Sisters and Sisterhood:
The Kenney Sisters, Suffrage and Social Reform
c.1890-1970

Lyndsey Victoria Jenkins
Wolfson College, Oxford
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Short abstract

This is the first thesis which offers a sustained study of working-class women who took part in the militant campaign for suffrage and remained loyal to the Pankhursts, not only during the campaign, but throughout their lives. Historians have often sought to demonstrate why working-class women would not be attracted to the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), identifying political and practical barriers to participation in militancy. The original historiographical contribution of this thesis is to reverse this question, asking instead why working-class women *would* be attracted to the WSPU, through a case study of the Kenney sisters. It identifies the factors that enabled their activism, the opportunities that activism created for them, and the benefits they derived from participating in this organisation. This starting point positions working-class women as significant actors and autonomous agents in the militant suffrage movement, rather than passive pawns subject to manipulation by middle-class women. In focusing on a particular family, it also begins to bridge the surprising lack of research on suffrage families, extending recent research on the historical significance of siblings into a new context. However, this thesis also makes a substantial contribution to modern British history as well as to histories of suffrage, feminism, women and gender. It uses the Kenneys' lived experiences to address questions of class and gender, politics and activism, and agency and identity in the early twentieth century. In doing so, it engages with broader historiographical themes including politicisation, networks and transnationalism. It is a history of education, literacy, religion, migration and social mobility as well as suffrage, and of teachers, theosophists, political activists, social reformers, friends and sisters as well as suffragettes.

Long abstract

This is the first thesis which offers a sustained study of working-class women who took part in the militant campaign for suffrage and remained loyal to the Pankhursts, not only during the campaign, but throughout their lives. Historians have often sought to demonstrate why working-class women would not be attracted to the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), identifying political and practical barriers to participation in militancy. The original historiographical contribution of this thesis is to reverse this question, asking instead why working-class women *would* be attracted to the WSPU, through a case study of the Kenney sisters. It identifies the factors that enabled their activism, the opportunities that activism created for them, and the benefits they derived from participating in this organisation. This starting point positions working-class women as significant actors and autonomous agents in the militant suffrage movement, rather than passive pawns subject to manipulation by middle-class women. In focusing on a particular family, it also begins to bridge the surprising lack of research on suffrage families, extending recent research on the historical significance of siblings into a new context.

This thesis therefore makes a substantial contribution to the feminist scholarship which has sought to enrich existing narratives of the militant suffrage campaign. Centring both working-class women and sisters within the analysis not only offers new insight into existing debates on, for example, the nature of militancy and the degree of autonomy among WSPU members, but also significantly adds to our understanding of the construction of individual and collective identities, the relationships between experience and activism, the development of international feminist networks, and the difficulties which working-class women faced in engaging in feminist politics after the suffrage campaign. All these issues have resonance well beyond the specific field of suffrage history.

This is not simply a work which recovers the careers and lives of these women purely to assert that working-class women were present in the WSPU. Rather, this thesis demonstrates how our understanding of the organisation, the movement and British politics and society are enriched by a full appreciation of the Kenneys' endeavours. Nor is it a work of hagiography. It is an analysis of the inconsistencies, challenges and disappointments that these women negotiated as political activists. At different moments, for example, the Kenney sisters proudly presented themselves as typical working-class women, claimed that they were exceptional members of their class, downplayed the significance of their workplace experiences, and argued that gender, rather than class, was the most significant

constraint on their opportunities. These contradictions point to the tensions between class and gender that women negotiated as political activists but were never able to fully reconcile. They genuinely believed in the possibilities of sisterhood, and in the WSPU as a democratic, meritocratic society in which class was essentially irrelevant. In doing so, however, they disregarded and downplayed the many ways that class continued to define the lives of the vast numbers of women who did not share their privileged access to the WSPU inner circle.

The Kenney family was comprised of eleven siblings who grew up in Saddleworth, near Oldham. While not necessarily involved in formal labour or trade union politics, the Kenney children were nevertheless deeply preoccupied with individual improvement and broader economic and social change. They were particularly inspired by the works of Robert Blatchford and the movement known as the 'religion of socialism'. Their formative experiences working in local factories and mills gave rise to their determination to achieve economic stability and prosperity, but they also pursued a range of literary, cultural and social interests and lived full and interesting lives. By the turn of the century, the adult lives of the sisters had begun to diverge – some working in shops, some training as teachers, and some anticipating marriage – but the Kenneys remained a close-knit and supportive family.

In 1905, Annie, Jane and Jessie Kenney attended a meeting at which Christabel Pankhurst and Teresa Billington-Greig outlined the intentions of their new political organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union. Profoundly moved by the urgency of their commitment, Annie Kenney became increasingly active as a speaker on behalf of the organisation. Later that year, she and Christabel Pankhurst attended Sir Edward Grey's meeting at the Free Trade Hall, where she demanded to know 'will the Liberal Government give votes to women?' This is widely understood as the first act of militancy and credited with reviving the suffrage cause. It generated the suffragettes' iconic slogan 'votes for women' and created one of its lasting images.

Yet Annie Kenney was just one of the Kenney sisters who became involved in the militant suffrage movement. Jessie Kenney also played a leading role in the WSPU, holding a central role in the organisation's headquarters as well as becoming a prominent figure in a shadowy group of devoted radicals known as the 'Young Hot Bloods'. Nell Kenney assumed a more conventional role as one of the WSPU's first organisers, helping shape the campaign in towns and cities across the country. Jane and Caroline Kenney combined commitment to the cause with successful professional careers as teachers. Their

international careers shed new light on the relationships between suffrage and education reform in this period.

Annie Kenney's role within the militant suffrage campaign has never been adequately scrutinised. She is usually seen as the exception that proves the rule: the only working-class woman of note within a middle-class organisation, used to illustrate the degree of control that Christabel Pankhurst supposedly exercised over her loyal followers. This study refutes this caricature by demonstrating the crucial role which Annie Kenney played in her own right, using her as a starting point to re-examine the relationship between gender and class within the women's movement and to reconsider the place of working-class women within feminist politics. However, this is very much a study of a family, not an individual, drawing on the recent advances within family history in general, and on studies of the significance of siblings in particular. This thesis will demonstrate that the emotional, moral, and practical support provided by other members of their family were essential to facilitating and sustaining their work. These family relationships also extended into a vast web of professional contacts, political comrades, and personal friendships which enabled the Kenneys to live full and fulfilling lives.

Rather than following a traditional 'cradle to grave' trajectory adopted by conventional biographies, this thesis uses a thematic approach to analyse different aspects of the Kenneys' lives and activism in detail. The first third of the thesis is concerned with the Kenneys' path to militant activism and their interest in the vote. Chapter one argues that current understandings of Annie Kenney as a 'mill girl' in thrall to Christabel Pankhurst are limited and partial. Following the example of Sarah Richardson, it traces alternative sites of politicisation and suggests that the Kenneys need to be understood in the context of the rich autodidactic culture articulated in the work of Jonathan Rose, and of the 'religion of socialism'. Chapter two examines why the vote was so significant to these women and what it meant to them. It demonstrates that for Annie Kenney, gender was a more significant and powerful force in her life than class, and analyses how this belief shaped her politics. It argues that her claims for the vote fell into three broad categories: the benefits to working-class women, the benefits to women collectively, and the benefits to the nation.

The thesis then turns to examine the meaning and experiences of the Kenneys' work within the WSPU. Chapter three argues that an analysis of Annie Kenney's public representation and private relationships offers a new way of evaluating how class was understood, experienced and negotiated within the organisation. It draws on the work of scholars including Sandra Stanley Holton, Sue Thomas, and Laura Schwartz, who have

analysed how class fragmented and shaped the women's movement. Chapter four contributes to the critical re-examination of the nature and practice of militancy, by developing the work of Laura Mayhall, Krista Cowman and Sandra Stanley Holton, who have challenged assumptions that militancy was primarily associated with violence and illegal acts. This chapter argues that militancy is better understood as an identity, rather than as a set of practices, and analyses the relationship between collective and individual identity in the expression of militancy.

The final third of the thesis broadens the focus beyond the WSPU to consider the relationship between political, social and educational reform, and the Kenneys' understandings of their legacy and identity throughout the rest of their lives. Chapter five develops current understandings of the role of feminist teachers within militant suffrage. It situates Jane and Caroline Kenney in an international network of suffrage activists and educational reformers, demonstrating how women's professional careers might be advanced through their political networks. Chapter six offers a new perspective on the historiography of feminist politics after 1918, by analysing how former activists reconstructed their lives outside the organised women's movement. It highlights the many challenges which Annie and Jessie Kenney faced after the collapse of their personal networks, and demonstrates how they turned to religion, work, and the writing of suffrage history as a means of asserting their ongoing significance.

As a result, this thesis makes a substantial contribution to modern British history as well as to histories of suffrage, feminism, women and gender. It uses the Kenneys' lived experiences to address questions of class and gender, politics and activism, and agency and identity in the early twentieth century. In doing so, it engages with broader historiographical themes including politicisation, networks and transnationalism. It is a history of education, literacy, religion, migration and social mobility as well as suffrage, and of teachers, theosophists, political activists, social reformers, friends and sisters as well as suffragettes. It contributes to wider debates on the possibilities for, and limitations on, working-class women in this transformative historical moment.

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I cannot thank Zoë Thomas enough for her kindness during recent years. She has been the most incredible friend and colleague, reading each chapter of this thesis with care and insight. I am also grateful to Rachel Hewitt, Alexandra Hughes-Johnson, Lucy Ella

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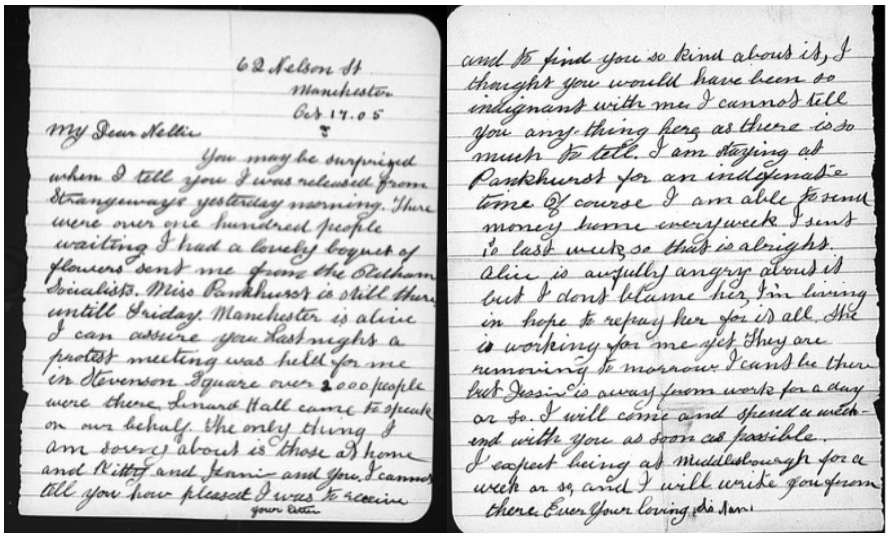
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Introduction



62 Nelson St
Manchester
Oct 17.05

My Dear Nellie

You may be surprised when I tell you I was released from Strangeways yesterday morning. There were over one hundred people waiting I had a lovely boquet of flowers sent me from the Oldham Socialists. Miss Pankhurst is still there untill Friday. Manchester is alive I can assure you Last nights a protest meeting was held for me in Stevenson Square over 2000 people were there Lenard Hall came to speak on our behalf. The only thing I am sorry about is those at home and Kitty and Jennie and You, I cannot tell you how pleased I was to receive your letter and to find you so kind about it, I thought you would have been so indignant with me I cannot tell you anything here as there is so much to tell. I am staying at Pankhurst for an indefinite time of course I am able to send money home every week. I sent it last week so that is alright. Alice is awfully angry about it but I don't blame her, I'm living in hope to repay her for it all. She is working for me yet, they are removing to morrow. I can't be there but Jessie is away from work for a day or so. I will come and spend a weekend with you as soon as possible. I expect being at Middlesborough for a week or so, and I will write you from there. Ever Your loving sis Nan.

