



Self-Guided Suffrage Walk

This walk highlights places and events important to the struggle for women to get the vote here in Nottingham.

The walk starts in the Arboretum and finishes in the Market Square. You can of course do it in reverse if that suits better. Go at your own pace to any of the listed places and read the text.

If you would like more information please see our book ***No Surrender***

or visit

www.nottinghamwomenshistory.org.uk

or contact us

nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com



Supported by



BACKGROUND

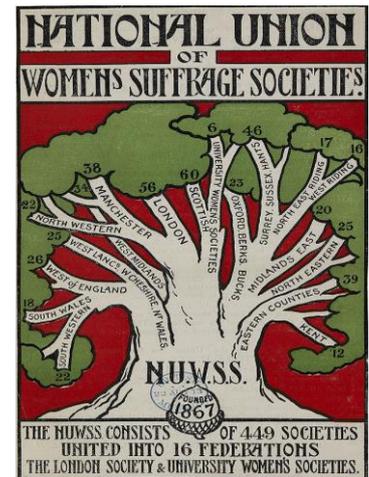
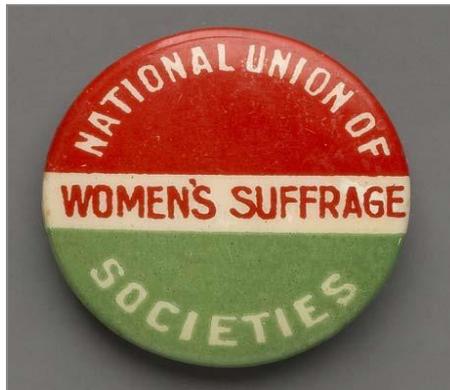
1866 – The first National suffrage petition was presented in parliament by John Stuart Mill MP. It had 53 signatures from women in Nottingham. Further petitions from Nottingham were presented in 1869 and 1870, and in 1881 Arnold Morley Nottingham's Liberal MP, presented another signed by 885 Nottingham women.

1871 – A Nottingham branch of the London Women's Suffrage Society was formed with Elizabeth Sunter who signed the original 1866 petition as Honorary Secretary.

1897 – The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies –

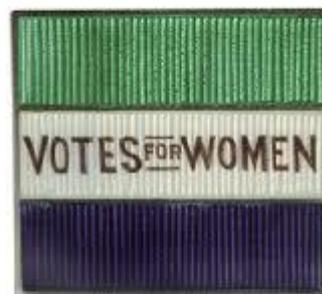
NUWSS – was set up under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett. The Nottingham group quickly affiliated with Nellie Dowson as secretary. The **Suffragists** sought to achieve votes for women by constitutional means:

campaigning, bills, demonstrations, writing, speaking, organising and lobbying for the vote. Their colours were red, white and green.



1903 – The Women's Social and Political Union **WSPU** was set up in Manchester by Emmeline Pankhurst frustrated at the lack of progress.

1906 – WSPU headquarters set up in London. A Nottingham branch was quickly established in 1906. The **Suffragettes**, as they were termed by the Daily Mail, felt that "Deeds not Words" were needed if women were to get the vote, they used civil disobedience and later militancy, e.g. setting fire to post boxes, smashing windows and arson. Their colours were Green, White and Violet – **Give Women the Vote**. Their newspaper was first called *Votes for Women*, later changed to *The Suffragette*. Nationally there were about 5,000 active members and about 60 here in Nottingham.



1918 – 6th February the **Representation of the People Act** was past – giving women over 30 householders or the wives of householders the Vote.

1928 – Women over 21 given the vote.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE WALK

▶ Arboretum

▶ ▶ Helen Watt's Tree and Plaque

Arrive at or head to the top entrance of the Arboretum (junction of Waverley St and Arboretum St). Follow the path with the bandstand to your right. The tree and plaque are up on the left.



HELEN WATTS is Nottingham's best-known suffragette. She was born in 1881 in County Durham, the eldest of 8 children of the Rev. Alan Hunter Watts and his wife Ethelinda Woodrow Cassels. They family moved to Nottingham in 1893 when Alan Watts became vicar of Holy Trinity, Lenton.

Helen joined the Women's Social and Political Union WSPU after hearing Christabel Pankhurst speak in Nottingham on 2nd Dec. 1907.

