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A mistake to raise any controversial question at the present time: the careful relationship of Glasgow's suffragists with the press 1902-1918.

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‘A mistake to raise any controversial question at the present time’: the careful relationship of Glasgow’s suffragists with the press, 1902-1918

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This chapter investigates how a constitutional suffrage organization navigated two distinct and problematic relationships – with the suffrage press and with local newspapers. It demonstrates that not all suffrage campaigners strode confidently into the public sphere of press debate, and that there were clear risks as well as benefits in doing so. Such an investigation moves the discussion beyond the publicity-seeking agenda of the militant campaign and focuses instead on the constitutional suffragists. It also offers new insight into the somewhat difficult relations between the Scottish constitutional suffragists and London headquarters of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).

Discussion of the women’s suffrage campaign and its relationship with the press has tended to focus on newspaper coverage of militant organizations, with their headline-grabbing stunts aimed at raising the profile of ‘the cause’.¹ The newspapers gave the suffragettes publicity while the suffragettes offered exciting and controversial stories that sold newspapers. The suffragettes also made full use of newspaper correspondence columns, which allowed them to present their arguments in some detail, even in anti-suffrage newspapers.² However, the constitutional suffragists also worked to publicise their policies and events through the press, and, as time wore on, also attempted to distinguish themselves in the public eye from their militant sisters.³

This chapter utilizes the minutes and public correspondence of the Executive Committee of the non-militant Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women’s Suffrage (GWSAWS), and its correspondence to suffrage and Scottish newspapers, to explore the changing relationship of this organization with the press. A 1906 letter of protest from the GWSAWS Executive Committee against militant suffrage activities in Glasgow provoked somewhat of a backlash in the local press, resulting in the women of the Glasgow Association becoming more wary of entering into press debate. This set something of a pattern for several years, as recognized by researchers who have described the Association as being ‘obstinate and insular’ and ‘curiously uncooperative’.⁴ However, with the advent of the First World War, GWSAWS adopted a more confident approach to the press, reflecting the general higher-profile engagement of women civic leaders throughout the country who were ‘doing their bit’ for the war effort.

¹ J. Chapman, *The Argument of the Broken Pane: Suffragette consumerism and newspapers*. *Media History*, xxi (2015), 238-251; K. Cowman, ‘Doing Something Silly’: The uses of humour by the Women’s Social and Political Union, 1903–1914’, *International Review of Social History*, lii (2007), 259-274; K. E. Kelly, *Seeing through spectacles: The woman suffrage movement and London newspapers, 1906-13*. *European Journal of Women’s Studies* xi (2004), 327-353; J. Mercer, ‘Making the news: Votes for women and the mainstream press’ *Media History*, x (2004), 187-199; R. Nessheim, *Press, Politics and Votes for Women, 1910-1918* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press 1997); S. Pedersen, *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

² Pedersen, *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press*.

³ M. DiCenzo, ‘Unity and dissent: Official organs of the suffrage campaign, in *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, periodicals and the public sphere*, eds. M. DiCenzo, L. Delap and L. Ryan (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁴ M. K. Smitley, ‘Woman’s mission’: the temperance and women’s suffrage movements in Scotland, c. 1870-1914’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2002), p. 224; E. King, ‘The Scottish Women’s Suffrage Movement’ in *Out of Bounds: women in Scottish society 1800-1945*, eds. E. Breitenbach and E. Gordon (Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 136.

The minutes of the Executive Committee detail both a growing realization of the need to heighten the public profile of suffragists in Glasgow, and a reluctance to engage too closely with the local press, particularly after the arrival of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in the city after 1906. Most of the members who *were* happy to engage in correspondence with the local press had left GWSAWS to join the Glasgow branch of the WSPU by the end of 1907. The first honorary secretary of GWSAWS, Nellie M. Hunter, stands out as one of the few members of the Committee happy to engage in press correspondence under her own name during the pre-war years. She finally resigned from GWSAWS in disgust in 1917, after the cautious press committee submitted a letter to the *Glasgow Herald* under a *nom de plume* rather than the name of the Association itself.

The chapter also explores the sometimes-difficult relationship between local and national organisations, particularly between a Scottish organisation uncomfortable with a London-based leadership. The NUWSS, based in London, was the umbrella group for constitutional suffrage societies and had affiliated branches all over the country. The GWSAWS affiliated to the NUWSS in 1903, but, as we shall see, there were tensions in the relationship. While the GWSAWS Executive Committee was more open to sending reports and letters to constitutional suffrage publications such as *Suffrage Record* and *Common Cause*, the relationship between these London-based publications and Glasgow was not always straightforward, and tended to reflect the wider problematic relationship between GWSAWS and NUWSS headquarters.

While the GWSAWS did seek newspaper promotion of its meetings and fundraising campaigns, there was more reluctance to enter into debate in the press, with either anti-suffragists or suffragettes. In addition, the editors of Glaswegian newspapers might refuse to cover suffragist meetings or even mock them. This resulted in a diminished profile for GWSAWS and a loss of members, and their subscriptions, to the militant organisations in the city.

The Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage

The GWSAWS was re-founded in 1902 by some of the leading women in civic life in the city.⁵ An earlier association had been established in 1870 (an Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage was founded in 1867), but lapsed in the succeeding decades. Membership of GWSAWS came primarily from the educated middle classes, with many prominent members also associated with the local Liberal party – the first meeting of the new association in 1902 was held at the home of Jessie Turnbull Thomson, referred to in the minutes as Mrs Greig, a former president of the Glasgow Women's Liberal Association.⁶ Invitations to send representatives to join the committee of the new society were extended to local temperance associations. King also notes the overlap in membership between GWSAWS and the Scottish Council for Women's Trades (SCWT).⁷ The Suffrage Association even met at the offices of the SCWT in Renfield Street from 1902 to 1909. GWSAWS had gained 200 members by the end of its first year, and by 1911 had supported the formation of four other suffrage societies in the west of Scotland. It affiliated to the NUWSS in 1903 'feeling that union is strength', but also instigated the formation of a Scottish Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies.⁸ By 1914 there were 63 suffragist societies in Scotland, with a membership of 7,370.⁹ The

⁵ *Common Cause*, 12 Oct. 1911, 9.

