

Women & Democracy: *the West Lothian story*



The Campaign for Women's Votes – early beginnings

The female suffrage movement came to the forefront of public life early in the twentieth century; the campaign for Votes for Women began much earlier. The first women's suffrage petition was presented to Parliament in 1832 after a Yorkshire woman, Mary Smith, petitioned Henry Hunt MP for the vote to be granted to spinsters.

A second petition was presented to Parliament by John Stuart Mill MP in 1866. This was the first mass petition on women's suffrage; it contained 1521 signatures. A year later, John Stuart Mill led the first parliamentary debate on female suffrage. Despite growing public support, Mill failed in his attempt to amend the second Great Reform Bill to include women in 1867.



John Stuart Mill

Angered about the lack of Parliamentary support, women created their own suffrage societies in London, Manchester and Edinburgh. The campaign for Parliamentary reform also continued. Jacob Bright introduced the Women's Disabilities Removal Bill to Parliament in 1870. The Bill, which had been written by Richard Pankhurst, passed its second reading. Three years later, the first newspaper report of a suffrage meeting in West Lothian was printed in The Falkirk Herald. Miss Taylor advocated the suffrage cause to a well-attended meeting of Bathgate residents chaired

by Provost Waddell. The meeting passed a resolution in favour of Bright's bill. Unfortunately, the Bill was never given time for a committee hearing.

Suffragist or Suffragette?

In the face of failed parliamentary campaigns, suffrage campaigners decided to adopt a more strategic response to campaigning. In 1897, 17 local suffrage societies came together to form the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The NUWSS was led by Millicent Fawcett from 1907 and the organisation campaigned peacefully for electoral reform. They held meetings and lectures, wrote letters to MPs and produced political leaflets.

With the passage of time, the NUWSS campaigns grew and demonstrations and marches raised the political profile of the organisation. By 1913, the society had recruited 50,000 members who were called suffragists



Some suffrage campaigners were frustrated that the NUWSS campaign wasn't having the desired impact. The Woman's Social and Political Union was formed in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst who decided that women needed to be more assertive in exertion of their democratic rights. Pankhurst used the slogan "Deeds not Words" to describe her preferred militant campaign methods. *Image courtesy of the LSE Library*

The phrase "suffragette" was coined by the Daily Mail in 1906. The replacement of "ist" with "ette" had been intended as a derogatory insult. However the militant campaigners claimed the word "suffragette" as their own, using it to distance themselves from the suffragists. Ironically the NUWSS was the largest group to campaign for votes for women but its contributions have often been overshadowed by the militant tactics of the suffragettes.

Militant Tactics – Effective Campaigning or Mischief Making?

The suffragette's campaign of militancy began in 1905 when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney attended a meeting in London; it was being addressed by Government minister, Edward Grey. The women kept interrupting with shouts of "Will the Liberal Party government give women the vote?" The police were sent for when they refused to stop their shouts. In the struggle that followed, the two women kicked and spat on the policeman who had been sent to deal with the situation. It had the desired result; they were both arrested, attracting publicity for the suffragette cause.



Suffragette leader, Christabel Pankhurst, stands in front of a group of women.

Image courtesy of the LSE Library

The militant campaigns quickly escalated. Politicians were heckled, suffragettes tied themselves to railings and windows on Government buildings were smashed.



Image courtesy of the LSE Library

Pankhurst and Kenney were not the only suffragettes to be arrested; many more women were given prison sentences for their militant campaigning tactics. Artist Marion Wallace Dunlop was the first suffragette to go on hunger strike. More suffragettes followed her lead and a short time later, the Government introduced forcible feeding.

In 1912, the campaigns of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) became more violent. The glass cases at Glasgow Art Gallery were smashed, post boxes across the country were attacked and in Dublin a group of suffragettes tried to set the packed Theatre Royal on fire whilst the Prime Minister was attending a matinee performance. In 1913, Emily Wilding Davidson threw herself in front of the King's horse at the Epsom Derby. She died four days later as a martyr to the suffragette cause.

Suffragettes were most active in cities where militant incidents could secure high media coverage. However a couple of local incidents made it into the pages of the West Lothian newspapers. The first came in March 1913 when the telephone lines between Whitburn and Harthill were cut. The West Lothian Courier reported that this had been carried out by "*a mischievously inclined person or persons.*" A collier was said to have found a card carrying the words "Votes for Women" attached to one of the telephone poles.

