



AUTHOR(S):

TITLE:

YEAR:

Publisher citation:

OpenAIR citation:

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Caroline Phillips: Aberdeen suffragette and journalist

Sarah Pedersen

The Suffragettes in Scotland

Aberdeen Art Gallery holds a unique collection of correspondence that belonged to a woman journalist called Caroline Phillips. As honorary secretary of the Aberdeen branch of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), otherwise known as the Suffragettes, Caroline Phillips met and corresponded with many of the leaders of the movement and was also involved in the organisation of militant action in Aberdeen.

Professor Sarah Pedersen is Professor of Communication and Media at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. She is the author of *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press* (Palgrave Macmillan 2017).

ISBN 978-1-907349-14-0



Aberdeen Art Gallery holds a collection of correspondence and papers that belonged to a woman journalist called Caroline Phillips. Most of the correspondence dates from between 1907 and 1909 and deals with the organisation of the Aberdeen branch of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), otherwise known as the Suffragettes. While the popular image of the suffragettes places them in England, particularly London, in fact the campaign for votes for women happened throughout the UK. However, it is unusual to have such a treasure trove of information about the goings-on in one small branch in north-east Scotland. This makes the Art Gallery collection – known as the Watt Collection after the person who deposited the letters at the Gallery – fascinating.

Caroline Phillips was not just a suffragette, she was also a journalist at the *Aberdeen Daily Journal*. Journalism was beginning to open to women as a career in the early days of the 20th century, but Caroline Phillips would still have stood out in the press room as one of only a handful of women. In 1900, the Society of Woman Journalists had only 69 members in the whole of the UK. Woman journalists were not expected to cover the same sort of news as their male counterparts, but instead mainly produced copy for the new 'Women's pages' that had started to appear in newspapers. In order to attract advertisers such as the new department stores and other fashion and homeware retailers, newspapers needed to prove that women read their newspapers as well as men. Hence the birth of the 'Woman's page'. It was assumed that women would not be interested in political and business news appearing elsewhere in the newspapers, but would want to be informed about fashion, beauty and domestic issues. However, one issue that was covered by woman's pages was the growing demand amongst some women for the vote. Thus journalists like Caroline Phillips would have been asked by their editors to attend the 'at homes' and tea parties organised by campaigners for the vote during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in order to report on this revolutionary idea. It is perhaps not surprising that the majority of woman journalists were in favour of giving women the vote since they not only attended meetings on the subject but, as working women themselves, knew how valuable the achievement of citizenship would be for women's equality in the workplace.

The campaign for the vote in the 19th century

Women in Britain first started large-scale campaigning for the vote in the 1860s. In 1867 (1868 in Scotland) the Representation of the People Act had given some working-class men the right to vote for the first time, but, despite efforts to amend the act to include women, no woman had the vote in mid-Victorian Britain. In response, a number of women's suffrage societies were set up all over the country over the next few years, including Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen.

By the start of the 20th century these societies had mainly amalgamated under the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), with a headquarters in London led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett. These women campaigners are known to historians as the 'constitutional suffragists' because they believed in winning the vote for women through constitutional means, such as petitions and letters to Members of Parliament. Some success had been achieved by the early years of the 20th century as women became eligible to vote and even be elected to local government positions such as town councils and school boards. In Aberdeen, for example, the city's Women's Suffrage Association campaigned to get women elected to the School Board. However, this limited amount of civic responsibility only whetted women's appetites for the Parliamentary vote, which was still firmly denied to them.

There was general excitement amongst women suffragists, therefore, when a new Liberal government was elected with a landslide victory at the end of 1905. The majority of Liberal MPs had pledged their support to the cause of women's suffrage, and the Liberal party was also associated with the slogan 'No taxation without representation'. Given that many middle- and upper-class women paid taxes of some sort, for example on property, it was hoped that this new Liberal government would grant the vote at least to these ladies. However, their hopes were quickly dashed. Although the new Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, was sympathetic he did not feel that there was the appetite in the country to change the *status quo* so startlingly. He preferred to use the Liberal's large majority in Parliament to push through other social reforms including old-age pensions, free school meals and national insurance. In addition, his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Henry Herbert Asquith, was a vehement anti-suffragist who was to prove a major barrier to any suffrage reform for the next decade.

The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)

Growing frustration with the situation finally prompted Emmeline Pankhurst, the widow of a socialist politician from Manchester, to establish a new kind of suffrage organisation. Working with her daughters Christabel, Adela and Sylvia, and others from her socialist circle in Manchester, Mrs Pankhurst established the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. The WSPU aimed to raise the profile of the question of women's suffrage, including in the press, and to make women campaigners more visible. For this reason, instead of holding meetings for women, 'at homes' and tea-parties, as the constitutional suffragists did, the WSPU aimed to raise the question of votes for women at public political meetings attended by men.

Such conduct outraged Edwardian sensibilities – women should stay in the domestic sphere and certainly should not try to raise their voices at male political meetings – and WSPU members found themselves shouted down and forcibly removed. In October 1905 things came to a head when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney, a mill-worker, disrupted a political meeting in Manchester, were arrested and opted to go to prison rather than pay a fine. Their imprisonment, and the cause they represented, made newspaper headlines throughout the country. The WSPU quickly realised that such 'militant' acts raised their profile and made 'votes for women' a hot topic. The Union adopted the motto 'Deeds not Words' and adopted these new tactics of disrupting meetings and accepting imprisonment in order to gain maximum publicity for their cause. It was at this point that the *Daily Mail* coined the name 'Suffragettes' for these new radical suffrage campaigners, to distinguish them from the constitutional suffragists of the NUWSS.

Annie Kenney and Teresa Billington were sent to London to establish a headquarters there from which Parliament itself could be disrupted. Teresa Billington was another socialist activist from Manchester. Originally a teacher, she became a paid organiser for the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in Manchester before undertaking a similar role with the WSPU. Having helped to set up party headquarters, Teresa Billington was sent to Scotland in 1906 to establish WSPU branches there. She was to be very influential in the development of the WSPU in Scotland and eventually settled there herself after marrying a Scottish socialist Frederick Lewis Greig, changing her name to Teresa Billington-Greig. Teresa Billington's travels around Scotland from 1906 onwards attracted many women away from the constitutional suffrage societies towards the militants. For example, Helen Fraser, a Glaswegian artist, was an early convert and became another Scottish WSPU organiser.

The Suffragettes arrive in Aberdeen

Aberdeen's first taste of suffragette tactics came at the start of 1907 when a by-election was prompted by the appointment of the city's MP, James Bryce, as British Ambassador to the United States. In February several WSPU leaders, including Mrs Pankhurst, Teresa Billington-Grieg and Helen Fraser, arrived in Aberdeen and a meeting was arranged at the YMCA hall on 1st February. Local author and activist Isabella Fyvie Mayo presided over the meeting, introducing the speakers but also attempting to control the audience. According to the *Daily Journal*, as the speakers took their place on the stage, they were 'greeted somewhat boisterously by a band of young men in the gallery' and Mrs Mayo was forced to appeal to them to 'behave like gentlemen'. There is also mention of Caroline Phillips in the news report – she seconded a motion that demanded the government enfranchise women. It may of course be that she actually wrote the news report, but it was rare for a journalist's name to be attached to specific articles at this time and so we have no idea if she attended the meeting as a member of the WSPU or also as a reporter.

Mrs Pankhurst's speech was frequently interrupted by laughter and comments from the gallery, but she pressed on, declaring that the suffragettes had come to Aberdeen and would stay until the by-election was over. In particular, she addressed the question of the WSPU's controversial by-election policy. This was to oppose the government (i.e. the Liberal) candidate, whether or not he was personally committed to women's suffrage. This provoked cries of 'Shame' from the gallery. Mrs Pankhurst explained that this policy had been adopted because the candidate represented a government that refused to give women the vote and it was therefore 'practical politics' to urge electors not to vote for the Liberal candidate. In the case of Aberdeen, the out-going Liberal MP had not been a supporter of women's suffrage, but the new Liberal candidate, George Esslemont, was. Mrs Pankhurst, however, declared that she would prefer that the Conservative candidate was elected because it would send a message to the Liberal government that they needed to give women the vote to stay in power.

The WSPU leaders stayed for some days in Aberdeen, continuing to urge voters to vote against the Liberal candidate. On Sunday 10th February they held two open-air meetings – one on Castle Street in the afternoon and the other in the evening at the Wallace Statue. Both meetings were described by the newspaper as well attended. The pull of the notorious suffragette leaders must have been strong to encourage people to attend open-air meetings in the dark chill of a February night.

The WSPU's controversial policy of campaigning against the Liberal candidate, despite his personal commitment to their cause, naturally caused problems with local Liberal supporters, particularly the Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association (WLA). Many of the members of the Association were keen suffragists themselves and were members of the Aberdeen branch of the NUWSS, the constitutional suffragist organisation. However, they were very unhappy about WSPU policy. The honorary president and secretary of the Aberdeen WLA, Mrs Black and Mrs Allan, wrote to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* to explain their position and to declare that they certainly would not work against a Liberal candidate who was in favour of giving the vote to women. In response, Helen Fraser wrote to the *Aberdeen Free Press*, pointing out that there were already 420 MPs in the House of Commons who were pledged to support women's suffrage, including the Prime Minister, but as yet no vote had been forthcoming. She argued that the Prime Minister had told women to have patience, but women had been waiting for the vote for fifty years and were running out of patience. In her opinion, women without votes had no right to belong to a political party – a direct attack on the Liberal ladies.

Mrs Pankhurst returned to London where she continued to lead demonstrations and raids on the House of Commons. In mid-February, one of these raids resulted in the arrest of many of those

involved, including Christabel and Adela Pankhurst. Mrs Pankhurst, Christabel and Annie Kenney had been scheduled to speak in Aberdeen the following day, but in the event only Annie Kenney arrived. She addressed another well-attended open-air meeting in Castle Street, and gave her audience an up-to-the-minute description of the exciting scenes of militancy that she had left in London. Flatteringly, she told her audience that she had been held back from the fray by the WSPU executive because of the 'special duty' before her of appearing in Aberdeen.