⁶ E. Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (UCL Press, 1999) 246

⁷ E. King, *The Hidden History of Glasgow's Women* (Mainstream, 1993) 91.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ L. Leneman, *A Guid Cause: the women's suffrage movement in Scotland* (Mercat Press, 1995), 189.

Federation's chairman was Andrew Ballantyne, who worked for the Railway Servants' Union and Scottish Trades Union Congress. From 1905 he was also manager of the Glasgow Public House Trust.¹⁰ The Public House Trust movement was established to promote the 'disinterested' management of pubs and represented the 'moderate wing' of the temperance movement.¹¹ For the first seven years of its existence, GWSAWS business was conducted from the home of honorary secretary Nellie M. Hunter (née Galbraith). In April 1911, however, an office was taken at 202 Hope Street, making it 'the centre of the Constitutional Women's Suffrage movement in Glasgow'.¹²

The minutes of the Executive Committee of GWSAWS are held at Glasgow's Mitchell library and date from 1902 to 1933. Elspeth King has provided a number of useful introductions to the collection, and she, Sandra Stanley Holton and Leah Leneman used the Association's minutes to inform their early and valuable surveys of the Glasgow, Scottish and UK suffrage movements, particularly the movements of members between suffragist and suffragette organisations.¹³ Megan Smitley and Annmarie Hughes use the minutes to identify inter-connections between the Scottish suffrage and temperance movements and explore the fraught relations between the GWSAWS and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) after the war.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the minutes of the GWSAWS continue to be a rich source for further study of the constitutional suffrage campaign in Glasgow, and this chapter investigates the light they cast on the relationship between the Executive Committee of GWSAWS and the suffrage and non-suffrage press. This expands on earlier work on the relationship between the press and suffrage organisations in Scotland, which has demonstrated how suffrage campaigners used Scottish newspapers – particularly correspondence columns – to communicate their arguments to the general public from the 1860s onwards. However, it is clear that it was the arrival of the WSPU in Scotland in 1906 that stimulated greater press coverage of the demand for votes for women, especially as militancy arrived in the country in the last few years before the outbreak of war.¹⁵

The oxygen of publicity

From the establishment of their campaign in the 1860s, suffragists had embarked on a press strategy that included placing letters, articles and reports in as many newspapers as possible in order to shift public opinion on the subject of women's suffrage.¹⁶ Scottish leaders such as Priscilla Bright Maclaren, signatory of the 1866 suffrage petition and first president of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage, were keen correspondents to the press. On Maclaren's death in 1906, *The Scotsman* acknowledged her frequent use of its correspondence pages, describing her as 'a

¹⁰ Smitley, 'Woman's mission', 219.

¹¹ D. W. Gutzke, 'Progressivism and the History of the Public House, 1850–1950', *Cultural and Social History* 4.2 (2007): 235-259.

¹² *Common Cause*, 12 Oct. 1911, 9.

¹³ S. S. Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); E. King, *The Scottish women's suffrage movement* (People's Palace Museum, 1978); King, 'The Scottish Women's Suffrage Movement'; King, *The Hidden History of Glasgow's Women*; L. Leneman, *A Guid Cause*.

¹⁴ Smitley, 'Woman's mission'; A. Hughes, 'Fragmented feminists? the influence of class and political identity in relations between the Glasgow and West of Scotland suffrage society and the independent labour party in the West of Scotland, c. 1919-1932', *Women's History Review*, xiv (2005), 7-32.

¹⁵ Pedersen, *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press*.

¹⁶ DiCenzo, 'Unity and dissent: Official organs of the suffrage campaign'.

ready and pungent writer'.¹⁷ Following Maclaren's example, Jessie Methven, honorary secretary of the Edinburgh Society, was another frequent letter-writer, using letters to the editor to publicize the missionary work of the Edinburgh society throughout Scotland. She was particularly quick to write letters of praise to newspapers such as the *Dundee Advertiser* that covered the meetings of new constitutional suffrage societies as they were established.¹⁸ It should be noted, in light of what will be discussed below, that Jessie Methven left the Edinburgh Society to join the WSPU in 1906 after the death of Priscilla Bright Maclaren. Elizabeth Crawford notes that, after Bright Maclaren's death, many of the Edinburgh Society's members flocked to the city's newly established WSPU branch.¹⁹ However, even before this, Methven was expressing sympathy for the suffragettes' impatience with the slow and steady tactics of the suffragists. For example, in a letter to the *Glasgow Herald* in May 1906 she commented that "it was not to be wondered at if at last some impatient spirits have not been able to restrain themselves."²⁰

While the leaders of the Edinburgh Society were writing to local and national newspapers on the subject of women's suffrage, what of their counterparts in Glasgow? The GWSAWS used newspapers to advertise its public meetings, and there was some coverage of these meetings by the local press. However, there seems to have been less of an appetite amongst the Glasgow women to engage in debate on the subject of women's suffrage in newspaper correspondence columns before the advent of the WSPU in the city. The usual policy of Scottish newspapers at this time was publication of all letters received, as long as the correspondent supplied a name and address to the editor. The lack of correspondence from the Glasgow suffragists suggests that they chose not to write to the newspapers. Correspondents could even choose to use a pen name in print, removing another barrier to publication. Anonymity offered the opportunity of offering an opinion on a contentious issue without revealing one's identity, a step which might invite criticism or even attacks. An investigation of Aberdeen newspapers of the same period shows that, with the arrival of militant suffragism, there was an increase in both the discussion of women's suffrage in newspaper correspondence and the use of pen names to cover the identities of the letter-writers.²¹

Reports of the meetings of GWSAWS that were published in local newspapers tended to be short summaries of events, perhaps noting speakers and the titles of their papers, or the wording of the motion in favour of women's suffrage supported by the meeting. They were very similar in style to reports of meetings of other societies, such as branches of the Young Scots or the Women's Liberal Association, and were probably submitted by secretaries of the branches themselves. The names of speakers and chairs of the meetings make it clear that they came from the civic leadership of Glasgow, connected to the council, charities, the Church or university, which helps to explain the mostly respectful, albeit abbreviated, way meetings were usually covered in the press.

