

## The Westmorland Suffragists

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Studies of Westmorland political history in the early twentieth century make no reference to the movement for votes for women. Primary sources however show that female suffrage organisations were formed in the county, and that their membership was vigorous and effective in the period 1908-1918. The principal archive is the collection of Catherine Marshall papers in the Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle. Marshall was the founder of organised dissent by disenfranchised women in Cumberland, and her work locally and nationally has been highlighted. Jo Vellacott's biographical study, *From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage. The Story of Catherine Marshall* was based on this archive. But the story of the struggle for female franchise in Westmorland, also contained within the archive, has not been told. The purpose of this paper is to tell it, using local press coverage to amplify the suffragist programme, identify its activists, and assess its impact.

**I**N the nineteenth century Westmorland's two constituencies – the northern (or Appleby) and the southern (or Kendal) divisions – regularly returned Conservatives to parliament, often against the national trend. In his analysis of the county's electorate Henry Pelling attributes this to an alliance of agricultural, freehold and off-comer voters, together with vigorous electioneering on behalf of their nominees by the Lowthers in the case of the northern division.<sup>1</sup> This pattern was interrupted in 1906 when both seats succumbed to the Liberal landslide. The margins were narrow, however, and in 1910 the traditional political order was restored. Lancelot Sanderson won in Appleby, and Captain Joscelyn Bagot of Levens Hall resumed the Kendal seat he had occupied since 1895. After his sudden death in 1913 another Conservative, Colonel John Weston, replaced him. All these men opposed votes for women.

Westmorland's reputation as one of the most reactionary parts of the country was built on facts like these. They help to explain why the secondary sources which deal with the political history of the county make no mention of the debate about the extension of the franchise to women which was gripping the rest of the nation.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this article is to correct this stereotype of Westmorland as a conformist backwater and of Westmerians as untouched by contemporary issues. Jill Liddington's view is that 'the Edwardian Votes for Women campaign was everywhere ... it entered every home; it was discussed up and down the land'.<sup>3</sup> It certainly included rebellions by Westmorland mothers and daughters against husbands and fathers whose political loyalties and patriarchal certainties blinded them to the new, more democratic climate.

A clue to the truth lies in the period 1906 to 1910 when Leif Jones was elected as member for Appleby and Dudley Stewart-Smith as member for Kendal. Both were Liberals and both supported votes for women. I want to demonstrate their response to the pressure of suffrage groups which were active in Westmorland at the time, to identify the people involved in them, and to describe the work they did. In doing so I hope to recover an important part of the political history of the county, and amplify the record of the suffrage campaign nationally. Primary sources relating to suffragism

in Westmorland are scarce, indeed the only suffragist who features in any collection within the county is Amy Sharp of Loughrigg. Material relating to her role within the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), though brief, is held in the Armitt Library, Ambleside. The Library of the Religious Society of Friends in London has an archive on Theodora Wilson Wilson who was active in Westmorland feminist politics as president of the South Westmorland Women's Liberal Association (SWWLA) in the early 1900s, but she was also a prolific novelist and pacifist activist and it is these matters that her papers cover. Similarly Hull University Library holds unpublished material about Margaret Llewelyn Davies of Kirkby Lonsdale, but it concerns her work on behalf of married women rather than the female suffrage campaign of the Women's Co-operative Guild.

Nevertheless, there is evidence of a movement for votes for women in Westmorland in the Women's Library picture collection at London Metropolitan University. This contains just one relevant photograph, but it is crucial to this study because it shows Westmorland suffragists demonstrating in London with their NUWSS branch banners in 1910. Elizabeth Crawford's recent examination of a wide range of primary sources, including birth, marriage and death registers, has created an impressive new database of previously unknown suffrage activists.<sup>4</sup> These are women omitted from the votes for women story because of the lack of other documentary evidence, such as letters and diaries, that could have been used to include them. Crawford's work covers all parts of the country, some more thoroughly than others, and it is clear that her profile of Westmorland is based only on NUWSS annual reports which add little to the list of local society officers mentioned in the *Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who* in 1913.<sup>5</sup> However, a fuller account of the National Union's organisation, tactics and membership in the county does exist. It is in the Catherine Marshall archive in the Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle, and in local newspapers.

The Marshall papers are extensive. They include family correspondence and records relating to Catherine's involvement with the No Conscription Fellowship, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the National Council for Civil Liberties, the Labour Party, and Liverpool orphanages, as well as the details of her work for votes for women nationally through her role as a leading member of the NUWSS executive, and locally. Her biographer has mined the archive in this last connection but suffragists with whom Marshall made contact as the movement spread beyond her base in Cumberland are mentioned only in passing.<sup>6</sup> It is these coincidental references that reveal the suffrage campaign in Westmorland, for they identify the location of local branches, the names of their officers and the dates and agendas of their meetings. The Westmorland suffragist programme is described in the county press. The Conservative *Westmorland Gazette* and the Liberal *Kendal Mercury and Times* both carry reports of local suffrage activism which clarify what this meant in practice in Westmorland, with particular reference to the roles of the officers of the NUWSS branches that were formed in Kendal, Ambleside and Appleby-with-Murton between 1908 and 1918.

