

The Scottish suffragettes and the press.

PEDERSEN, S.

2021

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge/CRC Press in *Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen* on 14.07.2021, available online:
<http://www.routledge.com/9780429344534>.

Chapter 5

The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press

Sarah Pedersen

The suffragette leaders learned early on that acts of militancy attracted press attention, and that this attention helped to engage the public in the campaign for parliamentary votes for women. When Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney were imprisoned for refusal to pay a fine after their disruption of a Liberal meeting in October 1905, the case made headlines throughout Britain. As Christabel claimed: 'Where peaceful means had failed, one act of militancy succeeded and never again was the cause ignored by ... any ... newspaper' (Pankhurst 1959, quoted in Kelly 2004, p. 327). While Christabel's suggestion that the press had previously ignored the suffrage campaign was not strictly accurate—local newspapers had dutifully acknowledged the meetings of constitutional suffragists since the 1860s—it is true that the advent of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) stimulated more in-depth engagement with the campaign, including editorials, opinion pages and readers' correspondence. The move of the WSPU headquarters from Manchester to London also facilitated national press coverage of the 'suffragettes'—a term coined by the *Daily Mail* during the 1906 General Election to distinguish the militants from the constitutional suffragists. As Kelly (2004) has described, the newspapers and the suffragettes quickly established a symbiotic relationship in which the press sold newspapers and the suffragettes achieved publicity. The suffragettes offered newspapers the potential for stories about violent conflict, the criticism of elite persons such as politicians, and entertaining descriptions of meetings and demonstrations. The newspapers offered the suffragettes the oxygen of publicity—although at a price. Militant acts, rather than reasoned argument, sold newspapers, but as time went on also had the cost of potentially alienating previously sympathetic readers.

This chapter focuses on the coverage of the suffragettes in Scottish newspapers. While Scottish readers were similar to everyone else in Britain in their interest in the more shocking elements of suffragette militancy, it was only with the establishment of WSPU branches in Scotland and the arrival of organisers such as Teresa Billington in the country that detailed reports of WSPU demands and arguments began to appear in the Scottish press. Not surprisingly, Scottish readers were much more interested in Scottish suffragettes and, even better, events that occurred in Scotland rather than England. For this reason, the presentation of the suffragette campaign in the Scottish press differed from that of England, with different framing, leaders and foci of interest. It is therefore important, when discussing the suffrage campaign, to acknowledge that newspaper readers in different parts of the UK were presented with varying information and opinion about the suffragettes depending on where they lived and what they read.

At the same time, the framing of the suffragettes was influenced in Scotland by the political leanings of individual newspapers, the concept of Scotland as a nation different from England, and also the introduction of so-called 'new journalism', with a greater focus on sensational stories but also a greater number of women's voices in the press. Matheson (2000) argues that the turn of the twentieth century saw the birth of a new type of media discourse, as newspapers moved from a straightforward reporting of events, with no attempt at interpretation, to a journalistic discourse where information was edited and contextualised by the newspaper. Reporters and editors now reworked news events into stories while offering interpretation and description, using interview material, photographs, introductory

paragraphs and decked headlines. This new type of newspaper was exemplified in Scotland by Glasgow's *Daily Record*, established by Alfred Harmsworth in 1895. As several studies of the women's suffrage movement in the UK have pointed out, these new mass-market dailies and the suffragettes were made for each other, and for this reason, newspapers offer a very important resource in the study of the women's suffrage campaign in the UK (Pedersen 2017; Chapman 2015; Kelly 2004; Mercer 2004; Nessheim 1997).

Constitutional suffrage societies had been established in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh by the 1870s and, by the turn of the century, the majority of Scottish towns and cities had some sort of suffrage association, mostly affiliated to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The meetings and 'at homes' of such societies tended to be reported on the 'women's pages' of local newspapers, particularly because many attendees came from the ranks of civic leaders. Newspapers' 'women's pages' were a comparatively recent phenomenon that responded to a demand for a female audience from advertisers such as the new department stores. There was an assumption that female readers would not be interested in general news or politics and therefore women's pages were filled with articles about the latest fashions, childcare, recipes and household tips. Many newspapers hired 'lady reporters' to fill these pages—and these women were often also expected to report on meetings of women's suffrage societies. The enthusiasm of some of the women reporters for such initiatives is clear. The *Dundee Advertiser's* 'Marguerite' (pen names and anonymity were the convention of the day for all reporters) wrote a particularly sympathetic report of one meeting in Dundee in 1904. She described herself as being previously 'a voice crying in the wilderness on this question' and celebrated the fact that so many of Dundee's great and good had turned out: in reference to the appearance of the Lord Provost at the meeting, she said, 'One has always a curious feeling to hear views one has held and advocated for so long ... come to their own at last, and winning support and attention in perhaps quite unexpected quarters' (*Dundee Advertiser*, 12 December 1904). In response to her article, Jessie Methven, honorary secretary of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage, wrote to thank the *Advertiser*, remarking in her letter that one of the reasons for the lack of progress on the question of women's suffrage had been 'the scant support as a rule given by the press' (*Dundee Advertiser*, 14 December 1904). Nonetheless, as in other parts of the UK, it was not until Christabel spat in the face of a policeman (Bartley, 2012, p. 78), and she and Annie Kenney went to prison, that a more general interest in the suffrage question manifested in Scottish newspapers.