One of these meetings, addressed by Nellie M. Hunter, caused the first rift between GWSAWS and the local press. By this time the Association had hired Mary Phillips²² to work as a paid organizer, and it was she who wrote to the *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette* in January 1905, complaining

¹⁷ *The Scotsman*, 6 Nov. 1906, 4.

¹⁸ Pedersen, *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press*, 37-40.

¹⁹ E. Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland* (Routledge, 2016), 234.

²⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, 1 May 1906.

²¹ S. Pedersen, 'What's in a Name? The revealing use of noms de plume in women's correspondence to daily newspapers in Edwardian Scotland', *Media History*, x (2004) 175-185.

²² Phillips later worked as an organizer for the WSPU from 1907.

about its report of a local meeting. Instead of a clear representation of the meeting, she complained, the newspaper had 'contented [itself] with a mere farcical misrepresentation of the subject'.²³

One can understand Phillips' unhappiness. The *Gazette's* report started with a short poem:

The wife has left the kids unwashed.
She's off to her society,
Where female votes as antidotes,
Are offered in variety:
Her manly clo'es and 'suffrage shows',
To other virtues blind me;
So I'm off the scene with the 9.15 –
And the wife I'll leave behind me.²⁴

The report also commented on the appearance of the suffragists: '[T]hey are rather severe looking than otherwise, but I suppose those women who had a right to insist on rights would be minding the baby or something else of that kind'.²⁵ Phillips used her letter to the *Gazette* to repeat some of the arguments presented at the meeting. However, the editor merely commented under her letter: 'The meeting referred to, turned out to be such a paltry affair that it was not worth a serious report, but our correspondent is here granted the "little space" she asks, to re-state the views last week addressed to empty benches – Ed'.²⁶

The minutes of the GWSAWS Executive Committee frequently mention the need to promote meetings and disseminate information about the activities of the wider NUWSS. In December 1903 it was agreed to ask 'the Editors of the Herald, the Citizen, the Daily Record and the News to receive a deputation from the Association',²⁷ while advertisements were to be inserted into the press to encourage those interested in setting up local societies to contact either the Glasgow or Edinburgh Associations.²⁸ Communication with the press might also be more targeted, such as the decision in January 1905 to instruct the Secretary 'to write to the Lab Leader, Clarion, Reynold's Newspaper, New Age, the Scottish Co-operator and the Co-operative News' to protest against the Labour party's support of an adult suffrage bill rather than one focused on women's suffrage.²⁹ The majority of these minutes placed the responsibility for communicating with the press on Nellie M. Hunter.

On 15 January 1906, the Prime Minister of the newly elected Liberal government, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, visited Glasgow to speak at St. Andrew's Halls. His speech was interrupted by a woman shouting, 'What about women's suffrage?' She was removed from the building and Sir Henry passed the incident off with a joke.³⁰ Mortification at such an event occurring in Glasgow led the Executive Committee to immediately submit letters disowning such militancy to the *Glasgow Herald* and *The Scotsman*.

Sir – On behalf of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage, allow me to say that, in common with the general public, we deeply deplore the unseemly

²³ *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette* 21 Jan. 1905, 5.

²⁴ *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette* 14 Jan. 1905, 5.

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette* 21 Jan. 1905, 5.

²⁷ Minute Book 1902-1905, 23 Dec. 1903.

²⁸ Minute Book 1902-1905, 16 March 1905.

²⁹ Minute Book 1902-1905, 31 Jan. 1905.

³⁰ *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 16 Jan. 1906, 6.

interruptions by some women suffragists at Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's meeting tonight. Strongly as we feel the justice of our demands, we equally feel that those are not the methods by which we would seek to have them conceded, and we desire to dissociate ourselves from all such discourteous behaviour.

Nellie M. Hunter, Secretary.³¹

An immediate response to this letter came from Elizabeth Pollok, honorary secretary of the newly formed Glasgow WSPU. This is the earliest mention of a branch of the WSPU in the city. Elizabeth Crawford notes that one had been established by at least March 1906, but this letter suggests that the date can be moved to the start of the year.³² Pollok wrote to the *Herald* to mock the 'hasty meeting' of Glasgow suffragists that had led to the letter and compared them unfavourably to the 'noble Glasgow women' who were willing to make sacrifices for reform 'which they consider of immediate necessity for the economic and social welfare of themselves and their more helpless sisters'.³³ This was not merely a difference of opinion over tactics between suffragists and suffragettes, but also reflected wider divisions. As has been noted, many of the leaders of the Glasgow suffragists were associated with the Liberal party. Indeed, the minutes of the Executive Committee frequently note a desire for Lady Aberdeen, President of the Women's Liberal Federation, to agree to accept the Presidency of GWSAWS.³⁴ Elizabeth Pollok, in contrast, was a member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). The Glasgow WSPU enjoyed strong support from the ILP, and in particular from Tom Johnston, editor of the new radical publication *Forward*. Hence Elizabeth Pollok's attack in her letter on 'Lady Aberdeen and the West of Scotland Women Suffragists' who could 'afford to wait' for suffrage reform, unlike 'the women factory workers, seamstresses and the unfortunate employees in the sweated trades'.³⁵