## 1908

Petitions to enfranchise women had been presented to Parliament by supporters in Westmorland in 1869 and 1871, but they did not demand that all women should be given the vote. Early suffragists such as Lydia Becker, who campaigned in Westmorland in 1873, emphasised the justice of rewarding women whose property and earnings were taxed with a say in the election of their lawmakers.<sup>7</sup> This principle became a major plank in the platform of the NUWSS, founded by Millicent Fawcett in 1897 to campaign for the vote for women on the same terms as it had already been given to men, that is to say only to owner-occupiers and lodgers paying a £10 annual rent. The National Union was to become the largest suffrage group in the country, but the first organisation to lobby for votes for women in Westmorland was the Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG) which supported adult suffrage, that is the vote for all men and women without any property qualification. Its general secretary, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, and over 50 other women met in Kirkby Lonsdale Concert Hall in February 1908 to discuss the political issues of the day. One of their decisions was to demand that their MP, Dudley Stewart-Smith, speak on behalf of women's suffrage in the current parliamentary session.<sup>8</sup>

However, the Keswick Women's Suffrage Association, affiliated to the NUWSS, was formed by Catherine Marshall in May 1908, and in July it arranged a caravan propaganda tour of the north west by Newnham College students which called at Grasmere, Ambleside, Windermere and Kirkby Lonsdale. Catherine Marshall thought it a great success,<sup>9</sup> and it must have influenced Westmorland sympathisers. A group from the Kendal area formed a steering committee to establish an NUWSS branch in September 1908, and it was this committee that was responsible for organising a momentous meeting in Kendal Town Hall on Monday 12 October 1908.<sup>10</sup>

It was chaired by Mary Wakefield of the family of Sedgwick gunpowder manufacturers, but the main speaker was Millicent Fawcett. Briefed by Canon French that 'Kendal does not like to move too fast' she emphasised NUWSS moderation – it rejected the violent tactics of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), it did not demand that women should have the right to become MPs, nor that all women should be given the vote. At question time it seemed that she had miscalculated. Her message was too extreme for Mary Cropper of the family of Burneside paper makers who claimed that women had enough influence at local government level to safeguard their interests, and too timid for the Kendal Quaker Theodora Wilson who argued for adult suffrage. N. F. Wilson supported her by pointing out that NUWSS policy would enfranchise only rich, not poor women.

It is clear that these participants were well informed and that a wide range of views on the franchise existed in Westmorland at the time. Nevertheless a resolution to ask Parliament to approve the NUWSS version of votes for women was 'carried by a large majority'. A similar sentiment was expressed at a meeting in Ambleside the following day, and a National Union branch was established there soon afterwards.<sup>11</sup>

## 1909

The driving force behind the work done by the Kendal suffragists was Louisa Walker of Brettargh Holt.<sup>12</sup> She was a member of the steering committee; she seconded the vote of thanks from the platform on 12 October; she became the first secretary of the Kendal branch and she worked closely with Catherine Marshall to devise NUWSS strategy in the north-west. This included badgering the press to publicise their activities, heckling Anti-Suffrage League meetings, running stalls selling suffragist literature, inviting well-known suffragists to address their meetings, attracting working-class and male support, and putting on special events such as plays and waxworks.<sup>13</sup> Amongst the nationally recognised figures who visited Westmorland in 1909 were Maud Royden, Ethel Snowden and Isabella Ford.<sup>14</sup> Local officers also spoke regularly, for example Louie Walker addressed 'a large audience' at Arnside in February. The records of Arnside's debating society suggest that this was a conservative community in political terms, but Louie could find no one to oppose women's suffrage on this occasion, the task, for form's sake, being undertaken by Dr. Muckalt, a suffragist.<sup>15</sup>

Other groups were also active, sometimes in competition with the NUWSS branches. From 1909 WCG adult suffrage business was conducted through the People's Suffrage Federation (PSF) founded by Margaret Llewelyn Davies whose arguments were strong enough to persuade Bertrand Russell to resign from the National Union and join the PSF instead.<sup>16</sup> The SWWLA also endorsed adult suffrage at meetings in Windermere and Ravenstonedale.<sup>17</sup> This perplexed Helen Ford of the Kendal NUWSS. She could not see why adult suffragists wanted married women to have the vote when the freedom to choose either to marry or to vote was so much more enviable.<sup>18</sup> Margaret Llewelyn Davies justified the PSF position on the grounds that to deny any women the vote was to deprive the nation of experience which could make a vital contribution, especially in matters of social reform.<sup>19</sup>

However, opponents of female suffrage in any form, stirred by these developments, launched a counter-campaign. There was 'a good attendance' at a meeting of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League in Kendal Town Hall on 18 January 1909 at which Lady Mabel Howard took the chair, supported by local women including Mary Cropper, the Hon. Mrs Cropper and Mrs A. Somervell. Lady Howard argued that the failure of many women to engage in local politics indicated that they had no wish for further voting rights, and other speakers echoed arguments about the difference between the sexes, Queen Victoria's dependence on Prince Albert to do her job, and the need for women to devote their special qualities to home making, nursing and education. But the main address was given by Mary Cropper, a member of the League's central executive, who made it clear that the new Westmorland branch of which she had just become chairman had plans to fight against votes for women throughout the county.

