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The Life and Achievements of Alice Hawkins, a Leicester Suffragette

Hiroko Tomida

Introduction

Britain has produced two female Prime Ministers – Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May. Many female MPs have taken important positions in the Cabinet and have made their presence strongly felt. 2018 marked the centenary of British women’s suffrage. Various celebratory and educational events such as public lectures and exhibitions have been held throughout Britain. ‘Voice & Vote: Women’s Place in Parliament’, a major public display at Westminster Hall, which highlighted the history of the women’s suffrage movement and the representation of women in Parliament, drew very many visitors. Alice Hawkins’s section of this became a centre of attention because her memorabilia was here first opened to the public.⁽¹⁾ ‘Voice & Vote’ brought her into the spotlight, augmenting public interest in her suffrage activities. The British women’s suffrage movement and its campaigners have been well researched in Britain and America, and a wide range of English publications on them are available.⁽²⁾ However, Alice had remained an obscure figure out-

(1) Mari Takayanagi, Melanie Unwin & Paul Seaward (eds.), *Voice & Vote: Celebrating 100 years of Votes for Women* (London: Regal Press Limited, 2018), pp. 70–71.

(2) Major publications on the British suffrage movement are Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women: The Story of a Struggle* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957); Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women’s Suffrage in Great Britain* (Kent: Croom Helm,

side Leicester, and her name had scarcely appeared in the historiography. She had been an under-researched suffragette, and to my knowledge, *Alice Hawkins and the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Leicester* is the only publication focusing on her.⁽³⁾ Therefore the main objective of this article is to introduce her eventful life and explore her women's suffrage activities, discussing her contributions to this cause.

Alice Hawkins's early life

Alice Hawkins had a very humble family background. In 1863 she was born into a very poor family as a daughter of Henry and Helen Riley in Stafford, where she spent her childhood.⁽⁴⁾ They had three sons and six daughters, and were typically working class. Although her father was a shoemaker, he did not have a regular employer, and moved from one factory to another in Stafford to find work. After he was unemployed, he went down to Leicester to seek work with his family in 1876. By then she had left school at the age of thirteen, having received a very basic education in Stafford, and lived the rest of her life in Leicester.

Before 1850 Leicester's main industry was hosiery, but the boot and shoe industry had existed for centuries in Leicestershire. With the specialization of the county in pastoral agriculture and animal rearing, there was a ready availability of leather, suitable for boot and shoe making. The relocation of Stead and Simpson

1978); June Purvis & Sandra Holton (eds.), *Votes for Women* (London: Routledge, 2000); Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage, 1866–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2002); Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866–1928* (London: Routledge, 2003); June Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2018).

(3) Richard Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins and the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Leicester* (Derby: The Breedon Books Publishing Company Limited, 2007).

(4) On Alice's life, see Peter Barratt's website entitled 'Alice Hawkins Suffragette', which is <https://www.alicehawkinsuffragette.co.uk>.

from Leeds to Leicester in 1858 meant that footwear became a major local industry.⁽⁵⁾ The firm pioneered an American machine which could stitch the insole and upper of the shoe to the outer sole, dramatically increasing productivity and lowering prices. Many more boot and shoe firms opened: the number of such manufacturers in Leicester between 1861 and 1870 rose from 23 to 117; and the 1871 Census showed that in ten years the numbers working in the boot and shoe industry in Leicester had more than doubled from 2315 to 5087.⁽⁶⁾

Considering these circumstances, Alice's family move to Leicester was well judged, and her father obtained a secure job in a shoe factory. More shoe-making machines of different types were produced and the different aspects of shoe-making were changed into simpler tasks, which relatively unskilled female operatives could perform. Consequently, the number of women employees in the boot and shoe industry grew considerably, in part because their wages were lower than men's. This made it easy for Alice, who had neither previous work experience nor training, to find simple work at a local boot and shoe factory in Leicester. Initially she worked as a fitter, attending a shoe machine with other three girls, pulling the leather tight while a shoe machinist ran the leather through to do the stitching for the boot or shoe.⁽⁷⁾ Later on she was promoted to a shoe machinist, the job which she continued to perform for the rest of her life until her retirement.

Alice's activities in the trade union movement

Although Alice was content with her work, she soon realized that working conditions in the boot and shoe industry were poor. Female factory workers' wages were less than half of male workers' ones, for doing similar types of work. Unlike

(5) Siobhan Begley, *The Story of Leicester* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013), p. 126.

(6) V.W. Hogg, 'Footwear manufacture', in R.A. McKinley, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Leicester* (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Historical Research, 1958), p. 316.

(7) Barratt, 'Alice Hawkins Suffragette'.

her sisters who worked in the same boot and shoe industry, Alice became dissatisfied with the disparity between male and female earning power. As she wanted to improve working conditions, she joined a trade union to demand equitable working conditions and equal pay for women in her factory.