The action of the Glaswegian suffragists in attempting to disassociate themselves from the suffragettes was not only attacked by Pollok. For several days after the meeting at St. Andrew's Halls, the correspondence columns of Glasgow newspapers were filled with letters either denouncing or supporting the suffragettes' disruption of Campbell-Bannerman's meeting. Several of these letters referred to the suffragists' condemnation of militancy. 'J.S.H.' suggested that Mrs Hunter's letter was written in 'in too great haste'³⁶ while 'Non-Suffragist' stated that she could 'hardly understand the attitude of those organizations which profess to make it [suffrage] a leading object, in repudiating and apologising for their sisters,' asking 'Are we to be "ladylike" when "feminine serfdom" is in the question?'³⁷ On the other hand, 'Juden' stated 'I quite agree with the secretary of the Glasgow branch of that association in her disapproval of the action of those women who both in London and in Glasgow, quite needlessly excited the animosity of many in the audiences by their irrelevant outcries.'³⁸

It is clear that the experience of being attacked in the press dismayed the women of the Glasgow Association, and made them much more wary of engaging in such newspaper debate. Apart from 'Juden', quoted above, most of the letters to the press that mentioned the GWSAWS condemned their letter. In May 1906 the Executive Committee was asked by NUWSS headquarters to circulate to

³¹ *The Scotsman*, 17 Jan. 1906, 10.

³² Pedersen, *Scottish Suffragettes*, 48-9.

³³ *Glasgow Herald*, 18 Jan. 1906, 12.

³⁴ Although she continued to turn them down citing her heavy workload.

³⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 18 Jan. 1906, 12.

³⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, 22 Jan. 1906, 11.

³⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, 19 Jan. 1906, 14.

³⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, 22 Jan. 1906, 11.

the local press another letter condemning suffragettes who had made a disturbance in the gallery of the House of Commons. The minutes note that 'it was decided to take no further steps as already it had been pointed out in the Press that our Association was in no way connected with them.'³⁹ Thus the Glaswegian suffragists both asserted their independence of action against headquarters, and also stepped away from engaging in more correspondence with the local newspapers, particularly in relation to another WSPU outrage.

Nonetheless, individual members of the Executive Committee did continue to engage in newspaper correspondence. Margaret Irwin, Mary Phillips and Dr. Marion Gilchrist all had letters published in the *Glasgow Herald* in March 1907, under their own names, in reference to an attempt to gather Glaswegian signatures on a national anti-suffrage petition.⁴⁰ Irwin was the secretary of the SCWT. She had been a leading campaigner for the establishment of a Scottish Trade Union Congress and was elected its first secretary in 1897. Marion Gilchrist was the first female graduate from the University of Glasgow and the city's first woman doctor, while Phillips was GWSAWS' paid organiser and, after leaving the Association and joining the WSPU, would become one of the longest-serving suffragette prisoners. These letters served the dual purpose of presenting arguments for granting women the parliamentary vote, and also promoting a meeting organized by GWSAWS that week. Later in the same month another committee member, Eve Baker, wrote to the *Herald* to refute a suggestion by another correspondent that the Conservatives supported women's suffrage because they believed women to be 'naturally and incurably stupid, silly or both'.⁴¹ Thus it seems that some members of the Executive Committee were still willing to step into the public sphere via the press, but as individuals rather than representatives of GWSAWS.

However, all four of these women had resigned from the Executive Committee by the end of 1907 to join the militant WSPU. Their resignations were driven by a frustration at the ineffectualness of constitutional tactics, the lack of direct action undertaken by GWSAWS and unhappiness at the refusal of others in the Executive Committee to engage with the WSPU, objecting in particular to the Executive Committee's refusal to invite Teresa Billington, a militant, to address the Association. Their letters to the Glasgow press can therefore be seen as signs of their increasing attraction to the tactics of the militants. Unlike their compatriots on the Executive Committee, they saw the value of raising the question of women's suffrage in newspaper correspondence, and were confident enough in their own positions to step into the public sphere of newspaper debate. Their move to the WSPU also demonstrates the draw of Billington – an excellent and witty public speaker – who had transformed the fortunes of the Scottish suffrage campaign on her arrival in the country in 1906.

The remaining members of the Executive Committee continued to be wary of engaging too readily in newspaper correspondence. In October 1909 a proposal to send a letter to the press outlining a NUWSS resolution condemning the use of violence in political propaganda occasioned 'a long discussion'. It was finally passed, but the suggestion moved by Miss Young and seconded by Miss Lamont "[t]hat we make a statement of our own policy and send it frequently to the press without referring to violent methods" was lost by 3 votes to 11'.⁴²

Mrs Taylor was appointed GWSAWS' first press secretary in 1912 in response to a request from the wider Scottish Federation for someone to monitor the Glasgow newspapers. However, it is evident that she did not feel up to the full task, and at first the job was shared between members of the

³⁹ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Book Dec. 1905 onwards, Mitchell Library 891036/1/2, 8 May 1906.

⁴⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, 9 March 1907, 11; 11 March 1907, 11.

⁴¹ *Glasgow Herald*, 18 March 1907, 10.

⁴² Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Book Dec. 1905 onwards, 20 Oct. 1909.

committee, with each undertaking 'to be responsible for all notices and letters appearing in the papers, cutting them out and sending them on to the Secretary'.⁴³ Mrs Taylor was invited to a national meeting of press secretaries in September that year in Manchester, although there is no indication that she attended. There are several references in the minutes of the difficulty and expense of travelling to England for meetings. It was later agreed that she could hire Durrant's Press Cuttings Agency to cover the newspapers under her supervision, which suggests that the amateur approach of individual committee members had been found to be insufficient.