Figure 1: Image of letter from Annie Kenney to Nell Kenney, 17 October 1905
Victoria, British Columbia Archives, MS-1029, File 1

Spelling and punctuation reproduced as in the original

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This letter, written by Annie Kenney to Nell Kenney after her release from prison in October 1905, offers new insights into the significance of family relationships within the nascent militant suffrage movement. Family obligations and responsibilities, tensions and conflicts, but above all, love and affection are revealed in an intimate and personal account of an event which would prove to be a turning point not only in Kenney family life, but within the women's movement and British politics more widely. Its poignant testimony to the conflicting emotions that Annie Kenney felt for her family at this extraordinary moment of turmoil is entirely unique. Kept by Nell Kenney, passed to her daughters, and donated to an archive in British Columbia, this letter is indicative of many of the themes which will be explored within this thesis: the vital importance of families and especially siblings, within political movements, the relationship between socialism and feminism in this period, the central place of working-class women in the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), and the Kenneys' sense of themselves as historical actors, with a history worth preserving. It has, however, been previously unknown to scholars.

This is the first thesis which offers a sustained study of working-class women who took part in the militant campaign for suffrage and remained loyal to the Pankhursts not only during the campaign but throughout their lives. Historians have often sought to demonstrate why working-class women would not be attracted to the WSPU, identifying political and practical barriers to participation in militancy.[1] The original historiographical contribution of this thesis is to reverse this question, asking instead why working-class women *would* be attracted to the WSPU, through a case study of the Kenney sisters. It identifies the factors that enabled their activism, the opportunities that activism created for them, and the benefits they derived from active participation in the campaign. This starting point positions working-class women as significant actors and autonomous agents in the militant suffrage movement, rather than passive pawns subject to manipulation by middle-class women. In focusing on a particular family, it also begins to bridge the surprising lack of research on suffrage families, extending recent research on the historical significance of siblings into a new context.[2]

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[1] RS Neale, 'Working-Class Women and Women's Suffrage', in RS Neale (ed.), *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1972), Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1914* (London, 1974) p. 77, Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women: a Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage, 1866-1914* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 212-6, Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London, 1978) especially pp. 205-7, and for the wider suffrage movement see Jihang Park, 'The British Suffrage Activists of 1913: An Analysis', *Past & Present,* 120 (1988), p. 149

[2] Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations 1780-1920* (Oxford, 2012), Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010)

However, this thesis also makes a substantial contribution to modern British history as well as to histories of suffrage, feminism, women and gender. It uses the Kenneys' lived experiences to address questions of class and gender, politics and activism, and agency and identity in the early twentieth century. In doing so, it engages with broader historiographical themes including politicisation, networks and transnationalism. It is a history of education, literacy, religion, migration and social mobility as well as suffrage, and of teachers, theosophists, political activists, social reformers, friends and sisters as well as suffragettes.

This is not simply a work which recovers the careers and lives of these women purely to assert that working-class women were present in the WSPU. Rather, this thesis demonstrates how our understanding of the organisation, the movement and British politics and society are enriched by a full appreciation of the Kenneys' endeavours. Nor is it a work of hagiography. It is an analysis of the inconsistencies, challenges and disappointments that these women negotiated as political activists. At different moments, for example, the Kenney sisters proudly presented themselves as typical working-class women, asserted that they were exceptional members of their class, downplayed the significance of their workplace experiences, and argued that gender, rather than class, was the most significant constraint on their opportunities. These contradictions point to the tensions between class and gender that women negotiated as political activists but were never able to fully reconcile. They genuinely believed in the possibilities of sisterhood, and in the WSPU as a democratic, meritocratic society in which class was essentially irrelevant. In doing so, however, they disregarded and downplayed the many ways that class continued to define the lives of the vast numbers of women who did not share their privileged access to the WSPU inner circle.

This introduction first summarises the historiography and relevant debates, to situate this thesis within the literature and to demonstrate its original contribution. After discussing the sources which have been consulted, it justifies the methodological approach, before providing an overview of the chapters and setting out their distinctive arguments.

Historiography

Suffrage history has often been a controversial and contested field, and its development has been ably traced by both June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton.[3] It is, however, worth bringing their assessments up to date and specifically discussing existing studies of the Kenney sisters in relation to the broader literature. As is frequently noted, the first histories of the suffrage campaign were written by Ray Strachey and Sylvia Pankhurst, in *The Cause* and *The Suffragette Movement* respectively. Strachey was deeply loyal to Millicent Fawcett and invested in a narrative of the campaign which attributed its success to her tireless campaigning, while Pankhurst's work reflected her own complex involvement with the WSPU, disillusionment with its policies and break with her family.[4] Both were deeply critical of the WSPU, and especially Christabel Pankhurst's leadership.

The Suffragette Movement in particular has been extremely influential, though scholars have since pointed out the problematic assumptions which underpin her narrative.[5] Sandra Stanley Holton, for example, notes that Pankhurst was largely responsible for establishing a gulf between the militants and non-militants, and for positioning militancy as an entirely new phenomenon, distinct from previous campaigns.[6] Kathryn Dodd shows that Pankhurst's focus on the 'great women' at the centre of the movement has obscured the 'worthy disciples' who undertook the bulk of the work.[7] Karen Hunt demonstrates that *The Suffragette Movement* misrepresents the early intentions of the WSPU, positioning it as non-party and independent from the outset, when it was clearly understood by participants and other socialists as a group of Independent Labour Party (ILP) women collaborating on a particular issue.[8]

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[3] Sandra Stanley Holton, 'The Making of Suffrage History', in Sandra Stanley Holton and June Purvis (ed.), *Votes for Women* (London, 2000), Sandra Stanley Holton, 'Reflecting on Suffrage History', in Claire Eustance, Joan Ryan, and Laura Ugolini (eds.), *A Suffrage Reader* (London, 2000), June Purvis, 'A "Pair of … Infernal Queens"? A Reassessment of the Dominant Representations of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, First Wave Feminists in Edwardian Britain', *Women's History Review,* 5/2 (1996), June Purvis, 'Gendering the Historiography of the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Britain: Some Reflections', *Women's History Review,* 22/4 (2013). See also Krista Cowman, '"There is So Much, And It Will All Be History": Feminist Activists as Historians, The Case of British Suffrage Historiography', in Angelika Epple and Angelika Schaser (eds.), *Gendering Historiography: Beyond National Canons* (New York, 2009)

[4] Ray Strachey, *The Cause* (London, 1928), Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London, 1931)

[5] June Purvis and Maureen Wright, 'Writing Suffrage History: The Contending Autobiographical Narratives of the Pankhursts', *Women's History Review,* 14/3 (2005)

[6] Holton, 'The Making of Suffrage History'

[7] Kathryn Dodd, *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader* (Manchester, 1993) p. 15

[8] Karen Hunt, 'Why Manchester? Why the Pankhursts? Why 1903? Reflections on the Centenary of the Women's Social and Political Union', *Manchester Region History Review,* 17 (2004)

Subsequent histories of suffrage have, however, taken many of Pankhurst's assumptions and assertions for granted. The first history of the movement written by a non-participant, George Dangerfield, treated the WSPU as an absurdity. Focused only on the most violent forms of militancy, he portrayed the WSPU as a cult made up of mentally unstable and sexually deviant women, simultaneously ludicrous and dangerous, and located well outside the political mainstream.[9] Jane Marcus has argued that he 'invented the narrative and historical plot from which subsequent historians have seldom been able to free themselves'.[10] Dangerfield's perspective was subsequently developed by David Mitchell, whose works on the Pankhursts were likewise not only critical but actively hostile to their politics in deeply gendered ways.[11]

Suffrage history remained a largely male-dominated and even, to use Stanley Holton's term, 'masculinist', well into the twentieth century.[12] The works of Roger Fulford, Andrew Rosen, Les Garner and Brian Harrison, while less overtly misogynist, offered equally unsympathetic assessments of the WSPU, particularly for its supposed break with the labour movement and use of militant tactics.[13] Martin Pugh's work, though more nuanced and sophisticated, has perpetuated this perspective up to the present day.[14] The caricature of the WSPU as a single-issue pressure group made up of credulous innocents and hysterical fanatics, entirely subject to the whims of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, remains evident in the work of Christopher Bearman.[15]

This school of thought has been criticized by feminist scholars on a number of grounds. In their view, such work diminishes the social and cultural importance of the militant suffragettes, as well as their political impact; it implicitly understands feminist politics as 'deviant, marginal and even dangerous',[16] and offers a limited interpretation of the organisation and its demands which failed to appreciate the rich meanings which the

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[9] George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1936)
[10] Jane Marcus, *Suffrage and the Pankhursts* (London, 1987) p. 3
[11] David Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts: A Study in Tenacity* (London, 1967), David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel: A Biography of Christabel Pankhurst* (London, 1977)
[12] Sandra Stanley Holton, 'Challenging Masculinism: Personal History and Microhistory in Feminist Studies of the Women's Suffrage Movement', *Women's History Review,* 20/5 (2011)
[13] Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women* (London, 1957), Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, Brian Harrison, 'The Act of Militancy: Violence and the Suffragettes, 1903-1914', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982), Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars* (Oxford, 1987), Les Garner, *Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty: Feminist Ideas in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London, 1984)
[14] Martin Pugh, *The Pankhursts: The History of One Radical Family* (London, 2001), Pugh, *March of the Women*, pp. 171-223
[15] Christopher Bearman, 'An Examination of Suffragette Violence', *English Historical Review,* 120/486 (2005), Christopher Bearman, 'An Army Without Discipline? Suffragette Militancy and the Budget Crisis of 1909', *The Historical Journal,* 50/4 (2007), Christopher Bearman, 'The Legend of Black Friday', *Historical Research,* 83 (2010)
[16] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 22

campaign held for participants. Together, these 'masculinist' works provide an unhelpfully narrow frame through which to understand suffrage. Concentrated on militancy, London and the Pankhurst family, they do not reflect the experiences or understandings of the vast majority of participants.[17]

The emerging field of women's history from the 1960s onwards led to an increasing desire among feminist scholars to revisit suffrage and examine it from new perspectives. Like David Mitchell, Antonia Raeburn also drew on extensive interviews with surviving campaigners, though her subsequent treatment of the movement was far more attentive to the beliefs and motivations of those women.[18] Barbara Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem* prompted a re-examination of the relationship between feminist and socialist thinking.[19] The publication of Hannah Mitchell's autobiography in 1968 generated new interest in the place of working-class women within the suffrage campaign, a theme reflected in works by Marion Ramelson and Sheila Rowbotham.[20] Jill Liddington and Jill Norris's groundbreaking *One Hand Tied Behind Us* called into question a number of assumptions about the women's suffrage movement, including its character and periodisation, by highlighting the efforts of working-class women from Lancashire during the 1890s whom they described as 'radical suffragists.'[21] Liddington's later work, *Rebel Girls*, moved the focus to Yorkshire, indicating commonalities and differences with the neighbouring county, and identifying new groups of 'community suffragettes,' and 'maverick militants'.[22]

Building on these early interventions, suffrage history has proved to be one of the most productive and fruitful areas of women's history.[23] Elizabeth Crawford's exhaustive research has provided an essential foundation for understanding how the campaign was constituted across the country and recovering the contributions of previously forgotten campaigners.[24] Krista Cowman and Sandra Stanley Holton, among others, have contested the division of the movement into 'constitutional' and 'militant' wings, instead demonstrating the degree of collaboration and co-operation which went on between

