a note saying she's not going to be home. She's left the children there. Our man comes in after a hard day's work and finds his house in chaos.

Here, 'beauty and intellect are superior to brute force.'

'Go home, wash the baby, isn't it there?'

And then we have the suffrage postcards that were circulating. Some of them are absolutely horrible. Some of them are really, really disturbing. Images of babies being almost abused type. They're just horrible. And yet you turn them over and they'll have messages like, I'm having a great time, wish you were here.

The newspapers as well are publishing cartoons. We had the People's Journal, the equivalent of the tabloids circulating at the time, which had a number of anti-suffrage campaign cartoons.

The MP for Inverness is an example of a split household. John Annan Bryce was not only against suffrage, when the bills were coming before Parliament,

he was the one that was against them and against any suffrage amendment. He was co-sponsoring the opposition. His wife was a militant suffragette. Absolutely militant. And when John Annan Bryce campaigned for re-election, she left to go to America. Every single newspaper in the Highlands reported this was because of his views on suffrage. She could not campaign for him because he was against suffrage. So, in this case, the Ross-shire Journal reports, 'she's not going to canvass for him because he opposes the suffrage movement.' Split households.

There was a backlash with an anti-suffrage movement right throughout the UK. And the strange thing, it is almost identical to the suffrage movement in its organisation. Like two could be modelled, it's just the message is absolutely 100% different.

So, we have the anti-suffrage society, has one, well, it has two groups here in the Highlands. We hear about them first in October 1909 and then in November 1909 they get their outside speaker who comes up to talk to them.

The Inverness meeting was presided by their president who was Lady Lovat, and the Nairn meeting was presided by their president who was the Countess of Leven and Melville. A straight difference in the type of clientele here. The newspaper accounts get huge press about these two talks, saying amongst other things, 'if they gave votes to women, one thing was inevitable, they would want to legislate for us in the Imperial Parliament'. Absolutely shock horror.

Another reason why women shouldn't have the votes, well women just aren't smart enough. They're not educated enough and so therefore all the decisions would be bad. And when countered, 'but surely that's the case of men,' it was agreed, 'yes of course that's the same, but if you add women to it, it's completely out of control.' So, therefore you shouldn't have women voting.

This is the only activity we know about this anti-suffrage society. I've gone through all their journals, there's never a mention of anything else happening in the Highlands. In fact, towards the end of the time they merge into one and it becomes the Nairn and Inverness Society.

I think it was a society that had one meeting and this was it when they got an outside speaker. But they're coming from a good tradition. This is on the right, you see, a letter, from a letter to Prince Albert's biographer Theodore Martin about the Queen. 'The Queen is most anxious to enlist anybody who can speak

in checking the mad, wicked folly of women's rights. God created men and women different, then let them remain each in their own position. Women would become the most hateful, heartless and disgusting of human beings, were she allowed to unsex herself? And where would be the protection which man has intended to give the weaker sex?' This is from the most powerful woman in the world, arguably at that point, of an empire and that is her stance.

So, as we see the NUWSS is sending up their speakers, we're starting to have societies formed and the militant WSPU now attempts to galvanise the Highlands as well. In September 1910, Emmaline Pankhurst comes, and she speaks at a number of places including Dornoch and then in 1911 she comes back to the Highlands and does the southern to Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey.

'Votes for Women', her journal, reports that 'Highland farmers are moved, thoughts too deep for tears by her words.' So, this at the bottom here is our only picture of a suffrage rally we have been able to find for the Highlands. This is in Wick, and it must be, it says Votes for Women there, it's in a motor car, that's almost certainly Emmaline Pankhurst coming to talk in Wick. That is the only picture and how did we find it? It's not in a newspaper, it's not in anything like that, it just happened to be donated to the Wick Society, it is one of these just chance survivors.

