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Sarah Pedersen (2017). Suffragettes and the Scottish press during the First World War¹. Women's History Review.

Abstract

This article analyses the coverage of the suffrage movement in Scottish newspapers during the First World War. Suspension of militant action and a re-focus on women's war work did not mean the complete disappearance of the suffrage campaign from newspapers. However, while militant and non-militant organisations received press coverage for their war work, there were also stories associating suffragettes with the peace effort – or even conspiracies against the state. Volunteers at the Scottish Women's Hospitals were approvingly described as 'suffragettes' but the appellation retained negative connotations when used about peace campaigners. Brave 'suffragette battalions' were reported to be arriving in France, but at the same time a politician painted the Germans as 'the suffragettes of Europe'. Whilst editors wrote enthusiastically of women's contribution to the war effort, jokes about suffragettes continued to provide light relief. Editorials made the connection between women's war work and achievement of the vote. However, not all readers were happy with this point of view, with some correspondents attacking what they saw as the suffrage organisations' opportunistic use of war work and abandonment of working women.

The start of the First World War led to the suspension of militant action in the campaign for votes for women, and both Emmeline Pankhurst of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and Millicent Garret Fawcett of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) urged women to focus their efforts on the war effort. However, this did not mean the complete disappearance of the suffrage campaign from the newspapers. This article demonstrates that there was a continuance of the suffrage campaign in Scotland throughout the war and that the suffrage issue continued to be raised in the Scottish press in a variety of ways. Press coverage of the campaign for votes for women *did* decline sharply in the first half of the war, only reappearing in any major way in 1916 with discussion of the Representation of the People Bill, but the issue did not fully disappear, even in the early years of the war. However, the press portrayal of the suffrage campaign and the figure of the suffragette became more fragmented during the war. This article discusses the ways in which the campaign for the vote became associated in war-time Scottish newspapers with a number of very different groups – war-workers, pacifists, patriots, socialists. The image of the suffragette also continued to be used by newspapers as a means of raising a quick laugh: old jokes from the pre-war years were repeated, with scant regard to the fact that they might share column

¹ The author is grateful to the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland for travel grant 31880 which has enabled this research.

inches with praise for the work of groups such as the Scottish Women's Hospitals, associated with the NUWSS. In addition, as the WSPU refocused its efforts on war service in order to demonstrate the entitlement of women to citizenship, the voices of other suffrage groups became louder in the Scottish press. Newspaper coverage of women's war work in general also contributed to a change of public opinion on women's right to the vote. Many of the pre-war suffrage organisations were involved in the organisation of women's volunteer war work, meaning an association of such work with the suffrage campaign, although by later in the war and the centralisation of war work under Lloyd George, the origins of such groups became less important. Nonetheless, newspaper editorials discussed women's war work in approving tones and made the connection between war service and citizenship. Since the granting of the vote to women in 1918 there has been debate over the differing contributions of women's war work and militant action to the final decision in favour of women's enfranchisement.² However, there was no doubt in the minds of newspaper editors that women had earned the vote through their war work.

In the months prior to the start of the First World War in August 1914, readers of Scottish newspapers would have been presented with a fairly coherent picture of 'the suffragette'. She was a fire-starting vandal whose tactics led to arrest and imprisonment, hunger-striking, force-feeding and release under the 'Cat and Mouse Act'.³ Coverage of arson attacks on Scottish buildings such as the church at Whitekirk in East Lothian, the grandstand at Ayr Racecourse and Farrington Hall in Dundee, plus the force-feeding of Scottish suffragettes in Perth Prison, ensured that the majority of Scottish press coverage focused on acts of militancy rather than the constitutional suffrage campaign. Whether you supported or argued against women's suffrage, the image of the suffragette in the Scottish press was generally consistent – if not representative of the whole movement – and the term 'suffragette' was used interchangeably to cover members of the two main militant societies, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the Women's Freedom League (WFL), and sometimes even the constitutional National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).⁴ This consistent image in the press was completely fractured by the War.

² See for example L. E. M. Mayhall (1995). Creating the 'suffragette spirit': British feminism and the historical imagination. *Women's History Review*, 4(3), pp.319-344.

³ This was the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Health) Act of 1913 that dealt with the problem of hunger-striking suffragettes by releasing them on licence and then re-arresting and returning them to prison once their health had improved.

⁴ Members of the NUWSS were known as constitutional suffragists because they believed that they could achieve the vote for women through peaceful tactics such as non-violent demonstrations, petitions and lobbying MPs.

This article draws on reports, editorials and jokes published in Scottish newspapers during the First World War. Newspapers offer a key source for the history of the woman's suffrage movement in Britain, which is not surprising when the importance of the press to the militant movement in particular is considered. The first act of militancy occurred in October 1905 when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney disrupted a Liberal meeting in Manchester by heckling the speakers. Both were arrested after Christabel spat at a policeman. Faced with the choice of paying a fine or a short prison sentence, both opted to be imprisoned. The press coverage that followed was an educational experience for the leadership of the WSPU and it adopted these new 'tactics' of interrupting meetings and refusing to pay fines in order to gain maximum publicity for the cause. Arguing that the suffrage question had been ignored by the press until that moment, Christabel stated later: 'Where peaceful means had failed, one act of militancy succeeded and never again was the cause ignored by ... any ...newspaper.'⁵ The move of WSPU headquarters from Manchester to London also facilitated national press coverage of the 'suffragettes' – and indeed it was the *Daily Mail* that coined this term for the WSPU militants during the 1906 general election to distinguish them from the constitutional suffragists. Whilst it was initially the WSPU that was at the forefront of engagement with the press, other suffrage societies soon followed suit when they realised how beneficial press coverage of the demand for the vote could be – and also that there was a need to get constitutional voices in the press as well as militant ones. The minute books of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage, for example, offer a fascinating glimpse of one suffrage association's growing acceptance of the need for engagement with the press. By 1912 this constitutional association had appointed its own press secretary to co-ordinate all press communications and authorised her to employ Durrants Press Cuttings to collect relevant press coverage.⁶

The digitisation of newspapers in recent years has made the task of the media historian easier by making access and search facilities much more comprehensive, allowing the historian to read and compare a much greater number of texts in a comparatively shorter time. This article is based on an analysis of local newspapers from Aberdeen to the Scottish Borders which have been accessed via digital resources such as the British Newspapers Archive (BNA). However, as Adrian Bingham warns in his useful review article on the use of digitized newspaper archives, such easy access brings its

⁵ C. Pankhurst (1987) *Unshackled*. (London: Century Hutchinson), quoted in K. E. Kelly (2004) Seeing through spectacles: The woman suffrage movement and London newspapers, 1906-13, *European Journal of Women's Studies* 11(3), p. 327.