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17 Purvis, 'Gendering the Historiography', Stanley Holton, 'Challenging Masculinism'
18 Antonia Raeburn, *The Militant Suffragettes* (London, 1973)
19 Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1984)
20 Marian Ramelson, *The Petticoat Rebellion: A Century of Struggle for Women's Rights* (London, 1967), Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden From History* (London, 1973)
21 Liddington and Norris, *One Hand*
22 Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote* (London, 2006) p. xiv
23 June Purvis, "A Glass Half Full'? Women's History in the UK', *Women's History Review,* 27/1 (2017) p. 93
24 Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland* (London, 2008), Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement, A Reference Guide, 1866-1928* (London, 2003)

different groups, especially at a local level.[25] Indeed, studies of regional and local organisations have been crucially important in complicating a national account all too often focused on London and the Pankhursts.[26] Scholars such as Krista Cowman and Jon Lawrence have redefined the WSPU as an organisation grounded in a recognisable tradition of British politics rather than seeing it as a unique phenonemon.[27] The meaning and nature of militancy itself has also been questioned by scholars such as June Purvis, Clare Eustance and Laura Mayhall, who have argued that it is misleading and unhelpful to define militancy in terms of violence.[28]

Broader histories of the women's movement have also placed the British struggle for the vote within wider social, cultural and transnational narratives. For example, scholars such as Lucy Delap, Maria DiCenzo, Jacqueline de Vries, and Joy Dixon have sought to locate the suffrage campaign in relation to other aspects of British political culture, analysing, for example, its relationship to periodical culture or religious practice.[29] Collections by Angela John, Clare Eustance, Myriam Boussahba-Bravard and Julia Bush have expanded our understandings of men's involvement in suffrage, suffrage activism outside the women's movement, and anti-feminist movements.[30] Other historians, including Kathryn Gleadle, Martha Vicinus, Catriona Beaumont, Cheryl Law and Julie Gottlieb have

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[25] Krista Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother: Women in Merseyside's Political Organisations, 1890-1920* (Liverpool, 2004), Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1986)

[26] Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1995), Leah Leneman, 'A Truly National Movement: The View from Outside London', in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (ed.), *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester, 1998), June Hannam, '"I Had Not Been to London," Women's Suffrage: A View From the Regions', in June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (ed.), *Votes for Women* (London, 2002), Cowman, *Mrs Brown*, Krista Cowman, "Minutes of the Last Meeting Passed': The Huddersfield Women's Social and Political Union Minute Book January 1907-1909, a New Source for Suffrage History', *Twentieth Century British History,* 13/3 (2002), June Hannam, 'Labour Women and Radical Politics in Bristol, 1906-1939', in Krista Cowman and Ian Packer (ed.), *Radical Cultures and Local Identities* (Cambridge, 2010)

[27] Krista Cowman, *Women of the Right Spirit: Paid Organisers of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) 1904-18* (Manchester, 2007), Jon Lawrence, 'Contesting the Male Polity: The Suffragettes and the Politics of Disruption in Edwardian Britain', in Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, 2001)

[28] June Purvis, 'The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes in Edwardian Britain', *Women's History Review,* 4/1 (1994), Claire Eustance, 'Meanings of Militancy: The Ideas and Practice of Political Resistance in the Women's Freedom League, 1907-1914', in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (ed.), *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester, 1998), Laura E. Nym Mayhall, 'Defining Militancy: Radical Protest, the Constitutional Idiom, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1908-1909', *Journal of British Studies,* 39/3 (2000), Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930* (Oxford, 2003)

[29] Maria DiCenzo, Lucy Delap, and Leila Ryan, *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (Basingstoke, 2011), Jacqueline de Vries, 'Transforming the Pulpit: Preaching and Prophesy in the British Women's Suffrage Movement', in Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (eds.), *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millenia of Christianity* (London, 1998), Joy Dixon, *The Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (London, 2001)

[30] Angela John and Claire Eustance (eds.), *The Men's Share? Masculinities, Male Support, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920*, Myriam Boussahba-Bravard (ed.), *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women's Vote in Britain, 1880-1914*, Julia Bush, *Women Against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain* (Oxford, 2007)

situated suffrage activism within a far longer tradition of feminist campaigning, disrupting narrow chronologies which focus on the years between 1905 and 1918 and thus privilege WSPU activism.[31] Scholars including Christine Bolt, Sheila Rowbotham, Lucy Delap, Jad Adams and Sumita Mukherjee have also challenged the fixation on British suffrage as supposedly exceptional, by placing this particular campaign in the context of Anglo-American, comparative and international histories of feminism.[32]

The centenary of the Representation of the People's Act in 2018 has provided an opportunity both to reappraise the overall campaign, and to investigate new dimensions. Recent texts by June Purvis, Jane Robinson and Diane Atkinson have provided comprehensive accounts of the overall campaign grounded in detailed attention to individual campaigners, and their beliefs, motivations and connections.[33] Studies by Katharine Cockin, Zoe Thomas, Miranda Garrett, Elizabeth Crawford and Naomi Paxton have built on the contributions of Lisa Tickner and Barbara Green in analysing the interaction of artistry, creativity, and professionalism within the suffrage campaign.[34] Using digitised sources, scholars have identified many previously unknown suffrage supporters, developed new approaches to understanding militant tactics, such as the census boycott in 1911, and undertaken quantitative analysis of large data sets.[35]

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[31] Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2009), Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London, 1985) Catriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928-1964* (Manchester, 2013), Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement, 1918-1928* (London, 1997), Julie V. Gottleib and Richard Toye, 'Introduction', in Julie V. Gottleib (ed.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2013)

[32] Christine Bolt, *Sisterhood Questioned: Race, Class and Internationalism in the American and British Women's Movements, c.1880s-1970s* (London, 2004), Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London, 2010), Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2007), Jad Adams, *Women and the Vote: A World History* (Oxford, 2014), Sumita Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks* (Oxford, 2018)

[33] June Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography* (London, 2018), Jane Robinson, *Hearts and Minds: The Untold Story of the Great Pilgrimage and How Women Won the Vote* (London, 2018), Diane Atkinson, *Rise Up Women! The Remarkable Lives of the Suffragettes* (London, 2018)

[34] Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914* (London, 1988), Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905-1938* (Basingstoke, 1997), Katharine Cockin, *Edith Craig and the Theatres of Art* (London, 2017), Zoë Thomas and Miranda Garrett (eds.), *Suffrage and the Arts: Visual Culture, Politics and Enterprise*, Naomi Paxton, *Stage Rights! The Actresses' Franchise League, Activism and Politics, 1908-1958* (Manchester, 2018), Elizabeth Crawford, *Art and Suffrage: A Biographical Dictionary of Suffrage Artists* (London, 2018)

[35] Jill Liddington and Elizabeth Crawford, *Vanishing for the Vote: Suffrage, Citizenship and the Battle for the Census* (Manchester, 2014), Liddington, *Rebel Girls*, Laura Schwartz, 'Domestic Servant Raids Parliament: The Case of Charlotte Griffiths – Suffragette and Working Woman' https://ukvote100.org/2018/02/28/domestic-servant-raids-parliament-the-case-of-charlotte-griffiths-suffragette-and-working-woman/ (1 March 2018), Kat Gupta, *Representation of the British Suffrage Movement* (London, 2016)

The relationship between gender and class has preoccupied scholars of politically engaged women from Chartism to the Women's Liberation Movement and beyond.[36] As Laura Lee Downs has noted, following Davidoff and Hall's foundational text, *Family Fortunes*, scholars have sought to analyse how 'gender and class are perpetually reconstructed in relation to one another, and in the context of the gendered separation of public and private'.[37] Feminist historians such as Joan Scott have also been central to deconstructing categories of gender and class, identifying how their meanings are created through discourse in historically specific ways.[38] The extent to which women were able to coalesce around a shared gender identity, thus transcending differences of class, in the women's movement which emerged from the mid-nineteenth century has been a central question for scholars, shaping interpretations of the suffrage campaign.[39]

Studies of the WSPU have frequently suggested that the relationship between class and gender was deeply problematic. Contemporary critics often levelled the charge that the WSPU was dominated by middle-class women, and that the concerns and needs of working-class women were secondary considerations at best.[40] This has been an ongoing theme in the historiography. Though Jill Liddington and Jill Norris identified the 'radical suffragists' within Lancashire as laying the groundwork for the later emergence of the WSPU as a political force, they argued that policy decisions taken by the Pankhursts – the insistence on the vote and the adoption of militancy – meant that working-class women found the WSPU increasingly irrelevant or actively unhelpful, a point reiterated by Martin Pugh.[41] Similarly, in his study of the Leicester WSPU, Richard Whitmore suggests that the demands of working-class and middle-class women were so different as to be fundamentally incompatible, and

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[36] Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (London, 1995), Mary Davis (ed.), *Class and Gender in British Labour History: Renewing the Debate (Or Starting It?)*, Lise Shapiro Sanders, "Equal Laws Based Upon an Equal Standard': The Garrett Sisters, the Contagious Diseases Acts, and the Sexual Politics of Victorian and Edwardian Feminism Revisited', *Women's History Review,* 24/3 (2015), George Stevenson, 'The Women's Movement and 'Class Struggle': Gender, Class Formation and Political Identity in Women's Strikes, 1968-78', *Women's History Review,* 25/5 (2016),

[37] Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London, 2004) p. 69

[38] Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), see also Kathleen Canning, 'Feminist History After the Linguistic Turn', *Signs,* 19/2 (1994)

[39] Sally Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and '30s', in Sally Alexander (ed.), *Becoming a Woman: And Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (London, 1994), Gerry Holloway, 'United We Stand: Class Issues in the Early British Women's Trade Union Movement', in Mary Davis (ed.), *Class and Gender in British Labour History: Renewing the Debate (Or Starting It?)* (Pontypool, 2011)

[40] See, for example, Carol McPhee and Ann Fitzgerald (eds.), *The Non-Violent Militant: Selected Writings of Teresa Billington-Greig,* p. 141, Rebecca West's comments in Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland*, p. 478, and Eva Gore-Booth's comments to Millicent Fawcett, 24 October 1906, quoted in Sonja Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth: An Image of Such Politics* (Manchester, 2012), p. 106-7

[41] Liddington and Norris, *One Hand*, pp. 205-7, Pugh, *March of the Women*, pp. 171-223

'charts the infiltration of middle-class women' who 'influenced and distorted the branch'.[42] Andrew Rosen even stated that Minnie Baldock was the only working-class woman of any significance in the WSPU after October 1906.[43] Many historians have suggested that the apparent loss of working-class members and increase in middle-class membership led to a break with the labour movement and an inevitable drift to the right. This, they argue, was detrimental to the WSPU's campaign, as it lost the opportunity to build a broad coalition of support and became too narrowly focused on the vote as an end in itself, rather than as a tool to secure broader political and social change.[44]

Some historians, however, have challenged this account. The suffragette Jessie Stephen, a domestic worker and labour organiser, told Brian Harrison that there were a 'tremendous number of working-class women' within the WSPU.[45] Scholars have identified many working-class women active in the WSPU well beyond the supposed split with the labour movement including Minnie Baldock, Helen Crawfurd, Molly Murphy, Alice Hawkins, Jennie Baines, Helen Jollie and Alice Morrissey.[46] Moreover, Krista Cowman reminds us that that rigid ideas about class are unhelpful: struggling teachers, clerks and secretaries are neither necessarily middle-class, nor inevitably less radical than more obviously working-class women.[47] Leading WSPU organiser 'General' Flora Drummond, for example, the daughter of a tailor who left school at fourteen, can hardly be described as middle-class despite a period of study at a civil service school. Yet she is consistently erased in those histories which position Annie Kenney as the only working-class woman of influence within the WSPU. Krista Cowman has also argued that the supposed 'split' with the labour movement has been overstated. Her work has shown the WSPU continued to campaign for and with working-class women, that branches and members retained strong

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[42] Richard Whitmore, 'The "Shrieking Sisterhood": Membership, Policy and Strategy of the Women's Social and Political Union in Leicester and the East Midlands, 1907-1914', (PhD thesis, De Montford University, 2000) p. 6

[43] Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 76

[44] Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain 1866-1914* (London, 1967) p. 75, Sophia van Wingerden, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1866-1928* (Basingstoke, 1999) p. 77, Pugh, *March of the Women*, p. 233, Garner, *Stepping Stones*, p. 49

[45] Interview with Jessie Stephen, conducted by Brian Harrison, 1 July 1977, London, LSE Library Collections, 8/SUF/B/157

[46] Purvis, 'The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes', Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, p. 52, 94, 111, 131, Liddington, *Rebel Girls*, Molly Murphy, *Molly Murphy: Suffragette and Socialist* (Salford, 1998), Richard Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins and the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Leicester* (Derby, 2007), Judith Smart, 'Jennie Baines: Suffrage and an Australian Connection', in June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (ed.), *Votes for Women* (London, 2002), Cowman, *Mrs Brown*. For further examples, see Laura Schwartz, 'A Job Like Any Other? Feminist Responses and Challenges to Domestic Worker Organizing in Edwardian Britain', *International Labor and Working-Class History,* 88 (2015), p. 42-43

[47] Krista Cowman, "Incipient Toryism"? The Women's Social and Political Union and the Independent Labour Party, 1903-1914', *History Workshop Journal,* 53/1 (2002), p. 133.

links to the labour movement, and that working-class women were encouraged to participate in, and celebrated within, the pageantry and spectacle of suffrage.[48] This suggests that the changes in WSPU policy are better conceptualised as a shift away from, rather than a definitive 'split' with, the labour movement, and that local campaigners did not necessarily alter their behaviour and strategies.

