

The Suffragette 'Misses Suffield' of Fulford

2018 marks the centenary of the first general election when women could vote in parliamentary elections. Not all women, but 8.4 million who were over 30 owned or paid rent on property. The 1918 Act granted the vote to all men over 21, but it took another 10 years before men and women shared an equal franchise. This seems amazing today, especially when serious consideration is being given to lowering the qualifying age from 18 to 16, as now in the Scottish Parliamentary elections. But women only got the vote after a long and arduous struggle with men in parliament and the leaders of the political parties, particularly Asquith, whose equivocation caused great frustration.

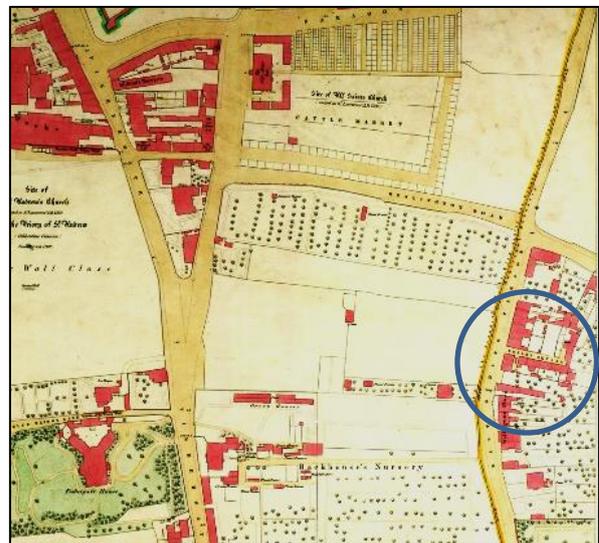
The campaign for the vote is generally associated in the public mind with the militant and sometimes violent actions of a few Suffragettes, but thousands of non-violent women of all classes stepped out of their day to day lives and took part. In York, they raised money, lobbied MPs, gave out leaflets, canvassed from door to door, sold the Votes For Women newspaper and many other imaginative activities. They spoke on street corners and organised packed and lively meetings in Museum Square, the Assembly Rooms and other venues across the city. It is this aspect of the movement and the women (and men) involved which has largely been lost to us today.

Members of Fishergate, Fulford and Heslington Local History Society have been researching this issue by looking through archives at the University of York, York Explore and local newspapers. We were delighted to find that quite a few women from our area were heavily involved, including Annie Coultate, who taught at Fishergate School and was the secretary of the York Branch of the Women's Social and Political Union, and the Suffield family of Fishergate and Fulford, whose story we tell in this article. The WSPU secretary, Violet Key Jones, also had connections to Fishergate. There is much more to discover, but we hope you find this an interesting start. If you can add to this story or others, please get in touch.

Tracing the Suffield Family

We found the Suffield family listed in the 1871 census as living at 11 Bexley Square, which was on the east side of Cemetery Road, see map on right. These small houses were replaced as part of a city-wide slum clearance programme by Horsman Avenue, pictured below.

Head of the household in 1871 was Jane Suffield, aged 59, a widow, who is described as a retired green grocer, born in South Dalton. Living with her is her son William, a coal dealer aged 25, born in York and his wife Mary, also 25, who is working as a dressmaker and their 1-year-old daughter Elizabeth Emma.



The 1881 census records William and Mary's growing family living in Alma Terrace, where William is again described as a coal dealer. Eleven-year-old Elizabeth now has four sisters; Maria Jane aged 9, Mary Alice aged 7, Florence Annie aged 5, both recorded as having been born in Bradford. Also, Clara Ellen aged 2, and 9 month old John William.



The census in 1891, describes William as a 45-year-old coal merchant. The family were living in the southernmost house in Main Street, Fulford, one of the pair of 'Pinfold Cottages'. These were built by William Henry Key, the Lord of Water Fulford Hall and great-uncle to Violet Key Jones, who, in 1910, became the Organiser for the WSPU in York. 21-year-old Elizabeth, has followed her mother's trade as a dressmaker and milliner's assistant.

The 1891 census also records that Florence Annie is aged 15, but not at school or in work, so she is probably helping her mother look after the family. Her younger siblings are still at school; Clara aged 12, her 10-year-old brother John, 8-year-old Ada, and 5-year-old Agnes. And they have another boy, George Francis, who is 2-years-old. The census does not record the other sisters because they are living away from home. Maria, aged 19, was living at Archbishop Holgate's School and working there as a housemaid. Mary is now 17 and working as a domestic servant at Kilburn House. This was the home of Joseph Agar, a wealthy tanner and JP.

