

‘A fine thing gone wrong’: Winifred Coombe Tennant and the Suffragettes

Introduction

Winifred Coombe Tennant (1874-1956) was a prominent women’s suffrage campaigner in south Wales through her work with the non-militant National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). In addition to her suffrage campaigning, she made significant contributions to Welsh public life through her cultural, social and political activities. She was active in the National Eisteddfod and a member of the Gorsedd of Bards, adopting the bardic title Mam o Nedd. She achieved some notable ‘firsts’, being the first woman JP for Glamorgan, and the first woman to be appointed as a delegate to the League of Nations.

Winifred Coombe Tennant was born in Rodborough, Gloucestershire. Her father was George Edward Pearce-Serocold (1828-1912), a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and her mother was his second wife, Mary Clarke *née* Richardson of Derwen Fawr, Swansea. The family moved around a great deal during Winifred’s childhood, and she was educated at schools in France, Switzerland and England.

In 1895 she married Charles Coombe Tennant (1852-1928) of Cadoxton Lodge, Neath, Glamorgan, the son of Gertrude Barbara Rich Tennant (1819-1918), and the landowner and politician Charles Tennant (1796-1873). Charles Coombe Tennant had inherited extensive estates and business interests in south Wales, including the Tennant Canal, built by his grandfather, Lancashire-born George Tennant (1765-1832) between Port Tennant, Swansea and the Neath Canal at Aberdulais. The marriage introduced Winifred into her mother-in-law’s social circle of celebrated writers, artists and politicians.

It would be hard to do justice to all of Winifred Coombe Tennant’s interests and activities. She was a spiritualist who joined the Society for Psychical Research in 1901 and was known as a medium under the alias ‘Mrs Willett’. This aspect of her life was not widely known during her lifetime, but the influence she had on Welsh public life certainly was.

‘A life of service in South Wales’

Winifred was an art collector and patron of Welsh arts, and served on the committee of Swansea Art Gallery. So committed was she to the promotion of Welsh arts and crafts that for several years after she went to live in Cadoxton Lodge she wore Welsh dress in the mornings. She was closely connected with the National Eisteddfod, which was held in Neath in 1918, having been elected to the general committee in March 1917. In 1918, when she was chair of the arts and crafts section of the National Eisteddfod, she was given an honorary Bardic degree and the title Mam o Nedd. She was appointed Mistress of the Robes in 1931.

She was not, however, a Welsh speaker, and this attracted criticism from at least one quarter. An anonymous satirist for the *Western Mail* mocked her involvement in the Eisteddfod by putting into her mouth the words: ‘It is true that I don’t know a single Welsh word and that I could not tell whether Ceiriog was a man or a mountain.’¹ Possibly the remark reflects an anxiety about the introduction of English language and culture into the Eisteddfod; possibly it is motivated by political differences for, as Peter Lord notes, the *Western Mail* was a Tory newspaper.² Whatever the author of this remark had in mind, there is no doubt that Winifred identified herself as Welsh and was devoted to the best interests of Wales as she saw them.

¹ Quoted in Peter Lord, *Winifred Coombe Tennant: A Life Through Art* (Aberystwyth, 2007) p.98. See also p.143.

² Lord, *A Life Through Art*, p.96.

She was a member of the Penal Reform League, the South Wales Garden City Association, and was on the executive of the Neath Nursing Association. She was a Liberal and an executive member of the Welsh Liberal Council (WLC). In 1921 she was appointed chair of the WLC Advisory Committee for West Wales. She was a member of the WLC Committee for Self-Government in Wales. She stood, unsuccessfully, for election as a Liberal MP in the Forest of Dean in 1922. In the same year she was a delegate to the League of Nations, the first woman to be appointed to the role.

She was a tireless advocate of social and political reform for Wales. In the 1920s she was a leading member of the Women's Section of the Welsh School of Social Service. She concerned herself with a huge range of public issues, including the provision of decent housing. She declared in a speech in 1918 that 'There must be no more of those dull, drab houses which were a disgrace to Wales'.³ She also supported (amongst other things) better health provision; the inclusion of more women on public bodies such as parish, district and local councils; the provision of pit head baths for miners; and better care for unemployed youth. She deplored the adverse affect on home life of the growing film industry with its emphasis on crime and 'sex-appeal'.⁴ Indeed, one of the arguments she used in favour of giving women the vote was that as women's place was in the home, women should have the vote so they could influence issues that affected the home.

She was Glamorgan's first woman justice of the peace, appointed in 1920. As a visiting justice at Swansea Prison she brought about improvements in the treatment of prisoners there which were adopted across the UK prison service.

Winifred lived in Neath until three years after her husband's death in 1928, when she moved to London. However, she remained passionately attached to Wales, retaining her links with the Eisteddfod and nationalist politics. When she died, she bequeathed a fund to the Eisteddfod. It is hard to dispute *The Times* obituary comment that hers was 'A life of service in South Wales'.⁵

Women's suffrage campaigner

In 1910, Winifred joined the NUWSS, which had been formed in 1897 by the affiliation of suffrage groups from around the country, some tracing their origins to the 1860s. In February 1911 she met Betty Balfour and her husband Gerald when she went to their home, Fisher's Hill, Woking, at Betty's invitation. Both Balfours were interested in psychic research, and it was this shared interest that first drew them together. Betty was also a suffragist, and during the visit she and Winifred talked about suffrage. After the visit, Winifred began to attend suffrage meetings with Betty.

At the same time, she started an affair with Betty's husband. By September 1911 Gerald Balfour and Winifred had acknowledged their love for one another. Balfour confessed to his wife in September 1912, and told Winifred that she took the news well. In November he showed her a letter from Betty which demonstrated that she accepted the situation. Betty Balfour and Winifred continued to meet and attend suffrage meetings together, and when Winifred commenced her NUWSS speaking career, she and Betty Balfour spoke on the same suffrage platforms.

The Common Cause records subscriptions Winifred paid to the NUWSS in 1911 and 1913. The Coombe Tennants often stayed in Brighton, and in January 1914 she joined the

³ *Western Mail*, 6 July 1918, 'Women as Voters – Mrs Fawcett on social reform at Cardiff', Press Cutting in WCT's Album of Press Cuttings held at West Glamorgan Archives, Reference D/DT 3698.

⁴ WCT, 'The adolescent and the home', *Welsh Outlook*, 15, 9, September 1928.

⁵ *The Times*, 1 September 1956.

local branch there. She was a member of the literature committee, a role she continued after her election, also in January 1914, as president of the Neath branch. She accepted the Neath appointment in spite of her husband's opposition; he said he was concerned about the risk of violence she would face from the local roughs.