It was through her participation in the trade union that she was introduced to radical working-class politics and socialist ideas, which called not only for improvements in working conditions but also radical change in society and a redistribution of wealth. At one of the socialist meetings in Leicester she met Alfred Hawkins, a working-class factory worker, who had socialist views like her.⁽⁸⁾ They married in 1884 when she was 21 years old, and went on to have six children. Even after marriage, she combined her factory work with her domestic duties and child-bearing and childrearing in addition to her trade union activities.

In 1887 she changed her workplace to the Equity, which was formed in 1886 by a group of shoe workers from large manufacturers in Leicester who became disillusioned with their employers.⁽⁹⁾ They planned to found their own shoe company, and their new venture was realized without great difficulty. This was mainly because shoe-making at that time was an enterprise that favoured small businesses since very little capital was needed to get started.⁽¹⁰⁾ The only thing required was shoe-making machinery. After having saved up enough money to purchase some second-hand shoe machinery, they leased premises in Friar's Causeway, and started their shoe-manufacturing operation in the spring of 1887, employing 21 people including Alice.⁽¹¹⁾ She wanted to work there because the company was the first workers' cooperative shoe company in Leicester and she was attracted by the company's work ethic: 'equality of opportunity and rewards for everyone regardless of sex or

(8) Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, p. 281.

(9) On the Equity, see Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, pp. 185–186.

(10) Begley, *The Story of Leicester*, p. 126.

(11) Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, p. 185.

class'.⁽¹²⁾ She worked there as a machinist from 1887 into the early twentieth century. As the company had a liberal attitude towards their workers and was very sympathetic about their employees' trade union activities, Alice continued to devote herself to her trade union activities, through which her radicalism and socialist ideas were further progressed. She later developed her interest in left-wing politics as well.

Keir Hardie, who had initially worked as a coal miner, helped form many trade unions as a prominent union organizer in Scotland, and he was elected to Parliament in 1892 as an independent MP.⁽¹³⁾ In 1893 he co-founded the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and became its first chairman. In the past many trade unions, which wanted Parliamentary representation, financially supported working-class candidates and asked the Liberal Party to accept and support them. However, the idea of collaborating with the more middle-class Liberal Party to achieve working-class representation in Parliament seemed to be unfeasible. Hardie, who had become convinced of the need for independent labour politics beyond Liberalism, established the ILP to obtain independent representation of working-class candidates. The party was supported by many trade unions, and aimed for a wide range of progressive social reforms. These included a minimum-wage law, the abolition of overtime, the ending of child labour, an eight-hour working day, the establishment of measures to reduce unemployment and to provide aid to the unemployed.

Alice admired Keir Hardie, and she sympathized with the ILP which she and her husband joined in 1894. She also became a member of the Clarion Cycling Club.⁽¹⁴⁾ The club was named after a socialist newspaper launched in 1891, which supported the ILP. Associated clubs and societies connected with *The Clarion* were

(12) Ibid., p. 185.

(13) On Keir Hardie, see Caroline Benn, *Keir Hardie: A Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1992).

(14) On the Clarion Cycling Club, see Hannah Ross, *Revolutions: How Women Changed the World on Two Wheels* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021), pp. 116–120.

created. The cycling club was one such, with strong links to the labour movement. It promoted cycling and socialism, and spread into industrial cities such as Leicester.

Having been a member, Alice went cycling into the countryside near Leicester on Sunday mornings with other male and female members of the club. After cycling, they met at a coffee house in Leicester, exchanging their socialist beliefs and ideas, and discussing their common aims of creating a better society. In 1902 Alice first came to public attention, having been reported in a local newspaper.⁽¹⁵⁾ Some among the public were indignant at a photograph of Alice cycling while wearing bloomers, which were short loose trousers that fit tightly at the knee. Her conduct was considered to be ‘unwomanly’, although bloomers became popular as the ‘bicycle dress’ for women during the bicycle craze in the 1890s, which was triggered by Annie Cohen Kopchovsky’s famous bicycle trip around the world in 1894 wearing bloomers.⁽¹⁶⁾ Alice ignored public criticism and continued to ride her bicycle. In this regard she could be classified as a ‘new woman’ of her period, as she fitted its conception of financial self-dependence and apparently emancipated lifestyle. She was turning against convention and fixed notions of women, rethinking the existing male-dominated society and creating one in which equal employment and legal rights would be available to women. Alice was a composite creation of the advancing women’s movement and a harbinger of the suffragette.

Alice’s participation in the women’s suffrage movement

In 1900 Alice was 37 years old and had committed herself to the trade union movement for a long time, agitating for the rights of female workers. However, she became increasingly disillusioned with what could be achieved through the move-

(15) Louise Dawson, ‘How the bicycle became a symbol of women’s emancipation’, *The Guardian* (4 November, 2011).