⁶ *Papers of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage: Suffrage Executive Committee Minute Books*, 30 October 1912. Mitchell Library, Glasgow, 891036/1.

own issues.⁷ For example, scanning and character-recognition problems can hamper digital searches and, more problematically, results can be separated from their original page, meaning that contextualisation is lost. As much as possible I have guarded against these issues by examining articles in their original page-setting. This has made it possible to identify, for example, occasions where jokes about the suffrage movement were placed on the same page as articles in praise of some aspect of suffrage war work. Some newspapers have not been digitised at all, others have only been partially digitised: these were accessed via the more traditional route of visiting archives.

Studies of press coverage of the suffrage movement offer valuable insights into the way in which the movement was framed by the mainstream media, and a number of studies have analysed the significance of newspaper coverage for our understanding of the suffrage movement and how it was received. Newspaper coverage of events such as suffrage processions and meetings not only reported these events in detail but also provided photographs, thus increasing the visibility of suffrage campaigners and providing a pictorial record of the changes in the tactics of both suffragettes and suffragists during the decades.⁸ In her analysis of newspaper coverage of suffrage processions in London, Katherine E. Kelly argues that the press and the suffrage movement were symbiotic: through collaboration, the suffragettes gained visibility and the press provided its readership with spectacle and modernity. However, while press coverage could be enthusiastic, sometimes it was more curious than positive, focusing more on the response of the crowds to the marchers than the cause itself, or even using the suffragettes as a source of humour. Krista Cowman notes the attitude of amused interest demonstrated in some press reports of the suffrage movement, even after it became militant and attitudes hardened.⁹ However, the approach of a particular newspaper to the question of votes for women very much depended on individual editors or proprietors and might change with a change of ownership.¹⁰ In Aberdeen, for example, the *Free Press* was of more liberal sympathies than its rival the *Daily Journal* and took a more positive view of the question of women's enfranchisement.¹¹ Differences might even be found between newspapers owned by the same proprietor. In Dundee, D C Thomson owned both the conservative *Courier* and

⁷ A. Bingham (2015) The digitization of newspaper archives: opportunities and challenges for historians, *Twentieth Century British History*, 21(2), pp. 225-231.

⁸ K. E. Kelly (2004) Seeing through spectacles: The woman suffrage movement and London newspapers, 1906-13. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 11(3), pp. 327-353.

⁹ K. Cowman (2007) 'Doing something silly': The uses of humour by the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-14, *International Review of Social History*, 52, pp. 259-274.

¹⁰ J. Chapman (2013) *Gender, citizenship and newspapers: historical and transnational perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); R. Nessheim (1992). *British Political Newspapers and Women's Suffrage 1910-1918* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oslo).

¹¹ S. Pedersen (2002) The appearance of women's politics in the correspondence pages of Aberdeen Newspapers 1900-14, *Women's History Review*, 11(4), pp. 657-674.

the more liberal *Advertiser* at the start of the 20th century, one supportive of the suffrage campaign and one not.¹²

Studies of the press treatment of the suffrage question have so far tended to focus on national, London-based newspapers with very little reference, if any, to newspapers outside London apart from *The Manchester Guardian*, and have also tended to focus on the years before the outbreak of the war. In contrast, this study investigates the ways in which the Scottish press covered the suffrage movement during the less-studied (in suffrage terms) period of the First World War. Jacqueline DeVries' 2013 review of new scholarship on women's suffrage in Britain suggests that the 'politics of location' and the study of regional dynamics is one of the clearest trends in suffrage scholarship in recent years.¹³ Thus a renewed focus on press coverage of the campaign for women's suffrage outside London, indeed outside England, is of value in contributing to a wider and more nuanced picture of the women's suffrage movement and also as a contribution to the wider history of women and the media in Scotland.

In June 1914, a few months before the start of the war, Scottish newspapers were full of the events of a suffrage meeting in Glasgow's St Andrew's Halls. Mrs Pankhurst had been re-arrested on the stage under the Cat and Mouse Act by baton-wielding policemen, despite defensive actions by the suffragettes, who threw flower pots from the stage and used Indian clubs on the policemen. The newspapers were filled with editorials and letters both sympathising with the suffrage cause and criticising the suffragettes and the police, and the controversy rolled on for months as campaigners attempted to take legal action against the police. However, on the outbreak of the war Mrs Pankhurst announced a negotiated peace with the British government. The WSPU promised to cease all militant acts and suffrage prisoners were released from jail with the remainder of their sentences remitted. Soon after, Christabel Pankhurst returned from Paris to join her mother in a campaign to support the war effort and demonstrate to the British public the value of women at this time of crisis for the Empire. The *Aberdeen Journal* reported Christabel's words: 'I feel that my duty lies in England now, and I have come back. The British citizenship, for which suffragists have been fighting, is now in jeopardy'¹⁴. Press coverage of the militant acts of the suffragettes ceased, but this did not mean that the movement disappeared entirely from the pages of the newspapers.

¹² N. Watson (2010) *Suffragettes and the Post* (Dundee: Linda McGill), p. 52.

¹³ DeVries, J. (2013). Popular and Smart: Why Scholarship on the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain Still Matters. *History Compass*, 11(3), 177-188

¹⁴ *Aberdeen Journal* (4 September 1914), p. 6.