There was some reluctance amongst the Committee to take on the role of press secretary, which appears to have been an unpaid honorary role. Apart from paid organisers, the majority of work undertaken for the suffrage cause in Scotland was voluntary and taken on by women who were already involved in many other causes and organisations. This was not unusual across the UK, especially within local branches. Mrs Taylor did not hold the role for very long and her apparent successor, Miss Brownlees, is only mentioned in the minutes as press secretary when she resigned from the role in 1914. To a certain extent, the role was covered by the Scottish Federation's able press secretary, Miss Stuart Paterson, who was also a member of the GWSAWS Executive Committee. In 1913 the Committee gave her permission to carry on her role as Federation press secretary in their Glasgow offices, perhaps hoping that her presence would absolve them of the need for their own separate official. Miss Stuart Paterson was a key speaker for the Glasgow Association at by-elections and brought a more professional approach to the role of press secretary. She was also more comfortable with dealing with the press, giving statements, for example, on the occasion of Mrs Pankhurst's arrest when she tried to speak at a WSPU meeting in Glasgow in 1914.⁴⁴ A report in *Common Cause* in 1913 praised her for tackling the press work 'with much energy' and noted that, of the 115 papers on her list for supervision, '54 are reported as favourable, including those of Glasgow, and only 19 as definitely Anti-Suffragist'.⁴⁵

It was Miss Stuart Paterson who suggested that GWSAWS needed to appoint both a press secretary and a committee to support her, 'which would considerably lighten the Press Secretary's work'.⁴⁶ However, despite Committee members helpfully suggesting the names of other women to fill the role of press secretary, none was appointed. It was finally agreed to appoint a press committee, to be convened by Miss Stuart Paterson, and including the erstwhile press secretaries Mrs Taylor and Miss Brownlees, amongst others.

As mentioned earlier, the Executive Committee of GWSAWS has been characterised by researchers as 'obstinate and insular' and 'curiously uncooperative'. This is certainly true of its dealings with the mainstream press. There was little appetite among the majority of Committee members to enter into press debate about the suffrage question, and many of those who were willing to do so soon lost patience with this attitude and moved to the new WSPU branch in the city. The press was mostly to be used to publicise public meetings and other events. In this, the women of the Glasgow suffragist association were not dis-similar to other suffragists in Scotland during the first years of the

⁴³ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Book Dec. 1910-1915, 31 Jan. 1912.

⁴⁴ *The Scotsman*, 10 March 1914, 6.

⁴⁵ *Common Cause*, 2 May 1913, 59.

⁴⁶ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Book Dec. 1910-1915, 16 March 1914. For more on the pro- and anti-suffrage positions of the Scottish press see Pedersen, *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press*.

twentieth century. In Aberdeen, the new WSPU branch poured scorn on the lack of public engagement undertaken by the older suffragist branch – which was also intertwined with the Liberal Women’s Federation. Similarly, the most active press correspondent amongst the Edinburgh suffragists, Jessie Methven, soon moved to the WSPU on the arrival of Teresa Billington in Scotland in 1906. For many Scottish suffragists, engagement with the mainstream press for reasons other than publicising meetings and other events could open them to attack, and a cautious approach was therefore taken.

Relations with the suffrage press

In comparison to its uneasy relations with the local press, the Executive Committee was more confident in its dealings with the suffrage press. They demonstrated independence in setting their own agenda and were confident in disagreeing with the London-based suffrage press, an attitude which is indicative of the wider relationship between the centre and the Scottish ‘periphery’ in the constitutional suffrage campaign. The suffrage press had been established because of a perceived ‘boycott’ of the women’s suffrage issue by the mainstream press – Helena Swanwick described the lack of mainstream coverage of the suffrage issue as ‘extreme and grotesque’ censorship.⁴⁷ From 1907 onwards, the number of ‘official organs’ also reflected the reality of a growing but factionalised suffrage movement.⁴⁸

It was part of the role of the honorary secretary to write to suffrage newspapers such as *Women’s Suffrage Record* (1903-06), *Women’s Franchise* (1907-11) and *Common Cause* (1909-20) with updates on the work of GWSAWS. The relationship here was a reciprocal one: the suffrage periodicals covered the news of societies throughout the country and those societies were expected to encourage members to buy copies of the publication and to sell them at meetings and other events. The minute books of the Committee frequently note requests from the editors of these periodicals to encourage sales. For example, in March 1909 ‘The Secretary reported that Mrs Swanwick was anxious to get local newsagents to stock the *Common Cause* and it was agreed after receipt of the first copy to do what was possible in this direction’.⁴⁹ The Executive Committee agreed to send a copy of the first edition to each of their subscribers in March 1909, but by September a request for further help in making the *Common Cause* better known was met with the response that nothing further could be undertaken at present, as they had already distributed 600 copies.⁵⁰

The Common Cause had been established by the NUWSS as a replacement for *Women’s Franchise*, the editor of which refused to exclude reports of the activities of the militant Women’s Freedom League.⁵¹ *Women’s Franchise* was published by John E. Francis, owner of the Athenaeum Press and a member of the Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage.⁵² The Executive Committee minutes for 10 February 1909 noted the receipt of a letter from *Women’s Franchise* ‘announcing that the NU [National Union] had decided not to send any further news to that journal and inviting local societies

⁴⁷ DiCenzo, *Unity and Dissent*, 76.

⁴⁸ DiCenzo, *Unity and Dissent*, 77. Suffrage publications included *Common Cause*, *Conservative and Unionist Women’s Franchise Review*, *Women’s Suffrage Record*, *The Suffragette* (later *Britannia*), *The Suffragist*, *The Vote*, *Votes for Women* and *Women’s Franchise*.

⁴⁹ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Book Dec. 1905 onwards, 31 March 1909.

⁵⁰ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Book Dec. 1905 onwards, 1 Sept. 1909.

⁵¹ E. Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, 458.

⁵² Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, 461.

to send news. It was agreed to do so.⁵³ This spirit of independence, if not rebellion, was typical of the temper of GWSAWS when dealing with NUWSS headquarters. While the Association had affiliated with the NUWSS in 1903, this had not been a whole-hearted commitment and Glasgow suffragists would have preferred to establish a Scottish Federation of suffrage societies if they could have persuaded the Edinburgh Society. A Scottish Federation was finally formed in 1909, under the umbrella of the NUWSS, and chaired by Andrew Ballantyne.⁵⁴ The minutes of the Executive Committee bear testimony to a fraught relationship with London headquarters, who were seen as being too far away and unsympathetic to the Scottish view of matters. Smith notes that the Scottish suffragists campaigned under the slogan “ye mauna tramp on the Scottish thistle” and worked to resist the imposition of an English cultural identity upon the Scottish movement.⁵⁵ In particular, the strong links between Scottish suffragists and the Liberal party meant great unhappiness at the NUWSS’ electoral alliance with the Labour party in 1912.