We can thus see that a branch of the WSPU was well established in Aberdeen by the spring of 1907. Caroline Phillips, at that time 36 years old, was its honorary secretary. The use of the word 'honorary' in the title tells us that this was not a paid position. The majority of the work that women did in organisations such as charities or political parties at this time was unpaid. The implication was that 'ladies' would be insulted and sullied by any attempt to pay them. Of course, women like Caroline Phillips were in other paid employment, but were still expected to put in hours of unpaid work in other aspects of their lives. Apart from a few paid organisers like Teresa Billington-Grieg and Helen Fraser, the vast majority of the women who worked for all the women's suffrage societies and women's political parties were unpaid.

The first letter in the Watt Collection dates from April 1907 when Emmeline Pankhurst wrote to Caroline Phillips from the WSPU office in Clement's Inn, London, in reference to a return visit to Aberdeen later that spring. The letter is handwritten on WSPU notepaper:

Dear Miss Phillips

I am spending a few days in Scotland early in May and shall be glad to visit your Branch if you can arrange a meeting for me.

I should like to have an opportunity of meeting members and friends privately as well.

We of the National Committee are very anxious to keep in track with the provincial Branches & so we arrange that from time to time visits of the kind I am now undertaking shall be made.

Please let me know as early as possible your views & what date will suit your members.

I need hardly say how much I should like to meet you again.

Sincerely yours

E. Pankhurst

Caroline Phillips evidently responded positively to Mrs Pankhurst's letter since she received another from her dated 17th April 1907:

60 Upper Brook St
Manchester

Dear Miss Phillips

Many thanks for you & Mrs Webster for your kind invitation which I gladly accept.

I can't leave home until the 1st week in May & I think my first engagement will be in Glasgow. Perhaps you will write to Mrs Pollok, "Walden" Broomfield Rd, Springburn, Glasgow, for information as to dates fixed there.

I shall be sorry if I cannot be in Aberdeen before Lady Ramsay leaves as I should much like to meet her.

Perhaps you will be able to arrange one or two drawing-room meetings for me while I am with you.

We have been holding very successful ones in London lately & have very greatly increased our membership. We might have an outdoor as well as an indoor meeting if you agree.

I do not yet know how my dates will be arranged as all the Branches have not yet written me but if need be "first come first served". You had better take the 2nd week in May.

With very kind regards

Sincerely yours

Emmeline Pankhurst

Lady Ramsay was the wife of the Sir William Mitchell Ramsay, a leading Scottish archaeologist and Regius Professor of Humanities at Aberdeen University who had been knighted in 1906. Lady Ramsay had accompanied her husband on many of his expeditions and was herself an author of books such as *Everyday Life in Turkey* (1897). She was an active campaigner for women's suffrage in Aberdeen and eventually became President of the Aberdeen WSPU branch.

Mrs Webster was the wife of the Reverend Alexander Webster, a leader of the Scots Unitarian church, Christian socialist and prolific pamphleteer. He was an influential figure in the development of socialism in Aberdeen, a member of the Aberdeen Labour Committee, and Vice-President of Keir Hardie's Scottish Labour Party. Given the roots of the WSPU in the socialist politics of Manchester, it is not surprising to see hospitality being offered to Mrs Pankhurst from such a household.

Caroline Phillips was urged to write to Mrs Pollok in Glasgow in order to co-ordinate Mrs Pankhurst's visit to Scotland. Elizabeth Pollok was honorary secretary of the Glasgow WSPU branch. She was also a member of the Labour party in that city – the Glasgow branch was particularly intertwined with socialist politics and enjoyed strong support from the socialist weekly newspaper *Forward*, which often campaigned for the vote for women in its pages. These strong ties to the Labour party might be another reason for the problems between the WSPU and the Liberals in Aberdeen.

Caroline Phillips evidently responded immediately to Mrs Pankhurst's letter because Emmeline Pankhurst wrote again:

60 Upper Brook St
Manchester

19 April 1907

Dear Miss Phillips

Thanks for your letter.

If you fix a meeting for the 2nd May I will come for it. I don't think I can get away from Manchester earlier.

I am giving up housekeeping & am in the midst of packing & dispersing of books, papers etc, the accumulation of many years. You will understand that it is not a light task. Besides this there are several public meetings.

I have not yet arranged my dates for Glasgow but will go there after I leave you.

With kind regards

Sincerely yours

E. Pankhurst

These two letters were written to Caroline Phillips from Mrs Pankhurst's home in Manchester. In 1907 Emmeline Pankhurst was forced to resign her paid work as a Registrar in Manchester, having been warned by the Registrar General that her suffragette campaigning was incompatible with the post. At the age of 49, therefore, Emmeline Pankhurst resigned from her job, thus losing her salary, and gave up her home in Manchester. From then on she was to live at a hotel in London in between her travels around the country. As we can see from her letter, this meant that she had to get rid of a lot of her personal belongings and papers because she had nowhere to store them. The personal sacrifice that Emmeline Pankhurst made for the suffrage movement is evident in this short letter – getting rid of the accumulation of many years was 'not a light task'.

Despite Emmeline Pankhurst's positive reaction to the proposed meeting in Aberdeen, it does not seem to have gone ahead in May. On 14th May Caroline Phillips received a letter from Emmeline's daughter, Christabel Pankhurst, from WSPU headquarters in London.

Dear Miss Phillips

Not having heard from you I thought the Aberdeen Union had decided against holding the meeting. Mr Murray tells me that though he will gladly help with a meeting after Xmas he cannot now as he is working for Mr Asquith's meeting & that is taking all his time & attention. After Xmas he w[oul]d throw himself into the preparations for our meeting & would see to the running of special trains from outlying districts.

What he is prepared to do before Xmas is to help to arrange a deputation to Asquith.

With this I think we had better be content as time is so far advanced now.

Yours sincerely

C. H. Pankhurst

James Murray had been elected unopposed as the Liberal MP for East Aberdeenshire in a by-election in February 1906 and was a keen supporter of the WSPU, despite their stance against the government. At the time of his election to Parliament he was Chairman of the Aberdeen Art Gallery and a keen art collector.

There is no further correspondence on the subject of this meeting in the archive until another letter from Christabel Pankhurst on 16th September 1907 to Caroline Phillips:

Dear Miss Phillips

Many thanks for your letter about the arrangements for the visit to Aberdeen. I am very much interested to hear that you have secured Mr Murray as chairman. I cannot yet write definitely to you about Mr Murray's kind invitation to stay at Glenburnie House.

I am sorry that there has been some little delay in replying to your letter. As you may imagine, we have been very much occupied here during the past week.

With every good wish

Yours sincerely

Christabel H. Pankhurst

James Murray lived at Glenburnie Park (rather than House) in Rubislaw Den North, a fine granite and slate property in the wealthy west end of Aberdeen. Caroline Phillips had evidently approached him directly and found him more amenable to involvement in a public meeting on the subject of women's suffrage than Christabel Pankhurst had suggested in her earlier letter. Was he more susceptible to the requests of a local organisation – and of course a local journalist?

Splits in the Suffragette ranks

In her 16th September letter Christabel referred to being 'much occupied' during the past week. This is probably because of a devastating split in the WSPU that occurred in September 1907. After her marriage to a Scotsman, Teresa Billington-Greig had stopped working for the WSPU as a paid organiser and settled in Glasgow, but continued her involvement in the campaign as a volunteer. Like several others in the WSPU, Billington-Greig had become increasingly concerned about the perceived autocratic domination of the organisation by the Pankhurst family, and particularly Emmeline and Christabel. In her book on the paid organisers of the WSPU Krista Cowman suggests that Teresa Billington-Greig also held a personal grudge against the two because it had been promised that she would be in charge of the campaign during the Aberdeen by-election in February, but instead Mrs Pankhurst had taken centre stage. Whether that is true or not, we know that over the summer Teresa Billington-Greig lobbied the Scottish branches of the WSPU to petition headquarters in London in favour of a more democratic system of leadership. An undated letter in the Watt Collection appears to come from this period – dating can be established by the contents of the letter, including a reference to an up-coming demonstration in Edinburgh in October.

Low Meadow, Hayfield, Derbyshire

Dear Miss Phillips

Thanks for your letter. I also am holidaying and shall be until Aug 29th. On that day however I get back to work and hope to keep steadily at it during the winter.

The Women's Societies in Aberdeen & those of old standing seem to be very hopeless. That cannot be helped & you will have just to appeal to individuals. I really hope that you will get a large number of volunteers....

With regard to the resolution it is not yet drawn up. You had better write to Mrs Bell 29 Comely Bank Place, Edinburgh, about it. She is secretary of the Demonstration Committee.

With regard to the amendments to constitution your branch of course must exercise its discretion. I oppose the three honorary secs., especially since we are to have a paid sec on the committee as well. This would land us into the absurd position of having four secs ex officio on a committee of 12 or 14. I don't mind a bit whether there are 8 or 9 elected members. It is not vital. What is vital is that as many as possible of the members should be elected by the branches and responsible to them.

I'm in haste as we have a big walk on this morning. Write me again if you need. I shall be home on Aug 29th.

Yours Teresa Billington Greig

'What is vital is that as many as possible of the members should be elected by the branches and responsible to them.' Here Teresa Billington-Greig emphasises the need for collective responsibility and a democratic approach to the organisation of the WSPU. In contrast, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and their supporters felt the necessity for a tighter operation in order to fight a militant campaign for the vote with no time to debate and deliberate every decision with rank-and-file members.

There were plans to bring matters to a head at a September conference. In response, Mrs Pankhurst and Christabel cancelled the conference and the constitution of the WSPU and invited those who were unhappy with their leadership to go elsewhere. Future decisions about the WSPU would be taken by a committee that Mrs Pankhurst would appoint and lead. Around 70 members of the WSPU, including Teresa Billington-Greig, Charlotte Despard, Edith How Martyn and Annie Cobden Sanderson, left and set up a new organisation. At first they called this organisation the 'true' WSPU, while the Pankhurst-led association adopted the name 'The National Women's Social and Political Union' – the change in title can be seen on the headed notepaper from the WSPU headquarters from this time in the Watt Collection. However, in November 1907, the break-away group voted to call themselves the Women's Freedom League (WFL).