Many suffragists also attended this meeting. Helen Ford challenged the charge of women's indifference to voting rights by pointing out that men, too, could often not engage in politics because of other commitments, yet no one suggested disenfranchising them. If men's involvement in war especially qualified them to vote, she claimed, women were involved in war work as well, in equally necessary, if different roles.<sup>20</sup>

Louie Walker added a criticism of rich women like Mrs Somervell, from influential local political families, for applauding those women who at the meeting expressed their inability to form political judgements.<sup>21</sup>

So by the end of 1909 the positions of all the Westmorland organisations which engaged with the franchise issue had become clear. Adult, limited and anti-suffrage opinion all had their followings, but it was the message of the NUWSS that was preferred. Their meetings were better attended and more sympathetically reported in the local press which made it clear that the National Union was not against adult suffrage in principle, rather it took the pragmatic view that, faced by a hostile government, limited suffrage was at present the more practical policy to pursue.<sup>22</sup>

An important explanation for the pre-eminence of the NUWSS amongst suffrage groups in Westmorland and elsewhere is the willingness of Conservative and Liberal women to unite within it to fight for the cause. Natland suffragists of both parties, for example, adopted the motto 'In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity'.<sup>23</sup> For Conservative suffragists at least this was more than an agreement to set aside sectarian differences for the sake of a greater good, it amounted to a rebellion against their once and future MP, Captain Bagot. In the run up to the January 1910 General Election a meeting of Conservative and Liberal women held in Milnthorpe declared its support for Dudley Stewart-Smith, the pro-suffrage Liberal candidate for South Westmorland. Women in Shap, Orton, Bowness and Windermere made a similar commitment to the North Westmorland candidate, Leif Jones.<sup>24</sup> These local decisions were prompted by the development of the NUWSS policy nationally to back whichever candidate proved the best friend of female suffrage. Contributions to the 'fighting fund' which was established to finance it were regularly called for from the National Union's Westmorland branches.

## 1910

Despite this alliance both pro-suffrage MPs were unseated in January 1910. The reasons for this are not immediately obvious, but nominally pro-suffrage men may have voted Conservative because of their views on the other main election issues – Free Trade, Tariff Reform, Temperance, the 1909 Budget and plans to reform the House of Lords. Violence by members of the WSPU certainly turned some potential supporters against female suffrage.<sup>25</sup> The NUWSS response was reorganisation. The North West Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies (NWF) was created to oversee National Union work in Cumberland and Westmorland and Louie Walker became its organiser in Westmorland. She was promoted to secretary of the NWF with a seat on the Provincial Council, and Mary Benson of Hynning, Levens, took over as secretary of the Kendal branch. Mary Wakefield died in September 1910 and the presidency of the branch was assumed by Annie Gandy of Heaves.<sup>26</sup>

It is difficult to gauge the impact of these changes on the effectiveness of the NUWSS in Westmorland, for initially its programme followed the usual pattern of meetings and letters to the press.<sup>27</sup> However, on 9 July 1910, Westmorland suffragists took part in a national NUWSS demonstration for the first time. A photograph of the event shows



write to Catherine Marshall to apologise for failing to provide all the delegates with the conference details.<sup>32</sup> Further mistakes followed. She recorded the June 1911 NUWSS demonstration as having taken place in May, and she had to apologise again, to Mr Richardson, MP for Whitehaven, for addressing him as Mr Jackson. Family matters also forced her to miss committee meetings she was responsible for organising.<sup>33</sup> The ability of the suffrage movement in the north west to cope with the shortcomings of a key officer suggests the strength and resilience of the local membership. By 1911 others capable of assuming leadership roles had emerged.

## 1911

In 1911 Amy Sharp transformed the position of the NUWSS in north Westmorland. In April she harangued the Ambleside urban council 'at some length', although unsuccessfully, about its failure to support the Conciliation Bill.<sup>34</sup> The Bill was also the focus of attention for Ambleside branch meetings in May, addressed by Maude Royden, and September when Miss Stirling, chairman of the National Union executive committee, visited. The September meeting was held at Neaum Crag, Loughrigg, the residence of Amy's neighbour, Albert Fleming, well known for his advanced views and support for progressive causes. He was a founder member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage which had been formed in Westmorland in 1908 as part of NUWSS strategy to boost recruitment nationally. Amy used this occasion to appeal for help in the formation of a society branch in Appleby, a town hitherto resistant to suffragist organisation, and to encourage the interest in votes for women expressed in Kirkby Stephen.<sup>35</sup> Catherine Marshall sent Amy her congratulations – 'your society gets more practical results from your work than the rest of us', she said.<sup>36</sup>

The Kendal suffragists were not complacent however. They, too, put pressure on their local town council to support the Conciliation Bill, and with more success, for it did so by a vote of 17 to 2.<sup>37</sup> The branch changed its name to Kendal and District, claiming to have recruited a dozen new members by doing so, and it sent delegates to 'the great procession in London' on 17 June 1911. For this purpose a new branch banner was made bearing a silver dove of peace on a red ground with green quarterings and the name 'Kendal' picked out in silver letters. It was the work of Mary Benson and was carried in the procession by Louie Walker and Miss Noel Wilson of High Park, Oxenholme.<sup>38</sup> Domestic production of such propaganda by earnest suffragists is typical of the period. Branches throughout the country made similar artefacts and the result was impressive – a joint NUWSS/WSPU demonstration in which 40,000 marched from the Embankment to the Albert Hall. Westmorland sent a contingent of 19, a respectable number for a small county perhaps, and one which compares favourably with Cumberland's seven.<sup>39</sup>