Now I did mention, if you remember, that there were a number of meetings that were held in Northwest Sutherland, Inchnadamph, Stoer, out that way and in the west at Lochinver. Why? That's not on the railway. Why are these people there? Well, there's an explanation. Dr Marian Mackenzie, she was, obviously, a female doctor. I'm not sure whether she was born in that area, but her father had retired to Lochinver and she came to visit him several times when she was living down in Scarborough. At that time, she was a member of the WSPU, secretary in fact of the society there and when she came up to the Highlands, she just organised a speaking tour. So, she spoke to a number of people there. Strangely enough we didn't know about her until we saw a 1913 report in the Northern Times which described her talk over at Lochinver.

So, obviously the great fear about militancy, but in the Highlands simply didn't happen. We have looked long and hard and the only incident of militancy in the Highlands is here in Dornoch. Twice, at least once, possibly twice, women disturbed the Prime Minister while he was playing his golf game. We'll come back to that in a moment, but it isn't to say that there weren't militants from

the Highlands, it's just that if they were going to be militant, they went elsewhere.

We hear about Mary Macalpine who goes down to London. She's from the Highlands, she goes down to London, she breaks windows, which is pretty mild compared to some of the activities they got into, and for that she's sentenced to two months hard labour. No man breaking windows would have been sentenced at that time to that sort of a sentence.

There's constant press distortion as well. We thought we had found another militant activity here in the Highlands. We first saw it from the New York Times, gosh the internet's wonderful there. New York Times, February 8th, 1914, 'Another house set on fire. Militants in Scotland destroyed the property of a widow. In Inverness, an arson squad of militant suffragettes today set on fire and burned to the ground Hazelbank House in Tomatin. The house belonged to the widow of a county councillor and was temporarily unoccupied. The usual traces of the presence of suffragettes were found in the ground in the shape of a quantity of suffragist literature.' In other words when the suffragettes did militant activity, they always signposted it, they left their literature. Well, we then checked all the other newspaper accounts we could find and here's one, 'Tomatin Mansion burned, suffragettes suspected of fire raising.'

Was it an outrage, the suffragists and the Tomatin fire? When you start reading these the first thing you realise is there was no literature left. I don't know, the New York Times just made that up because they believed it was a suffrage activity, so it was there. There was nobody claimed it, no suffrage was there. The woman involved was actually not anti-suffrage. The evidence for this was a motor car was seen at the wee hours of the morning with a man and a woman going over Slocht Summit and that must have been a suffrage.

So, it's basically they're so geared up for the idea, burnings it must be, they fit the evidence and the headlines support that even though there was absolutely nothing. There were what is said in a couple of the reports some tramps who were found in the area and the likelihood is that they started a fire, and it got out of control but there certainly was nothing to do with suffrage.

As I say they were perceived as a threat. This is from the People's Journal. It's a competition. It's almost like spot the suffrage, votes for women here. Here we have this woman, she's got petrol on her back, 'Destroy the House of Commons,' she's carrying her bomb there and it's a competition that you

can fill in with the first prize of two pounds. So, the whole idea, there's fear but it's also being brought into the public mainstream that way.

This is in the Highland Archives, a circular from the Chief Constable in Dingwall in May 1913 warning police to be vigilant and to watch for strange women. I like this next one, 'and known local ones likely to be influenced by strangers.' Susceptible women, watch out. Then he warns that, 'in the last fortnight known British militant suffragettes have purchased large quantities of ladies' rush satchel baskets which could be adapted for a fancy covering but they would give them an appearance of respectability.' But they could have been used to carry explosives so if any officers found any, they were supposed to put them into water. This is a police circular sent out so obviously they're worried despite the fact there's absolutely no militancy happening in the Highlands.

There's still this sense of fear. Again, this might have some resonance for what's happening nowadays.

So, what's happening here in Sutherland? What I want to do for the rest of this talk is really have a look at what the suffrage activity is here in Sutherland and especially what's happening here in Dornoch.