When Winifred took on the presidency of the Neath, Briton Ferry and District Women's Suffrage Society it had not been long in existence but was already on the brink of collapse. It had been founded in 1913 by a Miss Chambers. The secretary was Miss Tapper, but she resigned in July 1913. The branch affiliated to the NUWSS in June 1913, but then slumped into inaction. There were only twenty eight members, none of whom attended any meetings, and nor were there any committee meetings. Scottish-born William Graham, who was married and gave his occupation in the 1911 Census as a steel analyst, took over from Miss Tapper. He appealed for help to Barbara Foxley, a professor at University College, Cardiff, who was honorary secretary of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Federation (SWF).

The Federation despatched one of its organisers, Miss Harvey, to the district, and in January 1914 Barbara Foxley followed to address a public meeting. Mrs A S Tonner BA was elected secretary, and Winifred president. Winifred and Mrs Tonner worked together until after the outbreak of war. After the birth of a son in April 1916, Mrs Tonner's health declined and she died in November 1917. William Graham remained active in the branch.

In August 1914, *The Common Cause* reported that since the appointments of Mrs Tonner and Winifred the branch had 'made such remarkable progress during the last few months that the attention of the whole Federation and, indeed, of the Union, should be directed to it'.⁶ Neath had become the fourth largest in the SWF. This was all the more remarkable as Neath 'was one of those places in which it was once considered impossible ever to start a Suffrage Society'.⁷ Winifred had achieved a lot in a short time, and her advance through the suffrage ranks was a rapid one. From giving her first suffrage speech in March 1914 in Brighton, she was elected onto the executive of the SWF before the year's end, and in 1915 was elected on to the NUWSS national executive.

It is likely that Winifred's social connections contributed to her rapid rise. She was well connected socially through her family, notably her mother-in-law Gertrude Tennant, and politically through her friendship with the Balfours. Betty Balfour's sister-in-law was Lady Frances Balfour, who was on the executive committee of the NUWSS. However, she and Winifred had not met in 1914, so her influence, if any, would have been indirect. Winifred also had resources that many other women lacked. She could afford to travel and spend time away from home, and for meetings closer to home she had a chauffeur-driven car. She had servants to look after the house, and nannies and governesses for her children. Whatever her connections, though, the NUWSS was run on democratic lines and Winifred had to be elected to her roles.

Winifred had chosen to align herself with the NUWSS's constitutional suffrage campaign rather than with the militant tactics of the WSPU. On 16 November 1911 she attended a WSPU meeting at the Albert Hall in London with Betty Balfour, where she heard Christabel Pankhurst, Mrs Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and Annie Kenney speak. The meeting convinced her that militancy was not the path for her, though she respected those who believed differently.

⁶ *The Common Cause*, 7 August 1914.

⁷ *The Common Cause*, 25 June 1915.



NUWSS – law-abiding suffragists.

Working from the premise that the existing women’s suffrage movement was moribund and that more direct action was called for, Mrs Pankhurst had established the WSPU as a militant society in 1903. From the outset the WSPU employed aggressive tactics, such as heckling government ministers, campaigning against government candidates in by-elections, and causing disturbances at the House of Commons. These actions ended in arrest, imprisonment and, later, the hunger strike and forcible feeding. In 1906 *Daily Mail* war correspondent Charles Hands coined the word ‘suffragette’ to refer to the members of the militant WSPU.

Over the next few years, militant tactics escalated to include window breaking, arson, and other destructive acts directed at public and private property. There were also a number of physical assaults on government ministers, including the anti-suffrage prime minister and leader of the Liberal party, Herbert Henry Asquith (1852-1928), who was assaulted by three suffragettes at Lympne, Kent, in 1909. In November 1909 Winston Churchill (1874-1965) was assaulted in Bristol. Lloyd George was attacked several times, including an incident in 1910 when he was attacked by a male supporter.

The NUWSS was initially sympathetic to the WSPU. Both organisations were, after all, campaigning for the same thing: the vote on the same terms as it was granted to men. However, the official NUWSS attitude changed with the introduction of window-breaking in 1908, and as time went on the NUWSS distanced itself more and more from the WSPU. In October 1909 the quarterly NUWSS council meeting, which was held in Cardiff, resolved: ‘That the Council of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies strongly condemns the use of violence in political propaganda, and being convinced that the true way of advocating the cause of Women’s Suffrage is by energetic, law-abiding propaganda, reaffirms its adherence to constitutional principles.’⁸ At the same time, the NUWSS protested about treatment of suffragette prisoners in prison. Millicent Garrett Fawcett later wrote: ‘Far more violence has been suffered by the suffragettes than they have caused their opponents to suffer.’⁹

Despite these tactical differences, at local level militant and non-militant women did work together. Many were members of both societies (and also of other suffrage societies associated with religious or professional groups), or moved between the two as their politics dictated. On 28 September 1910, for example, Rachel Barrett of the WSPU and Mrs Charlotte Price White of Bangor NUWSS led a joint suffrage deputation to David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, at his house in Criccieth.

⁸ *The Common Cause*, 14 October 1909.

⁹ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Women’s Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement*; (London, ND but 1912 in the British Library Catalogue), p.65.

Like many other NUWSS members, Winifred's private attitude towards the militants was, at least initially, a positive one. A deeply religious woman (which she expressed through her spiritualist beliefs and an intensely personal sense of God, the Divine and the Spirit World), she saw the women's movement as divinely inspired. She confided to her diary in 1914: 'To me the whole Woman's Movement is something as deep and as broad as the religious instinct'.¹⁰ She described her work for the Neath branch as 'God's work'.¹¹ When, in June 1917, the House of Commons started to debate a women's suffrage amendment to a proposed franchise reform bill, Winifred wrote, 'May He watch over our cause – which is His'.¹² The link between her social work and her religious feelings always remained strong. Writing in *The Common Cause* in 1919 she asserted that feminism 'comes, like all things of the Spirit, as it listeth...Feminism is for the salvation of men and women equally'.¹³