Despite the significance of these insights, there is still no major study of working-class women's sustained involvement within the WSPU. Studies have been hampered by a relative lack of source material. As Leah Leneman has argued, 'nobody doubts there must have been a working-class component to the movement; the difficulty is in tracing it'.[49] As a result, working-class women most frequently feature within broader histories of the movement rather than appearing as the focus of the study.[50] Richard Whitmore's studies of working-class women in Leicester and Nottingham do not effectively engage with feminist scholarship on women's agency and autonomy, or local branches, and instead argue that Christabel Pankhurst was able to exercise total control over these women.[51]

This thesis therefore makes a substantial contribution to the feminist scholarship which has sought both to enrich the existing narratives of the militant suffrage campaign. Centring working-class women within the analysis not only offers new insight into existing debates on, for example, the nature of militancy and the degree of autonomy among WSPU members, but also significantly adds to our understanding of the construction of individual and collective identities, the relationships between experience and activism, the development of international feminist networks, and the difficulties which working-class women faced in engaging in politics beyond the suffrage campaign. All these issues have resonance well beyond the specific field of suffrage history.

'The Kenneys of Shelderslow'

The Kenneys were a family of eleven siblings who grew up working in cotton mills in Saddleworth, outside Oldham. Their mother, Ann (1852-1905), was from a family of cotton carders, speed tenters and cotton piecers employed in local factories. Their father, Horatio Kenney (1849-1912) came from a more transient family and later generations of the

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[48] Krista Cowman, '"Crossing the Great Divide": Inter-Organizational Suffrage Relationships on Merseyside, 1895-1914', in Clare Eustance, Joan Ryan, and Laura Ugolini (eds.), *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History* (London, 2000), Cowman, "Incipient Toryism'?' p. 143, Cowman, *Mrs Brown*, Cowman, *The Right Spirit*

[49] Leneman, 'A Truly National Movement', p. 46

[50] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!*

[51] Whitmore, *Alice Hawkins*, Whitmore, 'The "Shrieking Sisterhood"'

family believed that he was illegitimate.[52] By the time he was a teenager, his mother's husband and his siblings appear to have died, and he and his mother Agnes lived as boarders. Nevertheless, when Horatio and Ann married in 1873, he had stable employment in a mill and had progressed to becoming a 'self-actor minder,' managing his own spinning mules, such that his daughter Jessie considered him a member of the 'labour aristocracy'.[53]

Though the Kenneys were always associated with the mills in Lancashire, they technically grew up in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Saddleworth, together with neighbouring Lees and Mossley, had sent hundreds of men to the march on St Peter's Field which became the Peterloo Massacre, an event which continued to shape local collective cultural memory and identity. Most of Saddleworth was active in the wool trade with close links to Huddersfield, but the eastern fringe, where the Kenneys lived, was a separate enclave, with strong economic, social and cultural ties to Lancashire and Oldham, around eleven miles away. Ann and Horatio moved across Saddleworth frequently during the first fifteen years of their marriage before settling in the place which gave rise to the name 'the Kenneys of Shelderslow'. During the 1890s, the family moved twice more, finally settling in Wham's House, which, as chapter one will suggest, played an important role in the development of the family's collective sense of self, owing to its location on the local moorlands.

The Kenneys had twelve children over eighteen years: Reginald (Reg: 1873-1954), Mary (Mollie: 1874-1954), Sarah Ellen (Nell: 1876-1953), Alice (1877-1927), Ann (Annie: 1879-1953), Caroline (Kitty: 1880-1952), Rowland (1882-1961), Jane (Jennie: 1884-1961), Jessie (1887-1985), Herbert (Bert: 1889-1973), Harold (1890- ?) and Clara (born and died 1891).[54] As chapter one will show, while not necessarily involved in formal politics, the Kenney children were nevertheless deeply preoccupied with individual improvement and broader economic and social change, particularly inspired by the works of Robert Blatchford and the movement known as the 'religion of socialism'. Their formative experiences working in local factories and mills gave rise to their determination to achieve economic stability and prosperity, but they also pursued a range of literary, cultural and social interests and lived full and interesting lives. By the turn of the century, the adult lives

[52] There is no father named on his birth certificate, though his mother Agnes had been married for several years to William Kenney. See Wendy Cooper, 'Annie Kenney - Pankhurst Servant or Feminist Leader?', (MA thesis, University of Buckingham, 2013) p. 15.
[53] KP/JK/4/2/2/3, Norwich, UEA Archives, The Kenney Papers, p. 7
[54] For clarity, Nell Kenney is referred to by this name throughout, since that was how she was known within the suffrage movement, though her papers are filed under Sarah Ellen Clarke.

of the sisters had begun to diverge – some working in shops, some training as teachers, and some anticipating marriage – but the Kenneys remained a close-knit and supportive family.

In 1905, Annie, Jane and Jessie Kenney attended a meeting at which Christabel Pankhurst and Teresa Billington-Greig outlined the intentions of their new political organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union. Profoundly moved by the urgency of their commitment, Annie Kenney became increasingly active as a speaker on behalf of the organisation. Later that year, she and Christabel Pankhurst attended Sir Edward Grey's meeting at the Free Trade Hall, where she demanded to know 'will the Liberal Government give votes to women?' This is widely understood as the first act of militancy and credited with reviving the suffrage cause. It generated the suffragettes' iconic slogan 'votes for women' and created one of its lasting images. As a result, Annie Kenney could accurately claim in her autobiography that 'I was the first and remained until the end.'[55]



Figure 2: Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst, October 1905
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Annie_Kenney_and_Christabel_Pankhurst.jpg (accessed 1 November 2014)

[55] Annie Kenney, *Memories of a Militant* (London, 1924) p. 81

Yet Annie Kenney was just one of the Kenney sisters who became involved in the militant suffrage movement in a variety of different roles and contexts. Jessie Kenney, for example, was also a central figure within the WSPU. Working as private secretary to Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, she demonstrated such commitment to the cause and organisational ability that she was appointed the WSPU's youngest organiser. Her office at Clements Inn was next to Christabel Pankhurst's own, reflecting her vital role at the heart of the organisation. Despite frequent illnesses, she undertook an astonishing number of roles in the WSPU. She was second-in-command to Flora Drummond in organising the pageants and processions in London, a prisoners' secretary who co-ordinated links between incarcerated members and their families, and ultimately, 'Constance Burrows', the alias she adopted as she ferried copy for *The Suffragette* between Paris and Edinburgh to ensure the newspaper was printed. At the same time, Jessie Kenney was also a devoted militant in her own right. Though never violent, she undertook frequent daring acts, and was a central figure in a network of young women known as the 'Young Hot Bloods'. Despite her obvious significance to the organisation, however, this is the first study which takes seriously Annie Kenney's claim that her sister was 'absolutely indispensable' to Christabel Pankhurst and the WSPU.[56]

Nell Kenney assumed a more conventional role as a local organiser, and her papers – previously unknown to suffrage scholars – help to develop our understanding of the tensions between the centre and the periphery of the WSPU. Finally, Jane and Caroline's work in combining commitment to the cause with successful professional careers demonstrates some of the unexpected advantages of loyalty to the organisation. Their international careers as feminist teachers transform our understanding of the relationships between suffrage, feminism, and education reform, by revealing a transnational web of connections which the sisters navigated to further their professional and political goals. Their lives also indicate how and why women might define themselves as militant, without appearing to undertake what are usually thought of as militant acts.

Annie Kenney's name is well-known to scholars of suffrage, women's history and British history, and is even increasingly familiar to the general public. Yet her contribution to feminist politics and activism in this period has not been fully scrutinized. Indeed, she is frequently reduced to little more than a caricature. Much of this can be traced back to *The Suffragette Movement.* Sylvia Pankhurst describes Annie Kenney's 'lack of perspective' and 'intellectual limitations' which 'lent her a certain directness of purpose when she became the

[56] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 86

instrument of a more powerful mind'.[57] She is often mentioned in a sneering tone: fawning over Teresa Billington-Greig, speaking 'in a sort of wail', or sitting at Sylvia Pankhurst's feet waiting to be read to like a child.[58] *In One Hand Tied Behind Us,* she is portrayed as naïve and simple, unable to clearly face her material reality and resorting to escapist fantasies.[59] This is largely due to her close relationship with Christabel Pankhurst. Within the WSPU, she was known as 'Christabel's blotting paper'.[60] This perspective has often included the implicit or explicit suggestion that she was in love with Christabel Pankhurst and, indeed, any number of other members of the WSPU, and that her feminist politics was thus a product of romantic love rather than rational decision-making.[61] Within some 'masculinist' history, this has taken on a sinister cast, indicating an excess of emotions characteristic of an unbalanced mind.[62]

Her role in the organisation has therefore been subjected to very little sustained scrutiny. In her own autobiography, she presents herself as of very little value, claiming, for example that 'to put me on a committee was like putting a doll or a dummy there. I never had any suggestions to offer or ideas to contribute.'[63] Her own statements, such as 'if all the world were on one side, and Christabel Pankhurst on the other, I would walk straight over to Christabel Pankhurst', have often been taken as an indication that she lacked independent thought.[64] One group of historians, for example, describe her simply as a 'faithful lieutenant', while Les Garner calls her the 'ever faithful' Annie Kenney, and Elizabeth Crawford describes her autobiography as '*faux naif*'.[65] However, few scholars have sought to question why she might choose to present herself in this way: overlooking the significance of personal loyalty and collective identity within the campaign. Her charisma, ability to win over a crowd, and to inspire great loyalty herself has, as a result, received little attention and she has frequently been constructed as nothing more than a conduit or a cipher for Christabel Pankhurst's views.[66] Brian Harrison argues, for example, that she was useful insofar as she had symbolic value, in her ability to recruit apparently more significant

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[57] Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p. 186
[58] Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p. 187 and 208, 195, 197
[59] Liddington and Norris, *One Hand*, p. 86
[60] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 193
[61] Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 43, Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, p. 212
[62] Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, p. 184
[63] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 72
[64] Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p. 413
[65] Tricia Davis, Martin Durham, Catherine Hall, Mary Langan, and David Sutton, 'The Public Face of Feminism: Early Twentieth-Century Writings on Women's Suffrage', in Richard Johnson et al. (eds.), *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics* (London, 1982), p. 306, Garner, *Stepping Stones* p. 58, Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, p. 319
[66] Rover, *Women's Suffrage*, p. 24, Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 43, Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, p. 29.