This volatile meeting was abandoned and re-scheduled as a woman-only meeting in Circus Street Hall (near the current Playhouse) on 9th December 1907, Helen joined the WSPU and went on to become an active suffragette.

She was first arrested outside the House of Commons on 24th February 1909 for causing 'wilful obstruction'. In court Helen refused to be bound over to keep the peace and was sentenced to one month in Holloway gaol.

Helen was arrested again on 4th September 1909 in Leicester while protesting at a meeting where Winston Churchill, who was anti women's suffrage, was speaking. She and other suffragettes were arrested for 'disorderly conduct' simply for trying to enter the building! Helen

went on hunger strike for 90 hours while in Leicester gaol. She was enthusiastically welcomed at Morley's café on release, where she gave her first public speech.



In 1911 Helen was one of 60 suffragettes who recovered their health at Eagle House near Bath, the home of the Blathwayte family. She was photographed there on 17th March 1911 planting a juniper tree in the 'Suffragette's Orchard'. She carried



a sprig of juniper in her purse for over 50 years and hence why, in March 2016, the NWHG planted this juniper tree accompanied by 30 members of the Watts family. Two years later, on 14th December 2018 and again accompanied by Watts family members, a commemorative plaque celebrating her achievements was unveiled, 100 years to the day when some women first got the opportunity to vote in a general election.



By 1912 her WSPU activity was overtaken by her training to be a nurse. She later worked in the War Office and the Ministry of Labour. She died in August 1972 in Wells, Somerset, aged 91.

▶ College of Art & Design

▶ ▶ Dame Laura Knight

Leave the Arboretum at its lower gate on Waverley Street. Turn left toward to the city centre and on your left you will find the old College of Art & Design, now part of Nottingham Trent University.



MANY WOMEN and men trained here perhaps the most famous is **Dame Laura Knight (1877-1970)** one of the most important women painters of the 20th Century. She was born in Long Eaton in 1877 but spent her early years in a house at 9 Noel Street overlooking the Forest and attended the Nottingham College of Art – where her mother taught – soon taking over her teaching.

Laura Knight painted portraits of suffragettes Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Flora Drummond, both members of the WSPU.

Although not noted as an active suffragette, Laura Knight

was clearly sympathetic to the cause and attended Emmeline Pankhurst's funeral. Sadly, there is no plaque to her on this building – though the conservatory is named after her. There is a Brown Plaque on her birthplace at no. 9 Noel Street (opposite the Forest Recreation Ground on the left where the tram passes on the way out of town). She died in 1970.



▶ **Old Register Office**

▶ ▶ **Poor Law Office**

Still walking toward to the city centre take a fork left down Shakespeare Street (walking through a pedestrianised part of Nottingham Trent University campus. The building is on the left-hand side of the street.

THE BUILDING is now part of Nottingham Trent University, but was originally the offices of the **Poor Law Office** administration for Nottingham. In 1894 when women were able to become Poor Law Guardians, the **first** woman member of the Nottingham Board of Guardians (**1895-1907**) was Mrs **Jeanie Brownsword**, mother of Helena/ Nellie Dowson – more later. Others actively involved were Ann Cowen née Guilford, and her sisters Hannah and Sarah – all of whom were active in the NUWSS.



▶ **University College**

▶ ▶ **Controversial WSPU Meeting**

Still on Shakespeare Street, simply turn around to see the original University of Nottingham building.

THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE was founded in 1877 and grew out of the 19th Century desire to open-up university education to people unable to attend the traditional universities of Oxford or Cambridge. Many women who would later get involved in Women's Suffrage towards the end of the 19th Century would have attended evening classes in the arts, humanities and sciences. There was a **WSPU meeting** arranged in the University on **8th November 1907** but it was blocked by the University on the grounds that it was political rather than educational. It was re-located to the Baptist Church on Woodborough Road. This created a furore in the University and several governors resigned.



▶ **Guildhall**

▶ ▶ **Trial of Eileen Casey**

Head along Shakespeare Street then turn right into South Sherwood. Walk up the hill to the junction with Burton Street. Here you will find the impressive Guildhall building.

THE TRIAL OF EILEEN CASEY a militant suffragette was held here in July 1914 and there were protests outside and the WSPU local organiser Charlotte Marsh and other suffragettes were prevented from getting into the court room and were detained by police but later released.