Two months later, there was a bomb scare at a meeting of Bo'ness Town Council (in these days, Bo'ness was part of Linlithgowshire). A Town Council official found a mysterious square package at the door to the chambers, marked with the words "*Votes for Women - Death or Victory.*" The parcel was passed to the Town Clerk to open; inside he found a box packed with copies of "*The Suffragette*" and a working alarm clock.



Image courtesy of the Museum of London

More militancy inevitably led to more imprisonments and an increase in instances of hunger strikes. As sympathies for the hunger strikers grew, the Government introduced the 1913 Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act, popularly known as the "Cat and Mouse Act." This allowed for the release of dangerously weak prisoners, only for them to be recalled when their health had recovered.

Suffragettes used public meetings to defend this tactic. A meeting was held at the Masonic Temple in Linlithgow in 1913 to protest against the forced feeding of suffragettes. Miss Edith Hudson addressed the audience, explaining that suffragettes had started a hunger strike to win the same prison rights as men. She went on to share

her experiences of being forcibly fed in prison until, having become critically ill, she had to be released. The assembled audience voted in favour of a motion, proposed by the female chair, protesting forcible feeding. They also called on the vote to be granted to women.

The Media Response to the Female Suffrage Movement



Newspaper headlines were deliberately written to turn public opinion against the suffragettes.

Image courtesy of the LSE Library.

For Heaven sake, let the female Suffragette attend to her household duties, if she has any, and above all, let her husband show himself a man, provided always that she has a husband."

Unsurprisingly, female suffrage organisations produced their own newspapers which were sold at public meetings. This allowed campaigners to argue the case for female suffrage, independently of the British press.

"Votes for Women" was launched by Emmeline and Frederick Lawrence in 1902. Until 1907 it was the official newspaper of the WSPU.

Image courtesy of the Museum of London

The female suffrage movement had an interesting relationship with the press. The suffragettes in particular relied on the media to raise awareness of their cause. At the same time, newspapers often tried to belittle the campaign for female suffrage and the campaigning tactics of the suffragettes. Editorial comments contained within the pages of the West Lothian newspapers help to illustrate the media view of the suffrage campaign. In 1906 the Editor of the Linlithgow Gazette commented:

"It is said we have a Suffragette in Linlithgow – but one who likes to fight behind the hedge. They are a vindictive lot at the best.



West Lothian's Home Grown Suffragette



Image courtesy of the Scottish Women's Institute

Catherine Blair was a member of the WSPU and a prominent advocate of militant campaigning methods. She was born at Byres Farm in Bathgate in January 1872, the third child of Susan and James Shields. Catherine spent her formative years in the town and attended Bathgate Academy where she excelled academically, especially at art.

The family moved to a farm in Tranent in 1894 and two years later Catherine married a farmer, Thomas Blair. Despite having four children, Catherine became an active WSPU campaigner. She chaired meetings, delivered speeches and conducted a letter writing campaign in a number of newspapers. As she had a young family, Catherine decided not

to directly engage in militant tactics but she was a powerful defender of suffragette campaigns. Catherine's husband, Thomas, was fully supportive of her political activities. He even resigned as Vice President of the local Liberal Party because of their stance on the suffragettes.

In 1911 Catherine was one of many suffragettes who protested against the census. Emmeline Pankhurst had encouraged suffragettes to either stay away from home on the night of the census, or if at home, to refuse to take part. This could result in a £5 fine or even a month in jail. Whilst some suffragettes like Catherine Blair did take part in the census, they used it as an opportunity to protest. Catherine's occupation appears in the 1911 census for Gladsmuir, East Lothian as farmer's wife (*suffragette*).

Catherine also offered help to suffragettes, allowing those released from prison under the notorious "Cat and Mouse Act" to hide out at her East Lothian farm. Edith Hudson is one of the more prominent suffragettes who is believed to have sought political sanctuary at Catherine's farm.

The Suffrage Campaign in West Lothian



A small group of suffragettes stand conspicuously behind a group of men assembled at the front of Bathgate Academy for a Newlands Day photograph. Image courtesy of the Bennie Museum.

The success of the national campaign for female suffrage depended not only upon media stunts and newspaper headlines; they also needed to win the hearts and minds of the British people. With this goal in mind a committed band of both suffragists and suffragettes toured the country, addressing audiences at town halls and political meetings. The tour brought a number of high profile suffrage campaigners to West Lothian.