(16) Ross, *Revolutions*, pp. 50–56 & pp. 194–205.

ment. Almost all trade unions were dominated and controlled by men. They prioritised the interests of male workers rather than equal rights since they were seen as the 'breadwinners' of the family. The end of the Boer War in 1902 caused male workers to strengthen their doubts or antagonisms towards female workers. There was a decline especially in boot making for soldiers after the war, and many men working in the boot-making trade had been made redundant.⁽¹⁷⁾ Fewer women lost their jobs since their wages were much lower than those of men. In June 1905 about 500 unemployed male shoemakers, who had been reduced to poverty by unemployment, marched from Leicester to London, protesting about lack of employment.⁽¹⁸⁾ Many male workers began to regard female workers as a threat, depriving them of employment opportunities. Many of them were especially against married female workers because they thought that each family needed only one breadwinner, who should be the husband, in order to reduce the unemployment rate.

The relationship between male and female workers worsened. Accordingly, Alice felt that the trade union movement had a limited scope, and expressed her disappointment of its achievements for women:

I early began to find out there was something very wrong with the lives of women workers. Twenty years ago I joined the ILP and my trade union, and have worked for the uplifting of my sex ever since. For the last eight years I have been organizer and hon. President of the Women's Boot Union, but was never satisfied with the conditions of women's labour as compared with men's.⁽¹⁹⁾

(17) Begley, *The Story of Leicester*, pp. 178–180.

(18) Bill Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester Working Class Politics, 1860–1906* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), pp. 174–175.

(19) 'The Suffragette', *Leicester Pioneer* (24 January, 1913).

Margaret MacDonald stressed to Alice the significance of women's suffrage for equal pay and better conditions. Alice, who was a founding member of the Leicester ILP and had been Vice President of the Women's ILP in Leicester, was acquainted with Margaret after her husband Ramsay MacDonald became a Leicester ILP candidate in 1900. Margaret was from a middle-class family, but her experiences of the London poor led her to question capitalism.²⁰ Influenced by Christian socialism and Unitarianism, she became a socialist. In 1894 she joined the Women's Industrial Council, which originated from the Women's Trade Union Association, aiming to investigate and improve women's working conditions. She was also involved in the National Union of Women Workers. In 1906 she founded the Women's Labour League (WLL) with several socialist women such as Margaret Bondfield, and acted as its president.²¹ Its main objectives were to promote the political representation of women via their suffrage and enhance women's political education.

Before 1906 Margaret MacDonald drew special attention to women's suffrage, became a leading member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and served on its executive.²² However, most of the members of the NUWSS were middle-class women who endorsed the Liberal Party, so Margaret formed the WLL, which was affiliated to the ILP, hoping to encourage more working-class women to become involved both in the ILP and women's suffrage campaigns.

The League's inaugural conference was held in Leicester, with representatives of branches in London, Leicester, Preston and Hull. Margaret singled out Alice for a post of recruiting more working-class members for the Leicester branch of the WLL.²³ Alice agreed to help run the branch and succeeded in increasing the number

⁽²⁰⁾ On Margaret MacDonald, see Ramsay MacDonald, *Margaret Ethel MacDonald* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913).

⁽²¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁽²²⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁽²³⁾ Barratt, 'Alice Hawkins'.

of working-class members. However, less than a year later, in 1907, she deserted the WLL for the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

Since 1903 there were two major women's suffrage organisations – the NUWSS and the WSPU. The former was established in 1897 and Millicent Garrett Fawcett was elected as its president.⁽²⁴⁾ It was democratically run and its main objective was 'to obtain the Parliamentary franchise for women on the same terms as it is or may be granted to men'. Its campaigning methods were law-abiding and respectable. Indeed it conducted political lobbying and petitioning to begin with, and later embarked on organizing processions, public lectures and other means to attract public interest and support.

On the other hand, the WSPU was founded in Manchester in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst, who was assisted by her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia. Its major aim was to 'secure for women the Parliamentary vote as it is or may be granted to men'.⁽²⁵⁾ Its members' motto was 'Deeds, not Words'. The early days of the WSPU's activities involved petitioning and Parliamentary lobbying, which were moderate and law-abiding like the NUWSS. However, the WSPU's tactics changed on 13th October 1905 when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney were arrested and charged with disorderly behavior, causing an obstruction and assaulting the police.⁽²⁶⁾ When they were sentenced, they refused to pay their fines, so they were

(24) On the NUWSS, see Harold L. Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866–1928* (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 15–27; Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: The Garretts and their Circle* (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2002), pp. 252–265.