Winifred also saw the work of the WSPU from a religious perspective. On June 4 1911 she met Mrs Pankhurst: 'I honour her and wish her God-speed'.¹⁴ On 17 June 1911 all the major suffrage societies combined to march in the Women's Coronation Procession, although the NUWSS's decision to participate was not without dissenters amongst its membership, for not everyone had Winifred's tolerance for the militants. For her, however, reading a report of the event – at which there was a Welsh contingent in versions of the 'national dress' devised by folk lore revivalists in the 1820s – the women 'represent to me the visible sign of the divine inspiration brooding over human life...May God prosper these fighting sisters of mine'.¹⁵ In November 1911 she met the militant Lady Constance Lytton, who was Betty Balfour's sister. Winifred described Lady Constance as 'an illuminée, burning with an inward fire'.¹⁶ Referring to Mrs Pankhurst and the suffragettes, she wondered, 'Are these people drunk with the Holy Ghost?'.¹⁷

After attending a suffrage meeting organised by the NUWSS at the Albert Hall in London on 23 February 1912 and hearing David Lloyd George (1863-1945) heckled by suffragettes, she still expressed her belief that the militants were divinely inspired. Other NUWSS colleagues were not so forgiving. Helena Swanwick (1864-1939), editor of *The Common Cause*, was passionately opposed to militant tactics. Referring to the 23 February 1912 meeting, she wrote, 'I resent the destruction of our work by the WSPU. When the National Union [NUWSS] organizes a great meeting and the WSPU attends it in order to interrupt and insult our guest and speaker, I regard this as a clear act of hostility'.¹⁸

By 1914, however, even Winifred's patience had run out. She described women who heckled Labour party speaker Arthur Henderson (1863-1935) at the Albert Hall on 14 February in a meeting organised by the NUWSS as 'WSPU idiots'.¹⁹ When on 10 March 1914 Mary Richardson damaged the painting *The Toilet of Venus* (the Rokeby Venus) by Velázquez in the National Gallery, Winifred described it as an 'outrage' and lamented, 'The pitiful misguided folly of it all – militancy, a fine thing gone wrong!'.²⁰

¹⁰ Peter Lord, ed. *Between Two Worlds: The Diary of Winifred Coombe Tennant 1909-1924* (Aberystwyth, 2011) (BTW), p.134.

¹¹ BTW, p.135.

¹² BTW, p.216.

¹³ *The Common Cause*, 10 January 1919.

¹⁴ BTW, p.72.

¹⁵ BTW, p.72.

¹⁶ BTW, p.84.

¹⁷ BTW, p.97.

¹⁸ Helena M Swanwick, *I Have Been Young* (London, 1935), pp.231-232.

¹⁹ BTW, p.138.

²⁰ BTW, p.139.

She wrote a letter protesting against militancy which was published in the *Brighton Herald and Hove Chronicle* and the *Neath Standard* on 14 March, four days after the attack on the Rokeby Venus. She signed the letter published in the Brighton newspaper as 'President of the Neath and District Women's Suffrage Society' and addressed it from 16 King's Gardens, Hove, the house the family rented.

In her letter, she described the attack on the Velasquez painting as a 'lamentable outrage'.²¹ She then cited the statement recently issued by the NUWSS in the current issue of *The Common Cause* condemning militancy, which began, 'We desire to record once more our protest against the policy of destruction adopted by some militant suffragists.'²² After quoting this statement, Winifred ended, 'We of the National Union earnestly desire that no confusion should arise in the mind of the public as to our attitude to militancy.'

On 16 March the letter brought a visitation from a WSPU organiser, whom Winifred does not name, to remonstrate with her. In spite of their differences, however, she felt they were united in a common cause and praised the militants' courage, though she thought their actions were wrong. At other times her exasperation got the better of her. At a meeting in the Victoria Hall, Lampeter in July 1914, Winifred said 'that the National Union had always protested against the action of the militants, and did so still'.²³ She went on to suggest that the way to stop militancy was for people who thought women should have the vote to join the non-militant societies.

Militancy inevitably attracted criticism from anti-suffragists, to whom it provided proof that women were not fit to be trusted with the vote. More serious was the alienation of potential supporters. 'Saddened by militant violence,' Winifred wrote, 'how these misguided but dauntless women are putting back the movement.'²⁴ Later she noted, 'Militancy going on at full tilt and irritating the public.'²⁵

It was a view that David Lloyd George and other politicians seized upon as a justification of their failure to deal with the women's suffrage demand. At a speech in Caernarfon in 1910 he opined, 'The vote could not be obtained until there was a complete change of tactics.'²⁶ In Caernarfon two years later, he repeated the argument that suffragettes had alienated the sympathy of women's suffrage supporters. At this meeting women who were violently ejected for heckling him had their clothes torn and needed police protection to reach the railway station. He told a NUWSS deputation in 1913 that 'militancy had transformed indifference into hostility'.²⁷

Suffrage and Welsh Liberalism

In Wales that hostility was influenced by a number of factors: Liberalism; the popularity of Lloyd George; and Welsh nationalism. Two Liberal ministers who the militant suffragettes regarded as particular enemies – David Lloyd George and Reginald McKenna – had their

²¹ WCT, letter to *Brighton Herald and Hove Chronicle*, 14 March 1914, Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove, Digital Media Bank (date catalogued as '12 March 1914'), <https://brightonmuseums.org.uk/discover/2017/12/11/historic-brighton-newspapers-online/>.

²² The statement was published in *The Common Cause*, 6 March 1914.

²³ Untitled newspaper cutting, Album of Press Cuttings, in the West Glamorgan Archives, Winifred Coombe Tennant Collection, D/DT 3698.

²⁴ *BTW*, p.146.

²⁵ *BTW*, p.146.

²⁶ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 10 December 1910.

²⁷ E Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London, 1977, first published 1931), p.512.

constituencies in Wales, which thus came in for their share of militancy as militants targeted these prominent government politicians.



David Lloyd George

David Lloyd George, MP for Caernarfon Boroughs, had professed support for votes for women from the start of his political career in the 1890s. As he told the joint NUWSS/WSPU deputation in Criccieth in 1910: ‘He had supported women suffrage for over 15 years and had never swerved from that support’.²⁸ However, as far as the WSPU was concerned (and later the NUWSS), he did nothing practical to secure the measure. Sylvia Pankhurst thought the disparity between his deeds and his words arose from the tension between his conflicting desires ‘to win laurels as the heroic champion of Women’s Suffrage, without jeopardizing his place in a Cabinet headed by an anti-Suffragist Prime Minister’.²⁹ Christabel Pankhurst simply considered him a ‘determined and mischievous enemy’.³⁰

Many of the militant incidents in Wales were in Lloyd George’s constituency. They included an arson attack on Caernarfon County School, and arson attacks on two empty houses in Bangor. Shop and post office windows were smashed in his home town, Criccieth, and there was an attempt to burn down Colwyn Bay pier in 1914. Elsewhere, in June 1913 Margaret Mackworth, Lady Rhondda, was imprisoned for a month after setting fire to the contents of a pillar box in Newport; she was released after a five day hunger strike. There was an attempt to burn a race stand in Cardiff, and telephone and telegraph wires were cut.