The first suffragette meeting to be recorded in local newspapers was held at the "Green Tree" corner in Broxburn on 18 June 1909. It was reported:

"At last the Suffragettes have found their way out to Broxburn. Last Friday afternoon two stylishly dressed young women directed a certain amount of interest in their movements as they skipped along several of our thoroughfares and chalked on walls and pavements with rapidity that told of much experience, the intimation:- "Votes for Women, 6.15, at the Cross." The women had procured a chair, onto which one of them mounted, and introduced the proceedings in a few brief sentences. Her companion, a Miss Munro, then stepped on to the chair, and gave quite a lengthy address on the rights of women to have votes. She said there was a time when women's sphere was confined to the home, but, with the advent of machinery, there was no work now for the daughters in a family to do in their houses. With the greater educational facilities placed at their disposal, women now proved themselves to be equal to men in various professions, and held that they were equally entitled to have the right to vote and sit in Parliament."

The speaker, Anna Munro, was by this time one of Scotland's highest profile suffragettes. She was also the Secretary of the Scottish Council of the Women's Freedom League, which had been formed two years earlier amid concerns about the leadership style of the WSPU.

Prominent national suffrage figures also spoke in West Lothian. The NUWSS President, Millicent Fawcett, addressed a 700 strong audience in West Calder in 1910. She was seeking support for the Conciliation Bill which aimed to grant the vote to a limited number of women. At the end of the meeting, West Calder local, Mr Rae, gave a vote of thanks and his wife joined the NUWSS. The Conciliation Bill was passed in Parliament but was later abandoned.



Anna Munro, (c) CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection



Image courtesy of the LSE Library

In 1913, Adelaide born Muriel Matters spoke at a Winchburgh meeting presided over by fellow suffragette, Miss Anna Gordon. Five years previously, Matters had hired an airship painted with the words "Votes for Women" which she tried to fly over Parliament on opening day. The wind was against her and she didn't reach her destination. Undeterred, Matters scattered hand-bills from the airship, promoting the cause of the Women's Freedom League.

The following year "General" Flora Drummond addressed an audience at the Corn Exchange in Bathgate. There was a charge to attend this meeting and this helped to ensure a sympathetic audience, largely comprised of women. A number of these female attendees were also members of local political associations.

The platform was decorated with suffragette colours and placards were placed on prominent display, helping to create a vibrant, striking spectacle. During the speech, Flora Drummond delivered a passionate defence of votes for women and militancy:

"All constitutional means of agitating the vote for women which have been maintained for over 40 years have failed to move Parliament, and that is the reason for militant tactics. We are going to attack the men of this nation through their property, so that these men would persuade this Government to give women the vote. We have been cheated and betrayed by politicians, and we will be no longer. Militancy is our only weapon to force our claims on the government. We are determined to fight and determined to go on. We will never lay down the weapon of militancy until we have taken up the more powerful weapon, the vote."

The "Major" also used humour in her speeches, making her popular with audiences. At Bathgate, she commented:

"The suffragettes are often asked, what would you do with your vote? Well goodness knows, we could not make a worse hash of it than you men have done.."

Drummond was a formidable figure and was one of the few working-class leaders of the WSPU. Her militant activities had landed in her prison on no less than 9 occasions. The included a three month prison sentence for "incitement rush the House of Commons," although she was released after 9 days when the authorities discovered that she was pregnant.

Despite a low turnout at Major Drummond's address, the suffrage campaigners attracted large audiences at the majority of West Lothian meetings. Whilst some local people attended from curiosity or to offer support, others were there to ridicule.

At a suffragette meeting at the Steelyard in Bathgate in September, 1909, a group of young men tried to draw away the lorry on which the speakers, Miss McLauchlan and Miss Anna Munro were stationed. This was dismissed by a newspaper correspondent as "horseplay." Tellingly the same writer also goes on to mock female members of the audience interested in purchasing suffragette literature on sale at the event.

Perhaps surprisingly, it was not only men who did not always give a warm reception to suffrage campaigners. On arrival at Mid Calder in July 1909, members of the NUWSS asked the female caretaker how many people the hall at Mid Calder Literary Institute would hold. She responded in a rather derisive manner: "Far more than you'll get to listen to your blethers." Fortunately, the words of a female caretaker were not indicative of the public reception and the women were pleasantly surprised by the response. The arrival of the suffragists, including Dr. Elsie Inglis, brought a rush of men from various street corners.