The *Edinburgh Evening News* greeted the news of the WSPU's commitment to the war effort with approval and had no doubt that the suffragettes would respond well to the amnesty. Its editorial explained that, with the freeing of the militants, the need for able-bodied men to guard public buildings would end and that there was plenty of war work 'for women who wish to do real service'.¹⁵ *The Courier* celebrated the re-opening of Dundee churches on weekdays and that suffragettes were turning their attention to war work. Its article, 'Militants no longer', carried an interview with a local minister stating that 'the Suffragettes, who were associated with the Red Cross Society, had given him their word of honour that no damage would be done. There was a desire in these days to go into churches.'¹⁶

Thus the image we find in Scottish newspapers in the early months of the war is of the ex-militant suffragette, campaigning for the right to engage in war work and involved in recruiting men for the forces. Scottish newspapers covered events in London such as the 'March of the Women' in July 1915, with the *Aberdeen Journal* commenting approvingly on 'how well Mrs Pankhurst is playing her cards in the supreme crisis',¹⁷ but also reported on the visits of Christabel Pankhurst and Flora Drummond to Scotland to run military recruiting drives. During these visits Pankhurst and Drummond stressed the need for suffragettes to rally to the cause of King and Country. Indeed, in a speech reported in the *Dundee Courier* Christabel made direct connection between suffragettes' previous militancy and their new recruiting role – '[she] said as a militant woman she hoped to do something to rouse the spirit of militancy in men'.¹⁸ While praising such sentiments, the newspapers found time to appreciate the irony of the situation, with the *Aberdeen Journal* suggesting 'Anyone who watched the activities of the Suffragettes at the meeting must have been amused. They were busy as bees distributing pamphlets, not condemning Mr Lloyd George, but exhorting the young men to go and enlist'.¹⁹ The *Edinburgh Evening News* meanwhile mourned the low attendance of men at one meeting – 'It was a pity that eligible young men were not present in their hundreds to be thrilled and inspired by ladies who had "faced death" over and over again' – but hinted that perhaps the days of suffragette speeches and demonstrations were now over: '[A]lthough demonstrations are calculated to keep individuals and organisations in the limelight, they do not compare, for usefulness, with some of the other activities by which the suffragettes are seeking to play their part

¹⁵ *Edinburgh Evening News* (11 August 1914), p. 2.

¹⁶ *Dundee Courier* (2 September 1914), p. 4.

¹⁷ *Aberdeen Journal* (19 July 1915), p. 4.

¹⁸ *Dundee Courier* (9 September 1914), p. 2.

¹⁹ *Aberdeen Journal* (21 September 2014), p. 4.

in the quiet, splendid and devoted service which is being rendered by the womanhood of the nation'.²⁰

Overall the press wrote approvingly of this change of tactic from the WSPU and made the connection between war work and the eventual achievement of the vote. Several newspapers commented that the suffragettes' steadfastness of purpose could now be channelled into patriotic war work. As the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* put it, 'That they will perform their functions efficiently no one need have any doubt. In their political campaign they showed a capacity for sticking to their point which compelled a measure of admiration even from those most resolutely opposed to their claims.'²¹

The leader of the NUWSS, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, also announced that her organisation would be suspending its ordinary political work. She appealed to members of the Union to 'bind themselves together for the purpose of rendering the greatest possible aid to the country at this momentous epoch'²². Local suffrage societies were quick to point out that they could offer established organisation, contacts and offices to the war effort. At a civic meeting in Dundee, the provost read out a letter from the Dundee Woman Suffrage Society offering the use of its organisation and offices to a round of applause and suffrage workers were immediately co-opted onto newly formed committees.²³

Newspapers reported that not only were suffragettes eager to replace men to free them for service at the front, they might also be dispatched to the front themselves. In spring 1915 a number of Scottish newspapers reported on the arrival of 'Suffragette battalions' in France 'to take up the duties of telephone operators, signallers, telegraphists, and chauffeurs'.²⁴ The *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* praised the initiative as being a 'really useful and noble channel for their energies' and remarked that they were 'as good as an extra battalion for Sir John French'.²⁵ Emmeline Pankhurst had often applied military terminology to the suffragettes:²⁶ in *My Own Story* (1914) she described the WSPU as 'a suffrage army in the field'.²⁷ Thus the construction by the WSPU of its members as an army was now used to frame women's war work in the press. The newspapers also informed readers that the French press had called for 'three cheers for the

²⁰ *Edinburgh Evening News* (1 March 1915), p. 4.

²¹ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (26 February 1915), p. 2.

²² *Dundee Courier* (8 August 1914), p. 3.

²³ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (14 August 1914), p. 3.

²⁴ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (25 February 1915), p. 1.

²⁵ *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* (27 February 1915), p. 4.

²⁶ J. Purvis & M. Wright (2005) *Writing Suffragette History: the contending autobiographical narratives of the Pankhursts*, *Women's History Review*, 14(3-4), p. 414.

²⁷ E. Pankhurst (1914) *My Own Story* (London: Eveleigh Nash), p. 59.

suffragettes' and that correspondence from home found on the bodies of German troops contained warnings against them: 'I want to warn you to be very careful when you meet them, and don't let them scratch at your eyes, and, above all, don't let them capture you. That would shame you before the world.'²⁸ In such descriptions we find hints that the shiny new image of the suffragette war heroine still contained elements of the older version of the shrieking sisterhood aiming to scratch out men's eyes. The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* claimed that the Parisian crowd had rejected the name of 'Suffragettes' for the women, re-Christening them 'Lady Kitcheners' and commenting favourably on their looks – attractive women evidently not corresponding with the popular concept of the suffragette.²⁹