The decision by the Executive Committee to continue to send news to *Women’s Franchise* in spite of national policy to the contrary was typical of this uneasy relationship with London. They immediately responded with a report about campaigning in the Glasgow Central Division by-election written by Nellie M. Hunter.⁵⁶ This report explained the decision of the committee to do propaganda work only during the by-election since the only candidate who declared himself to be in favour of women’s suffrage, sitting Unionist MP Charles Scott Dickson, would not commit to any active support. Advice had been sought from NUWSS headquarters after a meeting with Scott Dickson, but no response was received. When headquarters belatedly sent orders that Glasgow suffragists should campaign for Scott Dickson, the Executive Committee declined to do so. A letter was then received from London headquarters demanding to know ‘on whose authority the Glasgow Secretary had sent the report to *Women’s Franchise* that the NU would do propaganda work only.’⁵⁷ ‘The Secretary was instructed to send in reply a history of the bye-election’ – presumably to point out that the advice of headquarters had been sought but, when no timely response was received, GWSAWS had decided to act (or not act) on its own initiative.

The editorial staff of *Common Cause* continued to appeal to Glasgow for support. In May 1910 a meeting was arranged between the Committee and Miss Walshe of *Common Cause*, who was in Glasgow for a week, and this seems to have led to a better understanding between the two groups and more coverage of Glasgow news. In September 1910 Nellie M. Hunter wrote to the journal to announce that Glasgow Town Council had unanimously agreed to petition Parliament in favour of the Conciliation Bill. The motion had been brought by Councillor Pratt, a member of the Executive Committee of GWSAWS. Hunter ended her letter ‘I am under the impression, but am, of course, open to correction, that this is the first time a Corporation has taken action in the matter’.⁵⁸ The Editor responded ‘We welcome with great pleasure this recognition of the value of women as

⁵³ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Book Dec. 1905 onwards, 10 Feb. 1909.

⁵⁴ Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, 621.

⁵⁵ H. Smith, *The British Women’s Suffrage Campaign, 1866-1928*, (Routledge 2014), 30-31.

⁵⁶ *Women’s Franchise*, 25 March 1909, 479.

⁵⁷ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Book Dec. 1905 onwards, 10 March 1909.

⁵⁸ *Common Cause*, 1 Sept. 1910, 345.

citizens by men who have had the opportunity of observing their work on the Council of a great city like Glasgow'.⁵⁹

Smitley's work on representations of 'Scotch' women in late nineteenth-century suffrage periodicals suggests that Scotswomen who wrote to such journals posited a special role for Scotland in the campaign by asserting a progressive political heritage.⁶⁰ This is evident in several of Hunter's letters to the *Common Cause*, which either reported on the leadership shown on the suffrage issue in Glasgow, or explained differences between Scottish and English law.

Hunter's next letter to the *Common Cause*, however, was much more critical in tone. She wrote in response to a cartoon published in the journal of 15 June 1911 entitled 'The March of England's Women':

I am somewhat short-sighted, and on looking at the cartoon of 'Common Cause' for June 15th my first thought was: There is something wrong with my glasses to-day. So I polished them well, but still saw the same word. My second thought was: Oh, they've sent me some stupid provincial weekly instead of our 'Common Cause,' and I looked at the heading again to make sure, and there read 'The Common Cause, the organ of the National Union of Women's Suffrage.' Well, I have hitherto been under the impression that the Union was National, but when its official organ designates the March of the Women 'the March of England's Women,' some of us have been rudely awakened and have realised the fact that though we may have had the temerity to include ourselves among the nation's women the N.U.W.S.S. denies our right to any such position.⁶¹

As Smitley has pointed out, while Scottish women and Scottish affairs were not wholly absent from the suffrage press, they tended to be marginal to the overall reporting, and the periodicals were primarily addressed to an English audience.⁶² Hunter's letter was followed by an apology from the editor stating that they had received other letters on the subject and 'we can only abjectly apologise for the legend which was most certainly not intended as an insult to any Celt or Australian'.⁶³

Smitley also suggests a tendency amongst English feminists to perceive Edinburgh as representative of the whole of Scottish feminism, perhaps because of the dominance of London in England.⁶⁴ As she notes, this narrow focus on the capital was not replicated in Scotland in many areas of charitable and political work, with Glasgow organizations being equals with their eastern sisters. Hunter's emphasis on the leadership shown by Glasgow must therefore be seen in light of the tendency of English suffragists to ignore Glasgow in favour of Edinburgh. For example, when the Scottish Federation was formed in 1909, the minutes of the Executive Committee noted that the National Union 'was under the impression that the Scottish Federation had been initiated and organized by

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ M. Smitley, 'Feminist Anglo-Saxonism? Representations of 'Scotch' Women in the English Women's Press in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Cultural and Social History*, iv (2007), 342.

⁶¹ *Common Cause*, 29 June 1911, 217.

⁶² Smitley, *Feminist Anglo-Saxonism?* 344.

⁶³ *Common Cause*, 29 June 1911, 217.

