

*Votes for Women. Cheltenham and the Cotswolds.* Sue Jones. Stroud: The History Press, 2018. 208 pp, numerous b/w ill. Paperback £14.99. [ISBN 978-0-75098277-1]

More than 100 years after most women over 30 finally achieved the right to vote in Parliamentary elections, the history of women's struggle for the suffrage in Britain continues to excite popular interest. Extensive research has been carried out into the suffrage campaign leading to debates around who was involved, the effectiveness of different tactics and the significance of class and party politics. Local studies have played an important part in showing the diversity and complexity of the movement and have shed new light on its main characteristics. Sue Jones's book on *Votes for Women in Cheltenham and the Cotswolds* is a welcome addition to this literature. The book is largely about the history of suffrage in the spa town of Cheltenham. Here the campaign was far stronger than in the neighbouring towns of Cirencester and Stroud which are both discussed in two chapters at the end of the book.

Sue Jones traces the growth of the suffrage campaign in Cheltenham from the establishment of a branch of the National Society of Women's Suffrage (WSS) in 1871, one of only twenty-one in the country, to the formation of new groups in the early twentieth century. She analyses the strengths and weaknesses of different organisations in the town and examines the development of new tactics and methods. In many respects the movement in Cheltenham follows national trends but there are several features that are different. The significance of certain groups can come as a surprise. The Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, for example, formed nationally in 1910, was quick to establish itself in Cheltenham. It gained over ninety members in three months. In contrast to other groups, it was successful in attracting women from lower-middle-class and working-class backgrounds as well as those from leading families in the town. The CUWFA kept its registration fee low and was helped by the fact that the local Conservative candidate, Sir James Agg-Gardner was a strong supporter of women's suffrage.

When the new militant groups arrived in Cheltenham after 1907 it was not the Pankhurst-led Women's Social and Political Union that came to predominate but the Women's Freedom League. This was because Edith How Martyn, whose family lived in Cheltenham, was one of the national leaders who broke away from the WSPU to form the new group. Her sister Florence Earengy established a branch in Cheltenham and provided energetic leadership. It was not until 1911 that the WSPU made their presence felt in the town when Ada Flatman, a paid organiser, arrived to carry out extensive propaganda. This can be contrasted with the spa town of Bath where the WSPU, under the leadership of the charismatic Annie Kenney, was the main militant group in the town from 1907.

Local studies are significant in enabling us to find out more about the broad range of women who were involved in suffrage campaigning. It is difficult, however, to trace individual suffrage activists when there are few branch records and only some names appear in the press. In the case of Cheltenham Sue Jones was able to dig much deeper when she found a book presented to James Agg-Gardner MP in 1912 thanking him for his support for a women's suffrage Bill. It was signed by 500 women, listed under organisation, who gave names or initials. They could then be traced in the census to reveal age, marital status, and their or family members' occupations. Across all groups they came from similar backgrounds. Women from military, ex-colonial and professional families predominated but others came from families in trades including coal merchants, grocers, and manufacturers.

Several women teachers and doctors were also attracted to the movement. One section of the book was for sympathisers and included domestic servants, shopkeepers, and a disproportionate number of drapers' assistants.

Sue Jones also provides us with in-depth biographies of leading suffrage campaigners in the town which bring them alive for the reader and show multiple layers of complexity. One pioneer was Harriet McIlquham, the wife of a solicitor, who spoke at meetings for the WSS in the 1870s. She then joined the more radical Women's Franchise League and became its president in 1889. She was always supportive of the rights of working-class women and was the first married Poor Law Guardian in the country. Theodora Mills, 28, the daughter of a wine merchant, was secretary of the WSS from 1902 until it folded. She spoke at outdoor meetings and attended several large demonstrations in London. Along with her mother she was one of eight women who claimed the parliamentary vote in 1909, thus challenging the law.

As was the case elsewhere women in the Cheltenham WSS were prepared to work with, and give support to, the more militant WFL and WSPU, and of course there were many overlaps with the CUWFA. They not only attended each other's meetings but also joined together over controversial issues such as the Daisy Turner case, where a young woman was accused of murdering her new-born baby, and a battle where Dr Alice Burn of the WSPU, an assistant medical officer of the town, was dismissed for promoting vegetarianism. There was greater rivalry, however, between the militant groups when the WSPU branch revived after 1911. This is revealed in a fascinating chapter on the Census Boycott of 1911 where both groups organised the boycott and used different houses as collection points for evaders.

It would have been helpful if the book had said a little more at the beginning about the economic, political, and social structure of the town itself and, in a conclusion, drawn some comparisons with similar towns elsewhere. Overall, however, this is a well-researched local study containing a wealth of detail on Cheltenham and its surrounding area. It does not just confirm what we know already but also comes up with some surprising findings which help to modify the national picture and to emphasise the complexity of the suffrage movement.

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