At the moment no evidence of any suffrage activity between 1868 and 74. Invergordon yes, Wick yes, but nothing in between. We do know that there are some debates. In 1911 we've got Golspie debating suffrage. We know in 1914, a group in Dornoch. It's probably happening elsewhere but not always reported. The societies reports being rather late, but that's mainly because as I said Mary Bury comes up and starts supporting them.

1909, Chrystal Macmillan is there and Miss Campbell Smith. 100 to 200 people attended the Golspie meeting. I don't have the numbers, they didn't report the numbers here for Dornoch, but if they're getting 100 to 120 at Golspie you can bet they'll be getting a good turnout here.

And as I say it results in the formation of a society in 1910 with one of the Gibson sisters, Jessie Gibson, as the secretary. Now the Gibson sisters were, I believe, members of the WSPU. They were militants but suffrage was suffrage, so they also became secretaries of the NUWS's society there.

Then in September 1910 Emmeline Pankhurst came to Dornoch. Interestingly enough you would never know it from the newspapers. There's not a single mention in the Northern Times about her visit and it must have been huge.



We do fortunately have some. 'Votes for Women' describes it. It says 'thanks to the magnificent work of the Mrs Gibsons not a soul for miles around Dornoch was unaware of Mrs Pankhurst's meeting. The hall was crowded to overflowing with residents deeply impressed by this speaker and her speech.'

And later as a correspondent says 'Mrs Pankhurst spoke for almost an hour and a half to an interested and attentive audience who felt they were getting an altogether new light on the woman question from that which they were accustomed to get from the daily papers. A few questions were asked but not of any great importance. Mrs Pankhurst having evidently replied to all possible queries in her clear and exhaustive exposition of the meaning of this movement. One lady remarked to a friend "I think Mrs Pankhurst has cleared up many misconceptions about this woman question" and the reply was "I know Mrs Pankhurst has cleared up many misconceptions about herself. I had no idea she would be like that and certainly the word unwomanly would never apply to the fine specimen of womanhood who stood before us that evening pleading so entirely for man's humanity to women.'"

It gives you an idea of the public persona and the reactions that are happening. As I say, Dr Marian Mackenzie who's coming up from Yorkshire and giving her talks as well. Then in May 1912 Mrs Abbott, who before that had been campaigning in the Highlands as Miss Lamond, she came for four days with meetings in Dornoch, Helmsdale, Golspie, Brora and Bonar Bridge. She's hitting this area of Sutherland with preparation by Eleanor Sheard and that is, her meeting held at the county offices, the county buildings, resulting in the re-formation of the Dornoch Society. Obviously, it fell on fertile ground because of all these areas here in Sutherland, Dornoch is by at least six months an earlier foundation.

August 1912, Mrs Snowden came there, and again Miss A Stewart-Patterson had done a lot of the preliminary work and again the Misses Gibsons were very much involved with that organisation. I put up these names because for some of your research or projects you have done some of names, may ring a bell.

Summer 1913 Miss Bury comes up here. The Dornoch society now has a membership of over 40. We know who the treasurer is, we know who the secretary is, they even have a correspondent, which I can only think must be the person who's sending out the press information to the press. She also,

came to Brora, recorded as 'An orderly but an unresponsive audience.' In other words, not enough. But also, when she was in Brora, she met with all the teachers and every single one of them joined and that is something we've really begun to realise from our work in Sutherland, that if you want to find a lot of the suffragists look at who's on the teaching roll.

It didn't quite happen in Golspie, but it's certainly here for Dornoch as well. Then in 1913, this is our second picture, second of our only picture of suffrage, but it's not a rally. What this is, is Lady Frances Balfour who's coming up here and this is in front of the Grange which I believe is the Golf Hotel, is that right? I believe it is anyway, and so this is a picture of her with her motor car, very unusual to have that and at that meeting 21 new members join.

She went to Golspie YMCA, to Embo where she had an open-air meeting amongst the fisher folk there, and basically working her way through a lot of these areas. So, as she heads south after Dornoch, Mrs Hunter from Inverness and Miss Bury and Mrs Fraser, who's the secretary of the Inverness branch, they continue up to the north and they do a lot more work in meetings here. At Brora, going to Rogart, an outdoor meeting at Lairg, Bonar Bridge. 'They just talk sense, and I agreed with every word they said,' according to the Journal.