But Westmorland anti-suffragists were also active in 1911 although only one meeting is reported in the local press, at Kendal in March, when Mary Ward of Fox How, Ambleside, spoke and the Hon. Mrs Cropper presided.<sup>40</sup> However, the biggest meeting of the year seems to have been organised by the WSPU. The suffragettes had not yet targeted the county, but in September Emmeline Pankhurst addressed an 'almost full' Kendal Town Hall supporting the Conciliation Bill and claiming that

her organisation's militant tactics were entirely responsible for its current successful passage through Parliament. The occasion was organised by Miss G. Wilson of High Park, Roger Strickland of Sizergh presided, and all the prominent local suffragists and anti-suffragists were in attendance. The press accounts of it suggest that Mrs Pankhurst received only a lukewarm reception, and only one letter about the meeting was printed. It was from Eleanor Acland of Ellergreen, Burneside, a Liberal adult suffragist who criticised the WSPU for accepting the Bill's exclusion of married working women from its provisions.<sup>41</sup>

## 1912

Ambleside activists continued to dominate Westmorland suffragism and when Catherine Marshall assumed a greater role in the work of the NUWSS nationally, Helen Cunliffe became president of the NWF. One of her first moves was to ask the Westmorland press to publish an extract from the NUWSS manifesto which explained why the Conciliation Bill had recently been defeated. The reasons offered were the opposition of the Irish Party, the absence or apostasy of pledged supporters, and the adverse effect of WSPU militancy on public opinion.<sup>42</sup> This last reason incensed Amy Sharp who hoped that Christabel Pankhurst and other suffragettes 'may be crippled by the retired position [imprisonment] they presently occupy'.<sup>43</sup>

But Amy's main concern was to nurture the new Appleby branch. Mrs. Baker of Battlebarrow had become its secretary, and with support from Amy had built up a membership of 90. Indeed by March 1912 there was enough interest in the neighbouring villages of Murton and Hilton for a separate branch to be established there, with Edith Burrell as its secretary.<sup>44</sup> It was a short-lived venture however, for by the end of the year an amalgamated society which took the name 'Appleby-with-Murton' had been formed.<sup>45</sup> Between them the Eden valley suffragists sent 50 letters to Sanderson, their MP, demanding his support for the Conciliation Bill, and their very existence caused great alarm amongst 'a coterie of fierce critics not far from Appleby and on the further side of Shap'.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless later in the year a tour of celebrity speakers was organised for meetings at Kirkby Stephen, Murton, Kirkby Thore and Long Marton, and the Appleby group was confident enough to challenge its town council to pass a resolution urging the House of Commons to give women the vote.<sup>47</sup> The challenge was successful, an outcome that could not have been envisaged a year earlier and testimony to the dramatic impact the NUWSS had made on the area.

Better organisation in north Lonsdale was also proposed. Amy suggested that suffragists there follow the example of the Eden valley by putting pressure on their Conservative MP, George Haddock, and by appointing their own secretary.<sup>48</sup> An attempt was also made to form a separate branch in Windermere, but the lack of evidence of its independent activity suggests it remained a part of the Ambleside branch, perhaps with semi-autonomous status.<sup>49</sup>

Kendal suffragist meetings are less frequently recorded at this time, but in September Annie Gandy and Mrs Benson gave an 'At Home' in Kendal Town Hall at which the banners of the National Union and the North West Federation were displayed

to 'a large and influential gathering'.<sup>50</sup> And in November Mrs Jeffreys of Castle Green invited Kendal women to copy the fashionable tactic already adopted by other groups and send a 'memorial' to Captain Bagot, on this occasion to inform him of their support for a Labour amendment to the Home Rule Bill enfranchising local government electors in Ireland.<sup>51</sup>

With Margaret Llewelyn Davies of the WCG no longer resident in the county, and Theodora Wilson Wilson of the SWWLA preoccupied with writing, promoting temperance and running the Evening Home for Young People in Kendal, Eleanor Acland emerged as the leading Westmerian exponent of adult suffrage in 1912, making a major speech to Kendal Liberals in May and subsequently founding the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union.<sup>52</sup> Later in the year her sister, Mary Cropper, intervened on behalf of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League at the only meeting of that organisation reported that year. Her speech is important because it claims that suffragists were boycotting the religious services of clergymen who opposed votes for women, or who refused to pray for that cause. This seems to have been the preferred tactic only of the Church Suffrage League, a minor group seldom active in Westmorland, but Mary Cropper was exasperated by it. She was amazed that decent folk could condone such behaviour. However, the suffrage movement had clearly affected even anti-suffrage hard-liners, for they were seriously considering supporting Mary Ward's proposal to press for more women to be appointed to local school and asylum management committees.<sup>53</sup>

### 1913

Louie Walker, the central figure in the launch and development of the NUWSS in south Westmorland, and a prominent member of the Provincial Council, suddenly dropped out of suffrage activism. She had been suffering from overwork and anxiety since 1911 and she disappears from NWF records, after being thanked for her work, in 1913.<sup>54</sup> She continued to take an interest in women's issues however, when they were considered by the Kendal Debating Society, and she still attended NUWSS meetings in Kendal as an ordinary member.<sup>55</sup>

Louie's role as area press secretary and local correspondent of *Common Cause*, the NUWSS paper, was taken over by another Kendal woman, Agnes Graham of Vicarage Terrace. She was an energetic substitute, arranging for *Common Cause* posters to be displayed in Westmorland railway stations,<sup>56</sup> but it was the by-election caused by Captain Bagot's death that gave south Westmorland suffragists an unexpected opportunity to advertise votes for women. They backed the pro-suffrage Liberal, William Somervell, who was defeated by Colonel Weston, the anti-suffrage Conservative. Nevertheless the campaign generated meetings throughout the area,<sup>57</sup> a suffrage shop was opened in Kendal, and a house-to-house canvass for signatures of 'friends of women's suffrage' was undertaken. Three hundred and seventy-eight were obtained, and at the April AGM a branch membership of 124 was recorded. Regular monthly meetings were also introduced, to be held in the Stramongate Hall on Monday afternoons for the purpose of exchanging 'news and progress of the NUWSS'.<sup>58</sup>

Kendal's work was still eclipsed by Ambleside's. Amy Sharp organised speaking tours taking in Shap, Tebay, Kirkby Stephen, Troutbeck, Grasmere and Windermere, as well as Ambleside, and she implemented a new NUWSS idea, the protest postcard, which qualified voters sent to their MPs demanding they vote for women's suffrage. Seventy per cent of the north Westmorland voters who were asked to take part did so.<sup>59</sup> Amy's regional expansion programme continued, consolidating the position of the National Union in north Westmorland and north Lancashire. As a result the number of affiliated societies within the NWF had risen to 23 by the end of 1913, from five in 1910. The Ambleside society itself claimed 182 members and an annual income of £84, which was by far the highest in Westmorland and more than Keswick (£56) or Carlise (£48).<sup>60</sup>

However, the main suffrage event of 1913 was The Pilgrimage. The NUWSS plan was for regional contingents to converge on the capital after marching through their own areas. As a recruiting tool it flopped in Westmorland for some participants used traps, bicycles or cars, and many dropped out, some perhaps because the Keswick banner was fired upon.<sup>61</sup> By the time the pilgrims reached Silverdale they numbered only 12, and stirred little local interest.<sup>62</sup>

The suffragettes visited Westmorland again in 1913, and this time with more success. As local complaints about their violence continued it was perhaps the emphasis they now put on hunger strikes and arguments for social and economic equality which gained them a sympathetic hearing. Indeed at a meeting of the Kendal Debating Society Mrs Whalley, a suffragist, berated Mr Cookson for his criticism of the suffragettes. 'How would you like to be forcibly fed?' she asked.<sup>63</sup> There is no evidence however that the WSPU was ever able to open a branch in Westmorland.

### 1914-1918

By early 1914 the effect of the NUWSS campaign was becoming evident throughout the country. In the area of influence of the NWF (Cumberland, Westmorland and north Lancashire) suffragists claimed that now only one of its eleven MPs, Colonel Weston, was still a pledged anti-suffragist.<sup>64</sup> A tour by Muriel Matters, the famous Australian suffragist, caused great interest, and recruitment in Milnthorpe was so successful that a committee of four was established to represent it as a separate section within the Kendal branch.<sup>65</sup> At the Kendal and District AGM in April a core membership of 140 and 400 'friends of suffrage' was reported, and reorganisation to maximise the potential of this growing support was discussed.<sup>66</sup> But Ambleside could still claim to be Westmorland's premier branch, having a core membership of over 300, together with over 500 'friends',<sup>67</sup> and this was despite the loss of Amy Sharp's leadership because of the onset of multiple sclerosis.<sup>68</sup>

On the outbreak of war all NUWSS branches were instructed by the national leadership to suspend the suffrage campaign in favour of relief work. Many Westmorland members complied, Louie Walker for example offered the Voluntary Aid Organisation a design she was about to patent for 'a shirt which prevented wastage',<sup>69</sup> but some defied the directive and continued to promote suffrage issues until 1918. News of this was regularly submitted to the local press by Miss N. Walker-Jones of Burton-

in-Kendal who was now Westmorland's correspondent for *Common Cause*. Amongst the events covered were the retirement through ill health of Charles Boullen, long-serving secretary of the Ambleside branch, and the appointment of Lilian Graham of Kendal as a speaker for the National Union. The number of suffrage activists in south Westmorland, about 100 in 1916, was also reported, as was the interference of anti-suffrage groups in their work.<sup>70</sup>

Eleanor Acland was involved in opposing this interference. She was among the signatories of a letter to the editor of the *Westmorland Mercury and Times* refuting anti-suffrage claims that the NUWSS had abandoned its policy of limited voting rights in favour of full adult suffrage. The letter pointed out that the principle remained unchanged, but that more women were now expected to qualify to vote as heads of households because so many men had been killed in the war.<sup>71</sup>

Eleanor Acland was one of Westmorland's most vigorous suffrage activists. She was a vice-president of the NUWSS, but her husband, Francis Dyke Acland, held office in Asquith's government,<sup>72</sup> so her major effort was made through specifically Liberal groups, the Women's Liberal Federation, and the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union (LWSU). She resigned from the NUWSS in 1914 because of its alliance with Labour, but she continued to urge support for candidates of any political party as long as they believed in 'representative government for women as well as for men'. This was the message of her propaganda pamphlets and of her speeches to suffrage groups in Windermere and Kendal in 1917.<sup>73</sup>