(25) On the WSPU, see Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866–1928*, pp. 28–42; Andrew Rosen, *Rise up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903–1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); Diane Atkinson, *Votes for Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 15–36; Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, pp. 65–249; Martin Pugh, *The Pankhursts* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2001); Diane Atkinson, *Rise up, Women! The Remarkable Lives of the Suffragettes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

(26) *Ibid.*, pp. 28–30; Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1959), p. 54.

sent to prison. This incident received considerable publicity, which made Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst realize that the best way to obtain the maximum attention of the media, the government and general public was the WSPU members' more strident behavior. After the WSPU's headquarters moved from Manchester to London in 1906, the members were encouraged to take militant action, which would cause them to be arrested. More and more members were imprisoned, refusing to pay fines. As a result, they became commonly known as 'suffragettes' in contrast with the law-abiding 'suffragists', the members of the NUWSS.⁽²⁷⁾

What made Alice decide to join the WSPU? On 17th January 1907 Leicester Trades Council accepted the WSPU's three speakers – Billington-Greig, Cobden-Saunders and Annie Kenny – to talk at a meeting held in the Shoe Trade Hall, Leicester.⁽²⁸⁾ As the three had suffered from arrest and imprisonment for protesting outside Parliament in 1906, they talked about their experiences in prison, which had a great impact on Alice. In particular, Kenny's talk must have had a powerful effect on Alice because they had several things in common. Kenny was a working-class woman and had worked for a cotton mill from an early age.⁽²⁹⁾ She had been involved in trade union activities for 15 years, advocating workers' rights, especially better working conditions for women. She was inspired by *The Clarion*, a socialist newspaper, and was influenced by socialist ideas. Most importantly, she was concerned about the limited scope of the trade union movement, just like Alice, and consequently she joined the WSPU. Her enthusiastic speech advocating women's suffrage won over Alice. In her own words Alice also explained her reason for joining the WSPU, stating that 'I joined the militants in 1907 to fight for the weapon which men have to push their trade union principles into the only place –

(27) Atkinson, *Votes for Women*, p. 15.

(28) Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, p. 42.

(29) On Kenney, see Annie Kenney, *Memories of a Militant* (London: Edward Arnold & Company, 1924).

namely, Parliament – where it was possible to better their conditions'.⁽³⁰⁾ Like the nineteenth-century Chartists, and many other working-class movements over the previous century, she had faith in a widely extended suffrage as being the key to alleviation of adverse working conditions. Conspicuous and often violent protest seemed the only avenue that would lead to this outcome, given so much male and Parliamentary opposition, and those women's protests took many forms at this time, even in some cases leading to loss of life. Another reason why she left the WLL was that the WLL supported the NUWSS: Margaret MacDonald (president of the WLL and an executive member of the NUWSS) was against the WSPU since she disapproved of its militancy. According to her husband, Ramsay MacDonald, Margaret was offended by militancy in practice.⁽³¹⁾ As a method of agitation she felt that it would lead to misrepresentation and delusional aspirations among its devotees. She tried to prevent members of the WLL from drifting into the WSPU, but her attempt did not dissuade Alice.

Although Alice did not become a member of the WSPU immediately after 17th January 1907, she and five other women, who had been inspired by the three suffragettes' talks, went down to Caxton Hall in London to attend a Women's Parliament organized by the WSPU on 13th February 1907.⁽³²⁾ The women gathered there were hoping to hear news in the King's speech of a bill to go through Parliament that would finally grant women the right to vote on the day of the state opening of Parliament. However this never happened, so Emmeline Pankhurst, outraged by the lack of a bill to enfranchise women, roused participants to lobby the Prime Minister. As a result, over 400 women in the Caxton Hall including Alice, the great majority of whom were members of the WSPU, marched to Parliament Square. They campaigned outside the Houses of Parliament. However, they met rows of police,

(30) 'The Suffragette', *Leicester Pioneer* (24 January, 1913).

(31) MacDonald, *Margaret Ethel MacDonald*, p. 201.

(32) Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, p. 43.

including mounted police, who tried to prevent them breaking into Parliament. The mounted police rode into the procession of the women to scatter it. The ensuing battle lasted five hours. The police's excessive violence left many women with bruises and torn clothes. 59 people including Christabel and Sylvia Pankhurst and Alice Hawkins were arrested, charged with obstruction or with resisting the police, and were sentenced to between 1 and 3 weeks.³³ As they refused to pay their fines, they were sent to jail. Alice was sentenced for 14 days, and went to Holloway Prison.

According to Mary Turner, more than 1000 suffragettes were sent to prison between 1905 and 1914.³⁴ They claimed that they were political prisoners, so they should have been sentenced to the first division.³⁵ However, many of them were treated as common criminals and were put in either the second or third division. The women in the first division had privileges. For example, they did not have to work in prison. They could wear their own clothes and send and receive letters. They were allowed to have magazines and books from outside and to have visitors. On the other hand, the women in the second and third divisions were not given any of these privileges. Instead they had to work in prison, such as cleaning, knitting, sewing and darning socks.

When Alice was sent to jail for the first time, she was sentenced to the first division, though working-class women like her were normally sentenced to the third division. In her notes she recalled Holloway Prison as follows:

³³ Atkinson, *Rise up, Women!*, pp. 60–63; Joyce Marlow (ed.), *Votes for Women: The Virago Book of Suffragettes* (London: Virago Press, 2000), pp. 52–53; Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story* (1914, London: Vintage Books, 2015), pp. 75–79; Caitlin Davies, *Bad Girls: The Rebels and Renegades of Holloway Prison* (London: John Murray, 2019), pp. 65–66.