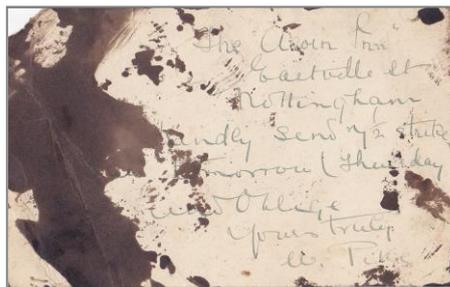


▶ **General Post Office**

▶ ▶ **Mail Attacks**

Continue up South Sherwood Street, cross Upper Parliament Street and head down Queen Street. On your left is the current Post Office.

THIS WHOLE building was the General Post Office at this time. It was subject to post box attacks by suffragettes pouring black fluid into them. As reported in Nottingham newspapers of the 7th February 1913, 'Votes for Women' stickers were left near the scene. This was the height of suffragette militancy with window smashing in other cities and arson. Nottingham activity included pillar box attacks in Mansfield on 20th February, in Beeston on 24th and in Nottingham on 17th April.



● *Postcard received by J Pidcock & Co. Ltd., Sneinton Maltsters, damaged by suffragettes.*

▶ **The Old Market Square**

▶ ▶ **Political Protest**

Continue down Queen St. Old Market Square opens out to your right. Stand in front of the Council House looking away.



OLD MARKET SQUARE has always been a place for political protest. On **5 July 1909**, the NUWSS organised a mass meeting here. Helena (Nellie) Dowson and her sister-in-law Maud Dowson were both present and speakers included Millicent Fawcett, Margaret Ashton and Eleanor Rathbone. The police had been told about the event and promised to attend but failed to turn up. The meeting became unruly and the speakers were prevented from being heard by the disruptive actions of a section of the crowd. Women – including Maud Dowson – were violently treated, groped and assaulted by hooligans. Nellie Dowson, NUWSS Secretary, afterwards sent a letter of protest to the local paper about the lack of police protection.



▶ **Mikado Café**

▶ ▶ **NUWSS AGM**

Look towards Debenhams.

THE 1910 NUWSS AGM was held in the **Mikado Café** in the Debenhams building (then Griffin and Spalding) on 1st June and was chaired by Dr Sarah Gray, (1860-1941) the city's first woman GP. Another NUWSS AGM was held in the Exchange Rooms – predecessor to the current

Council House. Perhaps the most audacious event in the **Old Market Place** involving suffragettes happened on **June 24th 1914**. Immediately before the visit of King George V and Queen

Mary, **Eileen Casey** was arrested for attempting to blow up the King. Eileen, originally from Australia and living in London, was a somewhat independent suffragette and seems to have come to Nottingham intending to bomb and set fire to things. Casey was arrested here in the Market Place carrying a parcel containing the wherewithal to cause an explosion. She was found guilty of intent to commit a felony and sentenced to 15 months hard labour but released in the general amnesty at the outbreak of WW1.

▶ **30 Bridlesmith Gate**

▶ ▶ **Charlotte (Charlie) Marsh**

From The Old Market Square head left along Cheapside until you reach Bridlesmith Gate. Turn right. You are looking for (currently) Eco Shoes on the right.

CHARLOTTE MARSH, or Charlie as she preferred (**1887-1961**), lived here when she took over as the WSPU local organiser in 1911, following Nellie Crocker.

Charlie, from Newcastle, had joined the WSPU in 1907 while training to be a sanitary inspector. Appalled by what she saw of women's lives she gave up a promising career and became active in the WSPU to give women a voice. She was arrested and went on hunger strike many times, and various militant activities continued while she was organiser.

Charlie was the standard bearer at Emily Wilding Davison's funeral procession in 1913. She protested at the trial of Eileen Casey at the Guildhall but was prevented from getting inside by the police. When WW1 broke out the WSPU agreed to support the war effort and Charlotte first became a motor mechanic, then Lloyd George's chauffeur. She became vice-president of the Suffragette Fellowship. She died in Wimbledon in 1961.



▶ **36 Bridlesmith Gate** (unfortunately now gone)

▶ ▶ **WSPU Shop**

Continue just a short walk down Bridlesmith Gate in the direction of Low Pavement.