The reason why, why are they here, why at this time? Generally, the NUWSS coincided their activities and sent their speakers if there was some sort of an issue. If there was a by-election, definitely they sent people up here or, in the case of Mr Morton MP, he was obviously considered somebody who was swaying and so they sent their resources to sway him further with the people up here. In 1913 and 1914, Dornoch society becomes increasingly active. It's not only increasingly active, I think it's also their correspondent was making sure that reports about the meetings were being put into the local paper, so we find out more about them.

November 1913, there was an at-home meeting of the Dornoch branch with a tableau representing famous women. Now tableaux, these were events where people would get dressed up, men and women together, as usually famous women, some of which, the one on the right is not from Dornoch, but Joan of Arc was obviously a great favourite at all these tableaux. Mary Bury was obviously keen because Brora had one as well.

So, we had an Egyptian woman played by Miss Macintosh, Penelope by Miss Munro, Boadicea by Miss Marjorie Sutherland, Alfred the Great's mother and

himself by Mrs Innes and Grant. We had Kate Barless as the Queen, Joan of Arc, Agnes of Dunbar, and ones you would not necessarily expect, Flora MacDonald, we would expect her. Barbara Frietchie, who I'm not even sure who she is, Queen Victoria receiving the news of her accession. Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Fry, girl graduate, so sometimes it was just a representative that way. And while this happens, *'Mr Freeman played music on the piano, there was a varied programme of music and dancing with contributions by a number of people. Mr Macgregor played the violin and Mr Munro, the Lord Advocate, sent a letter apologising for not attending'*. So, it wasn't all just political haranguing, you can see this was just a social event as well, bringing in a lot of people.

Then we have the by-election coming up, the Wick by-election and that brought lots of activity into this area.

January 1914, there was a meeting here where we are right now, so there was a debate at the council chamber here at the library. The NUWSS asked Dornoch borough to send a delegate to London to take part in the demonstration down there and then we had in March 1914, a drawing room meeting at one of the members and the society at that point decides to hold monthly meetings. Even though we don't know about these, you can see it's just getting more and more active, sometimes social, sometimes lectures. We're very lucky that the reports about the May 1914 AGM survive. And so that gives us sort of a snapshot of what happened over the past year.

It was a meeting in the council chamber, Mrs Hacon was in the chair, Mary Bury gave a talk. The annual report said they'd had five public meetings and three private ones over the year. Their income was £19.6s.5d, most of which they sent back to NUWSS headquarters. Apparently, the local societies had the right to hold on to some of the money for campaigning and other activities, though most of them sent it back to the parent organisation. We know they elected their office bearers and so here we have the names of who was on the Dornoch society. Mrs Murray was the secretary, Mrs Munro the treasurer. The old committee consisted of those two plus Mrs Mackay, Mrs Bell, Mrs Freeman, Mrs Sinclair, Mrs Macrae and Mrs Gunn. And also in addition, Mrs Ross, Mrs Mackenzie, Mrs MacAskill and Mrs Hacon. As you can see, for family history purposes this is not straightforward. How many Mackenzies are we likely to find? However, we've got a few here. At this meeting, Mrs Hacon was

elected the vice president and they brought seven new members, so we know that their membership as of this time is 63 people. So fairly good.

We have one other membership list, a complete membership list which survives which shows about one-third men and two-thirds women. Hard to know what it was here.

The only militant activities we have in the Highlands happened here at Dornoch. The Prime Minister liked to come up here, he liked to play his golf. We like to play golf all throughout the UK, which is why suffragettes targeted golf courses deliberately. Balmoral was wonderful, they went off on the course the night before and changed all the flags to the flags of the suffragette society, very imaginative. We have here two outside women who are not from the Highlands, Lillias Mitchell and Elsie Howie, who come in 1912, and they proceed to harass the Prime Minister.