This then was the event that had been preoccupying the Pankhursts in the weeks before Christabel wrote to Caroline Phillips on 16th September. It is perhaps not surprising that Christabel suddenly remembered to respond to Phillips because the new WFL was attracting WSPU members away from the Pankhurst-led organisation – it would eventually grow to around 4,000 members. Because of the high profile that Teresa Billington-Grieg and other leaders of the WFL had in Scotland, many of those that they had introduced into the movement now became members of the WFL – including Scotswomen such as Maggie Moffat, Eunice Murray and Anna Munro. It is evident from the Watt Collection that Caroline Phillips was certainly tempted, as we shall see later.

In the week following the split in the WSPU Caroline Phillips was sent several letters and invitations from the WSPU leadership in London, presumably determined to keep Aberdeen loyal.

20 September 1907

Dear Miss Phillips

Miss Fraser informs me by telegram that my presence at the council tomorrow will not be necessary. As I have to be in London on Sunday only urgent necessity w[oul]d lead me to take the journey to Scotland.

I am however very willing to attend the next meeting of the Council & any meeting of the local Unions.

Unity is all that is required now to take us through the little difficulty in which we stand.

Till the 1st October & sincerely yours

Christabel Pankhurst

Despite her plea for 'Unity... to take us through the little difficulty', it is clear that Christabel Pankhurst was rattled by the split in the WSPU. It was a serious challenge to the authority of the Pankhursts and had a major impact on the style of leadership and shape of the organisation in the years to come.

On 21st September 1907 Caroline Phillips received further attention from WSPU headquarters with the arrival of a printed invitation requesting the pleasure of her company at a reception to celebrate the second anniversary of the imprisonment of Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney.

[Insert photograph of the invitation here]

An invitation to such an event in London would be flattering for Caroline Phillips, although there is no evidence that she attended. In fact, the inclusion of the card of admission in the Watt Collection implies that she did not. However, despite this apparent display of normality, there is further evidence that behind the scenes the WSPU leadership continued to be disturbed by the threat posed by the split in its ranks. On 24th September, the leader of the Scottish WSPU, Helen Fraser, sent a postcard to Caroline Phillips, addressing it to the offices at the *Daily Journal* on Broad Street.

Hope you are going on with meeting arrangements. Christabel is coming self & Mrs Pearce & Mrs Pethick Lawrence. We must have meetings as we don't wish to seem disturbed here.

My love

H. F.

Again, the emphasis here is on the continuance of normal activity at WSPU branches in the face of disruption. Note also the more affectionate terms used by Helen Fraser – she sends her love rather than her regards, indicating a closer, more personal, relationship than those that Caroline Phillips had with the WSPU leadership based in London.

This postcard concerns plans for several of the leading lights of the WSPU to travel around Scotland to boost the WSPU. Isabella Bream Pearce was a member of both the Glasgow WSPU and the Independent Labour Party and a contributor to the socialist newspaper *Forward* on the topic of women's suffrage. It was from her home that Teresa Billington-Greig had been married in February 1907. Despite their friendship, however, Mrs Pearce continued as a member of the WSPU, becoming one of the joint secretaries of its Scottish Council. One of the key themes that arises out of any study of the Scottish suffrage movement is that there were often links of close friendship between members of different organisations. In a small Scottish town there would only be a limited number of women with the resources and interest in the suffrage issue, and so it is not surprising that they would know each other.

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and her wealthy husband Frederick had been introduced to Emmeline Pankhurst by the socialist leader Keir Hardie in early 1907. They acquired the offices at Clement's Inn, London, that became the headquarters of the WSPU and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence became the WSPU treasurer and Frederick its business and legal adviser. Together, the husband-and-wife team established the WSPU newspaper *Votes for Women* in 1907. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence had already suffered a short period of imprisonment after being involved in a WSPU protest at the opening of Parliament in October 1906. However, she suffered a nervous breakdown in prison and had been released early. The Pethick-Lawrences stayed loyal to the Pankhursts during the WFL split and became an important part of the leadership, but were to be thrown out of the WSPU by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst in 1912 because they disagreed with the increasing violence of the militant campaign. In the autumn of 1907, however, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence was touring the UK to shore up support for the Pankhurst-led WSPU.

National Scottish Women's Suffrage Procession

The planned meeting in Aberdeen was not to happen until later in the year. In the meantime, the focus of every suffragist and suffragette in Scotland was on a National Scottish Women's Suffrage Procession and Demonstration taking place in Edinburgh on Saturday 5th October. Whilst organised by the WSPU, the aim was a show of unity and strength, with women from all sides of the movement and all over Scotland encouraged to take part. A few weeks before the event, Elizabeth Bell of the Edinburgh WSPU branch, the organisers of the event, wrote to Caroline Phillips about arrangements for the demonstration.

39 Comely Bank Place
Edinburgh
26 Sep 07

Dear Miss Phillips

I am sending you the name and address of the Bill-poster who is responsible for our large Posters throughout Aberdeen and if not asking too much I shall feel obliged if you could see that they are really posted. We are having these in all the different towns where we have Branches of the WSPU and those coming to take part in the Procession. The Bills are for the week from Sat or Mon until the day of Procession. I have also much pleasure in enclosing Platform Ticket. We are very busy getting the final arrangements completed Sub Committee meets on ground today.

Aberdeen Societies all rally under No. 2 [underlined] in ground. It was arranged that Edin No. 1 lead the Procession and the other towns follow alphabetically so that will save any confusion. Will you let me know what time your special train arrives in Edin? & which station.

Like us here I expect you have been busy in Aberdeen. I had an interesting letter from Mr Esson telling me how hard you were working.

I feel this event is going to give our cause in Scotland a great impetus, and am looking forward with much hope.

Mrs Sanderson is with us here doing splendid work and Miss Fraser is working hard in Glasgow.

With kindest regards and hoping to hear from you. Yours in the cause going well. Bell

This letter gives an impression of the enormous task facing Mrs Bell and her co-organisers as they dealt with competing civic and organisational demands from different towns and cities and different suffrage organisations. Also included in the archive is a flyer for the demonstration urging 'RISE UP, WOMEN! COME IN YOUR THOUSANDS!' and a printed invitation for Caroline Phillips to take a place on the platform at the meeting that would follow the procession.

As can be seen from this invitation, the organisers achieved their aim of including all factions of the suffrage movement in the day. Those on the platform included members of the WSPU, such as Christabel Pankhurst, and Charlotte Despard, a leader of the new WFL. In addition, Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair (a great-granddaughter of the actress Sarah Siddons), President of the constitutional Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage, presided over the meeting. *The Scotsman* reckoned that 1000 women assembled in King's Park that afternoon to process through the city. The procession included representatives from constitutional organisations as well as members of the WSPU and WFL.

From *The Scotman's* report we know that the Aberdeen WSPU contingent came after a flute band and before representatives from Dundee and Dunfermline. While some women walked, the majority were in carriages and char-a-bancs, which were festooned in banners. The distinguishing colours of the procession were white and red, with marchers wearing rosettes, sashes, badges and armbands in these colours and carrying bannerettes. The afternoon was sunny, but with a stiff breeze, which caused some problems for those ladies wearing fashionably large hats.

Temptation to join the WFL?

Under the show of unity, however, was the widening split between members of the WSPU and the WFL. There are hints in the archive that Caroline Phillips might have been tempted to join the rebels. It includes a copy of the Constitution of the WFL, on which someone (Caroline Phillips?) has marked a tick next to a clause stating 'That the National Executive Committee shall not initiate any new policy between one Conference and the next'. The archive also includes a flyer giving the winter syllabus for meetings of the Edinburgh branch of the WFL. Finally there is a handwritten letter from Amy Sanderson, written at Forfar on 30 September 1907.

Dear Miss Phillips

On Sat. after I had written you, I got a telegram from Mrs B. Greig in London, saying, "Go to Aberdeen if possible." On the strength of that I booked right through to Aberdeen from Edinburgh, breaking my journey here. Now comes your P.C., it's rather distracting, and I don't quite know what to do. Have you had any later word from her? I will await further instructions from you, please write to this address. If I do go, I will not leave here till 1-35 tomorrow. Hoping you will get this in time.

Yours in haste

Amy Sanderson

Amy Sanderson had joined the WSPU in Forfar in 1906 and had been imprisoned in Holloway after a disruption at the House of Commons in February 1907. She left to join the newly formed Women's Freedom League and became a member of its Executive Committee – she is listed in the Constitution leaflet in the Watt Collection, as is a Mrs Bell. This is potentially the same Mrs Bell that organised the Grand Procession and Demonstration – we know that she thought Amy Sanderson was doing 'splendid work' when they co-operated to organise the Demonstration. With this letter of 30th September we have evidence that Teresa Billington-Greig had dispatched Amy Sanderson to Aberdeen for some purpose – possibly to persuade Caroline Phillips and other members of the WSPU branch there to join the WFL? Caroline Phillips had evidently responded with a postcard with 'distracting' news, but we have no idea what it might have said. What we do know is that Caroline Phillips did not join the Women's Freedom League. However, despite her loyalty, her relationship with the leaders of the WSPU was about to get very shaky.

Disagreeing with official policy

In November 1907 Caroline Phillips received another letter from Christabel Pankhurst, typed on the new NWSPU headed notepaper.

18 November 1907

Dear Miss Phillips

Thank you for your letter. We had a very successful demonstration at Nuneaton on Saturday.

I suppose you will enquire at once the available date for the Music Hall after Christmas. On hearing from you I will approach Mr Zangwill.

Mrs Mayo not long ago said she would leave the Union – it is a great pity she did not keep her word. She seems to be giving you a great deal of trouble.

I do not quite know when the Hull election will be, but as soon as it is over Mrs Pankhurst will be free to go to Scotland. We must have the drawing room meeting.

Mr Murray is ill at present, so he has not been able to pay further attention to the matter of the deputation.

I hope you will retain the Secretaryship. I think you will get on all right in a very short while.

Sincerely yours

C. H. Pankhurst

Israel Zangwill was a Jewish novelist and strong supporter of both Zionism and women's suffrage. He had joined the Men's League for Women's Suffrage in April 1907 and was a frequent speaker at WSPU events. Evidently there was some hope that he would travel to Aberdeen to speak at the Music Hall after Christmas.

Christabel's letter implies that there had been some trouble amongst members of the WSPU branch in Aberdeen and that Caroline Phillips' role as secretary was under threat. At this stage she obviously still retained the support of the London leadership, which would have been crucial, but there is also a hint that the trouble was led by Isabella Fyvie Mayo.