In Scotland, readers were particularly interested in reading about *Scottish* suffragettes, whether they were arrested and imprisoned in London, or—more exciting still—threatening violence in their own home towns. In January 1906, a speech given by the new Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, at Glasgow's St Andrew's Halls was interrupted when 'a woman screamed—What about women's suffrage?' (*Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 16 January 1906). She was expelled amidst cheers, but a row broke out in the columns of the *Glasgow Herald* between WSPU supporters and members of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage, a constitutional suffragist society, who were mortified by the 'unseemly interruption' and rushed to apologise to Sir Henry in letters to the *Herald* and *The Scotsman* (16 January 1906). The minute books of the Glasgow Association show that it haemorrhaged members to the WSPU after 1906, so it is not surprising that the executive committee reacted so strongly when this threat manifested itself in the city. Disagreement about levels of engagement with the press and the need to use local newspapers both to publicise events and to distinguish the Association from the WSPU led to the resignations of several leading members of the Glasgow suffragists over the next few years

(Pedersen 2020b). The event also demonstrates the problem that many middle-class Scottish suffragists faced, being both Liberal supporters and suffragists, once it became clear that the new Liberal government would not immediately introduce a women's suffrage bill.

The description of the woman as having 'screamed' is significant. The Scottish newspapers in general bought into the stereotypes of the suffragettes screaming, screeching and shrieking. Conventional opinion was that the female voice should not be heard in a public arena, and that, when women tried to speak loudly, their voices became distorted and screechy. A shorthand for the suffragettes in newspaper reporting quickly became 'the shrieking sisterhood' (*Montrose Standard*, 26 July 1912). A 1906 *Dundee Courier* report on the appearance of ten suffragettes in a London court on charges of breach of the peace used the word 'shriek' five times to describe the women's words in court and also referred to them as screaming and howling; the below excerpt is emblematic of the tone of the report:

The venerable Magistrate, with his mild countenance, gazed with pained wonderment at the extraordinary spectacle. For the time being the din seemed to rob him of his speech, and he could do nothing but gaze on the howling mob in the dock screaming themselves hoarse. (*Dundee Courier*, 25 October 1906)

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that a key theme of the newspaper correspondence stimulated by the St Andrew's Halls meeting was whether it was possible to be both ladylike and a suffragette. Picture postcards and cartoons in newspapers presented the suffragettes as ugly, embittered spinsters who had nothing better to do with their time than to fill it with posturing and invading masculine spaces. It was even suggested that all these women really wanted was the feel of a man's arms around them—and for this reason they tried to get themselves arrested and into the embrace of a policeman. Reporting on an attempt by 'the strenuous sisterhood' to gain entrance to the House of Commons in October 1906, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* mocked,

There has been a great destruction of millinery, and, we fear, the costumes of some of the ladies may not have been improved in those glorious moments when they found themselves in the strenuous but unwilling embrace of stalwart London bobbies. (24 October 1906)

This portrayal of the suffragettes as ugly spinster martinets thoroughly annoyed Mrs Pankhurst, who was always well-dressed herself and insisted on a certain standard from women representing the WSPU. Tickner (1988) and Rolley (1990) agree that the Edwardian public expected to see a woman's femininity exemplified in her appearance. Thus newspaper photographs of fashionably dressed suffragettes helped counter the stereotypes put forward by anti-suffragists and newspaper reports that they were unwomanly or even mannish. Sellers of the WSPU newspaper were encouraged to wear their smartest clothes, leading Sylvia Pankhurst to regret that many spent more on their clothes than they could afford so that they would not harm the cause (Rolley 1990).