Agar's house was situated in large grounds next to the junction of Cemetery Road with Fulford Road and is remembered erroneously by the streets of the post-war estate named after districts of north London, including Kilburn, whereas Agar named his house after his birthplace in North Yorkshire.



Could the garden party in this picture of Kilburn House be a Suffrage fundraising event? Maybe not, but the ladies clothes look is just right for such an event.

The oldest of the Suffield sisters, Elizabeth Emma, married George Frederick Stubbs at the York Methodist Centenary Chapel in 1900. George Stubbs was an insurance agent from Hutton Buscel, a small village two miles inland from Scarborough and coincidentally (?) just ½ mile from a hamlet called Suffield. In 1901, they were living in Gordon Street, Scarborough, where Elizabeth continued working at home as a milliner.

The 1901 census suggests that 55-year-old William is making good money as a coal merchant, and had moved the family to East View House, Back Lane, Fulford.



Some of their children are still living with them; 25-year-old Florence is working as a clerk to a wholesale druggist.

Agnes is 15. She is recorded on the Fishergate School 'achievements panel' as having been awarded a scholarship in 1898 and later became a teacher, working at Priory Street School from 1909 to 1945.

No servants are recorded in the census, so perhaps 22-year-old Clara has taken over from Florence in helping her mother with the large family. Ada is 18 and working as a school teacher. It is these three sisters, Ada, Clara and Agnes, who will all become very active in the suffrage campaign.

The 1901 census also records that Maria Jane is 29 and unmarried and working as a parlour-maid in the house of Cornelia Nicholson at Ventnor on the Isle of White. 27-year-old Mary Alice is in Scarborough, where she is working as a servant (mother's help) in the household of a music teacher, Henry Hill. John is 19 and has been apprenticed to Greenwood Rhodes, a butcher in the Market Place at Howden.

The 1911 census records William has changed his occupation and is now described as a dairy farmer. He and Mary are now both 65, and still living at East View House in Back Lane, Fulford, with 22-year-old George, who is described as a dairy farmer's assistant.

Also recorded at East View House in 1911, was their married oldest daughter, Elizabeth Stubbs, aged 41, with her three children - 7½-year-old Marjorie, 6½-year-old Dorothy and Hilda, just 11 months, but there is no mention of her husband, George Stubbs. At some point later, the Stubbs family moved to Western Australia. The date of their emigration has not been identified, but Elizabeth and George died there in 1942. Perhaps George had gone ahead and the family followed later.

None of the rest of the family are recorded in the 1911 census for East View House. Some were undoubtedly living elsewhere, but it is certain that Ada, Clara and Agnes were taking part in the WSPU's Census Evasion, deliberately hiding themselves from the enumerator.

The Suffield Family and the York Campaign for Women's Suffrage

'*Votes For Women*' the weekly newspaper of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), had a regular column - '*Campaign Throughout the Country*' where each local Society reported its activities and announces events. The Borthwick Institute has microfilms of these newspapers and we have found many references to the 'Misses Suffield' and their work for the campaign.

The first mention of the Suffield family was on 11th March 1910, when Ada Suffield, aged 27, is described as the Honorary Secretary of the Scarborough Branch of the WSPU, and living at 23 Barwick Street, Scarborough. In the 1901 census she was a teacher, so she probably moved to Scarborough to work in a local school and became involved in the suffrage campaign.

Ada also helped with the foundation of the WSPU branch in York, which was first announced in *Votes For Women* on 18th February 1910, when '*A group of women has undertaken to organise a women's meeting on March 2nd. All interested are invited to write to Miss Coultate - Hon. Sec. Miss Coultate, 68 Nunthorpe Road.*' This is the only occasion when a 'Miss' Coultate is mentioned and it may have been a mistake by the newspaper. Subsequent entries refer to Mrs Annie Coultate as the Hon. Sec. at 68 Nunthorpe Road. In March 1911, Mrs Coultate moved to 33 Melbourne Street, which is close to Fishergate School, where she was a teacher. Her son-in-law, William Mountain Holmes also taught there, before becoming Headteacher of Poppleton Road School.