Closely associated with the idea of suffragettes at the front is one of the key images of the woman war-worker to be found in the pages of the Scottish press – the volunteers of the Scottish Women's Hospitals. Founded by Dr Elsie Inglis, a member of the Edinburgh branch of the Scottish Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies, this organisation sent several hospitals, fully staffed by women, to work with the French and Serbian armies. While the NUWSS provided a London sub-committee, the headquarters of the hospitals were in Edinburgh. Jane McDermid explains that the name of the hospitals was chosen in order to appeal to both suffragists and anti-suffragists, but that all notepaper, appeals and press notices were headed by the NUWSS logo and all 14 hospital units flew the NUWSS red, white and green flag below the Union Jack.³⁰ Fundraising for the hospitals was carried on under the auspices of the NUWSS throughout the war, and scarcely a week went by without a mention in local Scottish newspapers of a flag-day, sale of work, fete, or other means of raising money. The sums raised could be very large indeed. In April 1918 an article in *The Edinburgh Evening News* reported that over £300,000 had been raised for the Scottish Women's Hospitals since the start of the war. All such activities name-checked the local branch of the NUWSS (usually with the careful addition of the word 'non-militant'). In addition, returning nurses, doctors or even Dr Inglis herself toured Scotland as speakers. Local newspapers carried articles and photographs of the women who volunteered to work with the hospitals, both when they departed and in the event of their death. Such articles usually made it clear that the volunteers were also suffrage campaigners. For example, when the Misses Gray of Leven departed for the Scottish Women's Hospital at Royaumont in November 1914, several local newspapers covered the story. Even more covered the death of Mary Gray in January 1916, described as a 'heroine's death' by the *Fife Free Press*.³¹ The

²⁸ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (23 March 1915), p. 3.

²⁹ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (10 March 1915), p. 5.

³⁰ J. McDermid (2008) A very polite and considerate revolution: the Scottish women's hospitals and the Russian revolution 1916-1917, *Revolutionary Russia*, 21(2), pp. 135-151.

³¹ *Fife Free Press and Kirkcaldy Guardian* (29 January 1916), p. 5.

Misses Gray were described as giving their services to 'the Unionist cause, women suffrage (non-militant) and the affairs of Scoonie Kirk', and the newspaper went on to state that 'The Scottish Women's Hospitals (launched by the Suffragette Society) was scarcely proposed ere the sisters were selected'. Note the use of the term 'Suffragette Society' to describe the NUWSS. Even before the war the term had become useful shorthand for the press to describe anyone involved in the campaign for women's suffrage, and it no longer necessarily indicated a member of the WSPU or even a member of a militant society. For example, the *Fife Free Press* described the NUWSS as the 'Suffragette Society' in its discussion of hospital fundraising in Leven³² while the *Arbroath Herald* similarly praised the work of the hospitals 'under the auspices of the Suffragette association'³³. However, it should be noted that the press also used the term 'suffragist' to describe members of the militant societies. For example an article in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* described a visit of Mrs Pankhurst and others to the Welsh coal mines with the headline 'Suffragists as Miners'³⁴ and Ethel Smyth, composer of *The March of the Women*, 'the battle song of the Women's Social and Political Union' was described by the *Daily Record* as a 'suffragist musician'.³⁵ Thus the careful distinction made by historians between constitutional suffragists and militant suffragettes was certainly not one being used by this time in the Scottish press and care should be taken before assuming the implications of the use of either term by a newspaper report.

An examination of Scottish newspapers therefore suggests that a dominant press image of the suffrage movement during the war was associated with the Scottish Women's Hospitals and the constitutional NUWSS rather than the militant WSPU. The Scottish Women's Hospitals' fundraising campaign was an extremely prominent 'good cause' in the press, and each advert, report or article re-asserted its connection with the NUWSS. The constitutional societies were also involved with the organisation of other war work, such as war relief for the families of soldiers and sailors, utilising networks built up over the decades in their campaign for the vote. The Edinburgh society, for example, at the start of the war argued that 'their organisation of over 5000 adherents in the district should be utilised in connection with the various schemes for relief, so that there should be coherence in the work and an avoidance of overlapping'³⁶.

A similar approach was taken by the more militant Women's Freedom League, which had a strong presence in Scotland, particularly in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and which established the Women's

³² *Fife Free Press and Kirkcaldy Guardian* (18 March 1916), p. 5.

³³ *Arbroath Herald* (26 May 1916), p. 2.

³⁴ *Aberdeen Daily Journal* (28 September 1915), p. 5.

³⁵ *Daily Record* (24 January 1916), p. 4.

³⁶ *Edinburgh Evening News* (25 August 1914), p. 3.

Suffrage National Aid Corps in August 1914. In Glasgow, the constitutional Society for Women's Suffrage also organised an Exchange for Voluntary Workers, while the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union concentrated on fundraising for Belgian refugees. Thus a clear connection was constantly being made between suffrage and women's war work – a connection that was also being made in editorial columns in the press with approving articles explicitly making the connection between suffrage campaigners' war work and their chance of winning the vote post-war.

However, not all newspaper readers were happy about this state of affairs. A letter to the *Perthshire Advertiser* in October 1914 objected strongly to 'the efforts being made in some quarters, not only to continue political controversy during the war, but actually to exploit the war and the sufferings of our gallant troops, to further the ends of a particular section. War-relief efforts put forward by suffragist women are labelled 'Suffrage' for the purpose of advertisement'.³⁷ The writer appealed to the patriotism of readers to see through this ploy. A similar point was made by a correspondent using the pen name 'A Simple Woman' in a letter to the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* the following year: 'Even now you hear suffrage women saying, "We will get the vote because we are working." They are little Jack Horners. They are eating their Christmas pie. They are working for an end. We anti-suffragists thank God that we are allowed to help, and only ask that we may do it well to His glory.'³⁸ Such letters demonstrate that, despite the more positive views of many editors, not all newspaper readers were happy to see the redemption of the suffrage movement through war work and were suspicious of the motives of these workers. This theme came strongly to the fore in the later years of the war in the campaign against women's enfranchisement through the Representation of the People Bill, with letters to the newspapers arguing that such war work should not be rewarded because it had been undertaken only because of self-interest and with political intent. The Anti-Suffrage League protested that it had taken the patriotic course of 'refraining from all propaganda and consecrating the entire organisation and effort in relief to the wounded' while its opponents 'had taken advantage of the war and the excellent service rendered by women to revive the demand for the suffrage in a very controversial form'.³⁹ In response, the Glasgow trade unionist and suffrage campaigner Margaret H Irwin wrote to the *Daily Record* arguing that 'all fair-minded persons' appreciated that women now deserved the vote in view of 'the magnificent work which women of every class have rendered and are rendering the nation at this supreme crisis'.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Perthshire Advertiser* (28 October 1914), p. 2.