Now the Prime Minister at this time, strangely enough, was staying with Mrs Hacon. She is a widow at this stage in Oversteps, one of the big mansions, she is one of the main people of society, she's a barrister's widow, and he stays at her house. I do wonder if she was there, or if she was there, what their dinner table conversations must have been like, because she was the vice president of the society and a leading light on that.

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary were here. It's quite interesting that while they're here, we have a report in the Northern Times about the Prime Minister's disruption, and the report in the Northern Times says, *'We are requested to state that the accounts of the suffragists' attack on the Prime Minister of Dornoch, which appeared in southern newspapers, were misleading. One of the ladies kicked Mr Asquith's ball and had to retreat at once under police protection, as the caddies and other juveniles in the vicinity resented the suffragists' interference with the distinguished visitors. The Dornoch people welcome strangers to their borough and are eager to preserve order and quietness on the golf coast.'*

In the same issue, an entirely different account of this appears, and this appeared in a lot, it appeared in the Inverness Courier, in the Nairnshire Telegraph, in lots of the Highland Papers, and the southern papers as well.

*'The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary had a very lively experience with two suffragists from Aberdeen on the golf course at Dornoch early on Tuesday morning. They had reached the Tenth Green,'* according to the person who

was reporting this. I would love to know who it was, was this one of the caddies, who is it that gave this report? *'Reached the Tenth Green, and were studying their putts, when suddenly the two suffragists appeared on the scene. Mr Asquith was asked, "Why are you forcibly feeding our women?" Whereupon Mr McKenna gave the questioner a hard push, and then seized the other suffragist, with the result that an unseemly struggle went on for a few minutes between the Prime Minister, between the Minister and the two ladies, during which Mr Asquith kept well to the background'*.

Ultimately, one of the ladies got free, and proceeded to question Mr Asquith on the subject of forcible feeding. Mr McKenna, it is said, threatened to throw the other suffragist into the pond nearby. The lady's retort to this threat was, *"If I go, you go too."* at the same time taking a hold of Mr McKenna by the arm. Meanwhile, Mr Asquith took hold of the other lady and said to her, *"The pond is the place for you too."* The situation was now becoming very uncomfortable for the two ministers, but fortunately at this point, and not before, a detective arrived on the scene and seized first one of the ladies, and then the other.

The consequence was that another struggle ensued, and the detective found he was unable to hold both ladies. One of them got away twice and went up to Mr Asquith and told him that if anything happened to Mrs Ley or Miss Evans, other protesters, other suffragettes, he was going to answer for it. He need not think he was any safer when Mrs Ley was in prison.

Then Mr Asquith said, *"seize that woman, she is the worst."* And Mr McKenna called on the two caddies, who were both small boys, to hold one of the ladies. You couldn't make this up, could you? The two boys however seemed quite petrified, and one of the lads remarked, *"I never saw such a funny scene."*

The detective's next move was to let go the lady he'd been holding and seizing the other, took her right off the links. As he was taking hold of the lady, she called out to the Prime Minister, *"Mr Asquith, how dare you receive the freedom of Dornoch, (which he'd just received the week before) when you refuse freedom to women."* No answer was returned to this question, and the lady was removed from the links.

The other lady was left on the scene, and she favoured the two statesmen with a long and pointed lecture on the suffrage question, until another detective appeared and took her off the course. No further action was taken,

but a member of the local police in plain clothes kept a vigilant watch over the two ladies, and finally saw them off at the station.

Quite different from the first report.

That is as bad as it gets in the Highlands. As you can see, it was just a case of forcibly doing it. It never went to court, because the Prime Minister would have had to testify, and so therefore they were never arrested.



1913, we have one local tradition, and it is only a local tradition, and our only evidence is a picture in the golf club, which shows here a woman being escorted off the golf course, and it says it's happening in 1913. It never appears in any of the journals, it never appears in the press, it doesn't even appear in the suffrage journals. And it's probably a copycat, having what happened the year before, Prime Minister's back here, he's playing golf yet again, staying in Oversteps yet again, and she goes to disrupt him, knocks his hat off, that's as militant as she gets, and then is escorted off.