members like Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, and in developing autocracy within the WSPU.[67] Some historians have drawn broader conclusions about the position of working-class women by using Annie Kenney as an example. RS Neale, for example, concluded that working-class women were 'left behind unless they turned themselves into faithful Annie Kenneys'.[68]

The other Kenneys, meanwhile, appear to have been overlooked by historians for more straightforward reasons. Though Sandra Stanley Holton's call for scholars to bridge the division between 'the suffragist' and 'the ordinary woman' is now twenty-five years old, for obvious reasons it remains easier to identify and study those women who were full-time and long-standing activists.[69] Nell Kenney, for example, does not feature in Elizabeth Crawford's major study of suffrage campaigners, nor in Diane Atkinson's more recent account of WSPU activists.[70] Meanwhile, Jane and Caroline Kenney's absence can also be explained by the difficulties in focusing on women whose archival traces are fragmented and dispersed. Digitisation of sources has made these women visible in a way which would not have been possible for earlier scholars. Jessie Kenney has also suffered through her association with Christabel Pankhurst and almost total omission from *The Suffragette Movement.*[71] As Krista Cowman has shown in relation to Mary Gawthorpe, however, absence from this supposedly comprehensive text did not mean that any given individual was not significant to the WSPU: only that they were not significant to Sylvia Pankhurst.[72] Her subsequent study of the WSPU organisers gives some indication of the range and diversity of the roles which Jessie Kenney played in the organisation: a theme developed here in chapter four.[73]

Yet Annie Kenney was clearly much more than Christabel Pankhurst's puppet. Beyond *The Suffragette Movement*, many other suffragette autobiographies – including lesser known texts by Millicent Price and Clara Codd as well as the more famous accounts of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Mary Richardson and Christabel Pankhurst – testify to her

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[67] Brian Harrison, 'Kenney, Annie (b. 1879 d. 1953),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, September 2009) http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-34285 (accessed 1 October 2014)
[68] Neale, 'Working-Class Women', p. 167
[69] Sandra Stanley Holton, 'The Suffragist and the "Average Woman"', *Women's History Review,* 1/1 (1992)
[70] Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!*
[71] She is also absent from the *Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who* (London, 1913), as she was recovering from illness in Switzerland.
[72] Krista Cowman, 'A Footnote in History? Mary Gawthorpe, Sylvia Pankhurst, the Suffragette Movement and the Writing of Suffrage History', *Women's History Review,* 14/3-4 (2005)
[73] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*

centrality to the organisation.[74] Jill Liddington has suggested that, after the Pankhursts, she was 'the most daring and influential of the Suffragettes'.[75] Other biographical studies by Karen Bouffard-Gilbreath, Fran Abrams and Wendy Cooper have pursued this theme, albeit within the confines of shorter academic theses and popular histories.[76] June Hannam's study of Annie Kenney's work in Bristol, using the Blathwayt diaries, has challenged the simple notion of Kenney as a devoted follower, indicating how far and frequently she acted on her own initiative.[77] More recent scholarship has developed this perspective still further. Diane Atkinson, for example, makes rich use of Annie Kenney's autobiography in *Rise Up Women* in an account which finally does justice to Kenney's role within the WSPU.[78] June Purvis also challenges the usual accounts of the relationship between Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney, arguing that this relationship was not only essential to Pankhurst, but to the effective functioning of the WSPU itself.[79] She rightly describes Annie Kenney as 'a charismatic figure in her own right, an inspiring speaker, strong-minded and capable of taking the initiative when necessary'.[80]

Scholarship on the Kenneys has, to date, largely been limited to individual figures.[81] There is only one brief study which has begun to map the Kenney family network. This was undertaken by Geoffrey Woodhead prior to an exhibition in Saddleworth Museum called 'The Annie Kenney Tale' in 2003. His pamphlet on 'The Kenney Family of Springhead' is a vital resource for understanding the structure of the Kenneys lives, and he conducted a great deal of original research which, for example, highlighted the instability and frequent early moves which characterised their early childhood. However, Woodhead was unable to benefit from recent digitisation of archival records which reveals a more complete and complex picture of the Kenney family movements and networks. He also chose not to reveal certain information, such as the fact that the Kenneys' father, Horatio, died in the

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[74] Millicent Price, *This World's Festival,* unpublished autobiography, London, LSE Library Collections, 7/MPR/01, Clara Codd, *So Rich a Life* (Pretoria, 1951), Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World* (London, 1938), Mary Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance* (London, 1953), Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (London, 1957). See also Phoebe Hesketh, *My Aunt Edith* (London, 1966) p. 23, 35, 50, 57.

[75] Quoted in Harrison, 'Annie Kenney'

[76] Fran Abrams, *Freedom's Cause: Lives of the Suffragettes* (London, 2003), pp. 41 – 59, Bouffard-Gilbreath, 'Annie Kenney', Cooper, 'Annie Kenney'

[77] June Hannam, "Suffragettes Are Splendid for Any Work': The Blathwayt Diaries as a Source for Suffrage History', in Claire Eustance, Joan Ryan, and Laura Ugolini (eds.), *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History* (London, 2000)

[78] Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!*

[79] Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, especially pp. 272-276

[80] Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 88

[81] Paul Burvap, 'Rowland Kenney and British Propaganda in Norway, 1916-1942', (PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2016), Karen Bouffard-Gilbreath, 'Annie Kenney: Militant Suffragette', (MA thesis, Georgia State University, 1983), Abrams, *Freedom's Cause*, Cooper, 'Annie Kenney'

workhouse.[82] More significantly, Woodhead was not deeply engaged with suffrage historiography, writing that accounts of the struggle 'are biased in favour of the campaign, and there is insufficient factual data available from the government side to present their case and so achieve a more balanced picture'.[83]

However, while staking a claim for Annie Kenney's crucial importance to the WSPU, this is very much a study of a family and not an individual. Family history has been reinvigorated in recent years by new approaches, tools and insights. For example, the rich possibilities presented by the digitization of various data sources have enabled historians to map lives and relationships more securely, drawing on the insights and techniques of genealogists.[84] This is particularly useful for feminist historians who have recognised that women's individual identities are often inseparable from those of their families. As Katie Barclay has argued, family 'is key to understanding how people saw themselves, how they passed on broader social values and how they performed class, gender and other markers of identity and social group'.[85] Feminist historians have moved away from the early critiques of the family as an institution associated with women's oppression and marginalisation. More sophisticated understandings of the family now acknowledge and analyse the ways in which the family might act as a more complex, even more positive, space within which women could generate influence, seize opportunities and exercise power.[86] For example, studies of family networks among religious women have shown that these were central to progressive movements in the nineteenth century.[87]

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[82] Geoffrey Woodhead to Deidre Sharp, 13 January 2003, KP/Woodhead
[83] Geoffrey Woodhead, *The Kenney Family of Springfield* (Saddleworth, 2003) p. 7
[84] Tanya Evans, 'Secrets and Lies: The Radical Potential of Family History', *History Workshop Journal,* 71/1 (2011)
[85] Katie Barclay, 'Thinking About Family Legacy ', *Women's History Magazine,* 61 (2009), p. 30
[86] Louise A. Tilly, 'Women's History and Family History: Fruitful Collaboration or Missed Connection', *Journal of Family History* 12/1 (1987), Megan Doolittle, 'Close Relations? Bringing Together Gender and Family in English History', *Gender and History,* 11/3 (1999)
[87] Kathryn Gleadle, "Doing Good By Wholesale': Women, Gender and Politics in the Family Network of Thomas Fowell Buxton', in Kathryn Gleadle (ed.), *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2009), Sandra Stanley Holton, *Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory and Radicalism in the Lives of Women Friends* (London, 2007)



Figure 3: Jessie and Annie Kenney (undated). A notation on the back reads 'sweet little sisters'
KP/AK/9/5

This study analyses the place of families within the suffrage campaign by drawing on the developing historiography of siblings. Leonore Davidoff's landmark study, *Thicker Than Water*, was the first to highlight and theorise the historical role of siblings, demonstrating that this relationship was often crucial, not just within childhood, but across the lifespan.[88] Important case studies by scholars such as Barbara Caine and Elizabeth Crawford, as well as several popular histories, have illustrated these relationships in practice, but they are largely focused on affluent women.[89] More recently, Jane Humphries' pioneering work has demonstrated how important siblings were to the economic prospects and emotional security of the working-classes.[90] Her study, however, is based around the autobiographical

[88] Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, see also Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink, and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (London, 1999)
[89] Barbara Caine, *Destined to be Wives: The Sisters of Beatrice Webb* (Oxford, 1986), Barbara Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury: A Biography of the Strachey Family* (Oxford, 2005), Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: the Garretts and Their Circle* (London, 2002), Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox, 1740-1832* (London, 1994), Judith Flanders, *A Circle of Sisters: Alice Kipling, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Agnes Poynter and Louisa Baldwin* (London, 2001)
[90] Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*

testimonies of men, rather than women. This thesis extends their insights into a new context.

To date, it is friendship, rather than family, which has been at the heart of suffrage studies.[91] Sandra Stanley Holton has rightly argued that 'webs of love and friendship' underpinned the women's movement, especially in supporting women to cope with the demands of the militant suffrage campaign, a point well illustrated by Ann Morley and Liz Stanley's groundbreaking study of the life and friendships of Emily Wilding Davison.[92] Furthermore, one of the major features of the narrative established by Sylvia Pankhurst was the sense of the militant movement as a family drama: specifically that of a family increasingly riven by discord and disagreement. Indeed, she even seems to indicate that it was not possible to maintain familial ties within the confines of the WSPU, stating that 'we were no longer a family; the movement was overshadowing all personal affections'.[93] In this context, family relationships beyond the Pankhursts' have been relatively neglected. Even Annie Kenney claimed that she and Jessie behaved as comrades, rather than sisters, towards one another. In *Memories of a Militant*, she wrote that 'we agreed that in work we would act towards each other as members, that we would never confide Union secrets out of our own departments, or try to shelter each other if we were rebuked for any mistakes we might make. We kept rigidly to these rules throughout the fight.'[94]

Yet Christabel Pankhurst herself later described the militant suffrage movement as 'a Super-Family'.[95] Many women joined the WSPU with other members of their family. These included Emily and Mary Blathwayt, Alice Ker and her daughters, and Hilda, Georgina and Marie Brackenbury. Una and Joan Dugdale, and Clemence and Laurence Housman, are among the better-known siblings who joined the WSPU campaign, but there were also the Spong, Casey and Lilley sisters.[96] Other families, such as the Lyttons, supported the cause through a range of different organisations.[97] Scholarship on these family groups, however, remains relatively limited.[98] Moreover, Annie's claim that she and Jessie were no more than

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[91] See, for example, Lis Whitelaw, *The Life and Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton: Actress, Writer, Suffragist* (London, 1990), Hilary Frances, '"… Our Job is to Free Women …": The Sexual Politics of Four Edwardian Feminists from c.1910 to c.1935', (PhD thesis, University of York, 1994)
[92] Stanley Holton, 'Reflecting on Suffrage History', p. 30, Liz Stanley and Anne Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison: a Biographical Detective Story* (London, 1988)
[93] Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p. 215
[94] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 86
[95] Christabel Pankhurst to Teresa Billington-Greig, 13 November 1956, London, Museum of London, David Mitchell Collection, 76.88/32
[96] Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!* p. 108-9, and 300-1
[97] Lyndsey Jenkins, *Lady Constance Lytton: Aristocrat, Suffragette, Martyr* (London, 2015)
[98] Beatrice Dobbie, *A Nest of Suffragettes in Somerset: Eagle House, Batheaston* (Bath, 1979), Elizabeth Oakley, *Inseparable Siblings: A Portrait of Clemence and Laurence Housman* (Studley, 2009), Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!*

comrades was clearly not accurate. Indeed, when Annie was arrested on charges of conspiracy in 1913, it was on the basis of incriminating evidence which actually belonged to Jessie, who was then very ill and recovering in Switzerland. Jessie suffered a lasting sense of guilt that her sister had served a sentence that was rightfully hers.[99] As this thesis will demonstrate, the emotional, moral, and practical support provided by other members of their family were essential to facilitating and sustaining the work of each individual. These family relationships also extended into a vast web of professional contacts, political comrades, and personal friendships which enabled the Kenneys to live full and fulfilling lives.