⁶⁴ *ibid*

the Edinburgh Society' despite the fact that the primary movers had been members of GWSAWS.⁶⁵ Hunter's emphasis on Glaswegian exceptionalism continued into the war years. In May 1916 she responded to a *Common Cause* article praising Bristol for appointing the first woman detective to its police force, claiming 'that honour is really due to Glasgow,' a worker with the National Vigilance Association of Scotland, having been appointed to the detective force of Glasgow the previous September.⁶⁶

On the outbreak of war in August 1914, GWSAWS suspended its campaign for the vote and instead focused on establishing an organization to provide work for unemployed women, the Exchange for Voluntary Workers, and supporting the work of the Scottish Women's Hospitals. While the headquarters of the Scottish Women's Hospitals was in Edinburgh, there was also a committee in Glasgow and several members of the Executive Committee were heavily involved in the administration of the Hospitals, with Nellie M. Hunter eventually becoming Chairman [sic] of the organization. A statement on the suspension of the suffrage campaign was sent to the local press in August 1914, and from then on correspondence to the press focused on fundraising for various schemes associated with the war effort. In December 1914 the Executive Committee 'agreed on Miss Stuart Paterson's suggestion that a letter be sent to the Editors in Glasgow thanking them for the space given in their papers to the important work done by the Suffrage societies.'⁶⁷ A separate minute book for the Exchange for Voluntary Workers also agreed that a good way of advertising the Exchange was through 'a letter sent to the Editor of the Glasgow Herald, signed by well-known people'.⁶⁸ There is a notable increase in confidence in dealings with the press on matters relating to the war emergency, reflected in both minute books and the increase in correspondence to newspapers. As I have argued elsewhere, newspaper correspondence from women's voluntary organizations associated with war work allowed women to demonstrate their contributions to the war effort and to assert themselves in the public sphere with confidence and legitimacy.⁶⁹ At the same time, the campaign for women's enfranchisement was continued throughout the war in Scotland by other organizations, in particular branches of the Women's Freedom League and the Northern Men's Federation for Women's Suffrage.⁷⁰

The establishment of the Speaker's Conference on electoral reform in 1916 led the National Union to write to GWSAWS in November suggesting that 'leading articles, paragraphs or letters to the editor dealing with women's work and its political significance should be inserted in the press, also that Editors should be interviewed.'⁷¹ It was agreed that the Secretary should approach the editors of Glasgow newspapers to interview them about the possibility of pro-suffrage material being inserted in their paper. The National Union also supplied a memorandum that it had drawn up on

⁶⁵ Smitley, 'Woman's mission', 245.

⁶⁶ *Common Cause*, 5 May 1916, 49.

⁶⁷ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Book Dec. 1910-1915, 17 Dec. 1914.

⁶⁸ Exchange for Voluntary Workers (National Emergency) Minute Book, Mitchell Library 891036/5, 24 Aug. 1914.

⁶⁹ S. Pedersen, 'A Surfeit of Socks? The impact of the First World War on women correspondents to daily newspapers', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, xxii (2002), 50-72.

⁷⁰ S. Pedersen, Suffragettes and the Scottish press during the First World War, *Women's History Review* xxxvii (2018), 534-550.

⁷¹ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute book 1915-1920, 6 Nov. 1916.

the subject of women's work and offered copies at a shilling each. However, it was pointed out by the Executive Committee that the memorandum only dealt with England.⁷²

The minutes of 20 November 1916 dutifully recorded the outcome of the interviews with newspaper editors, which were not particularly positive. Mr Bruce of the *Glasgow Herald* considered that the work women were doing spoke for itself and it would be a mistake to raise such a controversial question as women's suffrage at the present time. Mr Letham of the *Daily Record* could not see his way to inserting any paragraphs on the subject, but offered to publish a letter in reply to anti-suffrage letters. The same offer was made by Mr Graham of the *Glasgow Evening Times* while Mr Smith of the *News* stated that his newspaper was definitely anti-suffrage in its views.

A letter signed by representatives of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage had been recently published in newspapers throughout the country.⁷³ It was signed by, amongst others, Lords Curzon and Cromer, Rudyard Kipling, Beatrice Chamberlain, Margaret Macmillan, Gladys Pott and Flora Fardell, and argued that the present government had no moral right to consider an extension of the parliamentary franchise to women and that it should not be considered until after a general election, to be conducted on the usual terms. On the motion of Nellie M. Hunter, seconded by Mrs Taylor, it was agreed that a letter should be sent to all Glasgow newspapers in response. A small committee, including Mrs Hunter, Andrew Ballantyne and Frances Melville, was established to produce such a letter and the product of this committee, signed by the officials of the Association, was published in newspapers such as the *Daily Record* and *Glasgow Herald* at the end of the month.

The letter emphasized that it was not at their prompting that the question of women's enfranchisement had been raised once more 'but that it is entirely due to the proposals made in some quarters to alter the basis of the Parliamentary franchise. Should this be attempted, we cannot possibly stand aside.'⁷⁴ The letter concluded 'We take our stand now, as we have done in the past, on the ground that women should have the vote as a simple matter of justice. The work the women of the country are doing we hold to be merely additional evidence of their willingness and ability to share the responsibilities of nation and empire.'⁷⁵

An answer to this letter was published in the *Herald*, signed W. M. Cheshire. Cheshire objected to women being distracted from their domestic and maternal duties by politics and party warfare. Cheshire was not from Glasgow and similar letters were sent by him to newspapers throughout the UK during the later war years. The one published in the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* in May 1917 gives his address as N6 London. A discussion recorded in the minutes on 4 December 1916 indicates the Executive Committee did not feel it was their responsibility to answer his letter to the *Herald*. Since the President of the Association, Colonel Denny, was referenced in Cheshire's letter, it was suggested that it would be better if he was asked to answer it.⁷⁶ Eventually, a letter was published in the *Herald* on 19 December, some weeks after Cheshire's letter, written by some members of the press sub-committee. Whilst engaging with Cheshire's points, and presenting

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ For example in *The Scotsman* on 18 November 1916.

⁷⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, 27 Nov. 1916, 5.

⁷⁵ *ibid*.

