

## **A SUFFRAGE WALK AROUND THE CENTRE BY LUCIENNE BOYCE**

This circular walk is a companion to the Bristol Suffragette Walk in *The Bristol Suffragettes* by Lucienne Boyce (ISBN 978-1-78132-106-5). If you are feeling energetic you can do it as a detour from the main walk, or you can do it as a separate walk. Allow 20 to 25 minutes.

### **Start**

The start of The Centre Suffrage Walk is at Bristol Cathedral, which is No 8 in “A Walk with the Bristol Suffragettes” pp 81 to 90 *The Bristol Suffragettes*.

**[From the Cathedral continue down Park Street to the Centre, crossing over Canons Road at the lights and Anchor Road; turn left and walk towards the statue of Neptune (with the Colston Tower in front of you); bear right at the statue and cross Broad Quay at the lights; turn right into Baldwin Street; continue along Baldwin Street crossing at the lights over Marsh St. On the opposite side of the road (next to Domino’s Pizza) is the People’s Palace.]**

### **THE PEOPLE’S PALACE**

The People’s Palace opened in 1892 as a music hall which prided itself on attracting a “better class of audience” than other music halls in Bristol. Many famous stars performed here, including Charlie Chaplin. In 1912 the Palace became a cinema, and in the 1970s was a nightclub.

Following the general election in 1910, the WSPU launched a special campaign across the country called The Women’s Mission. During the suffragettes’ election campaigns – when they tried to persuade voters to vote against the Liberal candidates – they had seen a growing realisation amongst women about how politics affected their lives. It was this realisation they wanted to develop in the Women’s Mission, which would appeal to “women householders and lodgers” to demand the vote for which they were qualified and would also show “self-supporting women...how their economic independence is threatened and how powerless they are to protect themselves because of their voteless condition”. And “women of all classes will be urged to claim a share in deciding the welfare of the race.”

Mrs Pankhurst launched the Women’s Mission in February in 1910 and in the run-up to the Bristol Women’s Mission, the local WSPU organised women-only meetings around the city including at the Colston Hall. The Women’s Mission took place in Bristol on 14, 15 and 16 April when Mrs Pankhurst came to speak at the Co-operative Hall in Fishponds and the Temperance Hall on Bedminster Parade, and ended in a mass meeting in the People’s Palace on the afternoon of 16 April.

In her speech in the People's Palace, Mrs Pankhurst explained that because the suffragettes were opposed to the Liberal Government it did not mean they supported the opposition. They opposed the Liberals because they were in power and they weren't doing anything about votes for women. She added that the question of women's enfranchisement was not only a woman's question, but a human question.

**[Cross in front of Domino's into Marsh Street; turn right into Clare Street which leads into Corn Street; near the top of Corn Street turn left into Small Street and walk down to the Crown Court.]**

### **SMALL STREET POST OFFICE**

The Crown Court is on the site of Bristol's former main Post Office.

In November 1909 Winston Churchill, then a Liberal MP and President of the Board of Trade, visited Bristol to speak at the Colston Hall. The visit sparked off days of protests. The evening before he arrived Nurse Pitman of Clifton broke a window at Small Street Post Office. Nurse Pitman had just got back to Bristol after a spell in Newcastle prison, where she had been forcibly fed. In court for the damage to the Post Office window she said, "a few broken windows are less to be regretted than thousands of broken hearts". Nurse Pitman was aged fifty two, and her suffragette activities damaged not only her health but also her employment prospects, causing her to suffer much hardship.

London suffragette Vera Wentworth broke windows at the Liberal Club, which was in Corn Street. One of the missiles Vera used was a fossil, with a note to say she was reminding "Liberal statesmen that they are fossilising and out of touch".

The next morning Mary Allen broke the windows at the Board of Trade's office which was in Prince's Street.

Another woman, Jesse Lawes, threw stones at the glass entrance of the Colston Hall from the top of a tram. The first two stones fell into the plants so she went home for two more which were more successful. The police arrested her on the tram.

The four women were arrested and imprisoned in Horfield Prison, where they went on hunger strike and were forcibly fed.

**[Proceed to the end of Small Street; turn left and cross over in front of St Stephen's House. Stand by Burke's statue facing the Bristol Hippodrome.]**

### **BRISTOL QUAY**

It's hard to imagine now, but the church opposite, St Mary's on the Quay, was once actually on the quay. The River Frome, which brought Bristol docks into the heart of the city, was covered over in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and this area became the Tramways Centre, a large and busy tram interchange – the blue-faced clock on the double-gabled building where Colston Street meets St Augustine's Parade marks the former offices of the Bristol Tramways Company (it is now a Co-operative Supermarket).