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She looks pretty pleased of herself there. We have no idea who she is. There is a local belief that she's one of the Miss Gibsons. However, the woman in the photograph is too young to be one of the Miss Gibsons. She might have been a suffragist who is staying with them, but we haven't been able to verify elsewhere, and I have to say, without the caption, you'd be hard put to say that's what's happening. It looks like she's out for a friendly stroll with these two men.

Other militant activity happened, and we found evidence here in the Highlands, of hiding from the 1911 census. Certainly, elsewhere in the UK, there were safe houses to which women would go knowing that the enumerator is not going to come and so they're safe there.

However, we've got several other ways to be militant here in the Highlands. Amazingly enough, we have a census record here. You won't be able to read it because it's blurry and small, but this is for Dornoch and includes the

Gibsons again. And on the line, there is a woman who refuses to answer the census, 'who looks to be about 50,' is what it says there. That was illegal. It was illegal not to answer. And so, we had that happening at the Gibsons. So, we have outright refusal happening.

We also have lying. Annie Dunn was the Temperance Hotel keeper of Golspie, and she and her sister just simply lied. Annie Dunn, when asked where she was born said, 'at sea.' We know that from the 1901 census she was born in Perth. So basically, their way of protesting was just to lie. You may not think this is actually very militant, but interestingly enough, one of our suffrage members and supporters, who was a minister down in Nairn, in his preamble introducing the suffrage talk, talked about the militancy of these women who were refusing to give proper answers to the census. This to him, even though he was a suffrage supporter, was considered a militant act hiding from the census.

So, what happens? What happens with the suffrage campaign? War is declared in 1914, and immediately the suffrage organisations just put it all on hold. They throw all their energies into the war work. This obviously causes a lot of friction within a lot of societies, especially the NUWSS. Some of them were pacifists. Some of them were against the fact that they were completely abandoning suffrage. But obviously, what was happening there in society was such that basically suffrage just stops. The campaign stops.

And a lot of these NUWSS societies then throw themselves into war work, and in particular, the Scottish Women's Hospital. This was a hospital set up by Elsie Inglis. It was staffed entirely by women. The doctors were women. The orderlies were women. And it got a huge following. They had, I think at the end, hospitals, certainly in France, Serbia, Croatia, and a number of places as well. And we had women from here who went out. We know of at least two women, including Mrs. Hacon, who went out to France and worked at basically mending and folding things while she was there. And Margaret Davidson, who was a local teacher in the academy, she too went out to the hospitals.

1918, at the end of the war, there was enough women who had supported it that, they didn't get universal suffrage as men did, but what they got, women over 30 were granted the vote. But it was not until 1928 that women finally got the vote on the same status as men.

Finding the people who were involved in the suffrage. This is the outline of the story. But who were some of these people? And that is very difficult. We

have very few addresses. We have very few forenames, the first names. What we have primarily is, for example, Mrs. Fraser, who is the secretary of the society in Inverness, is always listed as Mrs. James Fraser. She doesn't get her Christian name.

We have no membership list other than this one that we had from Nairn. We only tend to hear about the office bearers and not the others. If 800 people are coming to a meeting, that's not just middle-class, upper middle-class people. It has to be broader than that. And we have virtually no pictures. So, we have had a lot of work to try to fill this in.

In particular, the group here at Brora that was working here, we had a number of people who were very skilled at family history. And they went through a lot of our material. School logbooks, we now know, are a good source.

In Dornoch and Brora, many teachers became, and that's Miss Davidson there, who was very active. She was the secretary. Golspie is the one that's not the case. The suffrage people are not so much members of the school board, and sorry, school teachers, but they're very much debaters in the local literary society. We see the same names coming up. We certainly have some interesting women, I have to say, from this area.