Thus, when WSPU organiser Teresa Billington arrived in Edinburgh in the summer of 1906, she found an audience eager to see in the flesh a suffragette who had been arrested and imprisoned for her militancy. Starting in the capital city, Billington travelled around the country, including a stop in East Fife, the constituency of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, H. H. Asquith, the leading anti-suffragist in the Cabinet. Her outdoor meetings were well attended and, for those who were unable to be present, the Scottish newspapers

gave detailed accounts. Reading these, it is clear that Billington was an accomplished speaker who proved popular with the Scottish crowds. Her speeches were reported verbatim, including her witty responses to hecklers, meaning that newspapers carried detailed reports of pro-suffrage arguments. The reports also noted that the majority of Billington's audience was male. Therefore, unlike constitutional suffragists' meetings, which were briefly mentioned only in the women's pages of newspapers, reports of her meetings were placed in the main news sections.

The Scottish press was also keen to offer readers personal information about the suffragettes. Items such as interviews, sketches and even photographs were part of the revolution of the popular press brought about by a 'new journalism' aimed at a mass readership. Mass-market dailies such as the *Daily Record* soon passed older newspapers in terms of sales because of the sensationalist nature of their reporting and the 'human interest' stories offered. For such newspapers, the suffragettes offered exciting possibilities. The *Edinburgh Evening News* printed a portrait of Teresa Billington and described her as 'an attractive-looking young lady, whose pleasant appearance would suggest anything but the aggressive characteristics which many have associated with one who had figured conspicuously in the action' (6 August 1906). In Dundee, 'Marguerite' interviewed Billington and found her to be 'young, charming, soft-voiced and not devoid of a sense of humour. Her head is crowned with braids of nut-brown hair and she gives the impression of a very attractive personality' (*Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 17 August 1906). Newspapers frequently reported on the suffragettes' clothing choices as well as their words, noting for example Teresa Billington's 'light-blue dress and straw hat' or 'tight grey dress' (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 and 7 August 1906). While the convention of the day meant that such reports were unsigned, it might be surmised that many of them were written by women reporters, with an eye to fashion and the interests of their female readers. Few news reports were illustrated with images, and those that were tended to use formal photographic portraits, hence the use of description to paint a picture of the scene and/or figures for readers.

Billington's work in Scotland meant that she was often portrayed in the press as a leader of the suffragettes—sometimes even as *the* leader. A *Scotsman* report of a WSPU protest outside an Asquith meeting in East Fife is fascinating in this regard since it focused almost entirely on her (*The Scotsman*, 15 October 1906). The group was described as 'Miss Billington and her supporters' and the reporter quoted extensively from her speeches. It was only several paragraphs into the story that Emmeline Pankhurst's presence at the event was noted. A few days later, another WSPU meeting was held in Glasgow. Again, reports of the meeting in the Scottish press focused on Billington's speech and only the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* noted that Emmeline Pankhurst was 'another of the speakers' (16 October 1906). Thus the framing of the WSPU leadership by Scottish newspapers focused on a local rather than the national leader.

One of Teresa Billington's earliest recruits to the WSPU, the Glaswegian artist Helen Fraser, achieved a similarly high profile in the Scottish press and was a frequent correspondent to the newspapers as the organiser of the Scottish Federation of WSPU branches. She was also often referred to in Scottish newspapers as the leader of the suffragettes, and there is even a suggestion that she attempted to assert an independence of action in Scotland. She clearly disapproved of the increasing militancy of the London leadership, and made this plain in her dealings with the press. An article in the *Dundee Courier* in July 1908 explained that Fraser had worked independently of the London leadership in recent election campaigns. For this reason, and also because she did not support militant action such as the breaking of Asquith's

windows, she had been asked by Mrs Pankhurst to resign (8 July 1908). Fraser became organiser of the Scottish NUWSS, the constitutional suffragists, against the wishes of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage, who were very unhappy that the woman who had organised the decimation of their ranks, when members deserted them to join the new WSPU, was now to be put in charge of them (Pedersen 2020b). Teresa Billington also left the WSPU, but as one of the founders of the Women's Freedom League (WFL) in 1907.