It is important not to idealise these family relationships. Jane Kenney, for example, was considered 'quite the pedantic ruler of the family' and 'intolerant and dogmatic' by some of her male relations (although Nell's daughter Beatrice disagreed, calling her 'pleasant and cordial' and 'generous').[100] The youngest sibling, Harold Kenney, is almost totally absent from the otherwise close-knit family relationships, and it has not been possible to trace him beyond the 1911 census. The portrait of an entirely harmonious, supportive and unified family that Jessie offers in her autobiography is also challenged by Rowland's bleaker account of the troubles at home. However, he should not necessarily be considered a more objective witness. Rowland was as keen to portray himself as a detached and self-reliant outsider as Jessie was to emphasis the family's shared identity, but he too benefited from family assistance.[101] Despite his critique of the WSPU – which he believed was 'spiritually and intellectually dead' and 'robbing the Socialist movement of its finest elements and wasting them in a fight for the votes, which was of little or no use compared with industrial solidarity and the making of Socialist converts' – he continued to support his sisters as individuals.[102]

However, the lifelong partnerships between Jessie and Annie, Molly and Alice, and Jane and Caroline; the central and stabilising role that Reg Kenney played within the family; and the fact that Molly, Alice, Jane, Caroline and Bert all ended up living in the same small town in California are all powerful indications of the ongoing centrality of family to their lives. Jessie, for example, wrote that Reg's home 'was ever open to any of my family if we

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[99] Circumstantial Evidence: Confession no 1, KP/JK/4/2/2/12

[100] Kent Kenney to Beatrice Clarke, 24 March 2001, KP/CLA/3, Harold Kenney, *Recollections from My Boyhood, Life With the Suffragette*s (Private Collection of Vanessa Potter), Beatrice Clarke to Kent Kenney, May 2001, KP/CLA/3. Note that the Harold Kenney referred to here was the son of Reg Kenney, not the youngest and elusive brother.

[101] Rowland Kenney, *Westering: An Autobiography* (London, 1939) p. 75, 89, 92

[102] Rowland Kenney to George Lansbury, 18 November 1912, London, LSE Library Collections, Lansbury/6/180, Kenney, *Westering* p. 137

needed help'.[103] Their achievements were understood as collective and familial, not individual. As Christabel Pankhurst wrote to Jessie Kenney, 'You and Annie may well be proud of what your brothers and sisters and their children have achieved and they may well be proud of what Annie and you <u>are</u> and have done for the greatest of human causes. I know what the world is and yet there <u>is</u> admiration for those who triumph over difficulty and win the race as your family have done.'[104]

Not all the sisters receive equal consideration in this study. Most significantly, the lack of records about the two oldest sisters, Mollie and Alice, mean there has been little opportunity to effectively explore the relationships between these two women and the rest of the family. Like Annie and Jessie, and Caroline and Jane, these two sisters formed a lifelong partnership: emigrating with their husbands first to Canada and then to the USA. A greater understanding of this partnership, and how it fit within the larger network of relationships within the family, would greatly enhance our understandings of the interactions between militant activists and their families. Within the constraints of doctoral research, I have made the conscious decision to focus on the sisters and their relationships, though I refer to the brothers as appropriate. Reg Kenney, who retained a lifelong interest in ethical socialism and Lancastrian cultural identity and tradition, was a formative influence on the young women, and was fully supportive of their activism. Reg had five children, and the current generations of Kenneys now living in England are all descended from him. Rowland Kenney worked for the Independent Labour Party during the 1910s before becoming the first editor of the *Daily Herald*, and later embarked on an extraordinarily diverse career in international relations, propaganda and government information. Herbert Kenney, like his sisters, emigrated to the United States, though he served in the British Army during World War I and was present at Ypres and the Paris Peace Conference. Harold, as indicated above, has not proved possible to trace.

Creating a collective biography of women who shared a coherent identity but in several respects pursued very different paths has required collection and analysis of a diverse range of source material. Two of the siblings – Annie and Rowland – published autobiographies, while Jessie wrote an extensive, though unfinished, autobiography. Annie, Jane and Nell kept many papers relating to their professional and political work, though many of Annie and Jane's papers were destroyed after their deaths. As a result, the Kenney archive at the University of East Anglia is dominated by Jessie Kenney's efforts at collecting,

[103] JK/4/2/2/3
[104] Christabel Pankhurst to Jessie Kenney, 15 October 1935, KP/JK/3/Pankhurst, C/8

writing and memorialising their lives, a point which is discussed extensively in chapter six. This archive has been especially useful in understanding the Kenneys' childhood and family relationships, and their lives after the suffrage campaign concluded.

Though very little material from the contemporary suffrage campaign is contained within the Kenneys' own archive, some documentation survives within other collections. I have therefore considered letters and relevant material held in many different archives, as well as the vast collection of suffrage materials housed within the Museum of London and the Women's Library collection at the London School of Economics and Political Science. The diaries of Emily and Mary Blathwayt are now well known as an invaluable source of information for local suffrage campaigns, but they are particularly useful for understanding the Kenneys' lives and relationships, given Annie Kenney's role as the West of England organiser, and many of the siblings appear in these diaries. To trace the lives of Jane and Caroline Kenney, I have consulted a variety of sources associated with the schools which employed them, including publicity materials and school histories. As issues of image and identity, self-representation and reception are crucial to this thesis, I have referred to many published and unpublished autobiographical accounts from their contemporaries. I have compared the accounts of the Kenneys within the suffragette newspapers, *Votes for Women*, *The Suffragette*, and *Britannia* with local and national press articles. This variety of source material has created a rich and textured history which not only offers a full and detailed account of the Kenneys' lives but also offers extensive new insights into broader political, social and cultural histories of the period.

Methodology

In 1945, Jessie Kenney wrote an essay entitled 'What Can We Learn From Biographies' for the Pelman Institute, asking:

> is it not wise for us to turn in the midst of our own problems and perplexities to the lives of great men and women down the ages[?] Are we not curious to know how they lived and loved? How did they resolve its (sic) conflict of the life within with that of the life without? How did they overcome physical disability, poverty or frustration, or the retrograde tendencies of the age in which they lived? Was there anything which they all possessed that we can find to aid and encourage ourselves?[105]

[105] Pelman Institute, Examination Work Papers and Work Sheets, 1945, KP/JK/1

Her understanding of the genre – that it should be focused on the lives of great individuals and their heroic struggles, that it is driven by curiosity, and that its purpose is ultimately didactic – illustrates many of the reasons why biography remains problematic for many historians.[106] When focused narrowly on the 'public' lives of 'great' individuals, it is has been particularly troublesome for feminist historians, who have been critical of the tendency to focus on 'exceptional' women.[107] As Carolyn Heilbrun has shown, the assumptions which underpin the genre are often inappropriate for women's lives, while Linda Wagner-Martin has critiqued the triumphant tone of narratives of achievement and success that many biographies adopt.[108] Natalie Zemon Davis's famous call to move from 'from Women Worthies to a worthier craft' has been more recently echoed by Jill Liddington's critique of 'celebrity suffrage'.[109] Judy Giles has also warned of the dangers of investing working-class lives with a sense of heroic exceptionalism, noting that:

> there is a very real temptation to write a history of working-class women that, in focusing unquestioningly on their struggle against poverty, drudgery and ill-health, posits a generation of working-class women whose fight against insuperable odds fills us with admiration. In our desire (rightly) to document not only the damage and oppression suffered by women in the past but also their achievements, we construct strong heroines whom we represent as resisting the victimisation and humiliation, contingent on the structures of domination. In doing so, however, we face the danger of creating quasi-myths that function to prevent any confrontation with the relations of women across a range of social boundaries.[110]

There have also been strong epistemological critiques of biographies. Post-modernist appraisals argue that they seek to impose an overly coherent narrative and unified sense of self onto what are often messy and complex lives. Kali Israel, for example, notes that the major claim of biography, that it is possible to 'know' people within the past, is in fact, impossible, while Liz Stanley has critiqued the concepts underpinning biography, such as objectivity and expertise. She has been particularly critical of the 'spotlight' approach which singles out 'great' individuals and presents subjectivities as stable and fixed rather than fragmentary and works-in-progress.[111]

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[106] For an extended discussion of these issues, see the papers introduced by David Nasaw in David Nasaw, 'AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography', *American Historical Review,* 114/3 (2009)
[107] Lucy Riall, 'The Shallow End of History: The Future of Political Biography', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40/3 (2010)
[108] Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women's History' in Transition: The European Case', *Feminist Studies,* 3/3/4 (1976), p. 93, Liddington, *Rebel Girls*, p. 326
[109] Leila J. Rupp, 'Women Worthies and Women's History', *Reviews in American History,* 12/3 (1984), p. 409
[110] Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-50* (Basingstoke, 1995), p. 9
[111] Kali Israel, *Names and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture* (Oxford, 1999) p. 17, Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (Manchester, 1992), p. 214 and 250

Nevertheless, biography has proven an attractive method for those historians particularly interested in interrogating the grand narratives of structures and organisations, and broader economic, political, social, intellectual and cultural themes. As Barbara Finkelstein has argued:

> Biographical studies situate historical storytelling at the margins of social possibility where social change originates, constraint and choice merge, large and small social structures intersect, cultural norms converge, and the relative force of political, economic, social and cultural circumstance becomes clear. Historical biography reveals the relative power of individuals to transform the determinacies of cultural tradition, political arrangements, economic forms, social circumstances and educational processes into new social possibilities.[112]

As biography offers a starting point for the essential work of recovering marginalised or forgotten lives, it has frequently been an important starting point for feminist historians keen to assert the significance of women's lived experiences. Jane Martin, for example, has suggested that 'biography is an important resource to show that women were not merely the victims of history but the makers of it'.[113] Sandra Stanley Holton has argued that microhistorical approaches enable a focus on the people rather than the organisations and structures which otherwise have shaped suffrage and labour history, as well as the ability to transcend broad categories.[114] Biography has therefore formed an important part of women's studies and women's history since the emergence of these fields from the late 1960s onwards. It has been used by feminist historians not only integrate women's stories into established histories but, as Laura Lee Downs argues, to change the very nature of that history.[115]

The proliferation of biographical work, together with the related interest in oral history and other subjective sources, has led Barbara Caine to claim there has been a 'biographical turn' within the historical discipline.[116] This is particularly evident within suffrage history, which has produced a staggering number of studies focusing on the lives of individual women.[117] However, historians have responded to the challenges of biographical

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[112] Barbara Finkelstein, 'Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History', in Craig Kridel (ed.), *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research* (London, 1998), p. 46

[113] Jane Martin, 'Reflections on Writing a Biographical Account of a Woman Educator Activist', *History of Education,* 30/2 (2001), p. 163

[114] Stanley Holton, 'Challenging Masculinism'

[115] Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History*, p. 3

[116] Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke, 2010) p. 1

[117] Recent examples include June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London, 2003), Whitelaw, *Cicely Hamilton*, Angela V. John, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life, 1862-1952* (London, 1995), Angela V. John, *Evelyn Sharp: Rebel Woman, 1869-1955* (Manchester, 2009), Angela V. John, *Turning the Tide: The Life of Lady Rhondda* (Cardigan, 2013), Lesley A. Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne: Feminist and Free Spirit* (London, 2011),

writing in a variety of different ways. Even while focusing on a single life, for example, historians have taken a range of approaches. One method, as Alice Kessler-Harris has suggested, is to use 'the life of an individual, not as a subject to be studied for its own sake, but as evidence that could provide a different path into the past'.[118] Susan Pedersen, Linda Colley, and Laura Beers have, for example, through their respective studies of Eleanor Rathbone, Elizabeth Marsh, and Ellen Wilkinson, shed light on the new woman and politics, migration and imperialism, and radicalism on the British Left.[119] These studies have carefully grounded individuals within a particular political, social and cultural context, using particular lives to illuminate broader themes.