³⁸ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (13 October 1915), 2.

³⁹ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (21 July 1916)

⁴⁰ *Daily Record* (20 November 1916)

Interestingly, a letter sent to the *Dundee Courier* in 1917 suggests that the close association between the Scottish Women's Hospitals and the NUWSS was not always promoted by the organisers of the hospitals themselves. A correspondent reported turning down a request to fundraise for the Hospitals on the grounds that she was anti-suffrage. She claimed to have received a letter in response stating 'Out of loyalty to the group of suffrage women who first started the running of hospitals staffed by women at the outbreak of war, we still have to put NUWSS on our notepaper... but my Hospitals Committee do no suffrage work, and, truth to tell, the hospitals take up so much of our time... that we really hardly have time to think of suffrage at all.'⁴¹ Such a letter suggests that, while the suffrage associations had been useful starting-points for the organisation of women's war work at the beginning of the war, this work had outgrown its foundations by 1917. It is not surprising that the suffrage societies, particularly the constitutional societies, were useful in establishing women's war-work organisations quickly given the number of civic-minded women involved in such organisations before the war. However, after 1915 and under the growing power of Lloyd George, first as Minister for Munitions and then Prime Minister, the government and local authorities began to impose a more centralised and less personalised approach to voluntary organisations in order to provide a more uniform approach to women's war work.⁴² This centralisation process, plus the passing of years and changes in personnel, may have meant that war-work organisations' ties to their founders became weaker.

Despite the more positive views of newspaper editors on the suffrage question, certain stereotypes associated with the figure of the suffrage campaigner did not disappear completely from newspapers. Jokes and stories about suffragettes, originally coined in peacetime, were repeated again and again in the Scottish newspapers. Reports of entertainments put on for the troops or to raise funds frequently featured skits such as '*The Heid o'the Hoose*, a Scottish comedy sketch founded on an episode of militant suffragism... a most delightful performance'.⁴³ A selection of letters to the *Falkirk Herald* in reference to the 'suffragette battalions' mentioned above humorously offered to sacrifice wives and mothers-in-law for the good of the country, whilst another writer suggested that it was a good thing that the suffragettes were to go since 'they have had practice in destroying ancient places enough'.⁴⁴ Meanwhile the *Southern Reporter* sarcastically suggested that the ladies who rushed to Oxford Street to buy wool to make garments for soldiers had merely

⁴¹ *Dundee Courier* (16 October 1917), p. 2.

⁴² S. Pedersen (2002). A surfeit of socks? The impact of the First World War on women correspondents to daily newspapers. *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 22(1), pp. 50-72.

⁴³ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (17 November 1914), p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Falkirk Herald* (13 January 1915), p. 1.

changed from Suffragettes to Selfragettes⁴⁵ and the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* quipped that, with the renaming of *The Suffragette* newspaper as *Britannia* in 1915, 'on the front page should be a symbolical figure of Britannia armed with a strident'.⁴⁶ The term 'suffragette' might also still be used to imply mindless violence or aggression. At the start of the war several newspapers picked up the description of the Germans by the Conservative MP Sir Arthur Stanley as 'the suffragettes of Europe'.⁴⁷ As Krista Cowman notes, humour at the expense of the suffragette 'crowded the popular Edwardian daily press'⁴⁸ and could also be found in film, the theatre and on picture postcards, so it is not surprising that such an easy target continued to attract jokes during the war. Such jokes might even sit uneasily on the same page as reports of women's war work. For example, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* carried the joke: "'Women Workers into the Breach" cries a Suffrage paper. "Into the breeches," echo answers' on the same page as an editorial praising the employment of women to replace men leaving for the trenches.⁴⁹

Thus the Scottish press continued to offer some coverage of the women's suffrage movement during the war years, but this was now primarily associated with the war work undertaken by groups established by different suffrage organisations at the start of the war. In addition, the figure of the suffragette was still occasionally used for humorous relief. However, this does not mean that coverage of the campaign for the vote disappeared altogether. Because the Women's Freedom League continued to campaign for the vote throughout the war, the Scottish newspapers still had the possibility of reporting on suffrage meetings and the campaign for the enfranchisement of women. In fact, the need for the female vote was argued to be more urgent than ever during wartime. As a letter to the *Dundee Courier* made clear, the Women's Freedom League 'reaffirms the urgency of keeping the Suffrage flag flying, and especially now, making the country understand the supreme necessity of women having a voice in the counsels of the nation'.⁵⁰ Local newspapers continued to report on the meetings of WFL branches in Scotland on the subject of the vote throughout the war, which continually made the point that women needed a voice in the government of the nation in both war and peace. Nina Boyle spoke at a WFL 'At Home' meeting in Dundee in February 1915. Her speech was reported at some length in the local press, including her emphasis that 'The Freedom League, in taking up relief work at this time, is never for one moment to haul down its suffrage colours, and it is woman's duty to think what her position is to be after the

⁴⁵ *Southern Reporter* (11 February 1915), p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (30 September 1915), p. 2.

⁴⁷ For example, *Aberdeen Evening Express* (17 September 1914), p. 2.

⁴⁸ Cowman, K. (2007), *Doing something silly*, p.261

⁴⁹ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (25 March 1915), p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Dundee Courier* (18 August 1914), p. 5.

war, and to see that her sex does not come out on the wrong side.⁵¹ NUWSS branches also continued to offer speakers on political and constitutional matters, mixing topical war concerns with the suffrage. For example, in November 1914 the Edinburgh branch advertised a meeting in the local press to hear about proportional representation in Belgium.⁵²