On 25th February 1910, an announcement in '*Votes for Women*' said that '*A meeting is being arranged for Monday March 2nd will all interested please communicate with Mrs Coultate?*' But on 4th March, it said '*The women's meeting is postponed until (probably) April 6th.*

They probably spent a few weeks getting themselves organised, as there is a gap in the notices until 27th July, when they begin activities with the dramatic announcement intended to attract lots of interested people: '*Open meeting to be held in York: speaker Miss Adela Pankhurst - 3rd August 1910. speakers; Miss Hodge of Australia, Dr [Marion] McKenzie, [from Scarborough] and Miss Frondsen of Norway.*' Adela Pankhurst was the Yorkshire organiser of the Women's Social and Political Union and the youngest daughter of its leader, Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst.

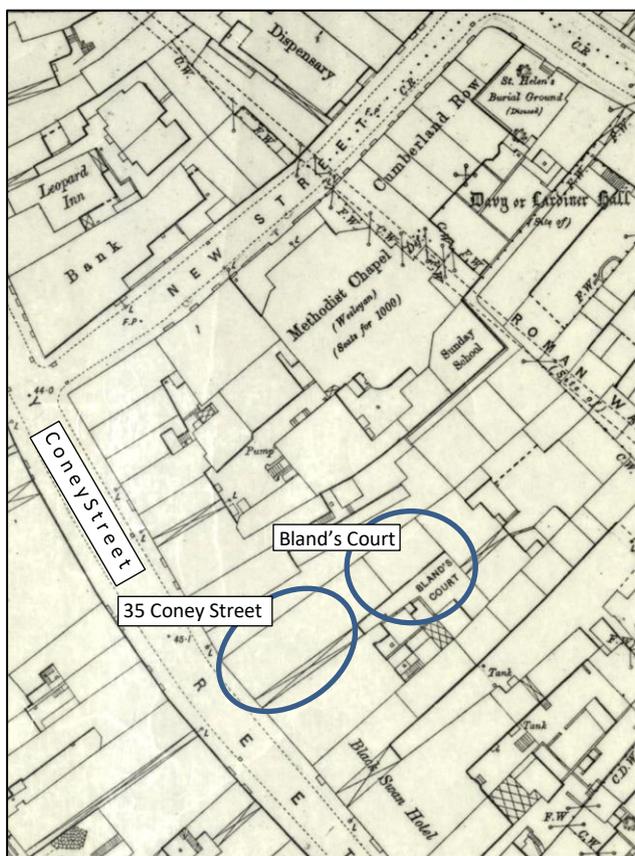
The notice also announced that *'Mrs Pethick-Lawrence will address a meeting on 14th September in the Festival Concert Rooms.'* And *'Miss Adela Pankhurst will open a campaign early in September.'*

On 12th August 1910, there is the first mention of Miss Violet Key-Jones, as Hon. Treasurer for the York branch. Violet was the niece of Captain William Key, Lord of Water Fulford Hall, and she soon became extremely busy as the WSPU Organiser for York. At the time, Violet lived with her widowed mother and brother in Hawthorn House, Bishopthorpe and the Yorkshire Gazette of 10th September 1910 has a long and detailed report of a packed meeting at Bishopthorpe School, chaired by Violet and addressed by Adela Pankhurst.

We know that the Suffield sisters were now heavily involved in the campaign, because on 23rd September 1910, 'Votes For Women' reported a *'splendid meeting in Yorkshire....on 14th September 1910; Mrs Pethick-Lawrence and Miss Adela Pankhurst addressed the meeting in the Festival Concert Rooms, chaired by Dr. Peter MacDonald.'* The report also says; *'The Misses Suffield are to be congratulated on the success of the meeting'*.

This is the first mention of the *'Misses Suffield'* but although they are regularly thanked for their efforts, it is not until later that we hear their separate names.

The York branch of the WSPU was growing fast and on 28th October, 'Votes For Women' announced that an office had been established at 35 Coney Street. Due to re-numbering, 35 Coney Street is now number 36, the former premises of Currys PC World and it is likely the offices were above the shop, with the access through the passage on the right of the shop, which leads to Bland's Court. This became a central meeting place for planning activities and holding events.



On 13th January 1911, 'Votes For Women' reported that *'During the Christmas holiday, the organiser and the Hon. Sec, with the assistance of the Misses Suffield of Fulford and Miss Ada Suffield, Hon. Sec. for Scarborough, have cleaned and renovated the office.'*

'The result is good and the effect is pleasing. In consequence of this, it was decided to have a 'House-Warming'. A members meeting was called and members mustered a strong force on Saturday afternoon, 7th January. A whist drive was decided upon and is fixed to take place today (Friday). Tickets 1s each.'