The next item in the archive is a draft letter from Caroline Phillips to the correspondence columns of the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* concerning the Women's Liberal Association. Since Caroline Phillips was employed as a journalist at the newspaper, it is interesting to see that she still used its correspondence columns in her role as the honorary secretary of the WSPU. The *Journal's* competitor in Aberdeen – the *Aberdeen Free Press* – was actually the more liberal newspaper and published more positive stories about women's suffrage in comparison to the conservative *Journal*. However, Caroline Phillips obviously felt brand loyalty to the *Journal*.

Sir – I am very glad to learn from the columns of yr paper that the Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association are anxious to make plain to Mr Asquith that they have intense interest in the subject of Women's Enfranchisement. We are further informed that any effort to get an audience with Mr

Asquith w[oul]d be fruitless, which is tantamount to an admission that nothing short of something in the nature of physical force will do job. They are to content themselves with the time honoured process [repeated ad nauseam crossed out] of 'forwarding a communication' which we are assured will be more emphatic than usual (one would fain hope (?) they have now reached the [screaming?] stage on the journey) Long experience might have taught them that communications of the sort have out lived their usefulness & only go to swell the scrap heap of wasted effusions & blighted hopes. It seems hard to believe that a body of intelligent & experienced politicians like the Abdn W L Assn are not deliberately shutting their eyes to the facts of historical experience which all goes to prove that a combination of moral & physical power is required to bring about political reform of this kind. The one without the other in dealing with Govts is a forlorn hope.

[Crossed out – To expect an earnest & open minded woman to listen to a politician like Asquith speaking about democracy & liberty, which she is denied, without making a relevant interjection.

It is surely something to be ashamed of that a relevant interjection of disapproval from a woman should be]

A few men are beginning to realise the cowardice and uselessness of ejecting & roughly handling a woman for making a relevant interjection at a Minister's meeting; especially when the subject of his discussion is about liberty & democracy, both of which blessings are forcibly denied to her. A proper sense of perspective should make men & women both see that the so-called disorderly occurrences are taken to much from the Mrs Grundy point of view & the fact is persistently ignored [crossed out by the vast majority of people] that these are the visible manifestations of a great revolutionary force in the political relations of both sexes.

Admonition & advice from our good Liberal friends we have had enough & to spare. We ask their assistance – which is infinitely more valuable to us. We ask them no more what they have to say but what they mean to do to help us. They need not fear for their party. Long ere we women all acting on strike principles could seriously damage it – the Liberal Party would cave in [crossed out on the subject] to our demands.

Caroline Phillips' letter was stimulated by an exciting event that was scheduled to happen in Aberdeen in early December – a planned visit to the city by the Chancellor of Exchequer Asquith to address a meeting of the local Liberal party at the Music Hall. The Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association was being pushed by local suffrage campaigners to use this opportunity to raise the question of women's suffrage with the notoriously anti-suffrage politician. However, the most they would promise to do was to send a 'communication' raising the subject. Hence Caroline Phillips' scornful letter upbraiding the Liberal ladies for their refusal to take stronger action. The letter also touched on a fear that, in an attempt to shield Asquith and others from militant action, no women at all would be allowed into the Music Hall to hear him speak – which would obviously affect the Liberal ladies as well as the suffragettes.

Response to the letter from Phillips' own branch President was very positive. Lady Ramsay sent the following letter immediately on reading the version published in the *Journal*.

Nov 22 1907

Dear Miss Phillips

Yr letter in the Journal is capital – the very thing. I wonder if it is really intended to exclude women from Asquith's meeting. If so, your proposal seems the proper thing. We had better wait & see if they will really shut the women out. It would one to get up a big meeting after all – even on the very night Mr Asquith is to be here – make a programme that would attract the people if only from curiosity!

I gave your address today to a man – a student – who wants literature on the subject of women's suffrage. He is to take part in a debate & is to take the side in favour of it. I did not know Mrs Bryant's add. I think it would be a good thing if you had some literature by you anyhow.....

Yrs very truly

A M Ramsay

In this letter Lady Ramsay referred to Caroline Phillips' 'proposal' to solve the problem of the exclusion of women from Asquith's meeting. More on that below! The letter also makes it clear that Agnes Ramsay was acting as a conduit between the students on campus at Aberdeen University, where she lived and her husband worked, and the suffragettes; and that the suffrage issue was attracting the attention of male as well as female students.

Another draft letter, written by Caroline Phillips to the honorary secretary of the Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association, Annie Allan, casts light on her 'proposal' to solve the problem:

28th Nov 1907

Dear Mrs Allan

Mr Asquith has been dealt with so very effectively by the WSPU in various centres of political activity that our Aberdeen WSPU are in the mind to leave him severely alone. Lady Ramsay expressed our sentiments in such plain terms the other evening we feel we have contributed a sufficient share towards the disillusioning process so far as he is concerned. Other work we have on hand is moreover very fully occupying our attention.

There is some talk of women being excluded from Asquith's meeting in case of suffragette 'outbreaks'. I am not speaking with complete authority, but I think that we as a Union will readily agree to keep away altogether, if other women are to be thus punished on our account. Your Liberal leaders many of them have proposed friendliness & sympathy towards woman suffrage. Why then do they so persistently ignore the subject in their speeches? Having pledged themselves to it when do they not meet the question in their public utterances so that the country may be educated as to its significance?

Apart from the injustice - according to Liberal principles – of withholding the vote from women, it is surely the duty of Liberal statesmen to initiate reform & go forward to meet its own ideals. Really great statesmen have always done so. Recent events have most plainly shown it to be the duty of the Liberal women to indicate in no uncertain terms that they desire the subject to be dealt with on Liberal platforms. I would therefore urge you to send a requisition to that effect to Mr Asquith & in a way he could with difficulty ignore. If you do this in Aberdeen you will have done well for the movement. There may be developments between now ... that may compel us to take other decided action, but meanwhile I have indicated our humour towards Mr Asquith & on my own responsibility.

Truly you will do this at least for the cause.

With best wishes for success.

I am yours sincerely

C. A. P.

This letter demonstrates a much more co-operative approach to the problem than the letter drafted for the *Journal*! Caroline Phillips is suggesting to Mrs Allan that, in order to achieve entrance to the Asquith meeting for women, the Aberdeen WSPU will guarantee to leave him alone. She evidently had the support of Lady Ramsay for this suggestion. Phillips also hints that the Aberdeen branch is too busy with other campaigning to undertake militant action during Asquith's visit.

Caroline Phillips did, however, admit 'I am not speaking with complete authority' and warns that 'There may be developments between now ... that may compel us to take other decided action'. In other words, the Aberdeen plan might not meet with complete approval from headquarters.

The Aberdeen branch leadership was quickly called on to explain themselves. Another draft letter in the archive, this time to Lady Ramsay, is dated 6th December. (It should be noted that both draft letters are written on *Aberdeen Journal* headed notepaper – evidently Caroline Phillips was used to drafting up WSPU-related correspondence on the stationery of her employer!) The draft is a response to criticism by a Mrs Macdonald of the decision to leave Asquith alone. There was a Mrs Macdonald who was a member of the Aberdeen branch – Krista Cowman's book on the paid organisers of the WSPU reports that Mrs Macdonald of Aberdeen put her entire house at the disposal of the WSPU for two years, so she was obviously a keen supporter of the movement. The criticism Lady Ramsay and Caroline Phillips clearly received again suggests that the Aberdeen branch was not united – as hinted by Christabel Pankhurst's earlier letter mentioning Mrs Mayo. Alternatively, given that the letter argues that 'In London, at a distance, these... local matters cannot be appreciated', this might imply that the recipient of the letter was based at WSPU headquarters in London rather than being a local woman.

6.12.07

Dear Lady Ramsay

I think you can ... reply to Mrs Macdonald by giving her a practical illustration or rather an instance of what we mean. We agree with the efficacy of Mrs Pankhurst's tactics and we should, acting completely under her instructions, likely be asked to go to Mr Asquith's meeting & make it impossible for him to speak – a perfectly justifiable proceeding. On the other hand we prefer & we believe that any strong action on our part w[ould]d consequently be a wanton insult to Mr Murray & might make it difficult for him to help us as openly in the future. We are prepared to take extreme measures like the others but we must, as the independent Aberdeen WSPU, be the judges as to when & where that action is politic. We give Mr Murray in return for his wholehearted support, & because we believe him to be our sincere friend & helper, a unique prestige in being able to say that his influence alone secured for Asquith an uninterrupted hearing so far as we are concerned, & that had he come under other auspices he w[oul]d have had to take his chances, here as elsewhere. We remember that Mr Murray stood alone on our platform when every other man invited declined to come, when only 5 out of 25 had the courtesy to even acknowledge the invitation!

In London, at a distance, these ... local matters cannot be appreciated, but they are often the things that matter a great deal. This does not affect generally our enthusiastic following of Mrs Pankhurst's policy, nor our devotion to her leadership.

With kind regards

Yours very sincerely

Caroline A. I. Phillips

Whoever the recipient of the letter was, the main argument here was one for freedom of decision-making for individual branches – a similar argument to the one presented by the break-away WFL. Caroline Phillips also argues that the branch leadership does not wish to be rude to the local MP Mr Murray, who had been so supportive of their cause. She attempts to soften her defiance by praising Mrs Pankhurst and offering assurance of the Aberdeen branch's support of militant tactics, but the overall claim is one of independence.

The response to such a statement was a handwritten letter from Emmeline Pankhurst herself.

10 Dec 1907

Dear Miss Phillips

I expect to be in Aberdeen on Thursday the 12th. I leave Kings X at 10 a.m. arriving Aberdeen 10.5 p.m. As of course you know, Mrs Jameson is giving a drawing-room meeting on the 17th. It appears to me that it would be well for me to meet our members first. I wrote Miss Fraser asking her to let you know of my coming but perhaps it is as well to write also. I don't know whether you can make arrangements for me to stay with friends. If not perhaps you will take a room for me at the hotel. I have written Mrs Jameson today telling her that I shall come on the 12th & that probably you will call upon her to talk matters over.

There are a great many things I want to discuss with you when I come.

Please give my kindest regards to Mr & Mrs Webster & accept the same yourself.

Sincerely yours

E Pankhurst

Whilst sending her kind regards, the sentence 'There are a great many things I want to discuss with you when I come' might have sent a shiver of anticipation through Caroline Phillips.