The women reported that there were almost 500 people in attendance. The hall was packed. There were men sitting on window sills, on the edge of the platform and even on the stairs down to the street. The attendees queued at the end to buy suffrage badges and copies of the suffragist newspaper, "The Common Cause," although there was not enough to go round. Interestingly there were only 50 women amongst the assembled audience. After the event, the suffragists recalled; *"There were men of all kinds and all ages, from the somewhat merry youths and the earnest faced mine-workers, to the oldest men of the village. And what a hearing they gave us...Four very contented Suffragists strolled in the deepening twilight to the country station. Not only had we gained the affections of Mid Calder, we had also received cordial invitations to go and speak at East Calder, West Calder and Oakbank."*



Suffragist Dr Elsie Inglis set up the Scottish Women's Hospital Unit during the First World War.

Image courtesy of the Wellcome Collection.

Parliamentary By-Elections - An Opportunity to Campaign

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies used the Mid Lothian By-Election campaign of 1912 to peacefully promote the cause of women's suffrage. The constituency included many villages that now form part of West Lothian including Addiewell, Stoneyburn and West Calder.

The by-election campaign was directed from two specially created committee rooms in Dalkeith and West Calder. The search for suitable rooms at West Calder had been challenging. There were no rooms or shops available for rent in the village's Main Street. Eventually, they were forced to set up their committee room in the lumber-room of a billiard saloon.



Doris Chew, Mrs Chew, Miss Blackstone and Mrs Townley campaigning in West Calder. The committee room is at the end of the passage in front of which the women are standing. Newspaper image © Rights holder unknown. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive.

The room was described by suffragist, A.Townley, as *"a dark smelly room, making one feel depressed at the idea of working any length of time inside."* The committee rooms may not have been fit for purpose but they were located in a prime position - opposite the polling station. The women also gained a prime marketing position – they got permission to put up posters on an ice-cream shop window and the wall of a pub.

The suffragist campaigners gave their support to the Labour candidate, Mr Brown, because he had pledged to support amendments to the Government Franchise bill, which would help to secure the vote for women. From the committee rooms, the suffragists prepared 1772 canvas cards. These were used to go from door to door, asking householders about their voting intentions and speaking to them about female suffrage.

The Society also held meetings across the local area. At the packed People's Hall in West Calder, Miss Mair spoke to the largely male audience about the confusion in people's minds about what the demands of suffragists really were. She went on to emphasise that the suffragists did not want universal suffrage.

Another meeting was held at the Inn in the village of Livingston Station where almost all the local inhabitants - men, women and children - came to hear the suffragists. The turn-out was helped somewhat by the efforts of Miss Alice Trail of Charlesfield who was Secretary of the new branch.

The by-election campaign attracted many prominent suffragists including Ada Nield Chew, Mrs Phillip Snowden and Annot Robinson who had served six months in prison after trying to break into the House of Commons in a furniture van. During the campaign, the suffragists shared a platform with many prominent figures of the labour movement including Ramsay MacDonald who expressed his support for female suffrage during a speech at Addiewell.

Annie Townley used an article in suffragist newspaper, "The Common Cause" to reflect on her time campaigning at West Calder and the surrounding villages,

"We found these sturdy Scotch miners very friendly on the whole ... Those who had been to meetings and heard our speakers were quite decided in favour of Women's Suffrage. Most of the women were unable to grasp half of what we had told them because they had never bothered about politics. The way has been paved for new societies, however. We had about 120 "Friends of Suffrage" cards signed, and sold 200 badges. The men in the billiard room all wore the National Union badge, and when we parted many a wish was expressed that we should soon return. At Addiewell the men were always kindly and sympathetic. Again we found the women quite afraid at first of our ideas.... Our surroundings were not pleasant, but we got at the people's hearts."

The following year there was a by-election in West Lothian. This time both candidates were in favour of women's suffrage; the suffragists used the election as an opportunity to distribute propaganda.

During a four day campaign, 216 copies of the suffragist newspaper, the "Common Cause" were sold. They also recruited 77 "Friends"; the Friends of the NUWSS membership scheme was launched in 1910 to allow supporters who could not afford fees, to join the association through a pledge of allegiance. A meeting was also held outside their Bathgate shop and 5 dozen copies of the "Common Cause" were sold whilst the Unionist candidate gave an address at the Corn Exchange.