In her study of the life of Margaret McMillan, Carolyn Steedman took a radically new approach to biography which placed 'the political and social setting to the life above its narration'.[120] Steedman's biography is reflective of a broader trend of more experimental biographies, which explicitly adopt post-modern ideas of the performative and fragmented self, as well as notions of self-construction and self-fashioning.[121] Fictions of objective biography and the omnipotent biographer, and claims to 'authority and authenticity',[122] still linger in contemporary popular biography, but within the academy, biographers are more likely to reflexively examine their own practice and explicitly discuss conceptions of selfhood and subjectivity.[123] Many historians have embraced a more experimental form which not only refuses the fiction of objectivity but in which they explicitly show the working through of different possibilities, even positioning themselves as a 'character', a very present 'I' within the text.[124] Luisa Passerini has argued that biographies should respond

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Maureen Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement: The Biography of an Insurgent Woman* (Manchester, 2011), Katherine Connelly, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Suffragette, Socialist and Scourge of Empire* (London, 2013), Robert Wainwright, *Miss Muriel Matters: The Fearless Suffragist Who Fought For Equality* (London, 2017) Fern Riddell, *Death In Ten Minutes: Kitty Marion, Activist, Arsonist, Suffragette* (London, 2018), Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*

[118] Alice Kessler-Harris, 'Why Biography?', *American Historical Review,* 114/3 (2009), p. 625

[119] Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (London, 2004), Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: How a Remarkable Woman Crossed Seas and Empires to Become Part of World History* (London, 2008), Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: The Life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist* (Boston, 2016)

[120] Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860-1951* (London, 1990), Carolyn Steedman, 'Forms of History, Histories of Form', in Carolyn Steedman (ed.), *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (London, 1992) p. 159

[121] James Walter, 'The Solace of Doubt: Biographical Methodology After the Short Twentieth Century', in Hans Renders and Binne De Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing* (Lampeter, 2013), see also Barbara Caine, 'The Making of Catherine Cookson's Autobiography', *Women's History Review,* 22/1 (2013)

[122] Christiane Schonfeld, "Constructing the Subject? Emmy Ball-Hennings's Autobiographical Texts", in Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey (ed.), *Representing Lives: Women and Autobiography* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 187

[123] Malin Lidstrom Brock, 'Telling Feminist Lives: A Study of Feminist Biography', (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2011), Liz Stanley, Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I* p. 162, Celia Hughes, 'The Socio-Cultural Milieux of the Left in Post-War Britain', (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2011) p. 17

[124] Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress* (London, 2015), Matt Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (Oxford 2016)

to 'the challenge of post-modernism' through embracing 'inter-subjectivity' to create 'an experimental history that meets the needs of our times'.[125] The influence of post-modernist theories on fragmentation and performance of the self is very evident in many contemporary biographies. Kali Israel's study of Emilia Dilke, for example, refuses to 'construct a story of a singular self or to attain closure in a unified history', instead highlighting the inconsistencies and ambiguities within her subject's identity.[126]

Many historians have also used group or collective biography as a means of transcending the challenges of individual biography and grounding those individuals in context. Krista Cowman argues that group biography enables the historian to simultaneously consider the significance of individuals and their relationships to one another.[127] For example, in their study of 1968 activists across Europe, Robert Gildea, James Mark and Annette Waring aimed to explore the 'decisions and processes by which individuals become members of networks and the dynamic relationships between members' as well as to tell 'the story of an era'.[128] Group biography offers particular advantages to political, social and cultural historians in its ability to compare and contrast lives. It can take many forms: from the 'crowd biography' in Jenny Uglow's study of the Napoleonic Wars, to the biographical essays of James Hinton's *Nine Wartime Lives*, to the oral histories critically analysed by Celia Hughes in her study of post-war radical left cultures.[129] This method has appeared particularly appropriate to historians of the women's movement, in recognition of the centrality of women's friendships and networks.[130] For example, June Hannam and Karen Hunt's excellent study of socialist women explores how different activists understood, negotiated and worked for feminist and socialist aims in a variety of contexts.[131] While many group biographies are linked by shared interests or endeavours, historians have also used them to study families, sometimes across generations.[132] Barbara Caine notes that

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125 Luisa Passerini, 'Transforming Biography: From the Claim of Objectivity to Intersubjective Plurality', *Rethinking History,* 4/3 (2000), p. 416
126 Israel, *Names and Stories*, p. 8
127 Krista Cowman, 'Collective Biography', in Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (ed.), *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh, 2012), p. 85
128 Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Annette Warring, *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford, 2011), p. 8
129 Jennifer S. Uglow, *In These Times: Living in Britain through Napoleon's Wars, 1793-1815* (London, 2014), James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford, 2010) Hughes, 'The Left in Post-War Britain'
130 Philippa Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment* (Oxford, 1990), Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, Sheila Rowbotham, *Rebel Crossings: New Women, Free Lovers, and Radicals in Britain and the United States* (London, 2016), Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories From the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London, 1996), Stanley and Morley, *Emily Wilding Davison*, Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, Patricia Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics, 1860-1914* (Oxford, 1986)
131 June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London, 2002)
132 Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury*

this approach particularly appeals to feminist historians who are interested in how women experienced constraints and negotiated identities as well as understanding how ties of friendship and family operated.[133] Susan Geiger, meanwhile, has argued that the collective biography is a way to transcend the diametrically opposed categories of 'biography' and 'exceptional' on the one hand, and 'life-history' and 'representative' on the other. What she termed a 'collective biographical narrative' offered insights into a 'cohort of 'political women" who fitted neatly into neither category but which significantly challenged existing narratives and histories.[134]

The collective biographical approach has several different benefits which have made it the most effective and appropriate methodology for this study. Liz Stanley's metaphor of biography as a kaleidoscope, a way to reveal complex and changing patterns and 'make visible the existence of something which is usually invisible' has been particularly useful in informing my thinking.[135] It would be relatively straightforward to write a conventional biography of Annie Kenney's life, but the research has been greatly enriched by placing her in a familial as well as political and social context, and it is a more significant contribution to the historiography as a result. Moreover, as chapter four will indicate, the Kenneys understood themselves primarily as members of, and in relation to, groups. Individual identity was far less significant than their sense of themselves as 'Kenneys', as women, and as suffragettes. Jessie Kenney wrote, for example, that she felt uncomfortable with the word 'I'. 'Not only had I got used to saying the word "We" in the Suffragette Movement but the word "I" was frowned upon in my family circle, consisting of eleven brothers and sisters, five [of] whom played a significant part in the great progressive movements of the day.'[136] To remove them from this context would therefore not only be inappropriate: it would also represent a refusal to engage with the ways that the Kenneys perceived themselves and the meanings they invested in their lives.

Rather than following the traditional 'cradle to grave' trajectory adopted by conventional biographies, this thesis uses a thematic approach to analyse different aspects of the Kenneys' lives and activism in detail. The first third of the thesis is concerned with the Kenneys' path to militant activism and their interest in the vote. Chapter one argues that

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133 Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke, 2010) p. 4
134 Susan Geiger, 'Tanganyikan Nationalism as 'Women's Work': Life Histories, Collective Biography and Changing Historiography', *Journal of African History,* 37/3 (1996)
135 Liz Stanley, 'Biography as Microscope or Kaleidoscope: The Case of 'Power' in Hannah Cullwick's Relationship with Arthur Munby', *Women's Studies International Forum,* 10/1 (1987), p. 31, see also Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I*, p. 158
136 Preface, KP/JK/4/2/2/7

current understandings of Annie Kenney as a 'mill girl' in thrall to Christabel Pankhurst are limited and partial.[137] Following the example of Sarah Richardson, it traces alternative sites of politicisation and suggests instead that the family needs to be understood as a product of a rich autodidactic culture and of the 'religion of socialism', developing both the work of Stephen Yeo and more recent findings by Jonathan Rose.[138] Chapter two analyses why the Kenneys wanted the vote and what it meant to them. Using contemporary statements and autobiographical evidence, it places their understandings of the vote in the broader context of their priorities for political change, social reform and democratic citizenship.

The thesis then turns to examine the meaning and experiences of the Kenneys' work within the WSPU. Chapter three argues that an analysis of Annie Kenney's public representation and private relationships offers a new way of evaluating how class was understood, experienced and negotiated within the organisation. It draws on the work of scholars including Sandra Stanley Holton, Sue Thomas, and Laura Schwartz, who have analysed the ways that class fragmented and shaped the women's movement.[139] Chapter four contributes to the critical re-examination of the nature and practice of militancy, by developing the work of Laura Mayhall, Krista Cowman and Sandra Stanley Holton who have challenged assumptions that militancy was primarily associated with violence and illegal acts.[140] This chapter argues that militancy is best understood as an identity, rather than as a set of practices.

The final third of the thesis broadens the focus beyond the WSPU to consider the relationship between political, social and educational reform, and the Kenneys' understandings of their identities and legacies throughout the rest of their lives. Chapter five develops current understandings of the role of feminist teachers within militant suffrage. It situates Jane and Caroline Kenney in an international network of suffrage activists and

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137 See, for example, Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, p. 12-13, Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, p. 59, Liddington and Norris, *One Hand*, p. 85, Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, p. 126, Liddington, *Rebel Girls*, p. 26.

138 Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Abingdon, 2013), Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London, 2010), Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', *History Workshop Journal,* 4 (1977)

139 Sandra Stanley Holton, 'Silk Dresses and Lavender Kid Gloves: The Wayward Career of Jessie Craigen, Working Suffragist', *Women's History Review,* 5/1 (1996), Sue Thomas, 'Scenes in the Writing of 'Constance Lytton and Jane Warton, Spinster': Contextualising a Cross-Class Dresser', *Women's History Review,* 12/1 (2003), Schwartz, 'A Job Like Any Other?'

140 These assumptions were established in a range of older texts, including Rover, *Women's Suffrage*, Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, Harrison, 'The Act of Militancy' but have persisted into some more recent historiography, for example, Bearman, 'Suffragette Violence', van Wingerden, *The Women's Suffrage Movement.* Critiques of this approach can be found in Laura E. Nym Mayhall, 'Creating the 'Suffragette Spirit': British Feminism and the Historical Imagination', *Women's History Review,* 4/3 (1995), Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, Lawrence, 'Contesting the Male Polity', Krista Cowman, "The Stone-Throwing has Been Forced Upon Us': The Function of Militancy Within the Liverpool WSPU, 1906-14', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire,* 145 (1996), Cowman, *The Right Spirit*

educational reformers, demonstrating how women's professional careers might be advanced through their political networks. Chapter six offers a new perspective on the historiography of feminist politics after 1918, by analysing how former activists reconstructed their lives outside the organised women's movement. It highlights the many challenges which Annie and Jessie Kenney faced after the collapse of their personal networks, and demonstrates how they turned to religion, work, and the writing of suffrage history as a means of asserting their ongoing significance.

Chapter one: 'We were all studying together, and striving together,' the spaces and processes of politicisation in the Kenney family.[1]



Figure 4: The Kenney family in the mid 1890s
Back row: Jane, Mollie, Caroline, Rowland, Alice, Reg, Nell, Annie
Front row: Bert, Horatio, Ann, Harold, Jessie
Personal collection of Vanessa Potter, great-granddaughter of Reg Kenney

Annie Kenney was expected to start every speech describing herself as 'a factory-girl and a Trade Unionist'.[2] Given the ways in which Annie Kenney was positioned as a 'working-woman' by the WSPU – discussed further in chapter three – and the uses which she herself made of those experiences in her claims for the vote – analysed in chapter two – it is not surprising that subsequent historiography has emphasised her workplace experiences as central to understanding her political activism. This chapter, however, argues that there was not a simple link between the Kenneys' work in the factory and their later political activism. Instead, it suggests that to fully understand the nature of their beliefs and interests, close attention must be paid to their experiences at home, and to the cultures of reading, education, socialism and Christianity, which profoundly shaped their political outlook.

