

Women's Suffrage in Dover

Part III

Lorraine Sencicle

The WSPU campaign of active disobedience and hunger strikes following imprisonment continued. In an attempt to thwart public sympathy, the Government introduced the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act 1913 or as it became known, the Cat and Mouse Act. This stopped force-feeding but instead the women were kept in prison until they became extremely weak when they were released and on recovery re-imprisoned.

The rationale was that the government would claim that any harm, was entirely the fault of the Suffragette. However, as the women recovered they were moved to 'safe houses', including ones in Dover, and subsequently 'disappeared'. The Act soon became counter-productive.

On 4 June 1913 Emily Wilding Davison, trying to pin a WSPU flag on the King's horse, Anmer, at the Epsom Derby, fell underneath its hooves. The establishment were outraged with the *Times* giving lengthy coverage on the state of the horse and the jockey. The horse was unharmed and the jockey's injuries

consisted of slight concussion, cuts and bruises and an injury to his arm.

As for Emily Davison, she received a few short sentences, saying that she had been taken unconscious to Epsom Cottage Hospital and that she was a suffragist who had been imprisoned several times but usually released after hunger strike.

What mention there was of Emily's condition was shrouded in vilification until she died on 11 June. Then it emerged she had gained a 1st class honours degree from Oxford. Emily was to be buried in Northumberland and the Suffragists announced that there would be a public tribute as her coffin crossed from Victoria railway station to Kings Cross in London.



*Suffragette removed from a demonstration.
Courtesy of Eveline Robinson*

The Home Office issued a statement that only a few women were to escort the body and the establishment press made it clear that only extreme militants would do so. On the day, Emily's body was accompanied by a long procession of Suffragists, including Lorna Bomford and members of Dover's Suffrage movement. On the way, the cortege stopped at the WSPU headquarters in Kingsway, where a memorial service was held.

On 4 August 1914, war was declared and the WSPU suspended its activities when the Government released all those held in prison. The Suffragists threw themselves into supporting Britain's war effort and by Christmas, nearly 5.9 million out of the 23.8 million females in Britain were in paid employment and many more in voluntary jobs. As more men were sent to the Front, women replaced them by taking on jobs that were traditionally regarded as 'men's work'. However, only nurses were sent to the front line. In August 1915, the Dover Women's Volunteer Reserve was formed under the command of Mrs Vasse and in 1916, the Women's Land Army. In 1917, the Queen Mary's Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women's Royal Naval Service were formed and many women were stationed at Dover. Towards the end of that year, as food shortages became severe, the Dover Food Control Committee was established and Lorna Bomford was appointed chief assistant and organiser. This was a role she resumed following the outbreak of World War II.

By 1918, it was hard to imagine a single job that had not been taken by women.

In farming, industry, offices and health services there were women in every position.

In the coal trade, a minor concession was made to women with the introduction of the 1-cwt weight sacks instead of the pre-war sacks weighing 2-cwt.

In response, the Government introduced the Representations of the People's Act, 1918, which gave the right of Parliamentary vote to women over the age of 30 who were householders,

the wives of householders, occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5, and/or graduates of British Universities. As a result, 8.5 million women became entitled to vote in General Elections. On 23 October, the Commons had voted 274-25 to allow women to become MPs.

The next General Election was held on 14 December 1918. Several of the women involved in the suffrage campaign stood for Parliament but only Countess Constance Markiewicz, standing for the Sinn Féin, was elected but she never attended Parliament. Nancy Astor, who played NO part in the women's suffrage movement, became the first woman to take her seat in the Commons. She won the Sutton, Plymouth by-election in December 1919.

In January that year, a by-election called in River saw Lorna Bomford elected as the first woman on Dover Corporation. She was appointed to the Housing and the Higher Education Committees. Her lasting legacy was the naming of the roads of the first part of the Buckland estate after characters from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* - Friars way, Weavers Way, Knights Way etc.

On 23 December 1919, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, the first piece of equal opportunities legislation, entered the statute book. However, the first solicitor, Helena Normanton, was not accepted into the profession until December 1922 and only after a struggle. Women were not permitted to sit in the Lords until 1958 and then only as Life Peers. Hereditary Peeresses were not given seats until the passage of the Peerage Act in 1963.

In March 1920, the Dover Housewives Union was established with the aim of

combating the ever-increasing cost of food and other items. That year the Dover Autumn Quarter sessions saw, for the first time, women jurors.

In 1926, Emily Pankhurst paid a visit to Dover and was photographed in Cambridge Road. In April 1927, Lorna Bomford was appointed a County Magistrate, the first woman from Dover to be given the office. She remained a Justice of the Peace until 1947.

On 26 April 1927, Mrs Emma East was given the honorary Freemanship of the town, the first lady so honoured. She had supported her husband, who was the Mayor throughout the General Strike when they were on duty 24/7. He died shortly afterwards. To date there is no plaque to honour Emma.

Emily Pankhurst died on 14 June 1928, the same year as the Representation of the People's Act gave women the vote on equal terms to men. To the end, the Establishment never honoured Emily. However, close to the Houses of Parliament is a statue to her; the cost

was borne by former WSPU members and sympathisers.

The General Election of 1929 was given the derogatory nickname 'Flapper Election.' The Labour Party took office for the second time with Ramsay MacDonald as Premier. Margaret Bondfield was appointed Minister of Labour - the first woman to hold a Cabinet position.

On 2 March 1930 Alice Barlow, Dover's Suffrage President, died at 15 Victoria Park - her residence. She was buried with her husband in River Churchyard. Her death passed unnoticed.

Dr Annie Brunyate, Dover's first woman doctor and Suffrage leader died at Bristol on 13 October 1937; again her death passed unnoticed. Her home in Effingham Crescent, the first headquarters of Dover Suffrage movement, was badly damaged by a shell on 3 November 1943 and was subsequently demolished.

During World War II, women were given major roles, but when honours were given out, they tended to be lower than those of their male equivalents.

Following the war, in July 1946, Dorothy Knight Dix, (1909 -1970) a barrister and Deputy-Recorder of Deal, made legal history when she covered for Dover's Recorder, at the Quarter Sessions. She was the first woman to pass sentence.

The following year, the



*Women Suffragettes - On way to Court
Courtesy of Eveline Robinson*

Dover's Business and Professional Women's Club made equal pay an issue that, it was hoped, would be achieved within the members' lifetime.

The Equal Pay Act came into force following the Ford Dagenham female workers dispute and under the auspices of Labour politician, Barbara Castle, in 1970.

The Sex Discrimination Act came into force in 1975. This was superseded by the Equality Act of 2010 to bring UK anti-discrimination law into line with EU Equal Treatment Directives.

On 25 February 1962, Dover's leading fighter for women's rights, Lorna Bomford, died aged 78 at her home, Milestone House, Temple Ewell. She has never been given a civic honour nor

is there a plaque on Hillesden House, Godwyne Road in her honour. Two years earlier, on 23 May 1960 Alderman Mrs Dorothy Bushell was elected the first ever lady Mayor of Dover. As Mayor, she proved that a woman was more than capable of holding the office. Dorothy died in 2004 age 95 - again, there is nothing publicly to honour her.

Editor's note;

Emmeline (Emily) Pankhurst

Born Emmeline Goulden on 14th July 1858 in Manchester she was the daughter of Robert Goulden and Sophia Crane, a family with a tradition of radical politics. In 1879, aged 20, she married Richard Pankhurst 24, a lawyer and a strong advocate of the women's suffrage movement. Emmeline had four children: Christabel (1880), Sylvia (1882), Frank (1884) and Adela (1885).

Going to Sea

Part III

Apprentice, Deck Officer and 'Inwards' Marine Trinity House Pilot for London Based in Dover

JIM FRANCIS

So the days, months and eventually a year passed, picking up any cargo to anywhere in the world while on the out look to make an honest penny for the Hain Line.

From Hong Kong to Japan, where there was an acute shortage of clothing, the crew would purchase shirts and trousers increasing in size. With care one could put on quite a few layers and walk with reasonable ease past the American armed guards on the dock gates in Kobe. Carpets purchased in Persia sold well in

Australia as did carved ivory from the East African coast. My work as the ship's medic proved quite interesting with different challenges. In Mombasa harbour, a seaman kicking the water from the bottom of the gangway had his leg grabbed by a shark. When the doctor arrived I was told that I had done the right thing by exerting pressure on the artery with fingers rather than using a tourniquet. Sometimes life was boring, such as swinging at anchor in the Persian Gulf for six weeks with no shore leave. Cargo and countries varied such