One of the leaders of the Women's Freedom League, Charlotte Despard, was a frequent visitor to Scotland and an indefatigable speaker on a number of different issues. In fact, Mrs Despard spoke on so many different issues, some more popular than others, that her role as President of the WFL might become blurred in newspaper reports. While she spoke on platforms organised by the WFL, her main attraction for the audience in the early years of the war was as the sister of Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force. As the *Sunday Post* quipped, 'Lord French's sister was at one time a prominent suffragette, which goes to prove that fighting runs in the family.'⁵³ However, as a committed vegetarian, she could also be found in newspapers advocating a change in the national diet, and she was also a popular speaker at meetings of Theosophical Societies. In one week in 1917 Scottish newspaper reports show that she spoke at the Perth Theosophical Society on 'The Making of Destiny' on Saturday 6th October; at Aberdeen on 'The Hidden Worlds' on Monday 8th; in Dundee on Tuesday 9th on the work of the Women's Freedom League; was quoted on the doctrine of reincarnation in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* on Wednesday 10th and returned to speak in Aberdeen on the same day on 'The Hidden Worlds' again. Descriptions of her speeches on these subjects usually included the information that Despard was a well-known suffragette, thus associating the suffrage question with other, possibly more 'cranky', subjects. Vegetarianism was part of the WFL ethos, with the League opening vegetarian restaurants during the war, and Despard saw vegetarianism as 'pre-eminently a woman's question'.⁵⁴ As Gifford Lewis points out, she exemplified 'a familiar clustering in the suffragist world of feminism, pacifism, vegetarianism and a working-class base'.⁵⁵ However, this mixture might still be alarming for some Scottish newspaper readers, whose views might perhaps better be summed up by the words of the psychiatrist Sir James Crichton-Browne as he opened the Dumfries and District Flower Show in 1915: 'The war is giving an opportunity to the faddists and cranks who are diligently exploiting it on behalf of their favourite whims. The prohibitionists, the vegetarians, the fruitarians, the nutarians, and all

⁵¹ *Dundee Courier* (4 February 1915), p. 3.

⁵² *Edinburgh Evening News* (14 November 1914), p. 4.

⁵³ *Sunday Post* 24 December 1916, p. 12.

⁵⁴ *The Vegetarian Messenger and Health Review* Vol.10 (1913), p. 308. Quoted in L. Leneman (1997) The awakened instinct: vegetarianism and the women's suffrage movement in Britain, *Women's History Review*, 6(2), p. 278.

⁵⁵ Lewis, G. (1988). *Eva Gore Booth and Esther Roper*, p. 169. Quoted in Leneman (1997). The awakened instinct, p. 281.

the rest of them.⁵⁶ Note that the campaign for women's suffrage was also closely associated with the campaign for prohibition in Scotland.⁵⁷

Charlotte Despard felt that it was still possible for women to be given the vote during wartime, arguing that 'this would be an advisable time for passing a non-party measure, such as Women's Suffrage, to take effect after the war.'⁵⁸ In what might be seen as a criticism of the WSPU she argued that this might have been possible 'had all the suffrage societies held together as suffragist'. However, it was her association with the Anti-Conscription League of 1916, and her advocacy of a peace by negotiation that opened her up to more critical remarks in the newspapers. Descriptions of the meetings at which she spoke on these subjects, often in the company of Sylvia Pankhurst, were dismissive if not downright hostile. The *Daily Record* account of a meeting in December 1916 in Trafalgar Square, where both Despard and Sylvia Pankhurst attempted to speak, was headlined 'More Peace Cranks'⁵⁹ while the *Aberdeen Journal* referred to the 'insidious campaign' of Mrs Despard and the anti-conscriptionists, who were 'fighting by passiveness... for a lost cause'.⁶⁰ Again, many of these comments linked Despard negatively to the suffrage campaign, such as a letter in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* of October 1915, which criticised a speech by Mrs Despard and warned 'Woman's Suffrage is against God's law'.⁶¹

Charlotte Despard's speeches on the subject of peace were, however, reported in some detail in the Scottish newspapers, giving her a good chance of getting her points across to their readership, just as before the war suffragettes' speeches were reported in detail, even by hostile newspapers.⁶² When she addressed the Perth Theosophical Society in October 1915, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* reported:

Speaking on woman's attitude towards the war, she said that many people said that the present moment was not the time to speak about peace; that they should crush the enemy, and then think of peace. She disagreed with that. At the present moment they ought to be working for and thinking about peace. The attitude of woman towards war should be one of

⁵⁶ *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* (28 August 1915), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁷ See M. Smitley (2009) *The Feminine Public Sphere: Middle-class Women and Civic Life in Scotland, c. 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁵⁸ *Daily Record* (18 October 1915), p. 3.

⁵⁹ *Daily Record* (26 December 1916), p. 4.

⁶⁰ *Aberdeen Daily Journal* (15 May 1916), p. 5.

⁶¹ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (13 October 1915), p. 2.

⁶² S. Pedersen (2002), *The appearance of women's politics*, p. 659

the very sternest disapproval. She should like to see a crusade of women against war, and it would be bound to cease.⁶³

In 1915 the WFL established the Women's Peace Council for a negotiated peace with members including Charlotte Despard, Teresa Billington-Grieg and Helen Crawford, and throughout the war Scottish press reports of WFL meetings returned to this idea of women's 'natural' abilities as peacemakers. In February 1918 a meeting of the Dundee WFL heard a 'Miss Munro' (possibly the Glaswegian Anna Munro) stating that 'in the past woman's natural outlook was towards peace and the building up of the homes of the people, and it was because of that outlook that they wanted women in the councils of the nations'.⁶⁴ Helen Crawford and Charlotte Despard were among the founders of the Women's Peace Crusade, which started in Glasgow in July 1916 and spread across the country in 1917. A grassroots socialist movement, the WPC aimed to demonstrate publically women's demand for a negotiated peace and the end to war.

Of course, the WFL were not the only suffrage campaigners to be associated with the peace movement in the Scottish press. In April 1915 many Scottish newspapers spoke out against the International Women's Congress in The Hague, also known as the Women's Peace Congress, organised by Dutch women's suffrage organisations and attended by over a thousand delegates from 12 countries. The *Stirling Observer* stated 'There is a decided feeling in this country against our women-folk taking part in international conferences and propaganda for terminating the war' and that there was danger of 'more harm than good being done by such conferences'.⁶⁵ It noted that Mrs Despard was suggested as one of the participants. Several other newspapers reported the reply of the French author Juliette Adam to an invitation to attend the congress: 'Are you truly an Englishwoman? Although I am but little of a Suffragette I must confess to you that I better understand those Englishwomen who would like to fight'.⁶⁶ Note the connection made between the suffrage movement and the war rather than peace despite the fact that many of the women attending the peace congress were also connected to the suffrage movement. In fact, the British delegation, which included Sylvia Pankhurst, was unable to cross the Channel to attend the Congress and only three British women, all of whom were already outside the UK, were able to attend – Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Kathleen Courtney and Crystal Macmillan.⁶⁷ Courtney and Macmillan were members of a group who had resigned from the Executive Committee of the NUWSS on Mrs

⁶³ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (11 October 1915), p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Dundee Courier* (18 February 1916), p. 7.