Liberalism had a strong grip on Wales, and Lloyd George enjoyed a fervent following. It was hardly surprising, then, that militancy aimed at Liberal ministers was deeply unpopular, and attacks on Lloyd George more unpopular still. When Mrs Pankhurst addressed a meeting in Caernarfon she was confronted by members of the Caernarfon Women’s Liberal Association and found herself in ‘a rather warm atmosphere among Mr Lloyd George’s supporters’.³¹

Winifred was herself a Liberal, who numbered Lady Aberconway, Laura Elizabeth McLaren (1854-1933), founder of the Women’s Liberal Federation and the Women’s National Liberal Association, amongst her acquaintances. However, Winifred’s attitude to the suffragettes was not influenced by a fondness for Lloyd George. An Asquithian Liberal, in

²⁸ *The Times*, 29 September 1910.

²⁹ E Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p.360.

³⁰ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 19 August 1910.

³¹ *North Wales Express*, 26 August 1910.

1916 she described Lloyd George as a ‘treacherous pig’³² for his role in ousting Asquith, which led to his appointment as Prime Minister in Asquith’s place. She was later to have a radical change of heart about Lloyd George and by 1921 was his whole-hearted supporter and friend.

In the meantime, she was willing to work outside the Liberal party to secure votes for women and did not oppose the NUWSS’s pro-Labour policy. The policy was introduced in 1912 after the failure of the 1912 Conciliation Bill which would have enacted a measure of women’s suffrage. At its conference in January 1912, the Labour Party had abandoned its demand for manhood suffrage in favour of adult suffrage. Since this would include women, they were thus the only party supporting votes for women. What was more, they were determined to oppose the government if women were excluded from any franchise bills.

The NUWSS responded by forming an alliance with Labour that committed it to supporting pro-suffrage Labour candidates in certain constituencies with funding as well as practical assistance from NUWSS organisers. The policy was intended to put pressure on the Liberal government, and was not popular with Liberal (or Conservative) NUWSS members. This was particularly the case in Wales with its strong Liberal tradition, and there was resistance from branches including Swansea, Cardiff and Bangor. The alliance was always an uneasy one, generating opposition and distrust both in the NUWSS and the Labour party.

From 1915 Winifred served on the NUWSS Election Fighting Fund (EFF) Committee which directed the policy. In 1917 she interviewed and approved the Labour candidate for North Monmouth, Thomas Griffiths, on behalf of the NUWSS. Griffiths (1897-1955) was born in Neath and was a Divisional Officer in the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. He was later MP for Pontypool.

By 1915, however, with shifts in the political landscape brought about by war and the anticipated coalition government, the NUWSS executive was questioning its commitment to the EFF policy. EFF committee member Catherine Marshall (1880-1961), who did not want the policy changed but did seek clarification of the executive’s position, pushed for the immediate suspension of EFF work in the constituencies, rather than leave Labour under the impression that they could call on NUWSS help in the post-war general election. Marshall proposed her resolution in an EFF committee on 5 October 1915, and Winifred seconded. Exceptions were made for East Bristol and Accrington, where work was already under way, but otherwise the EFF policy was abandoned to bitter recriminations from both Labour and EFF workers within the NUWSS.

It is difficult to understand Winifred’s position. Only a month after seconding Marshall’s resolution, after the EFF committee meeting on 5 November 1915 she described her as ‘utterly untrustworthy’, and the Labour representative as ‘specious and tricky’.³³ Following the meeting on 18 November 1915 she referred to the ‘defeat of Marshall, Courtney and party’.³⁴ Perhaps something had happened to change her mind, or perhaps her support had never been as straightforward as it appeared.

³² *BTW*, p.203.

³³ *BTW*, p.176.

³⁴ *BTW*, p.176.



Reginald McKenna

Reginald McKenna (1863-1943) was MP for North Monmouthshire, and Home Secretary between 1911 and 1915. He introduced the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act 1913, known as the Cat and Mouse Act. The Act was intended to solve the problem of hunger-striking prisoners who, undeterred by forcible feeding (introduced in 1909), continued their protests until they had to be released from prison on health grounds, thereby effectively evading their sentences. Under the Act, a prisoner could be released on licence to recover, then readmitted to prison to continue serving their sentences. *The Suffragette* called it ‘cat and mouse torture’,³⁵ and Christabel Pankhurst declared that with the Act, the government ‘have deliberately chosen death for women as the alternative to Votes for Women’.³⁶ Many politicians and women’s suffrage groups campaigned against the Act, and Sylvia Pankhurst was one of a number of suffragettes who were active in the Cat and Mouse Act Repeal Committee. McKenna himself was often accosted by suffragettes, for example when playing golf; his London home was pelted with missiles; and his brother’s house was destroyed by arson.

Suffrage and the Welsh

What was arguably most damaging to the militants’ cause in Wales was what were perceived as their attacks on Welsh culture by English outsiders. In June 1909 suffragettes interrupted Asquith and Lloyd George when they spoke at the National Eisteddfod at the Albert Hall in London. As Lloyd George put it when he was speaking to the joint deputation to his home in Criccieth in 1910, ‘When people go to their places of worship and disturb their services in the interest of woman suffrage, and go to their national festival and disturb that, they create a quite unnecessary prejudice in the minds of the Welsh people against their cause’.³⁷ Notwithstanding his warning, in 1912 suffragettes used disruptive tactics at the Eisteddfod in Wrecsam, and in 1913 there was an arson attempt in Abergavenny during the Eisteddfod there. In Wrecsam in 1912 Lloyd George commented, ‘I fail to see what they think they gain by insulting a whole nation in the national festival of its democracy’.³⁸

³⁵ *The Suffragette*, 27 June 1913.

³⁶ *The Suffragette*, 11 July 1913.

³⁷ *The Times*, 29 September 1910.

³⁸ J Graham Jones, ‘Lloyd George and the Suffragettes’, *Cylchgrawn Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru, National Library of Wales Journal*, 33, 1 (Summer 2003), pp1-33, p.20.