Krista Cowman suggests that one of the reasons behind Billington's withdrawal from the WSPU was her unhappiness at being sidelined by the Pankhursts during a by-election campaign in Aberdeen (Cowman 2007, p. 151). This may well have been influenced by the Pankhursts' awareness of her growing popularity and high press profile in Scotland. Proximity is an important news value and Teresa Billington was more accessible to the Scottish press than the distant leadership in London. We know that the London headquarters of the WSPU was in receipt of copies of Scottish newspapers, or at least press cuttings, and concerns about the popularity of women like Billington and Helen Fraser therefore fuelled Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst's determination to stamp out local cults of popular WSPU workers and potential challenges from alternative leaders. Teresa Billington's popularity in Scotland had been further augmented in spring 1907 by her marriage to a Glaswegian, Frederick Lewis Greig, and the announcement that she planned to settle in her adoptive country. A suffragette romance was a novelty that even led the *Dundee Courier* to burst into poetry to coincide with Valentine's Day:

And the girl, who Asquith's life
Once harried,
Has qualified to be a wife
And married. Oh! May her heart henceforth enough
Be set in
Domestic ties to stop her suff-
Ragettin!
By this inspiring hope elate,
I beg to Both Mrs Greig congratulate
And Greig, too. (14 February 1907)

Teresa Billington's influence in Scotland meant that many of the women who had originally followed her from the NUWSS to the WSPU now moved again to the WFL. The difference between the two militant organisations was rarely explained in the press, which merely referred to members of both, and increasingly to members of the NUWSS as well, as 'suffragettes'. The confusion between the two militant societies was clearly demonstrated in 1908 during Winston Churchill's campaign for election as MP for Dundee. Churchill had previously attempted to be elected in Manchester, and there were claims that the suffragettes' campaigns against him in this constituency had contributed to his failure. Manchester had, of course, been the birthplace of the WSPU. His arrival in Dundee, therefore, was followed by that of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and their followers, as well as members of the WFL. The WSPU campaign against Churchill certainly generated press coverage, particularly when the suffragettes brought the fight directly to the offices of the *Dundee Courier*, which were invaded to address a meeting of the night staff. However, it was another 'stunt'—by a member of the Women's Freedom League—that was to attract the most press coverage and criticism. On 4 May, Churchill held an outdoor lunchtime meeting to address workers at the Blackness Foundry. However, every time he tried to speak, a member of the WFL, Mary

Molony, rang a large dinner bell, drowning him out. It is clear from the outburst of condemnation in the Dundee press that there was little understanding of the distinction between the WFL and the WSPU, and 'the suffragettes' as a whole were blamed for the embarrassment that Molony's actions had brought to Dundee. In vain, Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst wrote a letter to the Dundee newspapers trying to distance themselves from the WFL, stating 'these women are not members of the WSPU and we do not accept any responsibility for their action' (*Dundee Courier*, 8 May 1908). At the same time, local suffragists wrote to the newspapers to distance themselves from those they described as 'women of such silly, hysterical temperament with no sense of honour' (*Dundee Courier*, 13 May 1908). To the incensed correspondents in the Dundee newspapers, however, all suffrage campaigners were suffragettes and all suffragettes were to blame.

Molony had travelled to Dundee from London in order to continue her vendetta against Churchill. Other members of the WFL travelled from Scotland to London to join militant action there. Anna Munro of Dunfermline was arrested in London in 1908 after attempting to disrupt the King's opening of Parliament and then holding a meeting on the steps of a Cabinet Minister's home. Her arrest, imprisonment and later release on grounds of ill health were all reported by local newspapers such as the *Dundee Courier*. While the editorial line at the Conservative-leaning *Courier* was mostly antagonistic towards women's suffrage, it was able to appeal to readers on both sides of the argument by running editorials deploring Munro's 'silly conduct' but at the same time offering its readers an exclusive 'Chat with Miss Munro' on her return to Dunfermline (21 February 1908).

The case of another Dunfermline WFL member, Jennie McCallum, allows us to contrast the treatment of the Scottish suffragettes by the English and Scottish press. Jennie McCallum was an unusual suffragette in that she was a member of the working class, a winder at a local mill. Both Jennie and her sister were active members of the WFL, and Jennie travelled to London in 1908 to take part in a raid on the House of Commons. Reports of her trial in the English press treated McCallum as a figure of fun. As the *Telegraph* reported: 'The last defendant proved to be a little Scotch girl, with a decided accent. When her name was called "Jane McCallum", she indignantly cried out "Ma name isn't Jane!" to the intense amusement of those in court' (*Daily Telegraph*, 30 October 1908). In comparison, on her release on grounds of ill health and return to Dunfermline, the *Dundee Courier* ran a detailed and sympathetic interview with her:

Miss McCallum was in the hospital, and was told by the doctor that it was no place for her. During the five days she was in prison she was employed hemming coarse kitchen towels, and had finished the sixth one. She complained bitterly of the food, which, she said, consisted of stale brown bread and greasy cocoa When arrested, Miss McCallum was making for the St Stephen's entrance along with Mrs Richards, who had her arm broken. A policeman said to her, 'Go away, you're Scotch'. (6 November 1908)

The advent of the suffragettes in Scotland posed considerable problems for the more Liberal-leaning newspapers in the country, such as the *Aberdeen Free Press* and the *Dundee Advertiser*. The editors of such newspapers had considerable sympathy for the campaign for women's suffrage as part of a general Liberal project. However, the attacks on leading politicians with Scottish constituencies, such as Asquith and Churchill, put these newspapers in a quandary. Should they report the suffragettes' criticisms of Liberal Cabinet Ministers and their calls for electors to vote against the Liberal candidate in by-elections? Conservative-

leaning newspapers, meanwhile, could gleefully report the suffragettes' attacks on the government while at the same time condemning their demands for the vote.

One way of tackling the problem was to allow space for both pro- and anti-suffrage opinion in the newspapers via the correspondence columns. As has already been seen above, suffragette activity in the vicinity immediately stimulated letters to the local press, and newspapers ran letters both praising and condemning the suffragettes in the same columns. The suffrage leadership also used letters to the editor to further explain their agenda or to attempt to correct misinformation. Arguments between different correspondents could last for weeks, and letters often included personal attacks on the intelligence and education of correspondents with different views. Thus a suffragette supporter calling herself 'A Woman' poured scorn on the arguments of a previous correspondent who used the pen name 'Mere Man' and what she described as his 'silly ebullition':

'Mere Man' jibes at the local suffragettes. They certainly are not, I think, deserving of censure for militancy, and their utterances seem that of well-balanced judgment and high intellect, not the poor vapidities 'Mere Man' put his name to. (*Southern Reporter*, 21 March 1912)

Letters for and against women's suffrage followed the general conventions of newspaper correspondence in Scottish newspapers at this time. Letters could be very long, and on occasion, were sent to more than one newspaper, which offers the possibility for comparisons. These confirm that, before the outbreak of the First World War, which brought paper rationing, there is little evidence of editorial gatekeeping in Scottish newspaper correspondence columns (Pedersen 2017). As long as a correspondent supplied a name and address, their letter would be published and they could choose to use a pen name to hide their identity. Letter-writers to Scottish newspapers were also fond of allusions to poetry, the Bible and other literature, which were often used to attack other correspondents. Thus a letter from 'Fairplay' about a debate on the suffrage question at the Motherwell Debating Society finished by quoting the Scottish poet Robert Pollok: 'O envy! hide thy bosom, hide it deep; A thousand snakes, with black envenomed mouths, Nest there and hiss, and feed through all thy heart.' This was in reference to two previous correspondents on the subject, whom 'Fairplay' described as a 'snake in the grass' and 'the other viper' (*Motherwell Times*, 11 December 1908). Similarly, the correspondent 'Votes for Women' wrote a letter attacking the Liberal party's attitude towards women's suffrage and ended by adapting the words of constitutional essayist Walter Bagehot (1877):

The turning of coats so common is grown.
That no one would attack it;
But no case until now was so flagrantly known.
Of the Liberals turning their jacket. (*Dundee Courier*, 30 January 1908)

An anonymous letter to the editor offered the opportunity for a suffragette supporter to step into the public sphere—albeit using the anonymity of an assumed name—and state her support for the cause. Popular pen names included 'Votes for Women', 'Suffragette' and 'Member WSPU'. Anti-suffrage correspondents similarly claimed the cover of anonymity, in real or purported fear of what militant suffragettes might do to them by way of retaliation were their identity known. One correspondent to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* in 1909, who criticised those who were campaigning for women's suffrage, finished her letter as follows:

The policeman who passes peaceably along my street wouldn't like to be scratched, and I should not like my window smashed. So ... I sink my personality beneath a safe anonymity, and subscribe myself Madame X. (29 September 1909)

Thus pro-suffrage letters might be published in anti-suffrage newspapers and *vice versa*. If necessary, the editor could choose to use a postscript to offer his own contrasting opinion. In July 1912, Helen Tollie of the Aberdeen WSPU had a letter printed in the conservative *Aberdeen Daily Journal* on the subject of 'Suffragettes and Equality'. The editor followed this with a postscript stating: 'That women can never be similar to men is obvious, and when Suffragettes, or women generally, try to compete with men on their own ground they are not only unequal, but, as a rule, they become mere imitations of third-rate men—The Editor' (30 July 1912).