⁶⁵ *Stirling Observer* (20 April 1915), p. 7.

⁶⁶ *Dundee Courier* (24 April 1915), p. 3.

⁶⁷ L. B. Costin (1982) *Feminism, pacifism, internationalism and the 1915 International Congress of Women*, *Women's Studies International Forum* 5(3), pp. 301-315.

Fawcett's announcement of its support of the war effort while Pethick-Lawrence was an ex-member of the WSPU. Mrs Pankhurst issued a press statement declaring that the WSPU would take no part in the Congress: 'She says this is not time to talk of peace'.⁶⁸ Later the same year there was also criticism in the press of what was called 'The Ship of Fools', the 'peace ship' organised by the American industrialist Henry Ford. A description of the ship in the *Edinburgh Evening News* pointed out that the 'dining-room was draped with Suffragette colours'.⁶⁹ Thus there were confusing and conflicting associations of the suffrage movement with both the war and the campaign for a negotiated peace in the Scottish press.

Mrs Pankhurst attempted to disassociate herself in the press with the suffragettes who campaigned for peace during the war. In the spring of 1917 she was also forced to issue press statements disassociating herself with attempted murder in what was known as the 'Poison Plot Trial'. On 1 February 1917 the newspapers reported that three women and a man – Alice Wheeldon, her daughters Harriet and Winnie and son-in-law Alfred Mason – had been arrested for a conspiracy to murder the Prime Minister and Arthur Henderson, both members of the War Cabinet. 'The three women... are said to be Suffragettes, and the man is believed to be a conscientious objector.'⁷⁰ The WSPU at once issued a statement: 'The officials of the WSPU have no knowledge of the persons as described.'⁷¹ The trial opened in front of the magistrates in Derby the following week and it was reported that 'Mrs Pankhurst has arrived in Derby, and it is understood she will ask permission to make a statement in Court.'⁷² The story presented by the prosecution was that the conspirators planned to make use of a plan previously concocted by the suffragettes before the war to poison the Prime Minister by driving a poisoned nail through his boot. (Note that it is suggested by Sheila Rowbotham that some of the evidence was fabricated in a government attempt to disgrace the anti-war movement.⁷³) Witnesses also reported Mrs Wheeldon discussing how she and other suffragettes had used petrol to burn down churches. This reminder of pre-war tactics, plus the suggestion that some suffragettes were now associating with anti-conscriptionists, conscientious objectors and socialists, came at the same time as the House of Commons was debating the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference on franchise reform. Thus readers of the Scottish press could turn from the reports of speeches praising women's contributions to the war effort to reports of other women – and self-confessed suffragettes – plotting to kill the Prime Minister. The *Dundee Courier* reported

⁶⁸ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (9 April 1915), p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Edinburgh Evening News* (6 December 1915), p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Aberdeen Daily Journal* (1 February 1917), p. 6.

⁷¹ *Aberdeen Daily Journal* (2 February 1917), p. 6.

⁷² *Dundee Courier* (6 February 1917), p.4.

⁷³ S. Rowbotham (2015) *Friends of Alice Wheeldon: The Anti-War Activist Accused of Plotting to Kill Lloyd George*. (New York: NYU Press).

on the trial on page 4 of its 10 March edition directly after a report on the preceding page of the death of Mrs Harley, a member of the NUWSS executive committee and administrator of a Scottish Women's Hospital in the Balkans. Mrs Harley was another sister of Lord French and was described as 'a worthy sister of a great soldier'.⁷⁴ On 12 March the *Aberdeen Journal* juxtaposed a report of the sentences handed out to the plotters on pages 3 and 4, which repeated the statement that the original plot had been conceived by 'the suffragists' (again note the use of a term usually associated with the constitutional NUWSS), with a letter from the Executive Committee of the Edinburgh Branch of the Scottish League for Opposing Women Suffrage arguing that the issue of the enfranchisement of women should not be discussed until all men had returned home from the front.⁷⁵ When the trial concluded with the conviction and imprisonment of Mrs Wheeldon and Winnie and Alfred Mason, Mrs Pankhurst was allowed to make a statement to the court, with the recommendation from the Judge that 'the press take note':

"There never was," said Mrs Pankhurst, "such a plot, nor was any money expended for such a purpose. The whole idea of a plot and the language employed by the prisoners about the war are abhorrent to the officers and members of the Union The W.S.P.U. regards the Prime Minister's life as of the greatest value in the present grave crisis, and its members would, if necessary to do so, take great risks themselves to protect it from danger."⁷⁶

Throughout the war some of the most prominent voices in the Scottish press on the subject of woman suffrage were actually those of men. Like the Women's Freedom League, the Northern Men's Federation for Women's Suffrage continued to campaign and hold meetings in Scotland. Originally established in 1913 through the work of the activist and actress Maud Arncliffe Sennett, the Northern Men's Federation was a formidable group made up of Scottish councillors, bailies, magistrates, trade council members and others in public life in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The Federation was originally formed to travel to London to deliver a petition to the Prime Minister in July 1913. Asquith refused to see the deputation, a slight that captured press interest and was portrayed as a great insult to Scottish manhood.⁷⁷ Having held meetings in Hyde Park, the group returned to Scotland and the core continued its campaign for woman suffrage throughout the war. In August 1916 they returned to London to deliver another petition to the Prime Minister. Again they were rebuffed, but this time the Prime Minister had changed his opinion on the subject of

⁷⁴ *Dundee Courier* (10 March 1917), p. 3.

⁷⁵ *Aberdeen Daily Journal* (12 March 1917), pp. 3-4.

⁷⁶ *Dundee Courier* (12 March 1917), p. 4.