Given that the WSPU, NUWSS and the Women's Freedom League (WFL) (formed in 1907 after a split in the WSPU) all sent English campaigners into Wales from branches in England, the perception that suffrage agitation was the work of English women coming into Wales was plausible. Kay Cook and Neil Evans trace what they call the 'external stimulus' behind the women's suffrage movement in Wales.³⁹ Contemporaries were at pains to point out that suffrage campaigners were not Welsh. After Lloyd George was interrupted during a speech on disestablishment in Caernarfon in May 1912, the *Western Times* noted, 'The majority of the disturbers were English people, but among them was one Welshwoman.'⁴⁰

As Deirdre Beddoe has argued, the notion that the campaign was imposed on Wales by English women 'was emphatically not the case'.⁴¹ There were many Welsh women and men active in the campaign for the vote, and suffrage literature was translated into Welsh. In 1910 the WFL refuted the allegation in a report on a speech by Mrs Lloyd George: 'his inaccurate, though zealous wife, who at a meeting of Liberal women in Caernarfon called for a vote of censure to be passed on "the imported suffragettes"'.⁴² In 1912 Mrs Charlotte Price White, the NUWSS organiser in Bangor, sent evidence of widespread support for the cause in north Wales to her local MP. In 1911 the Cymric Suffrage Union was founded in London to mobilise Welsh women living in and outside Wales.

There is no doubt, though, that the incidents at the Eisteddfodau were an element in hostile and often violent Welsh responses to the militants. When WSPU activist Mary Gawthorpe (1881-1973) spoke at a meeting in Conwy Town Hall in June 1909, the meeting was broken up by crowds of men shouting 'Three cheers for the Eisteddfod!' Several rushed the platform and in the end Gawthorpe had to be escorted to safety by the police. In January 1910 militants were attacked in Pwllhelli when, as one reporter put it, 'they were paid back in their own coin'.⁴³

If that was the case, it was payment with interest. The violence meted out to the women was out of all proportion to the offence. In May 1912 women who interrupted a speech by Lloyd George in Caernarfon were gagged, dragged out, and had their clothes torn. After the Wrecsam Eisteddfod in 1912, suffragette Kitty Marion reported, 'My hair was torn down, handfuls grabbed from every side, and pulled up by the roots. My clothes were ripped back and front, even my very undergarments were torn to shreds.'⁴⁴ Lloyd George, meanwhile, encouraged the violence by insinuating that the women should be beaten with sticks: 'I remember little eisteddfodau at which prizes were given for...the best hazel walking-stick. One of those sticks...would be rather a good thing to have just now.'⁴⁵ In the most notorious incident, when militants heckled Lloyd George when he was opening a village

³⁹ Kay Cook and Neil Evans, '“The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band?”: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1890-1918', in *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939*, edited by Angela V John (Cardiff, 2011), pp.157-185, p.167.

⁴⁰ *Western Times*, 20 May 1912.

⁴¹ Deirdre Beddoe, 'Women and politics in twentieth century Wales', in *Cylchgrawn Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru, National Library of Wales Journal*, 33, 3 (2004), pp.333-347, p.336. See also Deirdre Beddoe, 'Good Wives and Respectable Rebels, 1900-1914' in *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), pp.8-46; and Angela V John '“Run like blazes”: the suffragettes and Welshness', *Llafur*, 6, 3 (1994), pp.29-43.

⁴² *The Vote*, 29 January 1910.

⁴³ *North Wales Express*, 21 January 1910.

⁴⁴ *Votes for Women*, 13 September 1912.

⁴⁵ *Votes for Women*, 13 September 1912, *The Guardian*, 6 September 1912 (which give slightly different wordings).

institute in the village of his birth, Llanystumdwy, on 21 September 1912, women were kicked, beaten with sticks and stones, had their hair torn out, and their clothes ripped off. Rebecca West (1892-193), writing in the Labour newspaper *The Clarion*, called it ‘an orgy of disorder and cruelty’ and accused Lloyd George of inciting the crowd to violence.⁴⁶

‘Confusion and prejudice in the mind of the public’

The NUWSS condemned militant tactics both on principle and because it alienated public support, and these were viewpoints echoed by Winifred. However, militancy had another serious implication for non-violent campaigners for it was not only the women of the WSPU who bore the brunt of the violence. In Wales in October 1909 the WFL arranged a meeting at Buarth Hall in Aberystwyth. The WFL described itself as militant but not violent. Its members were prepared to break the law, but distanced themselves from the more extreme militancy of the WSPU.



Women's Freedom League office, Caernarfon

The distinction was too subtle for the mob. Hundreds of people gathered outside the hall, singing, banging on the doors and windows shouting, ‘What about the Eisteddfod?’ Eventually they broke into the building and stormed the platform, cheering for Lloyd George. WFL organiser Muriel Matters had to go to the local police station for protection. In August 1913 WFL speakers were mobbed at Pwllheli, and had to be escorted to the railway station by the police.

The public might be forgiven for confusing violent militants with non-violent militants, but worse still was their failure to distinguish between militants and non-militants. In England and Wales NUWSS women were as likely to be targeted by anti-suffrage mobs as suffragettes. When Charlotte Despard of the WFL and Millicent Garrett Fawcett of the NUWSS attempted to hold a meeting in Cardiff, the windows of the hall were smashed and furniture broken – this, incidentally, was in 1908, before any of the Eisteddfodau incidents had occurred. Between August and September 1909 a NUWSS caravan tour in north Wales was attacked in Trefor, Llangollen and Bala, with hecklers demanding, ‘Why did you break

⁴⁶ Rebecca West, ‘An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty: The Beginnings of Sex Antagonism’ in Jane Marcus, ed., *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West 1911-1917* (London, 1983), pp.97-101, p.97.

up our Eisteddfod?’⁴⁷ In 1913 the NUWSS organised a Suffrage Pilgrimage, when women walked to London along a number of routes through England and Wales. The violence was widespread, with incidents in towns in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and elsewhere. In Wales a police escort had to rescue pilgrims from a crowd in Rhyll. In Newport, where Margaret Mackworth had recently been convicted for damage to pillar boxes, pilgrims condemned militancy for ‘alienating hundreds of thousands of supporters and sympathisers’.⁴⁸

Winifred herself experienced some of this hostility at first hand. Following a suffrage meeting in Skewen on 13 June 1914 she was mobbed by a crowd outside the meeting. At a luncheon in her honour when she left Wales in 1931 given by the South Wales Area Group of Women Citizens’ Associations, one of the speakers referred to an incident from their suffrage days ‘when Mrs Coombe-Tennant, attacked by a crowd of young roughs, was almost ducked in her own canal!’⁴⁹ The occasion was reported in the *Western Mail* under the heading ‘Memories of Suffragette Days’.