At Uphall suffragist Miss Westwood offered a paper to a young man on his way to the mine. He didn't have a penny, but replied,

"If you'll gie me a paper, I'll give you a drink o' tea out of my can." He got his copy of the paper!

The "Common Cause" was so popular in Uphall that miners pushed forward with their pennies even when copies of the paper were sold out. A further open-air meeting was held in Blackridge. The suffragists received another positive response; 36 newspapers were sold and 30 "Friends" were enrolled.

The Edinburgh Suffrage Demonstration 1909 – West Lothian plays its part

With the exception of Catherine Blair, West Lothian didn't produce any prominent suffrage campaigners. However local women still played an important, and perhaps surprising, role in the campaign for the vote.

The Edinburgh suffrage demonstration in October 1909 was one of the biggest public spectacles of the Scottish suffrage movement. The colourful event was described by suffrage publication, "Votes for Women" as "the most gorgeous political pageant that Edinburgh has ever seen."

Thousands of women dressed in suffrage colours, paraded down Princes Street. The event was both planned and managed by women. Women acted as stewards, flag-holders and chauffeurs.

Five young women of Dr. Kelso's "Lothian Lasses" proudly played the pipes at the front of the procession. Three of the pipers were from Broxburn. They were Miss Sarah McDougall, Miss McGavin and Miss J. Black. They wore full Highland costume in a Kelso tartan including dirks and sporran.



Image courtesy of Edinburgh City Council

Dr. Kelso was a popular and well respected doctor who ran a medical practice in Broxburn. His love of Scottish culture led him to support a couple of young men to create Dr. Kelso's Lothian Pipers in 1904. Dr. Kelso personally paid for the teaching of the band and a group of Highland Dancers for the first year. The female Highland Dancers were later given the opportunity to learn the pipes and under the direction of Dr. Kelso, formed one of the first female pipe bands in Scotland.



The demonstration culminated in a large suffrage meeting at Waverley Market. There were seats for a thousand protestors and standing space for many more. As the protestors filed in, the female pipers played on the platform until Mrs Pankhurst arrived to give her address. The audience awarded their efforts with great applause and Linlithgow Gazette reported that *"mere men held their breath in admiration."*

On the Monday following the demonstration, the Broxburn pipers saw themselves on the front of the evening newspapers. Ironically their contribution to the event filled little over a paragraph in the pages of the Linlithgow Gazette.

The Lothian Lassies were not the only West Lothian group to participate in the Edinburgh suffrage procession. The Broxburn Public Band also played at the event, performing under the direction of their bandmaster, James Marshall, and marching in front of an impressive banner of suffrage leader, Christabel Pankhurst.

The music of the brass bands helped to turn the Edinburgh procession into a grand public spectacle.

Image courtesy of Edinburgh City Council.



The Right to Serve - From Education to Local Government

Although women failed to secure a voice at Westminster, early advances were made at a local level. The 1872 Education Act gave women in Scotland the right to sit on school boards where they could participate in the management and finance of local schools; importantly, women had secured the right to serve in public life.

A second significant piece of legislation followed in 1907. The Qualification of Women (County and Town Councils) (Scotland) Act gave women with property the right to vote in local elections and to be elected as town and county councillors. This was an important advance but unfortunately its initial impact was limited. Only one female councillor was elected in Scotland that year. It would be many years before a woman would be elected to serve in local government in West Lothian.

Nonetheless women began to get involved in community politics. Often they were motivated by issues affecting families; housing, education and poverty. In 1926, the women of West Calder took a collective stand against West Calder Parish Council after poor relief was denied to striking miners. Addiewell woman, Sarah Moore decided that it was time to take a stand. She got a group of miners' wives together by sending local children round to chap their doors. The women assembled outside the Parish Council offices to demand relief for their husbands. The offices were closed as the clerk was on holiday but undeterred the women remained in front of the building until the late hours of the night.



*Ma Moore standing with the protesting women.
Image courtesy of the Scottish Life Archive*

The women came back when the clerk returned from holiday; most were accompanied by their children. Many were destitute and in dire need of food and drink which was fortunately provided by the local strike committee. Despite the presence of very young children, the gathering eventually dispersed following a charge by police with batons after a bout of stone-throwing. The crowd gathered again later that day but returned to their homes after the council clerk agreed that food lines would be dispensed the following day.