⁷⁷ See C. Eustance (1997) *Citizens, Scotsmen, bairns: manly politics and women's suffrage in the Northern Men's Federation, 1913-20*, in C. Eustance and A. V. John, *The Men's Share? Masculinities, male support and women's suffrage in Britain, 1890 to 1920* (London: Routledge).

woman suffrage, and the deputation was informed of this in a meeting with the Chief Whip: 'It was only a matter of time when the women would be given the vote. They might consider women's suffrage as practically safe.'⁷⁸ Thus one of the first indications in the Scottish press of the coming franchise reform was through reports on the activities of male suffragists.

Since the enfranchisement of a limited number of women in 1918 there has been debate over the differing contributions of women's war work and militant action to their achievement of the vote. However, there was no doubt in the minds of newspaper editors that women had earned the vote through their war work. As the editor of the *Perthshire Advertiser* put it: 'Women's patriotism has never once been called in question....The hand that rocks the cradle is, after all, fit enough to help to rule the world.'⁷⁹ The *Evening Express* quoted the *Daily Mail's* opinion that 'The immense services that they [women] have rendered during the war have pretty well revolutionised the average man's ideas of their usefulness'⁸⁰ while the women's correspondent of the *Aberdeen Journal* opined that 'women's work in the war has handicapped the opponents of her political emancipation'.⁸¹ She also noted that 'For the essentially womanly woman it has long been a trial, this dilemma in which women have been placed, that if they were quiet and orderly they were stamped as not wanting the vote; while if they were not quiet and orderly they did not deserve it.' However, not all newspapers were fully in support of the extension of the franchise to women – the editor of the *Dundee, Perth, Forfar and Fife's People's Journal* suggested that newly enfranchised woman 'casts a most portentous shadow' and summed up with the words 'Well, whatever it may be, we are in for it now.'⁸²

It is a popular misconception that the suffrage campaign lay dormant or disappeared during the war years as women turned their energies to war work. This short introduction to the coverage of the topic in the Scottish press has shown that this is not entirely accurate. The campaign for women's enfranchisement continued throughout the war years in Scotland. Meetings were held, speeches made and letters written to the newspapers, even if not in the same numbers as before the war. In particular, the activities of groups such as the Women's Freedom League and the Northern Men's Federation for Women's Suffrage continued to prioritise the campaign for the vote, while the association of the NUWSS with the Scottish Women's Hospitals kept that organisation's profile high throughout the war. While coverage of the suffrage campaign did not preoccupy journalists as it had

⁷⁸ *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (18 August 1916), p. 3.

⁷⁹ *Perthshire Advertiser* (16 January 1918), p. 4.

⁸⁰ *Aberdeen Evening Express* (11 January 1918), p. 2.

⁸¹ *Aberdeen Journal* (16 January 1918), p. 2.

⁸² *Dundee, Perth, Forfar and Fife's People's Journal* (12 January 1918)

in the few years before the outbreak of war, in particular because of the cessation of acts of militancy, the cause did not disappear from Scottish newspapers. Thus newspaper coverage demonstrates that the suffrage campaign continued, albeit in a reduced form, throughout the war years in Scotland.

The Scottish press also continued to shape public opinion on the suffrage question. In their praise of women for performing their patriotic duty from very early in the war, newspaper editorial columns established a connection in the minds of their readers between women's war work and their achievement of the vote as editors and proprietors became convinced of the need for enfranchisement reform. Whilst historians debate how much women's war work contributed to their achievement of suffrage after the war, there was little question in the minds of contemporary newspaper editors that the two should be connected. The majority of Scottish newspapers were in support of some form of women's suffrage by the end of the war, and made explicit to their readers the connection between women's contribution to the war effort and their achievement of citizenship. However, not all readers were happy with this association of patriotic work and female suffrage, and some correspondents attacked what they saw as the suffrage organisations' opportunistic use of war work to further their political cause.

However, while there continued to be some coverage of the suffrage movement in the Scottish press during the First World War, the image of suffrage campaigners therein was contradictory and fragmented. Suffragettes were presented in the newspapers as both wartime heroines and figures of fun; murderous conspirators and committed reformers. The stereotype of the suffragette was too useful a shorthand for a particular type of enthusiastic woman reformer to be entirely discarded by the press, particularly in terms of her potential as a butt of jokes, which could easily be recycled from before the War. Whilst editors wrote enthusiastically of women's contribution to the war effort, jokes about suffragettes continued to provide light relief. The immediate pre-war press coverage of the suffrage issue had been dominated by the actions of the WSPU, but in war-time – at least in Scotland – other organisations, in particular the Women's Freedom League, came to the fore, perhaps because they continued to hold meetings on the suffrage question but also because of connections to campaigns such as the Women's Peace Crusade. At the same time, the fundraising campaigns for the Scottish Women's Hospitals served as a constant reminder to the general reader of the aims and arguments of the constitutional societies. While groups such as the Women's Freedom League and the Northern Men's Federation for Women's Suffrage benefited from the decision of the WSPU to focus on war work, gaining more newspaper coverage for their continuing campaigns for the vote, a less coherent position on the suffrage question was now presented in the

press. While both militant and non-militant organisations received praise for their war work, there were also newspaper stories associating the suffrage movement with the peace effort – or even conspiracies against the state. Volunteers at the Scottish Women’s Hospitals were approvingly described as ‘suffragettes’, but the appellation retained negative connotations when used about peace campaigners. It might also be suggested that, while suffrage associations were efficient and quick ways of establishing women’s war work at the start of the war, as the organisation of this work became centralised, the origin of such groups became less important.

It can thus be seen that, although the suffrage campaign did not disappear from the pages of the Scottish press during the First World War, its image became much less consistent than it had been before the war, and the newspapers presented a number of very different, and opposing, discourses on the subject, reflecting the differences of opinion on issues such as a negotiated peace that now appeared within both the constitutional and the militant organisations. Nonetheless, the overall tone of the Scottish newspapers towards the suffragettes’ contribution to the war effort was a positive one, and this helped to shape wider public opinion on the subject of women’s enfranchisement as the war drew to a close.