Mrs Pankhurst was in Aberdeen for a week, and some indication of her activities there is given by a scrappy handwritten note in the Watt Collection of what appears to be a list of branch events during that week.

Since the meeting on Nov 13 we have had a meeting for Miss H. Fraser.

Dec 12 Mrs Pankhurst paid a visit to Aberdeen.

Dec 16 Public meeting.

Dec 17 Drawing room meeting

Ditto 18 Ditto

Dec 19 L'affaire Asquith

Dec 20 Send off to Mrs Pankhurst

With exception of drawing-room meetings our doings are public property, & exceptionally full attention was paid to them by the press especially the F[ree] P[ress] Aberdeen

'L'affaire Asquith' of course refers to the Liberal party meeting at the Music Hall on the evening of 19th December. Women had, after all, been allowed into the meeting, and there was apparently an agreement that the leader of the Aberdeen WLA, Mrs Black, would be allowed to pose a question on the subject of women's enfranchisement to Mr Asquith. However, this question was never asked, partially perhaps because of the disruption that occurred – led not by Mrs Pankhurst but by Rev Alexander Webster.

The events were graphically described by an irate correspondent, describing herself as a Woman Liberal, to the *Journal* a few days later.

23 December 1907

The Procedure at the Liberal Meeting

Will you allow me space, as a Woman Liberal, to give my impression re the Webster episode on Thursday night?

While protesting against Mr Webster's evident intention of introducing a hostile element into the proceedings, I was deeply grieved to see the unseemly struggle in the orchestra, particularly as the individual concerned was an old man, and, had I been near, I should at once have gone to his assistance. I must confess, however, that, while standing on Union Street after the meeting, this kindly feelings received rather a rude shock, when who should pass, looking quite trim, alert and happy, but our friend Mr Webster, hand in glove with the Suffragists. Again, when passing Broad Street, a little later, there was he laying off with great gusto to his female admirers. 'This lets the cat out of the bag', thought I derisively.

Had Mr Webster been entirely ignored, there would have been very little disturbance, because, for one thing, his words would not have been heard. Realising this himself was no doubt the reason for the extreme vigour he inserted into the waving to and fro of his right hand, which was certainly more effective than his poor thin voice. It was perfectly obvious to any observant eye that the bulk of the audience really enjoyed the Suffragist affair – and assuredly the ladies (?) themselves did. Their conduct, I am sorry to say, was by no means lady-like; but these tactics seem to pay, thanks to the usual blundering stupidity of the sterner sex. Had they been quietly allowed to have their say, Mrs Pankhurst would have left the city rather less jubilant, for really there was little in it all.

Frankly speaking, I think a great deal of undeserved sympathy is being wasted over Mr Webster and the Suffragists – and they know it. The Press, I need hardly say, have greatly magnified the absurd affair. Men again! Mr Webster and the Suffragists cunningly set a trap, and the chairman, audience and Press have been neatly caught.

Self-Respect

Other critics of the disruption of the meeting wrote to the press from the East Aberdeenshire WLA, protesting at the 'tactics of these southern suffragists who think it is their duty... to come and fight our cause for us.' However, not all Liberal women reacted in the same way. 'Would-be Elector' wrote to the *Free Press* to state that, although she was a Liberal, 'I cordially agree with Miss Philips, the hon secretary of the WSPU, that the time has come when every woman who really wishes the vote ought to put the question of woman suffrage before attachment to any political party.' Even more revealingly, a 'Member of the Aberdeen WLA' wrote '... it seems the height of folly to expect the vote from any party in gratitude for services rendered. If women who are interested in politics had refused long ago to take only an oblique part in them, the intervention of the militant suffragists would probably have been unnecessary. As it is, however, women owe a debt of gratitude not of reproach to their more demonstrative sisters even if their tactics have not always been of the wisest.' An article in the *Dundee Courier* of 21 December also suggested that the Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association now agreed with the WSPU's militant tactics.

SUFFRAGETTES AT ABERDEEN.

REMARKABLE STATION SCENE

BASKET OF ORCHIDS FOR MRS PANKHURST.

Mrs Pankhurst, who left Aberdeen yesterday forenoon, was the centre of a remarkable demonstration at the Joint Passenger Railway Station. She was presented with a magnificent basket of orchids by Lady Ramsay, and the large crowd of ladies on the platform gave her a great ovation.

Before the train departed, Mrs Pankhurst declared that Thursday night's meeting at Aberdeen would be an historic one in the movement. It was the first time that at a Liberal meeting a man, speaking on behalf of women in a perfectly constitutional way, had been assaulted by the organisers of the meeting. The Rev. Mr Webster, who sought to move the rider to the resolution proposed at the meeting, was yesterday stated to be confined to bed as the result the injuries received in the struggle with the stewards on the platform.

A spirit of revolt is now manifested by the Aberdeen Women Liberals, who declare that after the treatment accorded them, tactics similar to those adopted by the suffragettes are the only course that can be effectively followed.

This apparent change of attitude amongst the members of the Aberdeen Women Liberal Association is also borne out by a letter in the Watt Collection from Mrs Black to Caroline Phillips. In the letter, Mrs Black refers to some confusion that arose during the Music Hall meeting around the question of whether she would be allowed to raise a question about women's suffrage. There appears to have been suspicion amongst some of the Liberal ladies that Caroline Phillips had 'telegraphed' this news to others in the Hall – presumably Mrs Pankhurst and Rev Webster – possibly starting off the disruption. Nonetheless, Mrs Black was evidently happy with the results of the affair, and saw herself as 'firing the first shot for the Women's Liberal Associations'.

Dear Miss Phillips

It is so exceedingly good of you to send me a private note instead of contradicting me in public – thank you so much. I saw you wave your hand to someone in the hall, just after I was told that Mr Asquith would answer, & those sitting near me as well as myself believed you were “telegraphing” the news!! The interviewer to whom I mentioned this in spite of the fact that it was only my belief says it was so.

We can well afford to let these little differences sink, we have all scored a victory. If the Chairman had introduced me as Common Courtesy demanded, that letter would never have appeared. I do not regret it now. I shall feel after that that I have had the honour of firing the first shot for the Women’s Liberal Associations.

The treatment Mr Webster received puts in the shade entirely anything I endured.

Again thanking you and wishing you the compliments of the season.

I am very sincerely yours

B V Black

Meanwhile, Christabel Pankhurst wrote again to Caroline Phillips praising the ‘Aberdeen affair’ and very pleased about the continuing correspondence in the newspapers on the subject.

Once Christmas and New Year was over, Caroline Phillips received two letters in relation to the promised visit from Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence to Aberdeen. The first suggested that she might arrive in the city in either January or February 1908 and undertake a series of meetings, social gatherings and meetings with various committees. The second letter is dated 6th January 1908:

Dear Miss Phillips

So many thanks for your kind letter. I shall be looking forward to my visit to Aberdeen and to other places in Scotland.

I am delighted to accept Mr Webster’s most kind offer to give me his pulpit on Sunday 26th of January. I should like to speak at the evening service. What a splendid champion for righteousness and justice he is. I think he played a most manly part at the meeting the other day. Shall be very glad to hear from you again about arrangements.

Very Cordial Greeting.

Yours sincerely

Emmeline Pethick Lawrence

Rev Webster was evidently recovered from the fight at the Music Hall – his ‘most manly’ actions, as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence described them, and was now offering the opportunity for Mrs Pethick-Lawrence to address his congregation from the pulpit when she was in Aberdeen in February.

Before this visit, however, news came that Christabel Pankhurst planned to be in Aberdeen. A letter in the archive to Lady Ramsay reveals that she would arrive on 21st January. Her visit was connected to the fact that Mr Asquith was standing as a candidate for the position of rector of Aberdeen

University. The main role of the rector was to support and represent the students of the university, which of course included women students, who had a vote in this case. Both the WSPU and NUWSS, plus at least some of the Women's Liberal Association, were therefore keen to campaign against Asquith's election.

Jan. 11th 1908

Dear Lady Ramsay

After telegraphing to you this morning I received a marked copy of the Aberdeen Free Press. In addition to the very excellent leading article I see a reference to Mr Asquith's candidature and a statement to the effect that the women students are likely to vote against him, and I do hope that this is the case because it would be one more way of bringing pressure to bear upon him. This election seems to afford a splendid opening for us. I suppose you know that I am to be in Aberdeen on the 21st and 22nd of this month. I hope that I shall have the pleasure of meeting you and your daughter. Will it be possible for me to get into touch with the woman students?

Mr Murray, MP, is in charge of all the arrangements in connection with my visit and when I am writing to him I shall speak of the matter to him also.

With kind regards

Sincerely yours

Christabel Pankhurst

Despite the disruption of the Music Hall meeting, which Caroline Phillips had feared would alienate James Murray, Christabel's letter demonstrates that he was still on the side of the suffragettes. Indeed, it states that he is the chief organiser of Christabel's visit, which given his status as MP and also his relationship with Mr Asquith as one of the leaders of his party, is interesting!

The suggestion that James Murray was organising Christabel's visit is borne out by a letter from Mrs Black of the WLA to Lady Ramsay. The letter contains a courteous invitation for Lady Ramsay to address some of the 'ardent reformers' of the WLA at Mrs Black's home on the subject of women's suffrage, and particularly the campaign against Mr Asquith. Mrs Black's letter refers to James Murray's request that the WLA cooperate with the WSPU. Whilst they could do nothing officially, she felt that some individual members would be happy to be involved in the upcoming meeting at which Christabel would speak. There is also a hint that WLA members were more looking forward to hearing Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence than Christabel Pankhurst.

65 Forest Avenue, Aberdeen

11th Jan 1908

Dear Lady Ramsay

Your letter of the 9th inst reached me only last night. I have consulted Mrs Allan about the subject and agree that the Liberal Women can do nothing officially in the way of co-operating with the members of the WSPU it would of course be directly opposed to our Constitution. We are however not bound as individuals, and I shall be delighted to have a talk with you, say on Tuesday first the 14th inst at or about 11 a.m. It is a long way for you to come, and I shall invite a few of the more ardent reformers in our committee to meet you here.

Mannofield Car is nearest to us.