Winifred herself recalled that the incident happened at Neath when she was distributing suffrage leaflets. The threatened ducking had been averted when she retorted, ‘Well, I shall go down to history as the only woman who has ever been ducked in her own canal!’ and the crowd realised who she was.⁵⁰ On the whole, though, she did not believe she had ever faced any ‘serious hostility’.⁵¹

Nevertheless, in an increasingly violent atmosphere it became harder to obtain a hearing for women’s suffrage arguments. The root of the problem, Winifred thought, was the ‘confusion and prejudice in the mind of the public’ created by the misapplication of the words ‘suffragist’ and ‘suffragette’.⁵² Newspapers described NUWSS members as ‘suffragettes’, or told hair-raising tales of ‘suffragists’ heckling MPs and carrying out attacks on property. The report of a speech by Augustine Birrell in Southampton given in *The Times* on 13 November 1907 described the ejected women hecklers interchangeably as suffragists and suffragettes. The word ‘suffragette’ had not been long in circulation at this point, which might account for this.

However, as the campaign continued and the difference between the suffragettes and other suffragists became more obvious, the usage remained unchanged. In many of the examples of militancy already mentioned, suffragettes were described as ‘suffragists’ including the women who heckled Lloyd George in Caernarfon in 1912 in *The Times*, 20 May 1912; the assault on Winston Churchill in Bristol in 1909 was a ‘suffragist outrage’ in *The Guardian*, 15 November 1909; the women who attacked Asquith at Lympne were ‘suffragists’ in *The Times*, 8 November 1909. In 1912 when Bristol MP Charles Hobhouse addressed an anti-suffrage meeting in Bristol, one of the WSPU women who heckled him was called a ‘suffragist’ by the *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 17 February 1912. This usage could only have been encouraged by the WSPU themselves, whose newspaper frequently referred to members as ‘suffragists’ and ‘militant suffragists’.⁵³

⁴⁷ Wallace Ryland, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009), p.141.

⁴⁸ Wallace, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, p.165.

⁴⁹ ‘Memories of Suffragette Days in South Wales – Women Citizens Honour Mrs Coombe-Tennant’, *Western Mail & South Wales News*, 14 December 1931 (there is also a copy with WCT’s papers in the West Glamorgan Archives D/D T3716).

⁵⁰ *Western Mail & South Wales News*, 19 October 1928.

⁵¹ *Western Mail & South Wales News*, 19 October 1928.

⁵² WCT, letter to *The Guardian*, 23 April 1914.

⁵³ See, for example, ‘The Treatment of Suffragist Prisoners’, *Votes for Women*, 16 August 1912; ‘The Making of a Militant Suffragist’, *Votes for Women*, 23 September 1910.

Nevertheless, there were signs that the distinction was important to the women involved. In 1912 the WSPU changed the name of its newspaper from *Votes for Women* to *The Suffragette*. Even then it continued to use the term ‘suffragist’, for example, ‘We militant suffragists’ in *The Suffragette*, 17 July 1914. Meanwhile, the NUWSS lost no opportunity in its publicity at events as well as in its publications to advertise the distinction. Mrs Fawcett addressed suffrage pilgrims in Hyde Park on 23 July 1913 under a banner proclaiming themselves to be ‘law-abiding suffragists’ (see page 4).

It was this confusion that Winifred attempted to tackle in 1914 when she wrote to the *Morning Post* about the use of the words. The editor wrote back inviting her to suggest an alternative to the word ‘suffragist’ to describe suffragettes. Accordingly, she launched a campaign to encourage a more precise usage. She drafted a memorial calling for recognition of the distinction so that ‘the word “suffragettes” [would] designate the militant section of the women’s suffrage movement and...the word “suffragists”...the law-abiding sections of the movement’.⁵⁴ The statement pointed out that this had been accepted usage for some years, and also referred to the WSPU’s official adoption of the term ‘suffragette’ in the title of their paper.

She obtained the signatures of a number of what she called ‘eminent men of letters and other prominent persons’,⁵⁵ many of them Cambridge intellectuals with whom she was connected by a friendship network, as well as by her interest in psychic research. Signatories included Lady Betty Balfour; G Lowes Dickinson, a Fellow of King’s College; the drama critic Desmond MacCarthy; Professor James Ward; L Pearsall Smith, a co-founder of the Society for Pure English; and Professor Gilbert Murray of the University of Oxford. *The Guardian* published her correspondence with the comment, ‘The distinction suggested has long been made by the “*Manchester Guardian*”’.⁵⁶ Otherwise, the memorial does not seem to have made much impact.

Winifred Coombe Tennant and the War

The outbreak of war in August 1914 sent the suffrage movement in new directions. Both the WSPU and the NUWSS suspended campaigning in order to support the war effort, believing that this would aid the women’s suffrage cause. The NUWSS declared that through war work ‘we have proved ourselves worthy of citizenship, and when the time does come we shall claim the right that we have not for a moment abandoned’.⁵⁷ Winifred herself did not agree with this view, insisting that women should have the vote as a right, not as a reward for war service. Rather, she wrote, women ‘regard the vote as the inalienable right of those among them who bear the burden of citizenship in such measure as would, had they been men, have entitled them to be voters’.⁵⁸

Winifred continued to work with the NUWSS, in spite of describing herself as a pacifist at heart. This sentiment did not translate into any meaningful action, although many women did resign from the NUWSS because of its pro-war policy, including Helena Swanwick and Catherine Marshall. Winifred attended and chaired SWF meetings and Neath branch meetings, and, as mentioned earlier, she served on the EFF Committee.

⁵⁴ WCT, Memorial published in *The Guardian*, 23 April 1914.

⁵⁵ *The Guardian*, 23 April 1914. Signatories are also listed in *The Common Cause*, 24 April 1914.

⁵⁶ *The Guardian*, 23 April 1914.

⁵⁷ *The Common Cause*, 10 December 1915.

⁵⁸ Winifred Coombe Tennant (WCT), ‘The Present Position of Woman’s Suffrage’, *Welsh Outlook*, 3, 12, December 1916.

At the start of the war she was appointed to the executive of the Mayor of Neath's Relief Committee and the committee of the Neath and District Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association. She was also a member of the Glamorgan Women's Agricultural Committee and chaired the Neath and District War Pensions Committee. In November 1914 she suggested that the Neath NUWSS should run a Soldiers' Club to give the men billeted in the town an alternative to the public house as a social centre, and the project duly went ahead.