The work done by Westmorland suffragists in the war years, though lacking official sanction, had one notable success – in 1917, Colonel Weston, a last bastion of reactionary values, was converted to the cause.<sup>74</sup> But the movement in the county was divided. Before 1914, Westmorland NUWSS members were loyal to the founder, Millicent Fawcett, and many continued to revere her,<sup>75</sup> but by 1917 others had clearly rejected her support for the government and the war, and carried on agitating for the vote against her wishes. There may also have been defections to the Women's International League. Westmerians Lilian Harris of the WCG and Theodora Wilson had helped to found the League in 1915, and in February 1917 another of its founders, Helena Swanwick, who had resigned from the NUWSS executive because of its refusal to embrace pacifism, addressed a Kendal audience on the need for a negotiated end to the war.<sup>76</sup> The effect of her speech was not reported, but when it became obvious that the government intended to enfranchise women over 30, and to give them the opportunity of voting in a general election in 1918, Westmorland suffragists changed their focus. Milnthorpe members for example were keen to promote social equality for women through better education and child welfare provision,<sup>77</sup> reflecting at the local level the growing interest nationally in the ideas of Eleanor Rathbone and the work of the Women's Citizens Association, which promoted a wider programme of reform amongst those whose politicisation through the suffrage campaign had created an enduring feminism.

Following the 1918 election, Westmorland's NUWSS branches closed down and most of the membership abandoned political activism. They were not natural rebels

and held few radical views outside the context of suffragism. For the most part they reverted to conventional middle-class ways. Annie Gandy, who had been president of the Kendal branch of the NUWSS from 1910 to 1918, now became president of the Levens Women's Institute; Helena Ford, the Yealand Conyers activist, gave her support to the campaign for the care of unwanted pit ponies; and Louie Walker, who had created the NUWSS in the county in 1908, moved to India to marry Frederick Waltham, traffic manager of the Madras and South Mahratta Railway.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

In Edwardian Westmorland much political power was controlled by a few leading families with paternalist views about the role of women in society. It was hard for women to challenge these views because those who worked were preoccupied with the everyday struggle for survival, and those who did not were often financially dependent on fathers or husbands unsympathetic to change. Despite these difficulties many rebelled, and Westmorland clearly played a prominent part in the votes for women movement in the north west. The WCG, PSF and the LWSU were well supported, but the greatest impact was made by the NUWSS. By 1914 it had over 500 active members in the county, it had established four branches and was planning two more, it had forced pledges of support from local councils and parliamentary candidates, and regularly sent delegates to national events. It became the strongest section of the NWF, at times able to give help to Cumberland and to stimulate the development of suffragism in north Lancashire.<sup>79</sup>

The success of the NUWSS in Westmorland owed much to its non-sectarian nature which facilitated friendly co-operation between activists from different political backgrounds. The Conservatives were better organised than the Liberals in the county, with thriving women's sections and Primrose League branches, but as these did not promote votes for women Conservative suffragists had to look elsewhere for an outlet. Liberal suffragists by contrast could work within the party's pro-suffrage branch of the Women's Liberal Association, or through the LWSU, yet many preferred to seek the franchise by joining the NUWSS. But whatever their party affiliations, Westmorland suffragists were overwhelmingly middle class – clergymen, businessmen, doctors, academics, property owners, and their wives and daughters. Amy Sharp worried about this – 'you cannot stir up divine discontent amongst unimaginative people whose lives have fallen in pleasant places', she claimed.<sup>80</sup> Although her own achievements contradict this judgement it supports the view that the cause of female suffrage primarily enabled well-heeled Westmerians to become temporary dissidents. In this respect Westmorland resembled most other parts of the country, for of the 559 NUWSS women listed in *The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who* for 1913, only one was identified as lower middle class and none as working class.<sup>81</sup> No one included in the sample was from Westmorland, but of the 121 supporters of women's suffrage individually identified in this study only one could claim working-class status, J. Hayso, a Grasmere nurseryman.<sup>82</sup> However, in industrial areas of north-east Lancashire and west Yorkshire working-class suffragists were more numerous,<sup>83</sup> and an effort was made to recruit working women to the NUWSS in Westmorland as well. At the inaugural meeting in Kendal in 1908, for example, the speakers shared a platform

with placards showing a mill girl reading factory regulations and remarking ‘what a cheek, they never asked me’,<sup>84</sup> and Louie Walker made a special plea for the voices of poor women to be heard through the ballot box because this was the only way their grievances would be taken seriously.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore Selina Cooper, perhaps the best known working-class suffragist, was engaged to speak in Westmorland in 1910;<sup>86</sup> in 1913 the *Westmorland Gazette* reported an Ambleside branch meeting attended by ‘all classes’;<sup>87</sup> and Rev. H. V. Mills, minister of the Kendal Unitarian Chapel and secretary of the Independent Labour Party in Westmorland, was a keen promoter of suffrage for working-class women.<sup>88</sup>

The evidence shows, therefore, that Westmorland suffragists were vigorous supporters of a national movement and effective leaders of its local operations in the north-west. They were fully involved in all major NUWSS initiatives – the fighting fund, the annual marches, the postcard campaign and so on. At the same time Amy Sharp, Helen Cunliffe and Louie Walker obtained remarkable results from slender resources as regional co-ordinators, and Margaret Llewelyn-Davies, Theodora Wilson Wilson and Eleanor Acland went on to become influential figures in the women’s movement on the national stage. Their work called for courage and sacrifice, for it was often done in the face of hostility from those within family and social circles who were still content that almost every household should contain a disenfranchised woman. This is surely an achievement that should be acknowledged as a significant part of the political history of Westmorland.

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## Notes and References

1. H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910* (London, 1967), 227 and 339.
2. For example, J. Marshall and J. Walton, *The Lake Counties from 1830 to the mid-Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 1981), and W. Rollinson, *A History of Cumberland and Westmorland* (Chichester 1996).
3. J. Liddington, *Rebel Girls. Their Fight for the Vote* (London, 2006), xi.
4. E. Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (Abingdon, 2001), and *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: a regional survey* (Abingdon, 2006).
5. *The Suffrage Annual and Women’s Who’s Who* (London, 1913).
6. J. Vellacott, *From Liberal to Labour with Women’s Suffrage. The Story of Catherine Marshall* (Montreal, 1993).
7. E. Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, 24.
8. *Kendal Mercury and Times (KM+T)*, 21 February 1908, 2.
9. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/1. Catherine Marshall’s report for September 1908.
10. *KM+T*, 2 October 1908, 8.
11. *KM+T*, 16 October 1908, 8, and *Westmorland Gazette (WG)*, 17 October 1908, 3.
12. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/1. Louisa Walker is always referred to as ‘Louie’ in the Catherine Marshall papers. That form is used here.
13. *Ibid.* For example ‘Man and Woman’ by Mrs J. Ward was to be performed by Isabella Ford’s group of actors and Cicily Hamilton was to present a display entitled ‘Waxworks-up-to-Date’. There is no evidence that either actually took place however.
14. Maud Royden was a member of the NUWSS executive and editor of its paper *Common Cause*. Ethel Snowden had an international reputation as a speaker on suffragism, pacifism and socialism. Isabella Ford was the author of *Women and Socialism* and an influential feminist, trade unionist and suffragist.
15. For example it voted against socialism (*WG*, 16 January 1909, 5), against women’s suffrage (*WG*, 13 March 1909, 8) and in favour of the Women’s Anti-Suffrage League (*WG*, 3 April 1909, 2).
16. Vellacott, *From Liberal to Labour*, 80 and 378.
17. *WG*, 5 December 1908, 2, and 12 December 1908, 2.

18. *WG*, 17 October 1908, 3.
19. *WG*, 7 November 1908, 5.
20. *KM+T*, 22 January 1909, 6.
21. *WG*, 30 January 1909, 8.
22. *WG*, 11 September 1909, 4 and 8.
23. *KM+T*, 10 September 1909, 6.
24. *WG*, 9 October 1909, 7, 15 October 1909, 5, and 11 December 1909, 7.
25. The officers of the Kendal branch of the NUWSS had written to the *Westmorland Gazette* in October 1909 deploring WSPU violence in an attempt to stem pro-suffrage disaffection. See *WG*, 16 October 1909, 7.
26. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/2. The NUWSS (North West Federation) Annual Report 1910-1911.
27. For example from officers of the Ambleside branch supporting the Women Occupiers Franchise Bill recently introduced into Parliament by David Shackleton, Labour MP for Clitheroe, because it proposed to extend the vote to women who paid rates and taxes. See *WG*, 9 July 1910, 9.
28. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/2. Margaret Llewelyn-Davies had left Kirkby Lonsdale earlier in the year following the retirement of her father. Her role as leader of the adult suffrage PSF in Westmorland was taken over by Eleanor Acland. See *WG*, 15 April 1910, 2, and 19 August 1910, 6.
29. The defeated pro-suffrage Liberals were W. Somervell (South Westmorland) and P. Wilson (North Westmorland). This was Phillip, brother of Theodora Wilson Wilson. She campaigned for him in this election. See *KM+T*, 15 November 1912, 8.
30. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/3. Ambleside was within the boundary of the North Westmorland parliamentary constituency.
31. *Ibid.*, a letter to Louie Walker from Charles Duncan, Labour MP for Barrow, dated 1 May 1911.
32. *Ibid.*, a letter from Louie Walker to Catherine Marshall, dated 26 October 1910.
33. *Ibid.*, Louie Walker's notes 'Arising on Minutes of General Meeting', and letters from Louie Walker to Catherine Marshall dated 27 September 1911 and 7 November 1911.
34. *WG*, 22 April 1911, 3.
35. *WG*, 30 September 1911, 7, and 25 November 1911, 7. However the Kirkby Stephen meeting was of a branch of the Westmorland Women's Liberal Association.
36. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/3, a letter from Catherine Marshall to Amy Sharp, dated 7 June 1911.
37. *Ibid.*, Catherine Marshall's note 'Arising in Minutes, 1 April 1911'.
38. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/4, report on Kendal NUWSS work 30 April 1911-30 April 1912 by Miss E. Harrison of Hill Cote, Kendal, who had taken over as branch secretary from Mary Benson in January 1912.
39. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/7, *passim*.
40. *WG*, 1 April 1911, 6. Mary Ward is better known as Mrs Humphry Ward, the best-selling author of *Robert Elsmere*, *Helbeck of Bannisdale* and other novels set in Westmorland.
41. *WG*, 16 September 1911, 7 *KM+T*, 15 September 1911, 5, and 22 September 1911, 5.
42. *KM+T*, 12 April 1912, 2.
43. D.MAR 3/4, a letter from Amy Sharp to Catherine Marshall, dated 21 March 1912.
44. *KM+T*, 29 March 1912, 8.
45. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/3, an undated letter from Mrs Baker to Catherine Marshall.
46. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/4, a letter from Amy Sharp to Catherine Marshall, dated 21 March 1912.
47. *KM+T*, 8 November 1912, 8.
48. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/4, a letter from Amy Sharp to Catherine Marshall, dated 21 March 1912. Miss Satterthwaite of Beckside became secretary of the Hawkshead branch, and 'numerous signed Memorials' were sent to Mr Haddock.
49. In 1912 Hubert Coutts was prepared to act as president of the Windermere branch (D.MAR 3/4 and *WG*, 9 November 1912, 9). Marjory Hall has been suggested as the holder of this office in 1913, see Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, 25.
50. *KM+T*, 20 September 1912, 6.
51. *WG*, 2 November 1912, 4.
52. *KM+T*, 17 May 1912, 6.
53. *KM+T*, 25 October 1912, 2.
54. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/5. Third Annual Report and Rules 1912-1913.
55. *Westmorland Mercury and Times (WM+T)*, 13 February 1914, 5, and 26 June 1914, 6.
56. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/5. Third Annual Report and Rules 1912-1913.
57. For example at Kirkby Lonsdale, Staveley, Milnthorpe, Burton, Levens, Endmoor, Burneside, Natland,