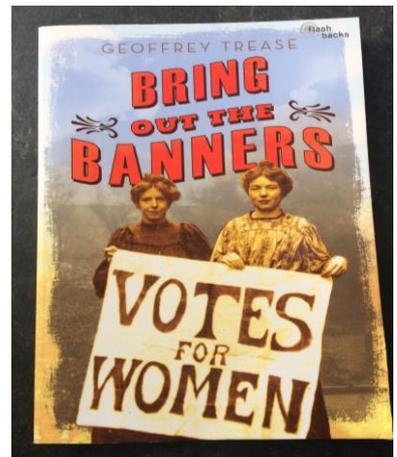
IN 1910 THE WSPU HAD A SHOP at no. 36 when there were two general elections and the suffragettes spent their time campaigning and collecting signatures in support of a women's franchise clause. We know this from adverts in the Nottingham Evening Post. There were also WSPU shops at 6 Carlton Street and 31 Derby Road at different times.

▶ Haywood's Factory

▶ ▶ Alice Dax

Walk to the end of Bridlesmith Gate turn right and walk down Low Pavement onto Castle Gate. On your left at the start of Castle Gate is Weaver's Wine Merchants. Look up to the right of the shop window and you will see the Green Plaque for Haywood's Factory.

HERE WE REMEMBER **ALICE DAX (1878-1951)** a suffragist from Eastwood, who was the inspiration for a character in DH Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. Lawrence worked at Haywood's for a short time. In the novel it becomes Jordan's factory and Alice, who he knew well from Eastwood, becomes Clara Dawes, the overseer, who was "separated from her husband and had taken up Women's Rights". Paul Morel, the Lawrence character, is strongly attracted to Clara, as (allegedly) Lawrence was to Alice. Along with Sallie Hopkin, another Eastwood Socialist, Alice attended meetings fronted by the Pankhursts and Annie Kenney, and led meetings of her own at the Socialist Hall in Derby. Geoffrey Trease, whose family still own the wine shop, wrote *Bring out the Banners* in 1994 about the suffragette movement.



Walk along Castle Gate and cross Maid Marian Way

▶ **58 Castle Gate (demolished for Maid Marian Way)**

▶ ▶ Signatories of the 1866 Petition

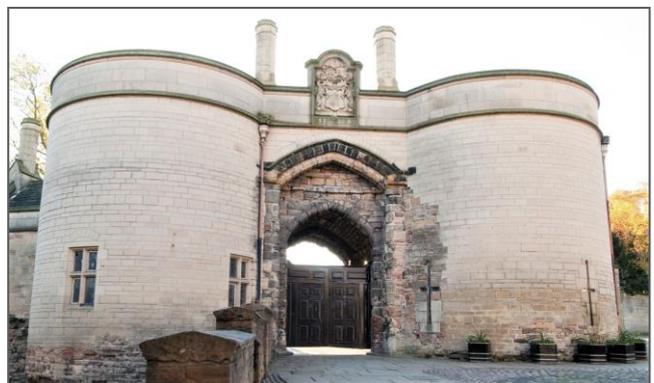
Three women who signed the very first 1866 suffrage petition to Parliament lived at **no. 58**. They were sisters and milliners – Mary, Annie and Martha Elizabeth Ward. Mary was also a member of Bromley House Library.

▶ The Castle

▶ ▶ Muriel Wallis

Walk to the end of Castle Gate, continue te until you reach the Castle.

MURIEL WALLIS (1882-1929) was the eldest daughter of George Wallis and Katherine 'Kate' Watson Carey, and lived at The Residence, Nottingham Castle, as her father was Director of the Art Gallery for 50 years. Muriel was active in WSPU from about 1907 and took part in several

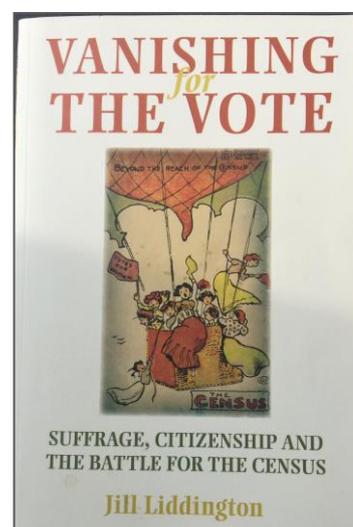


London processions. She was arrested for ‘wilfully obstructing Police whilst in the execution of their duty’ on ‘Black Friday’, 18th November 1910 at the Deputation to Parliament. She was bailed for £2 and bound over to keep the peace but not imprisoned. Christabel Pankhurst wrote personally to thank her for taking part and hoped “the ill-usage to which you were subjected has not seriously harmed you.”