The NUWSS resumed suffrage work in 1916 when the government set up a speaker's conference to investigate electoral reform. In February 1917 Winifred lost her seat on the NUWSS national executive. She attributed this to the fact that only eight out of fifty possible delegates from the South Wales Federation had attended the council. She continued campaigning for the vote, giving talks and attending meetings, but when the suffrage debate was under way in the House of Commons in June that year she confided to her diary how bitterly disappointed she was to be 'out of it all down here',⁵⁹ and no longer on the executive, especially after all the work she had done for the vote.

In August 1917 her son, Christopher, was killed in action, but she continued her public and suffrage work. However, her relationship with Balfour deteriorated. She felt he had failed to understand her grief, and the relationship ended in bitter recriminations.

When she learned, in January 1918, that a measure of women's suffrage had passed at last her response came from the depths of her religious feelings: 'Woman's Suffrage. *Gloria Dei.*'⁶⁰ She took part in celebratory meetings including one in Cardiff on 5 July 1918, when she gave a speech considering 'What is the practical use we women in Wales can make of our new opportunities as enfranchised citizens?'⁶¹

She was aware that the struggle was not yet over, and her suffrage work was not done. In 1919 the NUWSS changed its name to the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) and continued to campaign for equal voting rights. Winifred was President of the Neath Society for Equal Citizenship, and was also elected president of Neath Women's Liberal Association. NUSEC recognised the importance of getting women elected as MPs, and twice asked Winifred if she would stand. To the first invitation she replied that she felt that women's best chance of election was to be selected by a political party, rather than stand as independents, and she was unable to accept the second, probably because her husband was ill. She was eventually selected as Liberal candidate for the Forest of Dean in 1922, though she was unsuccessful.

Winifred recognised the significance of women taking part in political organisations, writing of her attendance at a Liberal Association executive committee meeting in 1918, when she was the only woman among fifty men, that she 'represented woman entering upon power'.⁶² Increasingly, her activities centred on the Liberal Party and there are fewer references in the diary to suffrage work. In 1928, when women were finally granted the vote on the same terms as men, she spoke at a celebratory reception hosted by the mayor and mayoress in Swansea on 17 October 1928. She reminded her audience that, 'We have a long way to go before we get equal citizenship, which is a very different thing from equal voting rights.'⁶³

As the years passed and the emotions aroused by the suffrage campaign faded, Winifred's feelings about the militants once more softened. In 1920 she wrote, 'How much we owe to suffragettes [and] conscientious objectors, and how stupid people are who fail to

⁵⁹ *BTW*, p.216.

⁶⁰ *BTW*, p.245.

⁶¹ *BTW*, pp.254-255. A programme in the West Glamorgan Archives gives the title of her speech as 'Women and National Health', Album of Press Cuttings, D/DT 3698.

⁶² *BTW*, p.264.

⁶³ *The Vote*, 26 October 1928. Suffragettes held a celebratory dinner two evenings later.

recognize nobility when shown through opinions they think wrong!’⁶⁴ Nevertheless, when her contribution to the suffrage campaign in Wales was honoured at the farewell luncheon given by the South Wales Area Group of Women Citizens’ Associations in December 1931 referred to earlier, the impact of suffragette militancy had not been entirely forgotten. Miss Vivian of Newport remarked, ‘Women of good social standing such as [Mrs Coombe Tennant] by their very presence in the movement strengthened it immeasurably at a time when their opponents could do no more than refer to them in opprobrious terms such as “hysterical females” and “shrieking sisterhood”.’⁶⁵

Suffragette and Suffragist

Perhaps it is because ‘suffragette’ is a made-up word that its meaning and usage have never been settled. To this day, the words ‘suffragist’ and ‘suffragette’ are used with a blithe indifference to the distinction between them. This was particularly visible during the recent one hundred year commemorations of the extension of the Parliamentary franchise to some British women in 1918. Events and coverage around the country, failing to recognise the distinction, drew in the main on the imagery, stories and ideology of the militant campaign to the extent that the history of the women’s suffrage campaign was presented as synonymous with the history of the WSPU.

When 100,000 women across the UK marched as part of the commemorations, they did so in the colours of the militant WSPU (purple, white and green), and newspaper reports about the marches which purported to refer to suffrage campaigners referred exclusively to ‘suffragettes’.⁶⁶ On 6 February 2018 the University of Bristol illuminated its buildings in purple, white and green calling them “the suffrage colours”,⁶⁷ as did the government, which described them as ‘the colours of the suffrage movement’.⁶⁸ *The Guardian’s* ‘pick of the best’ events article was headlined ‘Suffragette Cities’, although it covered events with information about non militants.⁶⁹

Many of the institutions that organised commemorative events focussed solely or mainly on suffragettes in their publicity and exhibitions. Many of their web pages have since been updated, amended or removed, so it is impossible to provide links. However, the Royal Holloway College 2018 events webpage displayed seven photographs of suffragettes and two of suffragists; it now shows more balanced images.⁷⁰ The Women’s Library at the LSE mentioned suffragettes in word and image six times and non-militants twice; the current page now shows eleven images, eight of which are WSPU-related, and the text also mentions suffragists.⁷¹ On the web page devoted to its Suffrage 100 events, The National Archives use

⁶⁴ *BTW*, p.296.

⁶⁵ *Western Mail*, 14 December 1931.

⁶⁶ *The Guardian*, 10 June 2018; *The Independent*, 10 June 2018.

⁶⁷ <http://bristol.ac.uk/news/2018/june/vic-rooms-suffrage.html>. The article is about the inclusion of the Victoria Rooms by English Heritage on its Sites of Suffragette Protest and Sabotage listing in June 2018 so the fact that it only mentions militants makes perfect sense. The February illumination on the anniversary of the Representation of the People Act only referenced suffragettes.

⁶⁸ <https://www.sis.gov.uk/centenary-of-womens-suffrage.html>.

⁶⁹ *The Guardian*, 31 January 2018. One of these events, which I was involved in organising, was at Bristol M Shed and included sessions on suffragettes and suffragists; the exhibition logo was designed to reflect this by incorporating both WSPU and NUWSS colours (red, white and green).

⁷⁰ <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/about-us/vote-100-at-royal-holloway>.

⁷¹ <http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/whats-on/exhibitions/suffrage18>. This link no longer works.

WSPU colours, and all ten images are related to the WSPU or militancy.⁷² Its classroom resources focus on suffragettes,⁷³ and its films and podcasts page shows eleven images which all relate to suffragettes.⁷⁴

Obviously, imagery (and artefacts on display) will depend on the content of the collections. The National Archives acknowledged this in a blog in which they state, ‘On a simplistic level, looking at The National Archives’ records you could be forgiven for thinking that the women’s suffrage movement started with the outbreak of militant activity in 1905...Despite this, some fascinating records can be found in The National Archives about constitutional campaigns, although they are often less obvious in the collections of a government archive – a government seemingly far more concerned by militancy, than by petitions or peaceful protests.’⁷⁵ This does raise the question of why, if records on the constitutional campaign are available, they were not highlighted in the same way as those relating to the militant campaign.

Arguably, the issue of the scope of its collections influenced the Museum of London in its 2018 representations, where images and text refer to suffragettes.⁷⁶ However, it is not clear how it could have affected the Government Equalities Office which, while stating that its aim was to remember ‘suffragette and suffragist’ figures, used the suffragette colours in its logo (with the addition of a gold bar). Many other organisations followed the trend of identifying both militant and non-militant campaigners and campaigns solely or mainly with suffragette militancy in words, images and exhibition content.⁷⁷ Of course, there are examples of more balanced treatments,⁷⁸ but it is clear the association of the suffrage campaign with militancy was widespread, if not overwhelming.

While it is true that a major feature of the 2018 commemorations was the erection of a statue of NUWSS leader, Millicent Garret Fawcett (1847-1929), in Parliament Square, the statue was not designed to spotlight non-militant campaigners or their principle of non-violent political action. Historical consultant Professor Julie Gottlieb has explained that the statue was intended to be a collective commemoration which would represent ‘both the suffragist and suffragette branches of the campaign, as well as digging deep into the dozens of other organisations campaigning for the vote’.⁷⁹ Hence, around its plinth are images of fifty-nine other campaigners, including many WSPU suffragettes such as Annie Kenney

⁷² The National Archives, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/suffrage-100/>.

⁷³ <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/suffragettes-on-file/>.

⁷⁴ <https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/?s=suffrage&Search.x=0&Search.y=0&Search=Search>

⁷⁵ Vicky Iglkowski-Broad, ‘Millicent Fawcett: her statue is unveiled in Parliament Square’, Tuesday 24 April 2018,

<https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/millicent-fawcett-statue-unveiled-in-parliament-square/>.

⁷⁶ <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/vote-100-celebrating-centenary-female-suffrage>.

⁷⁷ Further examples include Oxford City Council

https://www.oxford.gov.uk/news/article/647/commemorating_100_years_of_womens_suffrag
g, The University of Edinburgh, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/about/news/100-years-of-womans-suffrage> (this link no longer works); East Sussex First World War project <http://www.eastsussexww1.org.uk/east-sussex-suffragettes/index.html>.

⁷⁸ See for example Exploring Surrey’s Past

<https://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/womens-suffrage/suffrage-biographies/> or The National Trust <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/press-release/women-and-power-national-trust-shines-a-light-on-womens-histories-to-celebrate-the-anniversary-of-female-suffrage-in-2018>

⁷⁹ Lizzie Ellen, ‘Millicent Fawcett: A Statue to Suffrage’, The University of Sheffield, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research/statue-to-suffrage>.

(1879-1953) and Emily Wilding Davison (1872-1913), as well as a number of women and men associated with other suffrage organizations.

However, in seeking to ‘represent the diversity of the suffrage movement’,⁸⁰ the statue has not drawn attention away from the suffragettes. Indeed, the very wording on the image – ‘Courage calls to courage everywhere’ – references the suffragette movement, and specifically the death of Emily Wilding Davison after she ran in front of the King’s horse at the Derby in 1913.⁸¹



Statue of Millicent Garrett Fawcett
in Parliament Square

The words are Millicent Garret Fawcett’s own. But why, out of all she wrote about women’s suffrage, was it these words focussing on suffragette militancy that were chosen? And what do their use and prominent placement convey about the relations between the suffragist and suffragette campaigns?

Many of the 2018 commemorations thus contributed to the development and perpetuation of a one-sided narrative which privileged certain women’s histories over that of others such as non-militants, adult suffragists, and women’s suffrage campaigners across the British Empire. Winifred Coombe Tennant herself has been caught up in the confusion, in spite of her campaign to recognise the distinction. She is described as a suffragette in the entry in the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* published in 2001.⁸² This was echoed by BBC Wales in 2011 (which also described her as an MP).⁸³

⁸⁰ Lizzie Ellen, ‘Millicent Fawcett: A Statue to Suffrage’.

⁸¹ The passage is quoted in a review of Millicent Garret Fawcett’s book, *The Woman’s Victory and After: Personal Reminiscences* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1920) in *International Woman Suffrage News*, 2 April 1920.

⁸² Professor Graham Lloyd Rees, ‘Coombe Tennant, Winifred Margaret (‘Mam o Nedd’; 1874-1956), delegate to the first assembly of the League of Nations, suffragette, Mistress of the Robes of the Gorsedd of the Bards, and a well-known medium’, *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig/Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, (published 2001), [<https://biography.wales/article/s2-COOM-MAR-1874>, accessed 1 Feb 2020] (This is incomplete and contains only a few details of Winifred Coombe Tennant’s life.)

⁸³ ‘Secret Life Story of Psychic MP Winifred Coombe Tennant’, 18 May 2011 [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-13436348>]

Sumita Mukherjee, writing of her decision to designate as ‘suffragettes’ Indian women who campaigned for equal rights, has noted that, ‘The term “suffragette” denotes, in the widely used British context, a militant activist, whereas “suffragist” was the term used for men and women who supported female suffrage but did so through peaceful means and actions. Despite these differences, in common (non-academic) parlance in Britain...the term “suffragette” has come to mean any woman who fought for female suffrage. The distinction between militant and peaceful campaigning has often been lost.’⁸⁴

Some of Winifred’s contemporaries objected to the word ‘suffragette’ on linguistic grounds. One commentator, the author Lady Florence Bell, thought that the word was ‘barbarous...for if it means anything, according to the analogy of words formed in the same way, it should mean “a small suffrage”, and not a woman who wants to obtain it’.⁸⁵ To women like Winifred Coombe Tennant there was more at stake than semantics. The terms ‘suffragette’ and ‘suffragist’ represented two very different ideological outlooks, and these in turn gave rise to very different aims and methods. To ignore this now is to create false histories; to silence voices that do not fit into a single narrative; and to gloss over the ethical issues that a more considered approach to the history prompts.

Perhaps it is time to reissue Winifred Coombe Tennant’s memorial and set the record straight.

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All other images – author’s collection.

⁸⁴ Sumita Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks* (Oxford, 2018), p.3.

⁸⁵ *The Western Daily Press*, 4 October 1907.