



A Century of Women's Suffrage

By David S Stewart OBE D.Litt.h.c. DL

“Wide blows our banner, and hope is waking!” The stirring words of Ethel Smyth recall the long march toward equal parliamentary suffrage in this country and as we celebrate Vote100 this year it is perhaps time to reflect on the part played by The Park women and men in the Cause. Nottingham, long renowned for its radical independence and non-conformity, produced many who strove for the right for women to vote. Indeed, Nottingham was seen by some as a hotbed of radicalism. Writing to her niece, Lady Amberley, wife of the newly elected MP for Nottingham, in 1866, Louisa Stanley noted, “There is not so rough and brutal a lot as the Nottingham mob in all England. Well can we remember the Past – the burning the Castle – the attack upon Private Houses...”



In that same year, 1866, Lady Amberley signed the Suffrage Petition along with 1500 other women. Amongst them were 50 women from Nottingham, one of whom, Mrs Catherine Turner, (1797-1894) lived in the Park at 8, Park Terrace (and later 13 Park Terrace.) Passionate about education for girls – she had run a girls school on Market Street and later at Lenton Fields,

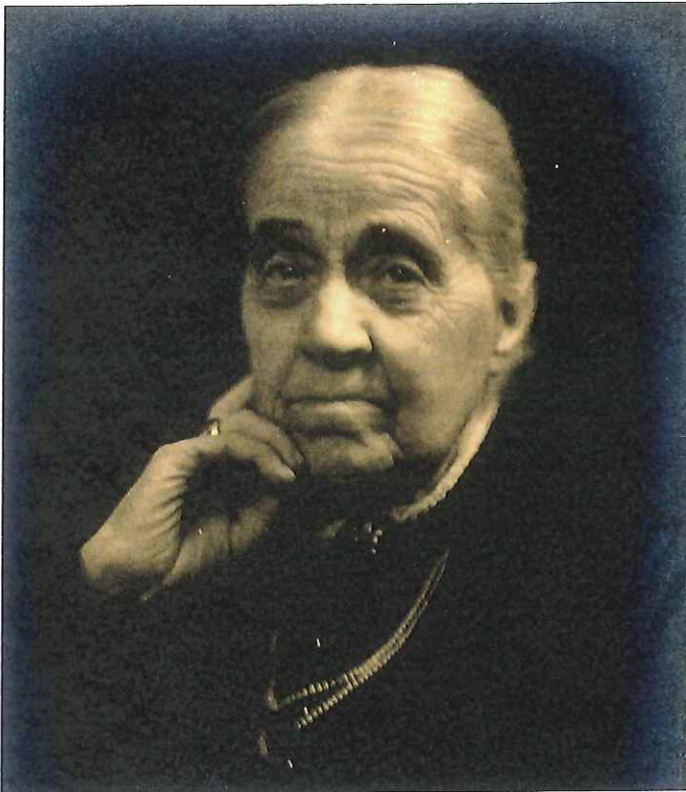
philosophy. They were taught French, to take an interest in public affairs, to think for themselves and “have an earnest purpose in life.” Dancing classes were organised at Bromley House Library. An active Sunday School teacher at High Pavement, Catherine was the cousin and sometime companion of Harriet Martineau, the economist and daughter in law of Rev William Turner, mentor of Mrs Gaskell. Other women who signed the petition who later lived in The Park included Mrs Sarah Loverseed of Gladstone House, Lincoln Circus, Elizabeth Westmoreland, Park Valley, and Elizabeth Cummins Key, (when married to John Jardine) 14 Newcastle Drive and then 14 Pelham Crescent. In February 1867, Mrs Turner and her friend, Miss Sunter, were once again collecting signatures for another petition.

On the other side of the road from Catherine Turner, on Park Row (not to be confused with the street, Park Row) lived the Jacoby family at Oakhill House. Moritz Jacoby, a successful Jewish lace manufacturer from Germany was a Director and President of People's College, which sits to the rear of Oakhill House. People's College had provided for adult female classes since 1848 and a Girls' Department, offering a broad education, set up in 1850. His son, John Henry Jacoby was elected a director in 1871, the same year in which the Head Mistress of the Girls Department at People's College became secretary of the newly formed Nottingham Committee of the London National Society for Women's Suffrage. Three years later, another son, born in the Park who joined the Unitarians, James Alfred Jacoby aged 22, was joint secretary of the Committee with Miss Sunter, organising the sale of tickets to the Mechanics Hall with Miss Lydia Becker as speaker. Later as Sir James Jacoby MP he recalled with pride his involvement in the early days of female suffrage. After a lull in activities Jacoby, now a town councillor was supporting the suffrage meeting at the Co-operative Hall in 1880.