Conservative newspapers also seized the possibility of offering an alternative viewpoint to their main editorial through the women's pages. In the *Dundee Courier*, 'Annette' was allowed to write of her enthusiasm for women's suffrage in her column on the women's page, but in the same edition a mocking editorial remarked 'man may console himself with the naked fact that the woman politician is still a microscopical minority, and that for some time yet his wife will not be able to negative [sic] his political power' (12 December 1904). Noteworthy is the completely redundant but titillating addition of 'naked' in a sentence describing female politicians. A letter to the *Motherwell Times* in 1914 claimed to come from a lady journalist who described how she had been asked to write about a local suffrage meeting by the editor of a newspaper with Conservative leanings. 'My conscience—a fairly accommodating organ as a rule—smote me, and I blurted out, "I can't do this". "Why?" asked the editor in surprise. "Because," I said, "I believe women ought to have votes." "But, lorblissus!" cried the editor, "That's just what we want you to say!"' (29 May 1914).

It should also be noted that it was the Conservative-leaning *Aberdeen Daily Journal* rather than the Liberal-leaning *Free Press* that employed the honorary secretary of that city's WSPU branch as a lady reporter. While the archive of Caroline Phillips' letters, now held at the Aberdeen Art Gallery, shows that Phillips was threatened with dismissal by the *Journal's* manager if she did not cease her involvement in the campaign for women's suffrage, it is also clear that this did not actually happen. Between 1907 and 1909, when she was removed from her position by the Pankhursts rather than by her employer, Phillips ran the Aberdeen WSPU branch from the headquarters of the *Journal*, making use of *Journal* notepaper to write drafts of her letters, using the *Journal* address as the correspondence address for the WSPU and even using the *Journal's* telegraph for WSPU telegrams (Pedersen 2020a). Her archive demonstrates a wide circle of correspondents, including the WSPU leadership in London and elsewhere in Scotland, as well as leaders of the Women's Liberal Association in her own city. It also cautions us to be careful about the exactitude of what we read in newspaper reports. Reading only the public statements that Phillips made as leader of the Aberdeen suffragettes in letters to the editor, we would gain the impression that she was a staunch supporter of militant action and had worked hand in glove with Mrs Pankhurst before the suffragettes and their supporters disrupted a Liberal party meeting at the Music Hall in Aberdeen, at which Asquith was the guest speaker. However, the archive tells a different story, including several letters from behind the scenes between Phillips and the leadership of the Women's Liberal Association, in which she attempted to strike a deal to allow women access to the Music Hall meeting by guaranteeing no suffragette militancy, only to be overruled by Mrs Pankhurst (Pedersen 2020a). It is clear, therefore, that it is important to use such newspaper sources

carefully and to recognise that published items such as letters to the editor are official statements of policy or opinion but do not necessarily offer the whole picture.

In the early years of the suffragettes' campaign, it was the novelty of the story that grabbed the attention of the press. Whilst there were detailed reports of meetings, these were often treated with a jocularly that is striking in comparison with the serious tone of the coverage of political meetings of men. Thus another framing of the suffragettes by the Scottish press was as light entertainment. Witty or insulting heckling, and the responses of the suffragettes, was often reported and the behaviour of the crowds tended to be described as either good-humoured or mocking. Attendance at a suffrage meeting was often presented to a newspaper's readers as a good, entertaining day out. However, the tone of reporting darkened as militancy increased. The detailed reporting of pro-suffrage arguments decreased and the focus became the militant acts themselves rather than the drivers behind them. As militancy arrived in Scotland, bringing with it a wave of arson and bombings, including attacks on Scottish icons such as Burns Cottage and the Wallace Monument, the sympathies of even the most liberal newspaper editor decreased and correspondence columns became dominated by the question of what to *do* with the suffragettes rather than whether women should get the vote (Pedersen 2017). The fight had now come to Scotland in earnest and every burned-out building or damaged golf course was reported in detail by the press. The suffragettes kept their cause in the newspapers, but readers' need for fresh outrage every morning meant that the campaign had to become more and more militant, moving from damage to the suffragettes themselves, through hunger strikes and forcible feeding, to damage to public and subsequently private property to achieve continued publicity.

Newspaper coverage of the most minor acts of militancy fuelled a general air of panic such that the whole country was on alert, which led to Dunfermline Abbey, for example, banning ladies from entering with handbags for fear that they were carrying bombs (*Dundee Courier*, 17 May 1913). Even stories that had nothing to do with the campaign for the vote could be given a suffragette 'twist' in order to sell papers. A story in the *Motherwell Times* about a 17 year-old boy who had committed arson was headlined 'Not suffragettes after all' (27 June 1913). Some correspondents pointed the finger of blame at the press itself for allowing the 'self-advertisement' of the suffragettes. For example, a correspondent to the *Aberdeen Free Press* who called themselves 'Non-militant' noted that the *Free Press* and other newspapers animadverted on the antics of the WSPU, yet still gave them publicity:

Might I suggest to you that it is in the power of yourself and your brother-editors to remedy the evil to a very large extent. Militant suffragettism [sic] can only flourish in the glare of the footlights; it basks and grows in the sunshine of continuous newspaper advertisements. Respectable young women, who would otherwise be occupying the useful but comparatively humble spheres of shop-women or domestic servants, are fascinated by the opportunity of posing as martyrs in the public eye, and having their foolish speeches and stupid actions reported at full length in the daily papers, with criticisms of their appearance and description of their costumes. (6 December 1912)

However, non-militant suffragists were also attacked in the press. A letter from 'Woman Observer' to *The Scotsman* following the burning down of Whitekirk Church blamed non-militant women for first creating a climate of dissatisfaction amongst women:

To gain converts, the largest non-militant society, of which Mrs Fawcett is president and Miss Mair president of the Edinburgh Branch, teaches that women are not free; that many laws concerning them are unjust, for which men are greatly to blame; that therefore women must try to desire the vote, and not rest till they get it. Such teaching does not tend to make happier homes or useful citizens; and is it not just such teaching that leads to the spirit of militancy? (*The Scotsman* 14 March 1914)

The terms used by newspapers at this time to describe suffrage campaigners frequently recalled older stereotypes of women. The *Arbroath Herald* referred to 'hysterical window-smashers' (8 March 1912), the *Falkirk Herald* to 'reckless hysterical violence' (13 March 1912) and the *Southern Reporter*, in even more titillating tones, to 'hysterical debauchery' and 'shrieking saturnalia' (28 March 1912). A correspondent to the *Glasgow Herald* suggested that, since imprisonment had not stopped the fire-raising of the 'crazy sisterhood', the 'ducking stool, jouks, stocks and pillory should be tried' (13 March 1914), while a columnist in the *Arbroath Herald* mooted the idea of shaving the heads of all suffragettes who had been in prison and banning their use of wigs (23 May 1913). These indications of possible punishment incorporated into the debate much older suggestions of how to deal with unruly women.

While English prisons had adopted forcible feeding in 1909, Scotland continued to release suffragettes on hunger strike until 1914—and was praised for so doing. In 1909 a group of five suffragettes, the majority of whom were English, were arrested in Dundee for disturbing a meeting held by Winston Churchill. They immediately went on hunger strike and were released after four days without forcible feeding. Flora Drummond told the press that the release of the women without resorting to forcible feeding was 'a great triumph' for Scotland, which demonstrated Scottish independence (*Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 25 October 1909). When Emily Wilding Davison was released from Aberdeen prison after a period of hunger striking, she wrote to the *Aberdeen Free Press* to celebrate the Scottish refusal to force-feed: 'The truth is that bonnie Scotland will not adopt the barbarity of forcible feeding!! All honour to her!' (10 December 1912). Scottish exceptionalism in this regard was thus contrasted with the perceived barbarism of the English prisons.

To summarise, it was clear, even in the early years of their campaign, that the exploits of the suffragettes sold Scottish newspapers, but this was particularly true when their actions took place in Scotland or involved Scottish women undertaking militant activity in England. Detailed coverage of the speeches of WSPU organisers such as Teresa Billington and Helen Fraser in the Scottish newspapers allowed pro-suffrage arguments to be circulated amongst the general public. Whilst maintaining their traditional political allegiances, newspapers were able to offer both sides of the argument through the use of the correspondence columns and women's pages, and the suffrage organisations themselves could provide further information about the reasons for their actions through letters to the editor.