The affectionately named “Ma Moore” remained politically active after the dispute and in 1912 she was elected to Midlothian County Council, serving as a Councillor for 27 years. During this time she played an active role at meetings and committees. Ma Moore retained a strong interest in health and welfare and latterly served as Convener of the Public Health Committee.



Image courtesy of the Scottish Life Archive.

As a politician, Sarah Moore was renowned for her wit and personality. Although formidable, she was also highly popular with local people and was returned unopposed to the County Council on several occasions.

Although Ma Moore is an important part of our political history, she was never an elected representative of West Lothian; West Calder and Addiewell did not become part of West Lothian until local government re-organisation in 1975. However West Lothian also gained a female Councillor when Helen Morgan was elected to the newly constituted West Lothian County Council, with a majority of only one vote. The result could have been very different; on the day of election her husband had to remind her to cast her own vote.



Helen Morgan and Harriet Dundas were both elected to the West Lothian Education Authority in 1925.
Image courtesy of Crawford Morgan.

Helen had been involved in politics for many years and had been a strong advocate of female suffrage. She had already served as one of only two females on the male dominated West Lothian Education Authority in the 1920s. During this time, she acted as Convener of the Education Authority's Disbursement Sub-committee. Helen was not the only political activist in the family and her husband Hugh had also served as a Councillor.

In the years that followed, other West Lothian women went on to achieve electoral success in local government. In 1930, Mrs Janet Wilson was elected as Linlithgow's first female municipal Councillor. The following year, she also became the first female municipal Councillor in West Lothian to hold a convenorship of a standing committee, when she was given direct responsibility for street lighting in Linlithgow Town Council. Unfortunately, Janet's time on the council was short-lived. She died suddenly in May 1933 after a short illness.

Since the 1930s, women have become an important and established voice in local politics. During the 1980s, West Lothian District Council even had a dedicated Women's Committee. Unfortunately, despite the growth in female councillors, women are under-represented in local government politics. In 2019, 9 of West Lothian's 33 councillors are female.

The First World War

The outbreak of war in August 1914 brought a temporary end to the female suffrage campaigns. Emmeline Pankhurst suspended the activities of The Women's Social and Political Union, investing her energies in supporting the war effort whilst the government released suffragettes from prison. Other suffrage organisations also put activities on hold although low-profile campaigning continued behind-the-scenes.



The female employees at the Regent Works were paid much lower wages than male staff. In 1915 they went on strike for better pay.

Women were crucial to the success of the British war effort, filling the jobs of men who had gone off to fight in the war. Women were also recruited to work in munitions factories. Here in West Lothian, the munitionettes at the Regent Works in Linlithgow worked hard to keep the British Army supplied with ammunition.

The war was instrumental in transforming public perceptions

of women; importantly, it was recognised that they could make worthwhile contributions to life outside the home. This change gave additional weight to the campaign for female suffrage; the political tide had begun to turn.

Westminster Welcomes Women

In February 1918, the Representation of the People Act was passed at Parliament. This was a significant and ground-breaking victory for the female suffrage campaign. The legislation gave the vote to women over 30 who fulfilled certain property-based criteria or who possessed a university degree. 8.5 million women were now able to vote but around a third did not meet the voting criteria. In contrast all men over 21, and soldiers over 19, were awarded the right to vote regardless of whether they owned any property. The battle for electoral equality was yet to be won.



Image courtesy of the LSE Library

Newly enfranchised women cast their first General Election vote in December 1918, a month after the end of the war on the Western Front. In West Lothian, Unionist candidate, Mr James Kidd addressed a meeting of female electors in Broxburn, chaired by Dr. Kelso.

He told the assembled audience that he had doubted proposals for women's enfranchisement, viewing women's role in the social world as much more important than any potential contribution to the political sphere. However now that it had been awarded, he said he attached a high level of value to their vote, in what he deemed to be the most critical election in the history of the country. He also commended women's role during the war and urged female electors to, ***"support the Government and secure that the victory gained by our men on land and sea should not be cast away."***

On polling day, women across West Lothian took to the polls in their droves. In Broxburn 35% of votes were cast by women whilst the figure rose to almost 39% in Linlithgow. At a number of polling stations, some married women even turned out to vote whilst their husbands stayed at home. Other couples attended the polling station together. On his way out of the polling station, one husband was apparently heard to comment, ***"We've gane divergent ways th' day. The partnership's broken!"***

In Stoneyburn, women left their houses early to cast their first vote. The task was a challenge as transportation was still affected by war-time restrictions. The nearest polling station was in Whitburn. Some decided to walk; a vehicle was eventually secured for those left waiting.

The Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act was also passed in 1918, giving women the right to both stand as a candidate and serve as a Member of Parliament. In December's General Election, Constance Markievicz became the first woman to be elected to Parliament. However like other members of Sinn Fein she did not take her seat, hence she never served as a Member of Parliament. A year later, Nancy Astor became the first female politician to serve as an MP when she won a by-election in Plymouth Sutton after her husband, who was also the former MP, was appointed as a peer.

Women finally achieved the same electoral rights as men when The Equal Franchise Act was passed in 1929 giving women over 21 the right to vote.

Margaret Kidd Stands for Parliament

Miss Margaret Kidd was the first woman in West Lothian to stand for election to the House of Commons. The election was called in 1928 after the death of her father, James Kidd, who had served two non-consecutive terms as Unionist MP for Linlithgowshire. Margaret had already made a name for herself in legal circles, becoming the first female member of the Faculty of Advocates in 1923.

Miss Kidd gave her first election speech to a crowded gathering of between 800-900 people at the Corn Exchange in Bathgate. A journalist reporting in the Scotsman commented upon Margaret Kidd's "quiet, confident, matter-of-fact style of speech." Her political arguments and knowledge were also commended.



Margaret Kidd

Margaret Kidd's by-election campaign gathered momentum when she was joined on the platform by Britain's first female MP, Lady Astor. Nancy Astor spoke at both Bathgate and South Queensferry where she made reference to female suffrage. During her speech she joked that some of the men in the House of Commons hoped she would be the first and the last female MP. She also stated that she was campaigning for Miss Kidd both because she had been fond of her father, but also because she wanted to get another woman into the House of Commons. She also commended her political style, asserting that nobody in the constituency had ever heard her express one word of personal abuse against anybody.

Margaret Kidd did not become one of Scotland's first female MPs. She was defeated at the by-election by Manny Shinwell who was elected with a majority of 5,178. She never re-stood for Parliament but in 1935 she addressed a Linlithgow meeting of female electors and spoke in favour of Sir Adrian Baillie, the National Government candidate. She reminded those gathered of their democratic responsibilities:

"We are really the only democratic country in the world, and if we are to continue to have a democratic Government and carry out the word of the people, women must take an interest and exercise their vote."

Instead of pursuing politics, Miss Kidd focused her energies on her legal career and became Scotland's first female QC in 1948.



Nancy Astor

West Lothian women enter Parliament

West Lothian had to wait over 70 years before sending women to Parliament. The Scottish Parliament opened its doors in 1999 with the promise of a new kind of politics. The new Parliament offered family friendly working hours which would allow its representatives to balance family life with a political career. Scotland's political parties also made a commitment to ensuring female representation in the new chamber.

In the first elections to the Scottish Parliament, Mary Mulligan was elected for the constituency of Linlithgow, becoming the first female constituency MSP in West Lothian. Margo McDonald and Fiona Hyslop were also elected in 1999 as list MSPs for the Lothians regional constituency. Women accounted for 44% of the newly elected MSPs in the Scottish Parliament.

West Lothian finally returned a woman to the House of Commons when Hannah Bardell was elected as MP for the Livingston constituency in 2015. Women have now had the right to serve in Parliament for a hundred years. However at the General Election in 2017, only 38% of MPs elected to Parliament were women.

The Future

Since 1918 women have made huge political advances. They are active in public life across Scotland and serve as representatives in local councils, at the Scottish Parliament and at Westminster. However, despite great progress, women are still under-represented at all levels of government.

The centenary of female suffrage is an opportunity to stop and reflect; on the struggles of the female suffrage movement and on the bravery and passion of the first female political activists.

Young women living in West Lothian today have the opportunity to bring about more positive change. To do this, they need to take an interest in politics and local affairs, have confidence in their abilities and courage in their convictions; they must learn from the suffragists and the suffragettes!





EDINBURGH



WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE LEAGUE

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

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