³⁴ Mary Turner, *The Women's Century: A Celebration of Changing Roles 1900–2000* (Surrey: The National Archives, 2003), p. 25.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

We had to get up at 6 o'clock, had breakfast about 7 and clean all up on our cells and be ready for chapel by 8 o'clock, which last until about 9:15. Then we had a visit from the doctor if needed and the Governor if you want to ask for anything. About 10 o'clock you go out for exercise which consists of walking around a few paths of gravel for about an hour after which we do as we like in our cells. Either we sew or write until dinner time.

The afternoon is lonely as we see no one till tea time between 4 and 5, unless a warder lets us out to empty any dirty water we may have. After tea we are locked in again until morning and so on day after day, excepting Sunday when we go to Church twice. I may say we are allowed a book twice a week and after the first Sunday we had a newspaper so that we were not altogether without news from the outer world. Now this is the daily routine for the 1st class prisoners. I don't think the others are allowed anything nearly as well as this.³⁶

Alice sent letters to Ramsay MacDonald from prison. In a letter of 22nd February she deplored the police's brutal treatment of suffragettes, writing that 'no other civilized country would treat women in such a manner'.³⁷

Alice's experiences of the mass rally and subsequent imprisonment had a profound effect on her. After her release from prison, she convened a meeting in which she and Christabel Pankhurst addressed their recent ordeals in prison. Shortly after Alice announced the foundation of the Leicester branch of the WSPU on 21st March (1907), becoming the first secretary of this branch, and organized its inaugural meeting at the Welford Coffee House on 9th April.³⁸ From then on, the

³⁶ Cited in Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, p. 183.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 53–55.

coffee house, the Temperance Hall, Corn Exchange and the Shoe Trade Hall were used for the local assemblies, in which many WSPU's leading figures like Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, spoke to the Leicester women, which helped to recruit more members in Leicester.

On 31st May, Sylvia Pankhurst came to Leicester to assist in the running of the Leicester branch for about three weeks. From early June open-air meetings were regularly held at the market square, where Alice enthusiastically spoke about the importance of women's suffrage, trying to encourage more women to join the WSPU. She arranged evening meetings for working-class women, which Sylvia talked to. She also took Sylvia to her workplace, the Equity, introducing female factory workers to her.⁽³⁹⁾ Sylvia was given an opportunity to observe their working conditions, and to develop her interest in the welfare of working-class women.

Alice and other members of the Leicester branch began a tireless campaign to increase their supporters, travelling by bicycle. Every Sunday morning, they cycled to the towns and villages throughout Leicestershire and parts of Northamptonshire and Derbyshire, ranging from 6 to 30 miles away, where they had open-air meetings at village greens and market squares, greeted their followers, distributed WSPU literature and asked for donations.⁽⁴⁰⁾ They also held several lunchtime meetings speaking and handing out hand-bills at factory gates in Leicester and Northampton. Their efforts bore fruit, many new members were recruited and a new WSPU satellite branch was established in Loughborough. As the Leicester branch closely collaborated with the Nottingham branch, Alice was often invited to Nottingham to speak at the marketplace there.

Moreover Alice retained close contact with the headquarters of the WSPU in London. She and other members of the Leicester branch often went to London, at-

(39) Ibid., pp. 57–60; Rachel Holmes, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Natural Born Rebel* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), p. 217.

(40) Ross, *Revolutions*, p. 116.

tending meetings at the Albert Hall and Women's Parliaments in Caxton Hall, and participating in many women's suffrage processions. During a mass rally in Hyde Park in June 1908, attended by over 250,000 people, Alice was one of the keynote speakers. When a deputation of women from different trades met the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George, in January 1913, Alice was the representative of the Women's Boot and Shoe Union.⁽⁴¹⁾ She and other representatives explained the terrible pay and working conditions that they had been suffering and expressed their hope that a vote would enable women to challenge the status quo in a democratic manner. She showed her frustration, stating how her fellow male workers could choose a man to represent them while the women were left unrepresented.⁽⁴²⁾ She also lamented that her two sons had the vote, yet the woman who had brought them into the world had no say and was 'looked down on'. Although the deputation was unsuccessful, Alice's presence was an important indication of working-class support for the WSPU.

Alice contributed to the WSPU's fundraising events in London as well. WSPU members organized the Women's Exhibition at the Prince's Skating Rink in Knightsbridge on 13th and 26th May 1909.⁽⁴³⁾ The exhibition was set out like a bazaar, with more than 50 stalls selling handmade items and food. Alice held a joint stall with Helen Watts from the Nottingham branch. On 13th December 1912 Alice helped with the WSPU's Christmas fair. These events not only made much profit but also gained publicity.