At a Com meeting of the WLA convened on Wednesday last to consider a request by Mr Murray MP for our co-operation [as a WLA crossed out] in a meeting at which Miss Pankhurst is to speak, it was unanimously agreed that we could not as an association work for it – but that individual members were at liberty to do so. I presume Mrs Pethick Lawrence comes for the same evening?

I am gratified to observe the sensible stand taken by the lady students re Mr Asquith's nomination. Perhaps this will do something to convince him that women do want the vote, especially so, if through their stand he should be defeated.

With kind regards I am very sincerely yours

B V Black

An undated letter from Lady Ramsay in the archive evidently dates from this time, referring to both Christabel Pankhurst's meeting and the Rectorial election.

Sunday

Dear Miss Phillips

The Glasgow meeting was very successful. I'll tell you more when we meet.

I enclose replies from Mrs Black and Mrs Williams.

Mrs Milne BWTA [British Women's Temperance Association] is to preside at Miss Pankhurst's meeting and Mrs Glegg of the Primrose League is to be there. Isn't Mr Murray doing well for us? I want to try & get as many of the women students as possible to come to the meeting.

I enclose also a note from Miss Pankhurst. Of course no outsider can interfere with the Rectorial election – not even professors have a say in the matter. Besides the election is not till ...

But we can try to work with the women students before then.

In haste with love

Yours sincerely

AM Ramsay

Perhaps the plans to continue the harassment of Mr Asquith were the last straw for Caroline Phillips' employer. On 18th January he wrote to her warning that her continued association with the WSPU might jeopardise her position at the *Journal*.

Dear Miss Phillips

You are identifying yourself far too closely with W S movement, considering the position you hold here.

I hear lots of protests, both inside & outside the office.

I trust you will give me the assurance before Friday that henceforth you will mind your own affairs, otherwise I will have to refer the matter to the Board.

Yours faithfully

Up until January 1908, the editor seems to have been happy to allow Caroline Phillips to both associate herself with the WSPU and indeed to conduct WSPU business using the *Journal's* office as her address. We have seen her continued use of *Journal* notepaper to draft letters. One of the reasons for this may have been the *Journal's* Conservative leanings. Since the WSPU were determined to harass Liberal ministers such as Mr Asquith and disrupt Liberal party meetings, the *Journal* could merely report the fun – thus selling newspapers – and also enjoy the spectacle of the Liberal Party put on the back foot. However, as the WSPU increased its militant action, it can be presumed that the owners and editor of the newspaper became more concerned about their connections to such notorious enterprises and warned Caroline Phillips to be careful in her interactions with the suffragettes.

There is also evidence that Caroline Phillips' involvement with the WSPU was impacting on her ability to do her job. An undated draft in the Watt Collection is a complaint that she has not been allowed into a Liberal party meeting as a reporter.

Sir

Things have come to a pretty pass at The Aberdeen Liberal Association when a chief reporter is declined a press ticket for one of his own staff when she happens to be a woman and a suffragist. This is what has happened in my case and I am prevented from exercising my duties as a journalist by these coercive means.

The opponents of the Liberal party may well say that Liberalism is dead. The chief reporter ... absolute silence on my part while at the press table but was informed that altho I represented all the paper until this day I should be refused admittance.

Despite these problems and her editor's warning, however, there is no evidence in the Watt Collection that Caroline Phillips ceased or even decreased her involvement with the WSPU, or that she suffered any penalties for this at the *Journal*.

Caroline Phillips received another affectionate letter from Helen Fraser later in January reporting on her exploits with the Scottish WSPU further south. Again, the support of James Murray for the WSPU cause is emphasised – he 'wants to make Aberdeen a centre'. His support of woman's suffrage is contrasted favourably to that of the influential Scottish Liberal Lord Haldane, who was Secretary of State for War and also a supporter of women's suffrage.

Cockburn Buildings
141 Bath Street Glasgow
28 January 1908

Dear Miss Phillips

I have been intending to write for some time but have had so very little time. The Rutherglen meeting was quite exciting – I succeeded in raising an amendment and outside we had a splendid open-air meeting. We are going back on 29th to hold a meeting there which I hope will be successful.

I wish we could interest the Liberal women really – but Haldane's address to them was a queer mixture – and they ought to have resented it.

I hope you have a very successful meeting on Wed afternoon and that it helps to make the students vote against Asquith. Mr Murray is going to be a splendid help to you – it is so good to have him. Lady Ramsay tells me he wants to make Aberdeen a centre.

Mrs Pethick Lawrence's exact time of coming I do not know yet, but hope to hear soon.

We are getting on well here and Miss Mary Phillips and I had a good campaign in East Fife last week – some of the meetings being splendid.

My love & shall be glad to hear how you get on.

Yours Helen Fraser

Mary Phillips was no relation to Caroline Phillips. From Glasgow, she had worked for a short time for the constitutional Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage as a paid organiser and then organising secretary but had resigned in March 1907 to join the WSPU. She worked for the WSPU on a number of campaigns in the area. Mary Phillips was another Socialist who contributed regularly to *Forward*. A few months after her campaigning with Helen Fraser in Scotland, Mary Phillips took part in several raids on Parliament that resulted in a six-week and then a three-month prison sentence. On her release from prison in September 1908 she was greeted by a number of WSPU members all dressed in tartan and accompanied by pipers.

A contentious meeting

Christabel Pankhurst's meeting in Aberdeen was held on 22 January 1908, and the women sitting on the platform included both Mrs Black and Mrs Allan of the WLA plus James Murray's wife, Lady Ramsay and Mrs Milne of the British Women's Temperance Association. There was an immediate backlash in the correspondence columns of the Aberdeen newspapers against women associated with the Liberal party appearing publically to support the WSPU. The majority of the letters in the newspapers in particular criticising Mrs Black and Mrs Allan for their appearance on the platform were signed by pen-names such as 'A Woman Liberal' and 'A Reasonable Suffragist Aberdeen'. One critic, calling themselves 'Liberalis' obviously prompted Caroline Phillips to write to Annie Allan asking her if she knew who this was. Mrs Allan's response was testy.

Dear Miss Phillips

Your note of yesterday to hand. I have not the faintest idea who 'Liberalis' is, nor do I care & I think it is entirely a matter for yourself to decide whether you answer it or not.

Personally & speaking frankly, I do not consider the letter far from the mark. I have no hesitation in saying I do not think the WSPU "played the game" in connection with "The Suffrage Demonstration". Mrs Webster, Mrs Bryant & many others had no right on the platform. They were not invited by Mr Duncan and no one else should have gone. I object strongly to Miss Pankhurst taking up the whole hour in a defence of the tactics pursued we went to hear and educative address on Suffrage not to hear the WSPU extolled all the time. It was not courteous. We ought to have had Mrs Pethick Lawrence. She would convert where Miss Pankhurst only irritates.

My strongest objection of all was to the selling of your literature, if I had noticed that stall before the meeting (but I do not think it was there then) I should not have fulfilled my promise and gone on

that platform. It was not a WSPU meeting, therefore I considered it distinctly dishonourable to have erected it & sold your "Votes for Women" etc.

I have not taken the stand I have in order to join the WSPU, but I have no objection to my reasons being known.

I have done it firstly because I will not allow any Committee under the sun to curtail my personal liberty, or call me to account for any action I may see fit to take as a private individual.

Secondly – because I put principle before party, & I realise that the Liberal women have to 'show this Liberal Government that they are in dead earnest over this great question.

With kind regard

Yrs sincerely

Annie F Allan

Why have you marked your letter private?

Annie Allan evidently felt that the WSPU had betrayed the trust that she and Mrs Black had placed in them by making the event a propaganda piece for the suffragettes rather than a meeting on the wider discussion of votes for women. The appearance of Mrs Webster, the wife of the socialist Rev Alexander Webster, on the platform seems to have been particularly upsetting, and Christabel's address compared poorly to the apparently more satisfactory Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence.

The Watt Collection contains a rough draft of Caroline Phillips' reply to Annie Allan, which was not particularly sympathetic to her complaints.

38 Carden Place, Aberdeen 6th February 1908

Dear Mrs Allan

If the instances you mention are grievances from the W.L.A. point of view, then my action in distributing 300 tickets in the meeting and in the vestibule for Mrs. Pethick Lawrence's meeting must certainly top the list of indictments against the W.S.P.U. Both Mrs Black and yourself, and Mrs. Glegg also, have heard Christabel Pankhurst speak at least once; you could not therefore pretend to be ignorant that her speeches are political above all else. She judged very rightly, in the opinion of most people that this particular audience was a well-informed one, and chiefly composed of women whose 'education' on Women's Suffrage was pretty well completed: therefore her speaking to the best and not the least informed of her audience will not sustain the accusation of discourtesy.

My last letter to you was written very hastily; and so far as I remember it was only the personal allusion to Mrs. Glegg that made me mark it private, otherwise I think it is not private, if you like to consider it so.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

Caroline A. I. Phillips

The success of its meetings, and the press coverage they provoked, evidently encouraged the Aberdeen WSPU to bigger and better events. A draft letter from Caroline Phillips to James Murray demonstrates the growing ambitions of the branch. Caroline Phillips and Lady Ramsay dreamed of a 'brilliant "dressy" affair' with 'real shine', potentially to be held in the Art Gallery, of which James Murray was of course Chairman. It is interesting that this WSPU branch was starting to use the arrangements of the constitutional societies, such as 'at home' meetings, despite the fact that Caroline Phillips dismissed those held by the 'older' organisations as 'dry, dreary affair[s]'.

Dear Mr Murray

I sent you a 'Free Press' today containing an account of our first 'At Home'. The affair was purely experimental and turned out a most successful, useful (because I got 23 new members, one cannot manage this in a big public meeting) and really bright & pleasant meeting. Through a variety of circumstances our programme was a 'scratch' one – which had to be made up practically after our guests arrived – a comparatively easy task when we have so many bright young accomplished people among our members. The remarkable feature of the meeting was that the question of Women's Suffrage was never lost sight of for a moment. This social gathering – votes & politics are lively interesting subjects – not the dry dreary affair that some of the older women political organisations make them. The spirit & success of last night's meeting only shows us how much better we can do in this way in the future.

Your insistence on the efficacy of the social side is indisputable. I daresay you know that Mrs Pankhurst is to be in Scotland speaking in Aberdeen on the 1st April, Edinburgh on the 2nd, & Glasgow on the 3rd.

We are inclined to think that an afternoon public 'meeting' would be best and that we should arrange a semi-social gathering for the evening of the same day. We would like to make the last named a brilliant 'dressy' affair, what Lady Ramsay calls a 'real shine'. I have promises already of the very best musical talent the town affords including Herr Pakoring (violin) & Herr Lasek (tenor). Are we too ambitious in aspiring to hold this gathering in the Art Gallery? The desire for such beautiful surroundings tempts me to ask you this question [crossed out – but it is perhaps ridiculous]

With best wishes [kind wishes crossed out]

I am

Yours sincerely

Caroline A. I. Phillips [Crossed out]

Turmoil and replacements

The Aberdeen WSPU branch appeared to be riding high, with flattering attention from key members of the national leadership; well-attended events, controversial enough to achieve long-running coverage in the local newspapers; and the support of the local MP. However, for Caroline Phillips, this was probably the high-point of her association with the WSPU. The first indication of the trouble to come is a letter from Helen Fraser in August 1908.

Nithsdale
Langside
Glasgow
20.8.08

My dear

I have thought of you often lately but have been away 'caravanning' for the Cause – and it seems utterly impossible to get letters written when one is leading that simple but strenuous life. The National Union of W.S.S. asked me if I would go and help so I went and we had splendid meetings beginning at Selkirk and going right down to Tynemouth. That is Mrs Fawcett's society and I have promised to work for them for some time later on – I am glad to get working for suffrage, of course – and am happy doing so.

I had a very worrying time before I resigned and felt very tired and ill when I did. I still could do with more rest but feel much better and as if I saw things clearer. It doesn't seem true, even yet, that I am no longer connected with you all – I feel sure somehow we shall still work together for Suffrage. How are you? I hope you are well and have you had a holiday. Una Dugdale has been asking me if I can come up for Sept. 2nd (she thinks of having a meeting) and I have written and said "Yes". If I come I shall see you, and have a talk, I hope. Una tells me she thinks of having a stall too and is going to ask Lady Ramsay to preside. That would be a splendid idea, I think. Have you heard about it?

We seem still to have a long fight in front of us – but it does good all the time so as we feel inclined to be. I wish one could preach the spiritual and moral side more but it will come, I know – and then we shall have a really great movement. I hear very little of W.S.P.U. just now – beyond the news in "Votes for Women". Annie told me how very kind Mr Webster and you all were to her. She is in Elgin now and seems to be getting on well.

My love to you and kindest regards to Mr and Mrs Webster.

Ever yours

Helen Fraser

Despite the fact that it had been Teresa Billington-Greig who first recruited Helen Fraser to the suffragette cause, she had remained loyal to the Pankhursts and stayed with the WSPU after the WFL split. Helen Fraser had become the organiser of the Scottish Federation of WSPU branches, but was seen as a threat to the leadership because of her desire to work independently of headquarters and her disapproval of the growing militant actions of the movement, such as window-breaking. She was asked to resign in the summer of 1908. As she explained in the letter to Caroline Phillips, Fraser was then approached by the constitutional NUWSS and asked to work as an organiser for them. She then

spent the summer travelling in one of the caravans loaned to suffrage societies by supporters to speak at open-air meetings in holiday spots along the Scottish and north English coasts.

It is clear from the letter that her expulsion from the WSPU had greatly affected Helen Fraser. Her tone is loving towards Caroline Phillips and Mr and Mrs Webster, but she also betrays the fact that she is still in contact with other members of the WSPU. The 'Annie' mentioned is presumably Annie Kenney, one of the earliest members of the organisation and still a keen supporter of the Pankhursts. Una Dugdale was a young member of an upper-class family living at Gordon Lodge in Aboyne. She had attended her first WSPU meeting to hear Emmeline Pankhurst speak when she was in London for 'the season' and had been a stalwart supporter ever since, accompanying Mrs Pankhurst on several tours of Scotland. In January 1912 she caused scandal by her refusal to include the promise to 'obey' in her marriage ceremony to Victor Duval, the founder of the Men's Political Union for Women's Enfranchisement. The fact that such key members of the WSPU were still in contact with Helen Fraser – indeed were inviting her to contribute to meetings – demonstrates again the inter-connectedness between the different suffrage associations in Scotland and the ties of friendship that kept members of different organisations close.

Growing distrust

The next few letters in the archive demonstrate a growing distance between the Pankhursts and Caroline Phillips. In early September, Christabel turned down the offer of a caravan since it was – in her estimation – too late in the season to be of much use. The caravan had been offered by Louisa Innes Lumsden, a highly educated woman who had been the first warden of a women's hall of residence at a Scottish university and was also the ex-principal of a girls' school. On her retirement to Aberdeen, Lumsden had become a member of several school boards and was also a member of the constitutional suffragist society in Aberdeen. Her caravan had been used by a variety of NUWSS members for campaigning purposes during the summer months – it was possibly the caravan used earlier in the summer by Helen Fraser. However, Christabel saw no use for it at present.

September 12th 1908

Dear Miss Phillips

I think it is now too late in the season to use the van which Miss Lumsden so kindly offers. Do you think it will be possible for her to place it at our disposal next year? I am writing direct to her, as you suggest.

I cannot tell you definitely today about the 16th of October for the Aberdeen meeting, but you shall hear from me again as soon as possible.

Please write to me whenever you hear of a Cabinet Minister's meeting in Scotland, as we do not mean to let them escape us by going there.

Very sincerely yours

pp. Christabel Pankhurst L.B.

A few days later Christabel wrote again to Caroline Phillips, again turning down an invitation for Mrs Pankhurst to address a meeting in Aberdeen.

September 18th, 1908

Dear Miss Phillips

Many thanks for sending me the programme of the Women Workers' Conference. I wish very much that Mother could address the proposed meeting in Aberdeen, but she feels it will be impossible for her to get to Scotland so soon after our meeting in the Caxton Hall on the 13th. There may be all kinds of important matters which will detain her in London, and therefore it seems better not to hold the meeting you suggest, useful as such a meeting would certainly have been. I wish the Conference had met at some other time more convenient to us!

Are you going to send us any active demonstrators from Aberdeen?

We gave a fine Scottish welcome to Miss Phillips this morning, and we think that other Scotswomen ought to follow her example.

Very sincerely yours

pp. Christabel Pankhurst LB

PS I hope you can make arrangements to have a band of women to sell the "Votes for Women" paper at the Conference of Women Workers. Can you begin at once to enlist volunteers for this work? They should wear the colours and have a good supply of the paper. I hope some of our local friends will be able to attend the Reception and wear the colours.

I am writing to Miss Una Dugdale to see whether she can help in any way.

pp. CHP LB

There is a note of criticism in this letter about the contribution of most Scotswomen to the cause. The Miss Phillips mentioned is Mary Phillips, who had been greeted by pipers and women in costume as she was released from Holloway Prison. However, Christabel was more concerned about when the Aberdeen WSPU were going to become more involved in militancy. At this point in the campaign, the majority of militant actions happened in London and Scotswomen were encouraged to travel down there in order to take part. The absence of women from Aberdeen had evidently been noted. However, there were activities that could be undertaken away from the capital, such as selling the WSPU newspaper in order to raise money, and Caroline Phillips was encouraged to make sure this was happening.

Replacement

Perhaps Caroline Phillips was aware of the growing disapproval of her at headquarters, or perhaps it was a total shock when she received a telegram on 5 January 1909 that merely stated

Sylvia Pankhurst arrives Thursday morning to take charge local work. Thursday's meeting had better be abandoned. Writing

Christabel Pankhurst

The Watt Collection holds a copy of a cyclostyled letter sent to all members of the Aberdeen branch of the WSPU by Sylvia Pankhurst after she had arrived in Aberdeen. Her arrival is couched in positive language, suggesting that the Aberdeen branch has been so active that it had been awarded its own permanent representative from headquarters. However, the letter also makes it clear that the local branch, with its claims to independence, was to be closed and all members would now be directly enrolled in the national organisation, and organised from headquarters. A new office was to be set up and a new organiser appointed. While there is a final sentence applauding the 'excellent work already done by the local workers' Caroline Phillips is not mentioned by name.

11th January 1909

Dear Madam

I am glad to be able to inform you that the Committee of the National Women's Social and Political Union are now able to send a permanent representative to Aberdeen to organise an active Votes for Women movement there in close co-operation with the Headquarters at Clement's Inn and in conjunction with the local W.S.P.W. [sic] Members and sympathisers who are invited to work under the organiser as Volunteers.

A large experience all over the country has shown the Committee that the movement makes very much greater headway under this system than when the provincial work is left to a number of separate and isolated local Unions, and as I am here representing the National Committee and making the preliminary arrangements on their behalf, I therefore recommend that the local Aberdeen W.S.P.U. be dissolved as under the new scheme it can no longer be recognised and I wish also most cordially to invite you to become a Member of the National Women's Social and Political Union (A Membership Card will be sent to you later) and trust you will join the N.W.S.P.U. organiser for Aberdeen in working for the cause of Votes for Women which is so dear to us all.

I am at present making arrangements for weekly Monday afternoon "At Homes" to be held on behalf of the Union in a Hall in the Centre of Aberdeen and also for a permanent office and should be glad to meet Members and friends who are willing to help with these and other schemes of work at the above address from 4 to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, 12th inst., or at the old Committee Rooms 236, Union Street, from 6-30 till 9 p.m., same date.

The excellent work already done by the local workers and the great success which has attended their efforts justify us in looking forward to an immediate and enthusiastic response to this appeal and in the belief that this will result in a strong and united movement for Women's Suffrage in Aberdeen.

I remain

Faithfully yours

(Signed) E. Sylvia Pankhurst

The new organiser sent up to Aberdeen to take charge was the Englishwoman Ada Flatman. She had been imprisoned for participating in a raid on the House of Commons in October 1908 and so had only

just been released when she was sent to Aberdeen. A draft letter in the archive is evidently in response to a meeting held between Ada Flatman and Caroline Phillips on her arrival. It is drafted on a WSPU postcard and crossed and recrossed, making it difficult to fully decipher. However, there is no doubt of the emotions behind Caroline Phillips' words.