'Members responded splendidly. Best thanks to Mrs Cooper for carpet, Miss Key-Jones for mirror, Miss Clara Stafford [Ellen Clara Suffield] for curtains, Mr Harry Coultate [Mrs Coultate's son] for the frieze and coat hooks, also fixing the same. Also to the Misses Suffield and Whitaker for their regular attendance during

office hours. Friday 13th January, whist drive, 7.30.'

One significant event in the suffrage campaign across the country at this time was a boycott of the census in 1911, with the slogan *'No Census without the Vote'*. In York, as in many places, plans were made for supporters to avoid being at home on census night, so they could not be recorded. On 31st March, Votes For Women carried a big section describing *'Local Arrangements - Suffragette Plans for Census Night'*.

Giving the Hon. Sec. Mrs Coultate as the contact, an announcement said that *'A meeting will be held at the office 8 New Street. It will take the form of an All-Night-Social. Music, readings and other recitations will be part of the programme. Supper (1s) and breakfast (6d) will be provided. Tickets for admission - Free, on application at the office.'*

Afterwards, on 7th April, there was a large main article on the *'Complete Success of Census Protest'* and then a local report: *'York – A large upper room was engaged and furnished with comfortable chairs, where evaders settled themselves in for the night. The whole affair was kept a profound secret.'*

The most thrilling moments were when the policeman ascended the stairs (and this happened three times during the night) and tried the doors. At the first sound of his footsteps all the lights went out and the room "lay low". Death-like silence prevailed, and having satisfied himself that no one was about, he retired. Supper was served amid much merriment and a most enjoyable night was spent.'

The event was also reported in the Yorkshire Herald 4th April 1911 (below) reporting that the census evasion was held in *'certain business premises in Coney Street'*.



This raises the probability that Mrs. Coultate's posting saying the census evasion gathering would be in 8 New Street, may have been a ruse to put off the police and census authorities, while they gathered in Bland's Court behind their offices. Interestingly, reports in *'Votes For Women'* show that the WSPU offices moved from 35 Coney Street to 8 New Street around the time of the Census evasion. New Street has been re-numbered since then and No. 8 was then at the southeast end.

The photograph above shows Bland's Court today, and it is likely the blocked doorway with the arched pediment was the entrance to the WSPU census evasion.

It is certain that some of the Suffield sisters were among those spending the night at the census evasion event, particularly as Annie, Ellen, Ada and Agnes are not mentioned in the census return for East House View, where only their mother and father and married oldest daughter, Elizabeth Stubbs, with her three children were recorded. The census Enumerator has crossed out *'Disenfranchised'* where it has been written in the *'Infirmity'* column against the names of Mrs Mary Suffield and Elizabeth, showing that the whole family were strong supporters of the campaign.

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Inhabitants 184
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection.)

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

| NAME AND SURNAME | RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family | AGE (last birthday) and SEX | PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE | PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of persons aged ten years and upwards | BIRTHPLACE of every person | NATIONALITY of every Person born in Foreign Country | INFIRMITY. |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--|----------------------------|---|------------|
| 1. William Suffield | Head | 65 | Married 43 | Farmer (Dairy) | York | English | |
| 2. Marjorie Suffield | Wife | 65 | " 9 9 | | York | English | |
| 3. George F. Suffield | Son | 28 | Single | Design Farmer, Architect | Fulford York | English | |
| 4. Elizabeth & Stubbs | Daughter | 41 | Married 18 yrs | | York | English | |
| 5. Marjorie Stubbs | Grandchild | 7 yrs | | | Scarborough | English | |
| 6. Milla Stubbs | " | 6 yrs | | | Scarborough | English | |
| 7. Milda Stubbs | " | 11 yrs | | | Scarborough | English | |
| 8. ... | | | | | | | |
| 9. ... | | | | | | | |
| 10. ... | | | | | | | |
| 11. ... | | | | | | | |
| 12. ... | | | | | | | |
| 13. ... | | | | | | | |
| 14. ... | | | | | | | |
| 15. ... | | | | | | | |

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

1. I certify that—
 (1) All the ages on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex column.
 (2) I have corrected the names and families in Column 3 and 4 respectively, and have compared their names with the usual register of births.
 (3) Above each of the names I have written the usual Christian name, and such as appears in the ordinary, with their initials and such as appears in the ordinary.

| | | |
|-------|---------|---------|
| Males | Females | Persons |
| 2 | 5 | 7 |

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling)

Write before the Number of Persons in this Dwelling (House, Tenement, or Apartment) the Names as a Room but do not count solitary, lodging, lobby, closet, bathrooms, nor warehouses, offices, etc.

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature William Suffield
 Postal Address East-Bevis House Fulford York

Another entry on 5th May 1911 in the 'Votes For Women' reports some very sad news about the Suffield and Stubbs family. The York WSPU held a packed meeting at the Festival Concert Rooms [attached to the Assembly Rooms, but now demolished] addressed by the leader of the movement, Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst.

Bouquets of flowers were presented to Mrs Pankhurst by 'Barbara and Derick Holmes and the two little grandchildren of the Hon. Sec. [Mrs Coultate's grandchildren] and also to Miss Adela Pankhurst by Marjorie Stubbs, instead of her little sister, Dorothy Stubbs, who was to have given it, and whose loss is still felt so keenly.'

It would seem that Elizabeth had recently lost Dorothy, her 6-year-old daughter and perhaps this is why she was staying at her parent's house in Fulford on census night.

The Suffield sisters were extremely busy supporting the campaign in any way they could, as illustrated by this report from the 19th May 1911 edition of 'Votes For Women': 'The Jumble Sale was most satisfactory and raised the sum of nearly £8. Best thanks to all members, friends and sympathisers who kindly sent in goods. Also, Sister Ferens and the Misses Fairweather, Hicks, Hyde, Allee, Clara and Agnes Suffield, Iva Hill, Dorothy Lamplough, Dorothy Smallwood and Mr Harry Coultate for assisting the organised and Hon Secretary during the sale.

The organiser feels especially grateful to Miss Clara and Miss Agnes Suffield for their indefatigable labour and untiring help they gave her in advertising, marking goods and preparing for the sale.'

These events were all part of the very busy campaign to build support for the 'Great Procession' in London on 17th June 1911.

There are many more entries in 'Votes For Women' which refer to the Suffield sisters, who were energetic stalwarts of the Suffragette movement in York. It is tantalising to think that they may have left diaries, photographs or other records of the campaign, including the York WSPU banner, all of which are yet to be discovered.

THE CENSUS DAY AND AFTER.

SUFFRAGISTS STAY OUT ALL NIGHT

ATTEMPTS TO EVADE THE COUNT

HOW YORK WOMEN "RESISTED."

The taking of the census in York on Sunday passed off very quietly. Yesterday the various enumerators were busily engaged collecting the schedules, and eventually it will be found that, with the exception of about 50 persons, the whole of the population of York has been recorded.

The 50 referred to comprised the local suffragists who resisted the census in one way or another. In common with their sisters in other places, the Branch of the Women's Social and Political Union resisted by having an "all night sitting." Between 9 p.m. and midnight on Monday a number of women might have been seen mounting the staircase leading to certain business premises in Coney-street. They were Suffragists living in York, Hull, and Castleford, or travelling from Scotland, the latter breaking their journey on arrival at York and repairing to the appointed place of meeting. Here every precaution was

taken to outwit the enumerators and the police: heavy blinds were closely drawn over the windows and skylights, and the door was curtained off on the inside, with the result that, to the outsider, the apartments appeared to be vacant.

This move seems to have been thoroughly effective, but, to make assurance doubly sure, further precautions were adopted. To gain the door, in accordance with their duty, the police had to mount some "creaky" stairs. A sharp ear was kept for the approach of any officers, and when any footsteps were detected the lights were temporarily extinguished, and silence reigned supreme until, after trying the door, and finding it locked, the officer had removed out of earshot. Inside the resisters engaged in impromptu entertainments to while away the time. The majority remained in the room from midnight until 8 a.m. yesterday, but those who work for their living left in time for their employment.

Supper and breakfast were provided, and, according to a prominent member of the York branch of the Union, the venture was eminently successful. None of the resisters returned to their homes till after mid-day yesterday, when the census had ceased from troubling and the householder was at rest. Some of the York Suffragists went to Leeds, where similar tactics were indulged in.

Yorkshire Herald, 4th April 1911

Thanks to Jill Liddington, Michael Waters, the Borthwick Institute, York Explore and Ancestry, for their extremely helpful advice and access to records. For more information see Jill Liddington's excellent book 'Rebel Girls'.

Christopher Rainger,

Fishergate, Fulford and Heslington Local History Society. August 2018