Catherine was the widow of Rev Henry Turner of the High Pavement Unitarian Chapel. She believed in a broad and enriching education, including botany, history and

TOP: Millicent Fawcett, President of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

LEFT: Mrs Catherine Turner, 8 Park Terrace



Active in this new wave of activity were the Guilford sisters, Sarah and Hannah who lived at 23, Lenton Avenue. In December 1883 Hannah joined the committee of the newly formed Nottingham Women's Suffrage Society, of which her elder sister, Mrs Ann Cowen, was Secretary. Supported by her husband, George, Ann lived nearby on the Ropewalk. These three sisters were to play a large part in extending the public role of women in Nottingham. Ann had been elected to the Nottingham School Board in 1881, although ironically her unmarried sisters, as ratepayers had voting rights which she did not! Such was the stupidity of the law. The Guilford sisters' names appear at many suffrage meetings and in 1892, Hannah joined the School Board. Mrs Cowen, supported by the Bishops of Southwell and Nottingham, championed the cause for women to be elected to the Poor Law Boards in 1894, and her sister, Sarah was elected to the Nottingham Board.

It is clear that what The Park activists had in common, regardless of denominational allegiance or type of family business, is that they had the financial advantage which enabled them to employ household staff which gave them the time and energy to engage in political activities.

Many of the women who supported the suffrage cause, were often part of the Liberal Party and had many other interests. Two good examples of this are the Quaker Hutchinson sisters, Rachel Proctor Hutchinson of 5, Lenton Road and her elder sister Margaret Hutchinson, Kirkstall Lodge, 3 Cavendish Crescent South. Margaret, as well involved in the suffrage cause, held office in the Nottingham Women's Liberal Association and was involved with the Nottingham Day Nursery and

Orphanage, Nottingham Charity Organisation Society and the British Temperance League. Her sister Rachel was active at suffrage meetings in the 1880s and twenty years she was still organising 'at homes' to support the local branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).

With the death of Ann Cowen in 1894 Alice Dowson of Felixstowe House, Clumber Road West (burnt down in the 1960s) became secretary of the local branch of the NUWSS. Her mother had been a pupil of Catherine Turner and Alice belonged to the strong family of Unitarians, which included Gregs, Rathbones, Needhams, Martineaus, Hollands and Enfields. She had supported the suffrage cause since the 1870s. How she found time to be so active as the mother of 10 children by the age of 32!



She handed on the secretaryship to her daughter-in-law, Helena Dowson in 1896. Helena was the daughter of Councillor Anderson Brownsword, who had supported the suffrage movement in Nottingham. When Alice moved from The Park, Helena and her husband, solicitor, William Enfield Dowson, moved into Felixstowe House, and this became the rallying point of the Nottingham branch of the

TOP LEFT: Miss Hannah Guilford, 23 Lenton Avenue
TOP RIGHT: Miss Sarah Guilford, 23 Lenton Avenue
RIGHT: Mrs Ann Cowen

NUWSS. She worked closely with her sister in laws, Miss Maud Dowson and Mrs Hilda Dowson, great niece of Mrs Gaskell.

Other Park members of the NUWSS included Mrs Annie Charlotte Eberlin, 16, Park Terrace, Mrs Helen Wynne Humphreys, 1 Park Drive, Miss Lucy Ann Pemberton, Kennilworth House, Kennilworth Rd, Mr Arthur and Mrs Frances Richardson, 17 Park Valley, Mrs Kate May Snook, Castle Grove, Mrs Jessie Kentish Wright, 9 Newcastle Drive, Mrs Jessie Wilkins, 4, Clare Valley, Miss Olga Mary Walker, 3, Hollies Crescent, Miss Constance Bourne, St Ives, 4 Tattersahll Drive, Mrs Lena Dowson, Brightlands,(now Adam House) Clumber Rd East, Mrs Jane Brownsword, 15 Cavendish Crescent South, Rev. Bingley Cass, 4, Park Drive. Mrs Mary Hewison Lewenz, who lived at 7 Clumber Crescent South, when Miss Gunston, had been Hon Secretary of Nottingham Branch of the Women's Freedom League. She had taught Swedish Gymnastics at the Boys High School during the war and taught at Nottingham University College. Her daughter, Letty, became Head Mistress of the Girls High School.

At Hardwick House, Cavendish Crescent North, lived Hon Mary Handford, daughter of Lord Belper, who on her removal to Southwell became a member of the committee the Southwell branch of the NUWSS in 1910.

Felixstowe hosted speakers such as Eleanor Rathbone, a distant relative of Helena Dowson, Edward Carpenter, as well as Mrs Bertrand Russell in 1909. Mrs Russell, (born Alys Pearsall Smith) was the daughter in law of Lady Amberley whom we have already met in this article. Fundraising activities had support from Mrs Elizabeth Anne Watson of Burton House, Newcastle Circus, who in 1910 threw her garden open for an "effective suffrage play" entitled Lady Geraldine's Secret", whilst 80 children performed the scene between Titania and Oberon. Meanwhile at Felixstowe, "hidden amongst the shrubbery was a ladies orchestra."

The Park suffragists were those who sought to bring about change by constitutional means, petitioning Parliament and gaining support from MPs who were sympathetic to their cause. They were firmly behind the leadership of Millicent Fawcett. They were to be frustrated time and again. Nationally there were those who felt the time had come for action and in 1903 the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was founded by Mrs Pankhurst, the Nottingham branch forming in 1908. Their mantra was "Deeds not Words."

Park supporters of the WSPU did include the Quakers, Mrs Catherine Hutchinson (born an Adlington from Mansfield) and her daughter, Miss Sarah Hutchinson, 5 Cavendish Crescent South. Sarah was the niece of the Misses Hutchinson, already mentioned. In 1911 Sarah and her mother hosted a "Garden at Home" at which a banner was unveiled, the work of local talent. Monies were collected for the cost of the banner, and a short play, entitled "The Englishwoman's Home" was performed by Mrs Pemberton Peake's company from Leicester. Sarah became one of the women who boycotted the 1911

Census. She went on to become Secretary of the Nottingham branch of the Friend's League for Women's Suffrage in 1913. At the start of the First World War when a truce had been declared by the suffrage organisations, Sarah chaired the first meeting of the Women's Suffrage Relief Corps in 1914.

Direct action such as setting fire to Pillar Boxes did not endear the WSPU to the leaders of the NUWSS and when in 1912, Helena Dowson organised an Xmas Tree Bazaar opened by Princess Catherine Duleep Singh, speakers spoke out against the actions of the suffragettes. On 30th May 1914, Park residents awoke to the news that the Park Tennis Pavilion had been set on fire. No one was ever caught but it was assumed that from "blasphemous suffragette leaflets" found nearby that this was the work of the WSPU.

With the outbreak of war, campaigning was suspended and energies were diverted into the war effort. Hannah Guilford was recognised for her efforts with Free Kitchens with an MBE in 1918, one of the first women in Nottingham to be so honoured.

As the War entered 1918 the Government finally passed the Representation of the People Act, which gave the Parliamentary vote to all men over the age of 21 and women over the age of 30 who were householders, wives of householders, occupiers of property worth £5 or graduates of Universities. It would be another ten years until women reached parity with men. The 1919 Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act, although seen by some as giving limited opportunities enabled women to become magistrates and Helena Dowson was appointed a Nottingham magistrate in 1920. In 1924 the American, Mrs Caroline Weinberg, Hardwick House, Cavendish Crescent North was appointed the first Jewish female magistrate. Alice Dowson's granddaughter, Alix Kilroy (later Dame Alix Meynell) was the first Nottingham born Civil Servant, by public examination in 1925.

This has been a quick resume of the role played by Park women and men in the fight for Votes for women and I have listed further work. The fight was long but the resolve of these Park residents never faltered and we should be proud of them.

"Shoulder to Shoulder and Friend to Friend"

For further information:

No Surrender – Women's Suffrage in Nottinghamshire – Nottingham Women's History Group 2018
The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland – A Regional Survey - Elizabeth Crawford 2006
What Grandmother Said – Alix Meynell 1998

Photos I would like to thank the 'Manuscripts and Special Collections, the University of Nottingham' 'Records of High Pavement Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel, Nottingham. Hi P 51-2, Hi P 128, Hi P 129, Hi P 130.

With thanks to the staff of Bromley House Library, Nottinghamshire Archives and the Archive of the University of Nottingham