And Dornoch in particular. Mrs. Hacon, she is an extraordinary woman. She was an artist's muse down in London, a model. And a wealthy barrister, who I think may have had a home before that, Mr. Hacon, saw her picture, fell in love with her, married her, and they moved back up here. So, from being a bohemian artist's muse, she became a very respectable barrister's wife here. And then after 1910, a widow.

She was very active here. She was also very active in trying to better conditions for the herring girls, especially up in Shetland. A very colourful woman. Don't have time really to say more than that, but certainly there's a lot more information that we've been able to uncover about her.

Margaret Davidson, a very close associate of her. Margaret Davidson also lived at Oversteps as well for many years. She was a teacher for part of the suffrage years, became a secretary, then went to France in war work, came back and rejoined the school. And there are people within living memory who remember when she was a teacher. There's probably some here in the room.

Mary Bury, who was the outside organiser. Not in any of the accounts, because she tended to work mainly up here. And she's still somebody I'd like to know



more about. The same with the Miss. Gibsons. They're quite interesting as well.

We also have an extraordinary document that survives. This is from the Canadian Forestry Corps World War I diaries and what this says is *'This is probably a unique company in respect to marriages, as all the original officers, except Mr. Bromley, who was already married, have married locally.'* And it lists the Canadian Forestry Corps men who married local women. At least half of the names of the women are from the suffrage society, including Mrs. Hacon, who married her husband who was, I think, 15 years her junior.

I think it's as much a testimony to the fact of how devastating World War I must have been when so many men killed and then you have these Canadian foresters here who were alive and healthy and were available and we had this block marriage, which is very unusual to find.

So, I used to say this is only the beginning, but this is only the middle. We're working our way now to try to tell the story of Highland suffrage. We still need to go through a lot more papers. We started work in Wick, finished off the Ross shire Journal and now have to go down and look at Badenoch and Strathspey to try to fill in a lot of the gaps. We need to find more of the people. People research is difficult, but it's so important. We need photographs. Two people, just two photographs for suffrage activities. There has to be more. There might be one in Brora but it's just a meeting outside and hearsay that it might be suffrage. And we need stories that people might have of their forebears who were active in the suffrage movement here. You would think this would be easy to find but it hasn't been. We have put adverts in newspapers. We've talked to lunch groups. We've talked to groups like this. And we've only fleshed out a small number of people who say, oh, yes, my great-grandmother was involved in the suffrage movement. We're still, somehow, not getting there.

Interestingly enough in two cases where we have been able to identify people whose ancestors were part of the suffrage movement, they've denied it. Part of the reason is, I think, in a lot of people's minds, suffrage means militancy. What they don't understand is that these people here were not those; they were the ones who actually held deep convictions and were campaigning for women's' suffrage.

In the other case a lady said she couldn't believe it because her, I think it was her great-uncle, was a complete misogynist. There's no way he could have possibly been in favour, but he was president of the society. People do change sometimes when they get older. We need to take all this information; we need to pull it together; to let people know how active this movement was here in the Highlands.

It was not that nothing happened, in fact it's the opposite, lots happened, and we need to document it for other generations. In 2009 as we were heading down to Edinburgh to do our bit of reenactment of the march, we brought a group of girls from Alness Academy and Dingwall Academy. For most of them on that march, it was the first time they had ever been involved in a political march and it was an eye-opener for them. They thought it was just extraordinary.

And then we worked with three different groups who were involved, one at Nairn, one in Inverness, and one in Dornoch, taking some of the young people. I gave them some of the background information. They wrote their own play and it is a great pity that this full film does not survive. The Dornoch group could not perform because we had to go by train, and the train no longer runs here, so this was done in Golspie. They did a fantastic skit of what happened in 1913 when the Prime Minister, who we can see here, who was disturbed at his golf.

We've also now created school packs so that they can be given to the schools and used for studying. Because it's very important, I think, that young women and young men, but especially young women, realise just how hard people fought for the vote for them.

Thank you.