The Scottish press focused on those it considered to be Scotland's own suffragette leaders, to the point of almost ignoring the Pankhursts at times. Thus it was able to frame the suffragettes in Scotland and the authorities' response to militancy as influenced by, but different from, what was occurring in England. This was supported by the suffragettes' own arguments, which compared their treatment in Scottish prisons favourably to the forcible feeding in England. The independence of action and opinion claimed by women such as Helen Fraser, Caroline Phillips and Teresa Billington-Grieg (as she was known following her marriage), and mirrored in press depictions of their leadership of the Scottish suffragettes,

contributed to their eventual parting from the Pankhursts. Local Scottish leaders setting up in opposition to, and criticising, London headquarters were either invited to leave the organisation or, as in the case of Caroline Phillips, replaced with little warning. While Phillips retired from the suffrage campaign in 1909, Helen Fraser became a paid organiser for the NUWSS in Scotland and Teresa Billington-Greig worked with others to establish the militant Women's Freedom League. However, the subtle distinctions between the WSPU and the WFL were of little interest to most Scottish journalists and all suffragettes were deemed to be the same, resulting in the actions of the WFL being blamed on the WSPU and *vice versa*. By the later years of the campaign, members of the NUWSS also found themselves tarred with the same brush as 'suffragettes'.

At first, suffragette meetings in Scotland were reported in full, with detailed accounts of the speeches and arguments of speakers. In addition, in comparison to earlier reporting of suffragist meetings, these reports were placed in the news or political sections of the newspapers. The correspondence pages also offered valuable space for the presentation of arguments in favour of women's suffrage, and the anonymity of pen names allowed women to join in the debate in the public sphere, and sometimes even aggressively to attack those with whom they disagreed, adapting to the somewhat pugnacious environment of the letters column. Women's voices were also heard through the growing number of women reporters and columnists, some of whom were relied on to bring a pro-suffrage flavour to newspapers with a predominantly anti-suffrage editorial line. However, militant acts, rather than reasoned argument, sold newspapers and therefore the oxygen of publicity also drove the tactics of the movement. The detailed and considered reporting of meetings and pro-suffrage arguments of earlier years was replaced in the years prior to the war by coverage of acts of militancy, with a particular frisson of excitement if a newspaper could cover local acts of vandalism, bombing or arson. Instead of discussion about the arguments for and against women's suffrage, correspondence pages became the place to express anger and disquiet at militancy and even to call for acts of violence against the perpetrators. Militancy and the violence meted out to women through force-feeding was echoed in aggressive words in the Scottish press.

Bibliography

Aberdeen Daily Journal

Aberdeen Free Press

Arbroath Herald

Daily Telegraph

Dundee Advertiser

Dundee Courier

Dundee Evening Telegraph

Edinburgh Evening News

Falkirk Herald

Glasgow Herald

Montrose Standard

Motherwell Times

The Scotsman

Southern Reporter

Bagehot, Walter, 1877. Lord Althorp and the Reform Act of 1832. In *The Works and Life of Walter Bagehot*. Ed. Mrs Russell Barrington. London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1915.

Bartley, Paula, 2012. *Emmeline Pankhurst*. London: Routledge.

Chapman, Jane, 2015. 'The Argument of the Broken Pane: Suffragette consumerism and newspapers'. *Media History* 21, no. 3: 238–51.

Cowman, Krista, 2007. *Women of the Right Spirit: Paid Organisers of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), 1904–18*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Kelly, Katherine E. 2004. 'Seeing through spectacles: The woman suffrage movement and London newspapers, 1906–13'. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 11, no. 3: 327–53.

Matheson, Donald, 2000. 'The birth of news discourse: changes in news language in British newspapers, 1880–1930'. *Media, Culture and Society* 22: 557–73.

Mercer, John, 2004. Making the news: Votes for women and the mainstream press. *Media History* 10, no. 3: 187–99.

Pankhurst, Christabel, 1959 (reprinted 1987). *Unshackled*. London: Century Hutchinson.

Nessheim, Ragnhild 1997. *Press, Politics and Votes for Women, 1910-1918*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Pedersen, Sarah, 2017. *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pedersen, Sarah, 2020a. 'Caroline Phillips: Balancing life as a journalist and a suffragette in a Scottish city'. *Women's History Review*. doi: 10.1080/09612025.2020.1745401

Pedersen, Sarah, 2020b. "'A mistake to raise any controversial question at the present time": the careful relationship of Glasgow's suffragists with the press'. In *Women's Suffrage and Beyond: Local, National and International Perspectives*. Eds. Jenkins, L. and Hughes-Johnson, A. London: Institute of Historical Research (forthcoming).

Rolley, Katrina, 1990. 'Fashion, femininity and the fight for the vote'. *Art History* 13, no. 1: 47–71.

Tickner, Lisa, 1988. *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.