The WSPU used various methods to publicize and promote the cause of

(41) 'Picturesque deputation to the Chancellor of the Exchequer', *The Daily Mirror* (24 January, 1913); 'Fisher wives and pit brow lasses on deputation to Chancellor', *Daily Sketch* (24 January, 1913); Frank Meeres, *Suffragettes: How Britain's Women Fought & Died for the Right to Vote* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), pp. 114–115.

(42) Atkinson, *Rise up, Women!*, p. 365.

(43) Sarah Ridley, *Suffragettes and the Fight for the Vote* (London: Franklin Watts, 2017), p. 28; Atkinson, *Rise up, Women!*, pp. 145–147.

women's suffrage, and tried to win more support from the government and the public. It utilized peaceful and legitimate methods, such as holding semi-private and public meetings, organizing demonstrations, writing propaganda literature and distributing it, fundraising, lobbying MPs and petitioning Parliament, which were all traditional methods of persuasive campaigning and were also used by the NU-WSS. However, the WSPU later adopted confrontational tactics, which it combined with the conventional ones. First, the WSPU members attended political meetings, in which they heckled politicians and interrupted their speeches. Therefore the Liberal government took the step of banning suffragettes from political meetings. However, the WSPU members continued to disrupt political meetings.

Despite their efforts, their cause of women's suffrage seemed little advanced. Consequently, from 1908 the WSPU turned to more militant measures: trespassing in buildings, damaging property by smashing windows, setting fire to letters in post boxes, and setting fires in churches, sports pavilions, railway stations and race courses, cutting telephone and telegraph wires, pouring acid into post boxes, throwing bombs at churches and burning messages such as 'No vote no golf' onto golf greens.⁽⁴⁴⁾ However, the WSPU members' destructive acts were all directed at property, not people or animals. By engaging in such illegal activities, they were liable to arrest and imprisonment. Many of them followed the example of Marion Wallace Dunlop, who was the first to adopt the hunger strike as a protest in July 1909, and they went on hunger strike in prison to protest that their detention was unfair. In order to defeat hunger-striking, the government ordered suffragettes to be forcibly fed if they refused to eat, which caused a public outcry against forced feeding.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The

(44) June Purvis, 'Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) and Votes for Women', in Purvis & Holton, *Votes for Women*, pp. 123–125; Sylvia Estelle Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (1931, London: Virago Press, 1977), pp. 393–410.

(45) On hunger strike and forced feeding, see Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, pp. 312–319; Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners* (1914, London: Virago Press, 1988).

government, which was concerned about strong public criticism and also feared that a suffragette might die while on hunger strike or while undergoing forced feeding, responded with the introduction of the Temporary Discharge of Ill-Health Act in 1913, which authorized the government to release a prisoner whose health was endangered by her own actions and then to re-arrest the woman after her health had improved.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The suffragettes' militancy continued to escalate, especially after Emmeline Pankhurst declared a guerrilla war on 28th January 1913,

Alice was jailed five times in total for the cause of women's suffrage, and her first imprisonment was in February 1907 before becoming a member of the WSPU. Her second prison sentence was 4th September 1909 when she and other suffragettes tried to force entry into a public meeting where Winston Churchill, a cabinet minister of the Liberal government, was speaking at Palace Theatre in Leicester.⁽⁴⁷⁾ As they were barred entry by the stewards, her husband, who supported the women's suffrage cause, went in on their behalf, and heckled Churchill shouting 'How dare you stand on a democratic platform? What about the rights of women?'⁽⁴⁸⁾ After he was ejected from the meeting, he and Alice besieged the main doors, trying to regain entry with other suffragettes, for which they were all arrested for disrupting the meeting. He paid a fine because he needed to work and earn wages to keep his family. On the other hand, Alice refused to pay any fine, respecting WSPU policy on this, and stayed in Leicester Prison for four days where she went on hunger strike for the first time.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Alice was arrested for the third time in London on 18th November 1910. She

(46) On the Temporary Discharge of Ill-Health Act, see Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, pp. 393–410; Fulford, *Votes for Women*, pp. 291–292; Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, pp. 217–231.

(47) 'Woman suffrage: Disturbance at Mr Churchill's meeting', *The Times* (6 September, 1909).

(48) Barratt, 'Alice Hawkins Suffragette'.

(49) Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, p. 89.

was selected to be part of the WSPU's deputation to the Prime Minister in protest at the failure to proceed with the Conciliation Suffrage Bill. With over 300 women gathered at Caxton Hall, she marched to Parliament, where they were met with the police's brutal treatment. Many of them were injured and sexually assaulted by the police, and the day became known as 'Black Friday'.⁵⁰ Although Alice was not injured, she was arrested. However, on the following day, the Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, dropped charges against the arrested women because he was anxious to avoid the publicity that court cases would bring.