⁷⁶ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute book 1915-1920, 4 Dec. 1916.

statistics and other arguments to present the case for women's suffrage, the letter was not signed by either Colonel Denny or the members of the press sub-committee. Instead it was signed 'O.F.Q.'⁷⁷

The decision not to officially sign the letter angered Nellie M. Hunter. At the next Executive Committee meeting on 8 January 1917, she stated that she had not been present when this letter had been drawn up and asked why it had not been signed officially. Frances Melville 'replied that the Press Committee had considered it wisest to answer this individual letter by a *nom de plume*'.⁷⁸ This was clearly not sufficient explanation for Mrs Hunter, who raised the matter again at the following month's meeting. She demanded to know which members of the press committee had been present when it was decided to make the letter to the *Herald* anonymous and whether the decision was unanimous. In her opinion, 'the Press Committee had been appointed to answer letters on behalf of the Executive Committee, and ... it was not competent for it to do so anonymously without the sanction of the Committee.'⁷⁹ Mrs Hunter 'considered that it was neither competent nor wise to sign the letter anonymously, and that a letter carried far more weight if signed on behalf of the society.' Her motion that it was not competent for a sub-committee to act in this way was defeated by seven votes to six. In comparison, a further motion moved by Miss Morris that such things should be left to the discretion of the press committee, was carried by ten votes to two. 'Mrs Hunter asked that her name be withdrawn from the Press Committee.'⁸⁰

It was not unusual for correspondents to the press on the subject of women's suffrage to use pseudonyms. However, it was usually individual women who sought the cloak of anonymity rather than official associations affiliated to the NUWSS. The choice of the press sub-committee to hide behind a pen name was in direct contrast to Mrs Hunter's willingness to correspond with the newspapers as both an individual and a representative of GWSAWS. Like others before her, she felt unable to continue her association with the Executive Committee and left to continue her work for women and the war effort elsewhere. She not only left the press committee in anger at their choice to use a *nom de plume*, she also left GWSAWS itself. She continued to correspond with the Scottish press and *Common Cause* as Chair of the Scottish Women's Hospitals, and was later awarded the Order of St Sava IV from Serbia and the Royal Red Cross. Hunter also continued her work with the National Vigilance Association of Scotland, and in 1920 was one of the first women to be appointed a Justice of the Peace for Glasgow.⁸¹

While the press sub-committee continued to report to the Executive Committee, after the departure of Nellie M. Hunter much of its work now focused on recommending newspapers for subscription for the office on Hope Street rather than further correspondence with the newspapers. Indeed, there is a clear indication that it considered communication with Scottish newspapers to be the responsibility of NUWSS headquarters in London. On several occasions the Executive Committee sent letters to headquarters querying whether the *Herald* was included in its list of national newspapers and insinuating that the dearth of suffragist news in this paper was related to a lack of action on the behalf of headquarters. There seems to have been little consideration as to whether

⁷⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, 19 December 1916, 3.

⁷⁸ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute book 1915-1920, 8 Jan. 1917.

⁷⁹ Suffrage Executive Committee Minute book 1915-1920, 12 Feb. 1917.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *The Scotsman*, 23 March 1933.

GWSAWS itself could do more to achieve such coverage. In February 1918 advertisements were taken out in the *Herald* and *Daily Record* indicating that information for new women voters could be found at GWSAWS headquarters in Hope Street. However, even this motion was not passed without the proviso that London headquarters should be telegraphed for further information before printing the advertisement.⁸²

Conclusions

The minute books of the Executive Committee of GWSAWS demonstrate how the majority of its members were reluctant to embrace the possibilities of public debate offered by local newspapers, despite increasing pressure from NUWSS headquarters to raise its profile in order to better deal with the eye-catching actions of the militants and the increasing activity of the anti-suffrage campaign. And they were right to be wary. The Association's reprimand of WSPU disruption in 1906 caused an upsetting backlash, which meant that it was several years before GWSAWS returned to the newspaper correspondence columns. Of those Executive Committee members who were willing to expose themselves and their opinions in newspaper correspondence columns, only Nellie M. Hunter remained a member of the committee by the end of 1907, with the other members who were confident enough to correspond with the newspapers attracted by the enthusiasm and public engagement of the WSPU. Their move to the militant organization was echoed in Edinburgh by the erstwhile honorary secretary of the Edinburgh Society, Jessie Methven. The Scottish constitutional suffragists' slow and steady approach to reform was contrasted unfavourably to the direct action and publicity of the militants, leading to a haemorrhage of members to the WSPU in the years after 1906, particularly in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. However, it must be noted that, outside the major cities, it was NUWSS-affiliated rather than WSPU societies that continued to be established.

The Glasgow suffragists showed more enthusiasm for coverage of their activities in the suffrage press, although again their contributions were frequently penned by Hunter. These periodicals, however, brought their own issues. Pressure to sell more copies, in order to promote and financially support the NUWSS, was pushed back by Glaswegian suffragists who felt they had done enough and who queried the relevance of the periodicals to their own situation. It is clear that the English-centric coverage of the nineteenth-century suffrage campaign identified by Smitley was continued by the new publications of the twentieth century. The relationship with the suffrage press reflected the sometimes prickly relationship of GWSAWS with NUWSS headquarters, with the Glasgow suffragists both wishing to assert their independence and the difference between England and Scotland while at the same time complaining that the National Union and suffrage press did not do enough to acknowledge Scottish achievements. Nonetheless, in comparison to the biting contempt that might be shown by Glaswegian newspapers, editors of the suffrage press were always ready to apologise when challenged.

The press committee of GWSAWS was finally wound down in December 1918 when it was decided that its work could now be carried on by other committees. Its disappearance marked the transformation of the Association into the Glasgow Women Citizens' Association with a focus on

⁸² Suffrage Executive Committee Minute book 1915-1920, 11 Feb. 1918.

women's active citizenship.⁸³ Breitenbach and Wright suggest that, after the achievement of partial suffrage, many women's organisations were treated more respectfully by the press, with a level of coverage that made them highly visible to their contemporaries.⁸⁴ Links might be made here with the more respectful coverage given to the Association's war work during the emergency. Since the minutes of the Executive Committee continue until 1933, further work should be undertaken to investigate this new relationship between the Association and the press.

⁸³ E. Breitenbach, and V. Wright, 'Women as active citizens: Glasgow and Edinburgh c. 1918–1939', *Women's History Review*, xxiii (2014), 401-420.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 413.