- Crook, Crosthwaite, Heslington, and at 'many of the large works'. See D.MAR 3/5. Third Annual Report and Rules 1912-1913.
58. *WG*, 6 September 1913, 6.
59. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/5. Third Annual Report and Rules 1912 -1913.
60. *Ibid.* Appleby's income was £10, Kendal's £10 14s. 6d. No indication of the origin of these sums is given, but chief amongst them must have been subscriptions, donations and proceeds from fund raising. The following year's figures were very different, for in July 1913 the Kendal branch raised £23 from a single event – a garden party organised by Helen Ford of Yealand Conyers. See *KM+T*, 12 July 1913, 3. Kendal's total income in 1913 was £62 16s. 7d. See *WG*, 7 February 1914, 6.
61. Vellacott, *From Liberal to Labour*, 235.
62. *WG*, 5 July 1913, 9. The marching programme through Westmorland was: 24 June – Grasmere to Windermere, 25 June – Windermere to Kendal, 26 June – Kendal to Arnside, 27 June – Arnside to Lancaster. The arrival of the pilgrims at 10 Downing Street in August was reported in the *local* news section of *KM+T*, perhaps indicating that some Westmerians made it all the way, but no details of those involved are given. See *KM+T*, 8 August 1913, 5.
63. *WG*, 6 December 1913, 8.
64. *WM+T*, 30 January 1914, 7.
65. *WM+T*, 6 February 1914, 8. Muriel Matters had become notorious for showering the Houses of Parliament with suffragist propaganda from an airship painted with the slogan 'Votes for Women'. She mainly worked within the Women's Freedom League which broke away from the WSPU and favoured non-violent tactics such as tax resistance, but she was also involved with the Church Suffrage League.
66. *WG*, 14 April 1914, 6.
67. *WG*, 9 May 1914, 11.
68. After her retirement as its organiser in north Westmorland, Amy moved to Windermere and needed constant care until her death in 1939. She is not listed amongst the officers of the NWF after 1913. See NUWSS (NWF) Fifth Annual Report and Rules (May 1st 1914 to April 30th 1915), The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, ref. X120668008.
69. *WG*, 15 August 1914, 5.
70. *WM+T*, 13 October 1916, 8.
71. *WM+T*, 1 December 1916, 8.
72. Francis Dyke Acland was First Secretary at the War Office 1908-11; Under Secretary at the Foreign Office 1911-15; and First Secretary at the Treasury in 1915, in Asquith's government of 1908-15. See D. Butler and J. Freeman, *British Political Facts 1900-1960* (London, 1963), 5-6.
73. See E. Acland, 'Prospects of a Government Suffrage Measure', *The Englishwoman*, 55, 9; *WM+T*, 30 March 1917, 2; and *WG*, 16 June 1917, 4.
74. *WG*, 16 June 1917, 4.
75. *Ibid.* The Kendal branch of the NUWSS sent 'a resolution of congratulation and esteem' to Millicent Fawcett on her seventieth birthday.
76. *WM+T*, 2 February 1917, 6.
77. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/6 1916-18. A note written in preparation for a forthcoming conference.
78. *WG*, 1 February 1919, 5 16 August 1919, 4, and 25 January 1919, 5.
79. Although there were nine NUWSS branches in Cumberland, some, such as Carlisle, Workington and Whitehaven in towns larger than any in Westmorland, Westmorland often out-performed its neighbour, and Catherine Marshall recorded that 'Westmorland Women's Suffrage Societies send workers and funds to help Cumberland'. See D.MAR 3/7, an undated note in Catherine Marshall's handwriting.
80. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/5, a letter from Amy Sharp to Catherine Marshall, dated 26 November 1913.
81. J. Park, 'The British Suffrage Activists of 1913: An Analysis', *Past and Present*, 120, 1988, 160.
82. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/1, membership list of the Cumberland and Westmorland Men's League for Women's Suffrage.
83. See J. Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper 1864-1946* (London, 1984), and *Rebel Girls*.
84. *KM+T*, 16 October 1908, 8.
85. *WG*, 30 January 1909, 8.
86. CRO (C), D.MAR 3/2, a letter from Mrs C.W. Benson to Catherine Marshall, dated August 1910.
87. *WG*, 18 June 1913, 7.
88. *KM+T*, 8 November 1907, 4. See also L. Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour* (Keele, 1993), 112 and 164.