It is likely that Muriel also took part in the **Census Boycott** on 2th April 1911 as she cannot be located anywhere that night. In her scrapbook there is a newspaper article about a WSPU meeting held at Morley’s Cafe on 22nd March 1911 at which the speaker, Mrs Simon Massey, said the census offered “an excellent and most logical method of protest.”

From Jill Liddington’s book, *Vanishing for the Vote*, we know that many suffragettes joined the census boycott either refusing to fill in the forms – **Resisters** – or by going missing on census night – **Evaders**. Others defaced the form, writing ‘Votes for Women’; ‘If women don’t count; don’t count women’ or ‘No vote, No census’.

Muriel died on 21st January 1929 at no. 26 The Ropewalk. The Evening Post (23rd January) said: “Miss Wallis was well known in the district and engaged herself in social and philanthropic work on an extensive scale.” She is buried in the Carey plot at the Church Rock Cemetery. May Burgis attended Muriel’s funeral on 24th January at St James’ Church (now demolished).



▶ **34-36 Wheeler Gate** (currently Trailfinders)

▶ ▶ **Morley’s Café**

Head back down Castle Gate (toward city centre). Cross Maid Marion Way, turn left then first right walking down Hounds Gate until you reach Wheeler Gate.

THIS WAS MORLEY’S CAFÉ where the larger WSPU meetings were held including one when **Helen Watts** was welcomed back on release from her first one-month prison sentence in Holloway on 24th March 1909. At a meeting on 17th September, after release from Leicester gaol, she said: ***“We must come down from the various little pedestals on which we have been mounted by birth and education and forget everything but the fact that we are part of humanity, fighting for a human right, on absolutely simple and straightforward principles”.***



▶ **Bromley House Library**
 ▶ ▶ **Signatories of 1866 Petition**

Head up Wheeler Gate crossing South Parade onto Beastmarket Hill. Pass the Bell Inn and onto Angel Row and on your left you will find the entrance to Bromley House Library.

Many of the early suffragists had an association with Bromley House Library, for example, some of those who signed the original 1866 petition including Maria Attenborough, Mary Curzon, Phoebe Sutton and Mary Ward.



▶ **Regents Chambers**
 ▶ ▶ **NUWSS Shop**

Look across to Long Row (opposite) and above the old Pearson's/Habitat store is the location of Regents Chambers.

THE NOTTINGHAM NUWSS shop, run by Nellie Dowson, was situated here.

Helena – or Nellie – Dowson (1866-1964) was born to liberal and socially-involved parents Anderson and Jeanie Brownsword.



In 1894, she married Will Dowson.

Nellie worked with her mother and sisters-in-law for women's suffrage becoming secretary in 1896. She attended many suffrage meetings in Nottingham and in London as well as hosting at homes, fundraising and working in the suffrage shop.

In 1913 she took part in the **Great Suffrage Pilgrimage** where women from all over the country followed various routes over a six-week period to reach London, cycling, riding etc staying and holding meetings on route. They were keen to demonstrate to Parliament how many women wanted the vote and to emphasize that the NUWSS was non-militant. The Pilgrimage route from Newcastle came through Nottinghamshire where Nellie joined in at Pleasley Hill and Mansfield on 8th July and



Millicent Fawcett addressed the crowds. The Pilgrimage ended in Hyde park when 30-40,000 people gathered and national and local speakers, including Nellie, addressed the crowds.

Nellie was presented with an illuminated address by fellow suffragists after the campaign was successful. The citation included the following wording:

'... in token of affection and as a memento of Victory by Friends and Fellow-Workers, in recognition of her splendid Services in the Cause of the Enfranchisement of Womanhood, through years of Struggle for Freedom and for Justice for the Claims of her own Sex and the Uplifting of the Race.'

After the Sex Disqualification Removal Act was passed in 1919 she became one of the first cohort of woman JPs in 1920 and became the first woman Liberal Councillor in representing the Meadows Ward between 1920-24.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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