9th February 1909

Dear Miss Flatman

I am always at your service to help you in any way I possibly can but after my interview with yourself and Miss Strachan this afternoon I leave it to you entirely to reconsider whether I am the right person to undertake a prominent part at Mrs Pankhurst's meeting. I am as likely as ever to overlook hard and fast formalities & as these are so liable to be construed ... wanton acts of discourtesy perhaps I had better have nothing to do with the stewarding. I enclose also the circular sent out by Sylvia. I can find nothing rude or unfair in it & I can assure you her speech to the branch meeting was if possible more polite and the vast majority of the members present will bear testimony to this. That there is a very wide difference of opinion as to the behaviour of these 4 members of committee towards me is shown by the part of letters I enclose for your strictly private perusal from another member of Committee who is aware of every detail of the circumstances. Miss McRobie is the most able clear headed member we have and has often criticised and advised me. I never refused to meet the Committee. I simply declined meetings called by that section when I knew that these only would attend because I should have been forced to engage in self-vindication which is mere egoism of interest to nobody. I think personal contraversion an exceedingly low form of ...

You will find out I am sure that the present paucity of.... has precious little to do with these matters.

This letter suggests several issues. Firstly, that certain members of the committee had complained about Caroline Phillips. There is a reference to her overlooking formalities and refusing to meet particular groups of committee members. Looking back through the archive, there are several mentions of problems with members of the branch, and it may be that matters had come to a head recently. It is somewhat ironic to consider whether Caroline Phillips was to be side-lined for refusing to discuss decisions with committees, when the Pankhursts had similar leadership styles! Caroline Phillips had evidently been offered the job of stewarding an upcoming meeting when Christabel Pankhurst would once more arrive in the city – very much a downgrading of her usual role of honorary secretary. Interestingly, she also spares the time to defend Sylvia Pankhurst, who had clearly left Aberdeen by this time, from criticism of the way she handled the closure of the local branch.

The following day, a further and much briefer draft turned down the offer of stewardship.

10 2 09

Dear Miss Flatman

I have reconsidered that I will take no prominent part in Mrs Pankhurst's meeting. I have done my share of local work to the best of my ability and I think there are others who wd like to occupy that position.

Wishing you all success.

Yrs sincerely

C. A. I. Phillips

This brought an immediate response from Ada Flatman, now based in the new WSPU headquarters in Union Street:

Feb 10th 1909

41½ Union Street

Aberdeen

Dear Miss Phillips

I was sorry to get your card saying you could take no prominent part in stewarding Mrs Pankhurst's meeting, but of course you yourself must know best to what extent you can give time & energy to the cause we have so much at heart and you will I am sure know we shall always be grateful for any help you can give us.

Hoping to see you on Thursday evening.

Yours in the cause

S. Ada Flatman

Caroline Phillips had mentioned another committee member who would support her claims in her letter to Ada Flatman, Annie McRobie. On 22 July 1909 she received a letter from McRobie reporting on events at a recent WSPU meeting in Aberdeen. She makes it clear that both Caroline Phillips and Sylvia Pankhurst were heavily criticised at this meeting, and also that Lady Ramsay appears to have joined the critics. Also attacked were Helen and Constance Ogston, daughters of Professor Francis Ogston of Aberdeen University. Helen Ogston was a university graduate in science and a qualified sanitary inspector. The two sisters had joined the WSPU in 1908 and Helen was a frequent speaker on WSPU platforms in London. She was notorious as the suffragette who had wielded a dog whip at an Albert Hall meeting at which Lloyd George was the principal speaker. Criticism of Caroline Phillips, the Ogston sisters and Sylvia Pankhurst demonstrates that the Aberdeen members of the WSPU by this time were happy to criticise suffragettes from both the militant and more conciliatory sections of the organisation.

It is clear that a 'Miss Pankhurst' had been making enquiries about whether Annie McRobie would be interested in a position as organiser for the cause. Given that McRobie later refers to Sylvia Pankhurst in more familiar tones, this might imply that the 'Miss Pankhurst' making enquiries was Christabel, which implies that Christabel was still in contact with Caroline Phillips.

2 Rosemount Terrace

Aberdeen

22 July 1909

My dear Miss Phillips

Thank you so much for your letter this morning. Let me take the purely personal item first.

As you may suppose, the information that Miss Pankhurst had been making certain inquiries about me came as a shock, albeit an exceedingly pleasant one. I confess that for one brief moment I 'soared' and then I came back to solid earth again.

No, my dear, the opening which you hint at is not for me, even, if on closer acquaintanceship, Miss Pankhurst was satisfied that I might be of use to the WSPU I cannot leave Aberdeen.

For a considerable time now, I have been my mother's chief support and sole companion. She is very old, and it would be cruel on my part to leave her.

Clearly my duty is at home. Apart from this however, I am very conscious that there would have to be a considerable 'licking into shape' before I could be of real service, and – well one is not so adaptable and easily moulded when one is no longer youthful.

And so I have put from me all thought of the wider sphere, and shall give of my best to the work here.

I appreciate more than I can say this fresh evidence of your kindly interest in me, I shall not forget it.

Of course I shall preserve the most absolute secrecy on this matter.

And now about Wednesday's meeting. Yes, that was a field night. Our friends were out in full warpaint. I was glad you were not present and yet I regret that you missed the show.

An atmosphere of virtuous indignation pervaded the front benches, and there was something irresistibly funny in the solemnity with which the enormities of our secretary were reeled off from bulky M.S.S.

After mauling you beyond all recognition, they lashed out against Helen Ogston, gave Constance Ogston a kick in passing, and as a grand finale wiped up the floor with Sylvia Pankhurst.

Oh, I tell you it was a triumphant march from glory unto glory!

I presume Lady Ramsay's speech on the WSPU was a repetition of the one given at Westbourne House.

I would not have thought it possible for a woman of the world to speak so much wild nonsense in the time.

Really, I did not know which was strongest in me – the inclination to laugh, cry or swear! I'm afraid I yielded to the last one – mentally.

As for the allocation of the funds, I feel very bitter when I think that the money which was won for us by Mrs Pankhurst and Miss Helen Ogston should be handed over to other societies.

So far as I am concerned, one result of the meeting is, that I have vowed I must learn to speak without making a fool of myself through sheer nervousness.

I shall be seeing you soon.

With my warmest regards

Sincerely yours

Annie McRobie

An undated draft letter to Sylvia Pankhurst from Caroline Phillips tells a similar story.

My dear Miss Sylvia

I hope you got back quite comfortably & that you are now in a more congenial atmosphere than you found altogether in Aberdeen.

You will be interested to hear that the jackals are re-instated in full favour with Miss Strachan and Miss Flatman. They have had a rendez-vous & grievances real and imaginary have been fully gone into & a unanimous verdict given that the National have treated the local Union abominably. The same old lies about your coming and your sayings and doings when you did come have been repeated ad nauseum.

Lady Ramsay's ideas have been endorsed & both Miss J & Miss F are giving free expression to their views. I have got so used to the personal fault finding that I really can't mind it very much now, but I am very sorry that anything more is being made of this wretched business because it will keep the well affectionate element away.

It is wonderful what a marvellously quick study these ladies have made of local personalities and conditions.

I do not wish to trouble your mother or any of those at headquarters about the 'business', but I just wish to assure you that if any vindication of yourself is required I am quite ready to give it. The atmosphere at 41½ Union St will ... me from taking a prominent part at Mrs Pankhurst's meeting but I will help in a quiet way all I can to make it a success.

With kindest regards

I'm keeping well and taking it quite good heartedly. Broadly speaking events have happened in Aberdeen just as I wanted.... They are welcome to my scalp – so long as the ... movement does not suffer.

The aftermath

While the movement as a whole did not suffer from the removal of Caroline Phillips from her role in the Aberdeen WSPU, from that time on the WSPU in the city was subjected to a cycle of different organisers sent up north by headquarters, thus assuring that official policy was at all times followed. The independence that Caroline Phillips had tried to quietly assert was forgotten.

The campaign for the vote for women continued until the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, with growing militancy on the part of the suffragettes and violent retribution on the part of government. The militant actions of stone-throwing, window-smashing and arson soon appeared in Scotland, and many Scottish suffragettes were caught up in action in their own home towns. The suffragettes in prison started to hunger strike, which led to forcible feeding and the Cat-and-Mouse Act.

These issues, however, are not part of the archive. Caroline Phillips' association with the suffragettes appears to have ended in 1909. Unlike her friend Helen Fraser there is no evidence that she turned instead to the constitutional suffrage societies to continue her fight for 'the cause'.

Caroline Phillips left Aberdeen and her career as a journalist in December 1912 when she inherited the Station Hotel in Banchory from an aunt. An article in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* described her leaving party at the newspaper where she was presented with a pair of 'handsome silver Sheffield plate entree dishes'. William Maxwell, the editor, also made a speech, referring to the pleasant relations that had always existed between Miss Phillips and the rest of the staff. However, he also made the dig that 'if she had decided to devote her whole time newspaper work she would have proved one of the foremost of lady journalists' – evidently alluding to Caroline Phillips' dedication to the suffragette cause during her time at the newspaper. Caroline Phillips ran the hotel under her retirement in the 1940s to Kintore and is buried in the cemetery there. Her gravestone reads 'Caroline Agnes Isabella Phillips, journalist, died 13th January 1956, aged 85'.

The Watt Collection offers us a unique view of the conduct and decision-making of a Scottish branch of the WSPU in the early years of the organisation in Scotland. While Caroline Phillips did not join the Women's Freedom League, it is clear that she sympathised with that organisation's concern about policy being dictated from headquarters and wished for local circumstances to be taken into account before militant action was decided upon. Like her friend Helen Fraser, this attitude perhaps contributed to her eventual ousting from her position in the WSPU. However, it is also clear that the Aberdeen branch was riven with disagreements and that internal politics as much as external forces were at work. The archive also demonstrates the importance of Aberdeen in suffrage politics, which may come as a surprise to some. The frequent visits of leaders of the movement such as Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, and Scottish leaders such as Helen Fraser and Teresa Billington-Greig, demonstrate the importance of the city and its politicians. The affectionate tones in which some of the letters to Caroline Phillips are written also demonstrates how close-knit and supportive Scottish suffrage circles could be – even between members of different organisations. However, there are also hints throughout the archive that not all in the Aberdeen branch agreed with Caroline Phillips' approach to militant action and that it was these disagreements that eventually led to her replacement by outsiders. No Aberdeen woman would ever again lead the WSPU in the city.