The suffragettes held outdoor meetings on the Docks, which often resulted in the women receiving rough treatment from the crowd. On one occasion in 1907, three inexperienced

suffragettes were addressing a crowd from a lorry parked near the water. The mob tried to push the lorry into the water, and the women with it. They were rescued by a group of young socialist men who fought off the mob and held the lorry back. Annie Kenney, who was a frequent speaker on the Docks, arrived on the scene and was apparently able to gain the crowd's attention.

## **THE HIPPODROME**

The Hippodrome opened in 1911. It was re-designed by Frank Masham and reopened on 16 December 1912 with a water spectacular.

Wilkie Bard (1874–1944) was a celebrated music hall comedian whose real name was William August Smith. He was famous for his songs and character sketches such as *The Nightwatchman* and *The Cleaning Lady*, and for his pantomime dames. He appeared in Bristol many times, at the People's Palace and at Prince's Theatre which was renowned for its pantomimes, produced by theatre owner, Mr Macready Chute, himself; they won the praise of no less a critic than George Bernard Shaw.

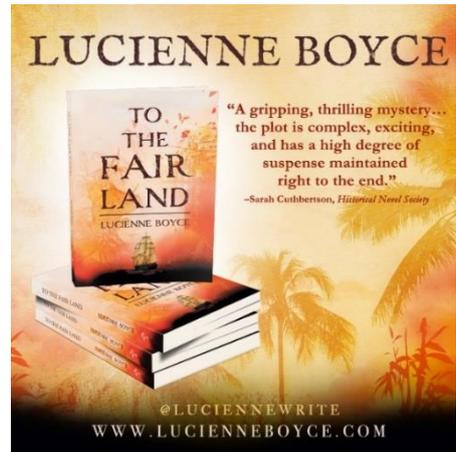
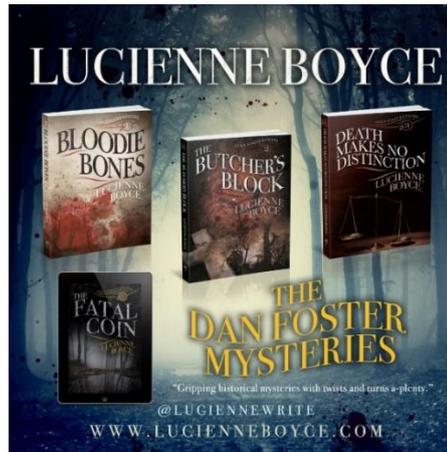
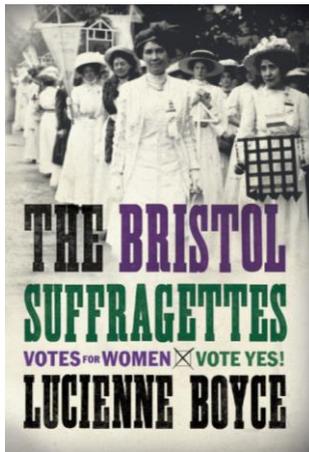
Bard also appeared at the Hippodrome.

One of Wilkie Bard's popular songs was *Put Me Upon An Island (Where the Girls are Few)*. It is one of many music-hall songs written about the suffragettes; in it he declares he would be happier on a desert island, amongst fierce lions, or on a treadmill than amongst suffragettes. Some songs are downright unpleasant. "Feed 'em with a hosepipe" cries Mark Sheridan in his 1909 *In the Days that are Coming Bye and Bye*. Arthur Aiston's 1912 *The Suffragette* credits 'Mrs Pancake' with the declaration, "Man? I hate him. I hate him."

Many of the songs have catchy choruses and were sung with gusto by interrupters at suffrage meetings, reflecting as they did popular images of the suffragette as an old maid, a hammer-swinging termagant, or a woman who really wants not "votes for women" but "blokes for women" (Mark Sheridan again). In *That Ragtime Suffragette* sung by Warwick Green we are introduced to "That ragtime suffragette/She's no household pet".

There are some songs that raise a laugh, anti though they are. In a rolling Scots accent Jock Mills wails, "Since my wife joined the suffragists/I've been a suffragee." On a more positive note, Jen Latona gives a reminder that not every calamity can be laid at the feet of the suffragettes in *You Can't Blame the Suffragettes for That*.

**[Now turn right and walk up Colston Street to resume the main walk at the Colston Hall, or walk back across the Centre and up to the Cathedral.]**



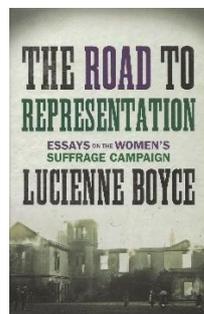
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