[1] Jessie Kenney, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[2] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 30

Historians have tended to characterise the earliest members of the WSPU as strongly politicised, with a history of activism in trades unions and in the Independent Labour Party (ILP).[3] Krista Cowman, for example, argues that Annie Kenney 'exemplifies [the] early suffragettes'.[4] As for why this political activism took a feminist form, historians have generally explained this with reference to her relationship with Christabel Pankhurst.[5] The 'childlike' and naïve Kenney is seen as having been manipulated, and even exploited, by Christabel Pankhurst.[6] Sylvia Pankhurst, for example, argued that Annie Kenney 'wanted what is called culture, and to get away from the mill', not only placing activism as a response to working life, but indicating that the Kenneys did not otherwise have access to 'culture'.[7] Some historians have contexualised these accounts with reference to the Kenneys' lives outside the factory. Andrew Rosen, for example, also sees Annie Kenney as a typical early member of the WSPU not only in terms of union activism and ILP membership but also in what he portrays as unsatisfactory home lives. He constructs a stereotype of frustrated women with inadequate fathers and dominant mothers, hinting at unhappiness with heterosexual relationships, and lack of fulfilment at work.[8] Yet this caricature does not acknowledge Annie Kenney's own testimony which suggested her childhood – outside the workplace – was fundamentally happy.[9]

More perceptive studies by Karen Bouffard-Gilbreath and Fran Abrams contextualise Annie Kenney's work experiences with reference to her interest in socialism and religion, though Bouffard-Gilbreath nevertheless concludes that her family were of little importance to her activism.[10] Both, however, are heavily reliant on her own testimony and make little reference to other evidence. Wendy Cooper draws on Jessie and Rowland Kenney's autobiographies to add greater depth, and considers the role that Ann Kenney played in shaping her daughter's outlook, though still primarily considers Annie Kenney's activism as a product of Christabel Pankhurst's influence.[11]

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[3] Olive Banks, *Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of 'First Wave' Feminism* (Brighton, 1986) p. 54
[4] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, p. 12-13. She identifies other members of this cohort as Minnie Baldock, Jennie Baines and Alice Hawkins.
[5] For example, Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, p. 59, Neale, 'Working-Class Women'
[6] See, for example, Liddington and Norris, *One Hand*, p. 85, Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 208, Liddington, *Rebel Girls*, p. 26, Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, p. 126
[7] Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p. 185
[8] Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 45-6
[9] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 5
[10] Abrams, *Freedom's Cause*, Bouffard-Gilbreath, 'Annie Kenney', p. 13
[11] Cooper, 'Annie Kenney'

But these explanations are at best limited and partial. Narratives which stress the Kenneys' workplace experiences fail to explain why these women should choose to prioritise gender and feminist activism rather than class and union agitation, while accounts which focus on Annie Kenney's personal relationship with Christabel Pankhurst cannot demonstrate why so many of the sisters became involved with the WSPU. In order to fully account for these outcomes, it is necessary to draw on the flourishing body of feminist research which stresses the importance of understanding the home and other spaces outside work, and the interplay between them, in the formation of political consciousness.[12] Gillian Scott's study of the Women's Co-Operative Guild, for example, suggests that working-class women were politicised as much through their domestic responsibilities for consumption and household management as their paid work.[13] Such studies more accurately reflect the ways that feminist activists themselves understood the relationship between the public and private spheres. In her autobiography, for example, Kitty Marion positioned both the oppressive and abusive relationship she had with her father, and the experience of sexual harassment at work, as key influences on her feminist politics.[14] Historians also pay increasing attention to the ways in which early experiences, and the ways that these are understood, are incorporated into adult subjectivities, without suggesting that the adult self is an inevitable outcome of childhood experience.[15]

This chapter therefore argues that while the Kenneys' experiences at work were undoubtedly significant, it is also necessary to analyse their experiences at home in order to understand both their political development and the formation of their individual and collective subjectivities. This chapter follows the example of Sarah Richardson in analysing alternative spaces in which the sisters became politically aware and engaged, especially within the home.[16] Here they read books, discussed ideas, developed their beliefs, and observed and experienced gendered norms. A focus on the home thus brings different aspects of their politicisation to the fore: specifically, their reflection of the autodidatic

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[12] For example, Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford, 1992), Banks, *Becoming a Feminist*, Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink, and Holden, *The Family Story*, Lynn Abrams, 'At Home in the Family: Women and Familial Relationships', in Deborah Simonton (ed.), *The Routledge History of Women in Europe Since 1700* (London, 2006), Tamara K. Hareven, 'Recent Research on the History of the Family', in Michael Drake (ed.), *Time, Family and Community: Perspectives of Family and Community History* (Oxford 1994), Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, Hughes, 'The Left in Post-War Britain'

[13] Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (Brighton, 1998)

[14] Autobiography of Kitty Marion, 7KMA, London, LSE Library Collections, pp. 15-30 and 44-46

[15] Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 132, Maureen Wright, "An Impudent Intrusion?' Assessing the Life of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, First Wave Feminist and Social Reformer (1833-1918) ', *Women's History Review,* 18/2 (2009), p. 259

[16] Richardson, *Political Worlds*

culture among the working-classes in this period, as articulated in the work of Jonathan Rose, and their embrace of the 'religion of socialism' through extensive family debate, and leisure activities.[17] This chapter also underscores the importance of seeing the Kenneys as political actors, and their choices as political acts. Their decisions to become feminist activists were not distractions from more traditional labour activism, and nor were they solely a product of Christabel Pankhurst's influence. Rather, they were an understandable – though not inevitable – outcome of their experiences at home, as well as work. This perspective helps to restore the sense of agency and choice which has been lost or downplayed in earlier accounts.

Child labour, factory life and the desire for alternative employment

There is no doubt that the Kenneys' experiences within the workplace profoundly shaped their lives. Work structured their daily lives, dictated their routines, and defined how other people saw and understood them. Annie Kenney, for example, is almost always described as a 'mill-hand,' 'factory girl' or 'cotton operative', by historians as well as contemporaries, though she stopped working in the mill in her mid-twenties. The entire community, as well as their family, was largely dependent on the mill for economic prosperity.[18] At the time of the 1881 census, for example, approximately half of the male working population and seventy per cent of the female population in Saddleworth were employed in the textile trades.[19] During the 1890s, when the Kenney children entered the workplace, the mills were still the largest employer, though there were also hints of the broader macroeconomic changes – falling productivity, increased international competition, and declining exports – which would ultimately lead to the industry's demise.[20] Annie Kenney experienced the consequences of recession directly: unemployed for fifteen months in her mid-teens, she had to get up every morning and search fruitlessly for work. She also suffered an industrial accident in which she lost a finger. Yet she herself never spoke about

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17 Rose, *Intellectual Life*

18 For useful recent histories of these industries and their communities see Andrew Marrison, 'Indian Summer, 1870-1914', in Mary B. Rose (ed.), *The Lancashire Cotton Industry: A History Since 1700* (Preston, 1996), Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes c.1880-1930* (Oxford, 2001), Carol E. Morgan, *Women Workers and Gender Identities, 1835-1913: The Cotton and the Metal Industries in England* (London, 2001), Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Unpicking Gender: The Social Construction of Gender in the Lancashire Cotton Weaving Industry* (Aldershot, 2004), Duncan Gurr and Julian Hunt, *The Cotton Mills of Oldham* (Oldham, 1998)

19 1881 Census of England and Wales, Tables: Ages, Condition as to Marriage, Occupations and Birthplaces of people, Table 10: "Occupations of Males and Females in the Division and its Registration Counties". http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/table_page.jsp?tab_id=EW1881AGE_M10&u_id=10199451&show=DB (accessed 1 June 2015)

20 Marrison, 'Indian Summer'

these experiences: they were recorded by some of her colleagues in the suffrage movement.[21] However much she presented working-class women as in need of protection, 'victim' was not part of her self-construction and she saw no need to share her most vulnerable moments.

Some historians have stressed the positive and emancipatory benefits of the industrialised workplace in an attempt to counter generalisations which position workers solely as victims. Emma Griffin, for example, is broadly optimistic about the opportunities presented by the industrial revolution, in terms of increasing employment, rising wages and increased self-worth.[22] Harold Benenson emphasises that, within limits, young women employed in factories enjoyed far greater autonomy and earning power than women in other industries.[23] Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, meanwhile, stress the collective strength and spirit of solidarity which some women factory workers experienced.[24]

For the Kenneys, though, the mill had no redeeming features. Rowland Kenney said he 'hated the work there. I hated the barrack-like building. I loathed the dust and grease and stink of the place' and described in great detail the noise, filth, heat and monotony he detested.[25] Annie remembered crying before work, every morning for two years, dreading the fearful woman who trained her and the terrible overlooker.[26] Though their work differed – the girls worked in the cardroom, preparing cotton, and the boys worked as spinners, the idea being to progress from 'piecers' to 'minders' – both boys and girls loathed the experience. Jessie 'learned to dislike the cotton mills which swallowed up some of my older brothers and sisters in their teens until they had freed themselves'.[27] This hatred of their working conditions was clearly a powerful motivating force for the siblings, and as chapters two and three will indicate, Annie Kenney frequently drew on these experiences to build a sense of understanding and empathy with working-class audiences. Though their employment does seem to have given the family a degree of economic security and stability – none of the siblings mentions hunger or concerns about paying the rent – this was not sufficient compensation for the hardship of their working conditions.

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21 Fred Pethick-Lawrence, *Annie Kenney: Character Sketch and Prison Faces* (London, 1907) p. 3, Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette* (London, 1910) p. 20
22 Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (London, 2013)
23 Harold Benenson, 'Patriarchal Constraints on Women Workers' Mobilisation: The Lancashire Female Cotton Operatives, 1842-1919', *The British Journal of Sociology,* 44/4 (1993) p. 617
24 Liddington and Norris, *One Hand.* Emma Robertson argues this persisted well into the twentieth century. Emma Robertson, "It Was Just a Real Camradarie Thing' Socialising, Socialisation and Shopfloor Cuture at the Rowntree Factory, York', in Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson (ed.), *Women and Work Culture, Britain c. 1850-1950* (Farnham, 1998)
25 Kenney, *Westering,* p. 22
26 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 15-17
27 KP/JK/4/2/2/3, p. 4

Given the emphasis which was placed on Annie Kenney as a 'trade unionist' in contemporary accounts, it is worth considering her relationship to trade unions in some detail. Unlike, for example, Ada Nield Chew, these young women do not seem to have considered trade unions to be a mechanism through which they could effectively agitate for change. There were high rates of unionisation in the textile factories in Lancashire, and Oldham in particular, but as Paul Thompson has argued, these unions were often 'notably cautious, disciplined, even deferential' to employers.[28] Moreover, their relationship with female members was frequently ambiguous. Their attention was primarily focused on protecting the wages of their skilled male membership: women were encouraged to contribute passively, paying dues, but not participating more actively.[29] While Annie Kenney approved of the principles of the union movement, arguing that 'its chief object was to protect the workers against real injustice', no sibling records any particular collective action conducted through their union.[30] Rowland Kenney instead records a general atmosphere of apathy and docility which he rejected entirely. 'I simply could not accept, as apparently nearly everyone else accepted, the life of the factory as normal and natural. Filled with a sense of rebellion against the whole circumstance of my youth, I was entirely out of place among these cotton operatives,' he wrote.[31]

There are several accounts of Annie Kenney's early relationship to the local union of card and blowing-room operatives. Fred Pethick-Lawrence described her as fighting for higher wages and persuading her colleagues not to work without concessions, after which they asked her to stand for election as a trade union representative.[32] Her initiative and leadership are thus contrasted with union inertia. