

Following Lorraine's talk at the March meeting I have decided to publish the complete article - Editor

Women's Suffrage in Dover

Part I

Lorraine Sencicle

Dover, as a Cinque Port, held on to the terms of Gavelkind, a Saxon Law, long after the Normans came in 1066.

Meaning 'Give all kind,' it was a form of land tenure dealing with intestate estates where, amongst other things, the children, whether male or female, of a deceased son inherited the father's portion. It was not until the end of the 16th century, when Elizabeth I was on the throne, that it became custom for women to bestow their titles and properties on their husbands and sons. In consequence, they lost their rights to property and associated rights. The Reform Act of 1832, replaced the term 'person', as was usual, with the term 'male' and from then on, women were officially disenfranchised ... and the fight was on!

In 1857, women from the upper strata of society successfully campaigned for the right to sue ex-husbands after divorce for their share of the marital home. John Stuart Mill, in 1865, called for women to



Mrs Alice Barlow 1909 - President of Dover Women's Suffrage Society

have the vote and women's suffrage was discussed during the debates on the Second Reform Act of 1867. The Act extended the vote to ratepayers and male franchise increased to 2.5 million. The Act, however, did not specify the sex of the ratepayer. On 26 November 1867 Mrs Lily Maxwell, of Manchester, voted. The Court of Common Pleas declared her vote illegal and the word 'man' was inserted into the Act.

This led to an outcry from women, including a petition from Dover dated 17 June 1869, and led to the Municipal Franchise Act of that year. This Act allowed unmarried women householders to vote in local elections and in Dover the women used their vote, most notably in 1871. Their vote turned the Conservative long-standing majority in Pier Ward to Liberal. Richard Dickeson was elected Mayor. He went on to make a positive impact on Dover's economy and supported women's rights.

The year before, MP Richard Pankhurst

pushed through the first stage of the Married Women's Property Act, which allowed married women the right to own property. However, it was another twelve years before it was fully achieved. Parliament's procrastination triggered a public outcry ensuring that a Mrs Ronniger spoke to a full house at the Apollonian Hall, Snargate Street, on 21 February 1872, on the subject. She also argued that: Firstly it was unjust that those women who were taxed equally to men had no direct power to say, through members of Parliament, how the public money should be raised, and how it should be spent.

Second, Women must obey the Law and many laws affect the interests of women, yet they are the largest class of citizens without a share in the making of laws that affect them.

Later that year the National Society of Women's Suffrage was formed and on 15



Woman Coalheaver Carrying 1 cwt Sack

January 1873, a meeting was held in Dover that initiated the Dover Suffrage Society. Its committee included Mary Anne Apps of 68 Maison Dieu Road and Mrs Wakefield of 8 East Cliff, who was the secretary.

Public meetings were held and on 6 December 1876, 400 people, mainly women, attended a packed Wellington Hall, (between Snargate and Northampton Streets), to hear speeches from leading suffragists, Helen Blackburn, Isabella Tod, Caroline Biggs and Mary Anne Apps of Dover Suffrage Society.

The third Reform Act of 1884 doubled male electors to 5 million. Five years later, in 1889, Emily, the widow of Richard Pankhurst, founded the Women's Franchise League. Their campaigning led Government to allow property-owning single women to become Poor Law Guardians, and to become members of School Boards.

1892, and George Wyndham, Dover's Conservative MP, made a stirring speech in Parliament advocating Women Suffrage. He thus became one of the oldest and most trusted supporters of the suffrage movement. However, he did not receive the backing of the House of Commons and with frustration mounting, groups of women, all over the country, were setting up independent organisations all with the same purpose.

This led, on 14 October 1897, to the formation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies or the NUWSS. Their main aim was to put pressure on non-supportive MPs. The long-standing president was Millicent Fawcett, the sister of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836-1917), UK's first female

doctor, Dr Anderson had been reluctantly admitted to the British Medical Association in 1873 and it was another 19 years before the next female was admitted.

Emily Pankhurst and her two daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, were members of the NUWSS but felt that it was not radical enough. Thus, in 1904, the Pankhursts set up the Women's Social and Political Union - WSPU. Their first campaign was aimed at a Liberal Party conference but made little impact. With the slogan, 'Deeds Not Words', they organised a Women's Sunday march in Hyde Park - in June 1906, 250,000 people attended. It was at that time the word Suffragettes was coined and was only applicable to members of the WSPU.

The following February (1907) the NUWSS held a demonstration in which over 3,000 women took part - including a small contingent from Dover. On 30 September 1908, the NUWSS held an even larger rally and again Dover was represented. One of those who attended was Dr Annie Brunyate (1872-1937) Dover's first female medical practitioner. A graduate of Girton College, Cambridge (1892-5) she had undergone medical training at Durham and gained her doctorate from St Hugh's, Oxford. She lived with her mother at 4 Effingham Crescent, where she practised. The house was also the HQ of the Dover Woman's Suffrage Society.

In January 1909, Dr Annie along with six other ladies took the Dover Women's Suffrage Society (DWS) into the NUWSS and invited women of the town to an 'At Home'. This was held in the then Christ Church Mission Hall and one of their

speakers was Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. The chairman was Hungarian born Ilena Ginever, the wife of a vicar who lived at 17 Park Avenue.

The meeting was a lively affair emphasising that the right to elect an MP was not an end in itself but the beginning of major social reforms appertaining to women. These included: Equality in wages; Equality in the work place, for instance the abolition of the sweat shop system for women - it had already been abolished for men; The availability of technical training for women - trades unions had successfully legislated against this being available to women; Opening up the professions - such as the law, to women.

The majority of those who attended that meeting were impressed and on Thursday 22 April 1909 DWS held a public meeting at the Town Hall. Mrs Alice Barlow, wife of Edward Percy Barlow, Chairman of Wiggins Teape, Buckland, was elected President, her daughter Alice, Vice-President. Honorary Secretary was Dr Annie Brunyate and Honorary Treasurer was Lorna Bomford. Lorna was born on 29 December 1883, the daughter of the retired Indian Surgeon-General Sir Gerald Bomford. She lived with her parents at Hillesden, 14 Godwyne Road.

The DWS committee arranged further public meetings and frequently joined forces with Florence Macauley (1862-1945) of Folkestone. She was the Kent representative of the radical WSPU, the members of which broke windows of well-known shops in the west end of London and carried out other activities that brought attention to the cause.