After 'Black Friday', the style of deputations, which was more likely to result in higher injury risks to suffragettes, was replaced by law-breaking actions, which would guarantee immediate arrest, and window-smashing became the WSPU's official policy. Four days later Alice volunteered to lead 12 suffragettes to a Cabinet Minister, Edward Harcourt's house to break the windows, for which she was sentenced to 14 days on the next day.⁵¹

On 21st November 1911 Alice and a group of suffragettes broke windows at the Home Office in Whitehall, protesting against the failure of the government to include women in its manhood suffrage bill. Alice was sentenced to 21 days and sent to Holloway Prison, where she went on hunger strike, and was subsequently awarded a WSPU hunger strike medal.⁵²

The WSPU's escalated militancy created concerns among many WSPU members and led to some loss of public support. However, Alice continued to have faith in the WSPU, believing that it offered the best chance of achieving women's suffrage. The Leicester WSPU members went on adopting militancy in Leicestershire

⁵⁰ On 'Black Friday', see Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, pp. 150–152; Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, pp. 218–219; Atkinson, *Rise up, Women!*, pp. 221–223; Caroline Morrell, *'Black Friday' and Violence Against Women in the Suffragette Movement* (London: Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, 1981).

⁵¹ Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, pp. 105–108.

⁵² Takayanagi, Unwin & Seaward (eds.), *Voice & Vote*, pp. 70–71.

even in 1913. They attacked many pillar boxes, cut telephone wires, and went to golf courses with spades at midnight and dug the words of their slogan ‘Votes for women’, into the grass greens.⁵³ They also began arson attacks, attempting to burn down Stoughton Hall near Leicester and Neville Holt mansion further to the east, at which they failed. However, they successfully burnt down Blaby Railway Station in Leicester, causing £500 worth of damage.⁵⁴

Alice was involved in some of these militant actions, and was imprisoned for the last time on 25th May 1913 for damaging pillar boxes in Leicester, with Brunswick black ink.⁵⁵ She stayed in Leicester Prison for one month. The Leicester WSPU’s militancy was met with hostility from local people, and Alice and other WSPU members were attacked several times during meetings held at Leicester marketplace. The Leicester WSPU shop had its windows smashed. Consequently, the Leicester Watch Committee tried to ban WSPU meetings in public places, but the Leicester WSPU continued to hold meetings in the marketplace, and even organized a large grand parade through the town.⁵⁶

Alice’s life after 1914

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst felt that ‘victory against Germany was a more immediate priority than the vote’.⁵⁷ They decided to suspend their entire suffrage activities and sent telegrams to all the WSPU branches throughout Britain, asking the members to cease their campaigns and to redirect their energy and determination into support for the country’s war effort. The Pankhursts encouraged the members to recruit women from all social

⁵³ Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, p. 151.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵⁷ Helen Pankhurst, *Deed Not Words: The Story of Women’s Rights, Then and Now* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2018), p. 17.

classes doing jobs such as labouring in the fields and working in munitions factories in order to replace the work of men who had been drafted into the armed forces.⁵⁸ As her son, Alfred served in both the army and navy during the war, Alice followed the Pankhursts's instructions, and her time as a suffragette came to an abrupt end after seven years of campaigning. In 1917 the WSPU changed its name to the Women's Party, which lasted until 1919. However, it seems unlikely that Alice was associated with the Women's Party.

The government introduced the Representation of the People Act in February 1918. However, it enfranchised a limited number of women over the age of thirty who met certain conditions such as householders, the wives of householders, and occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5.⁵⁹ Unfortunately Alice did not meet any of the conditions, so she had to wait another 10 years to obtain the vote at the age of 65 when the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act in 1928 finally enfranchised all women over the age of 21, upon the same terms as for men. Alice always proudly told her family that 'it was the pressure brought to bear by the suffragettes that finally got them the vote', although her son Alfred believed that women's contributions to the war effort especially affected the issue of women being granted the vote.⁶⁰

Even during her suffragette years, she carried on with her trade union activities. Alice had been president of the Leicester women's branch of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operative (NUBSO) since its foundation in 1904. However, she and Elizabeth Wilson, a shoe heel builder, a trade union leader and a member of the WSPU, who was elected to sit on the Executive Council of the NUBSO in 1910, were dismissed by the union's (male) general secretary. This was mainly because they accused the NUBSO Executive Council for 'being autocratic

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁹ Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign*, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Barratt, 'Alice Hawkins Suffragette'.

and domineering and of demanding absolute surrender and obedience to their dictates'.⁶¹ Consequently, they established the breakaway Independent National Union of Boot and Shoe Women Workers, of which Alice became president with Elizabeth as secretary. Even after World War I, Alice kept the position until her retirement and did excellent work by rousing female workers in the boot and shoe industry to a sense of their needs. She retained her interest in politics and was a strong supporter of the Labour Party after 1900, following her prior membership of the Independent Labour Party.

In the 1945 election 83-year-old Alice went to the Labour Party's office in Leicester city centre, to help the election campaign, putting together leaflets to be distributed. On 12th March 1946 she died at her son Alfred's house, where she had lived for about 15 years. Her death was reported on the front page of a local newspaper *The Leicester Evening Mail*.⁶²

Conclusion

Alice's achievements were very notable. The keys to her success were her enthusiasm, diligence, willpower, patience and perseverance. Her extremely energetic life was extraordinary, for she combined multiple tasks such as work at a shoe factory, activities in trade unions, campaigning for women's suffrage, household duties and childrearing.

The most distinguished role that Alice rendered was as a spokeswoman and leader of working-class women in her trade union and in the women's suffrage movements. Sylvia Pankhurst recalled that Alice was the only working-class woman in Leicester to mount the platform to speak about women's suffrage in a dignified manner.⁶³ For Alice 'the vote and improved working conditions were in-

(61) Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, p. 114.

(62) 'Alice Hawkins Obituary', *The Leicester Evening Mail* (12 March, 1946).

(63) Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p. 263.

trinsically bound together, and she consistently argued that one could not be achieved without the other'.⁶⁴ After the headquarters of the WSPU moved to London, there were relatively few working-class members, for the WSPU was dominated by middle-class women. However, the Leicester branch had many working-class female members thanks to Alice's strong presence and her recruitment campaigns targeting working-class women. In spite of her limited education, she was an outstanding orator, and her speeches exerted such a strong influence upon many working-class women that she proved that their participation in the women's suffrage movement was advantageous. Moreover she had great organizational ability and readily commanded loyal support from working-class women. These contributions have been her greatest and most lasting achievement and legacy.

She also inspired middle-class suffragettes especially Sylvia Pankhurst. During her stay in Leicester, Sylvia developed a close friendship with Alice. Sylvia's resulting associations with many female factory workers in Leicester was a formative factor for her, which led her to found a WSPU branch in the East End of London to recruit working-class members in 1912.⁶⁵ The branch later became the East London Federation of Suffragettes, and she launched a weekly paper, the *Women's Dreadnought*, as a forum for the voice of working women.

Alice was also a skillful negotiator, so she was highly respected by Emmeline Pankhurst. When Alice lost her youngest child, Emmeline sent her a heartwarming personal letter of condolence.⁶⁶ On occasions, Emmeline sent up her car driven by a chauffeur to Leicester to collect Alice, notably to take her to a rally to meet the Pankhursts.⁶⁷ Although most working-class suffragettes' stories have been forgot-

⁶⁴ Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Patricia W. Romero, *E. Sylvia Pankhurst: Portrait of a Radical* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 62–87; Katherine Connelly, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Suffragette, Socialist and Scourge of Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), pp. 58–66; Holmes, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 431–448.

⁶⁶ Barratt, 'Alice Hawkins Suffragette'.

ten now, Alice's life has continued to be remembered among people in Leicester, featuring in a number of exhibitions over the past two decades. Recent developments in that city have ensured that this memory of her is perpetuated and augmented.

Leicester has been chosen as one of seven centenary cities marking 100 years of votes for women, and in that connection it received funding from the Government Equalities Office. In the centenary year of 2018, Alice was commemorated through the unveiling of a bronze statue of her on 4th February in New Market Square, near where she had addressed crowds about the urgent need for women's suffrage.⁶⁸

The statue portrays Alice speaking and gesturing with her right arm raised, and wearing her WSPU sash, her hunger strike medal and the Holloway brooch designed by Sylvia Pankhurst. Thousands of people, including Alice's great-grandson Peter Barratt, attended the statue's unveiling ceremony. He said: 'The statue features Alice but it is in recognition of all the women in the Leicester Suffragette movement 100 years ago, to gain a basic human right that we all have today'.⁶⁹ An exhibition entitled 'Alice Hawkins & Votes for Women!' was held at New Walk Museum in Leicester on 27th October. Deputy City Mayor Adam Clarke stated: 'Although there are still many inequalities in our society, it's fair to say that we wouldn't be where we are now without the strength and determination of women like Alice Hawkins, who made the establishment look up and listen'.⁷⁰

Clearly Alice has thus become an iconographic part of the social history of

(67) Davies, *Bad Girls*, p. 93.

(68) 'Leicester suffragette Alice Hawkins made of true grit', *BBC News* (4 February, 2018).

(69) 'Suffragette Alice Hawkins' family praise Leicester statue', *BBC News* (24 January, 2018).

(70) 'New exhibition tells story of women's campaign for the vote', *Leicester City Council, Leisure and Culture* (25 October, 2018).

Leicester, alongside other key Leicester figures with major statues there such as the Baptist religious leader Robert Hall, the radical Liberal politician John Biggs, and the travel company entrepreneur Thomas Cook. As befits her sharing company with such national figures, her recent statue denotes how important she was both personally and symbolically for women's suffrage and women's working rights, indicates local and civic pride in her life, and shows how her suffrage and trade union contributions projected her onto a national stage beyond the city of Leicester.

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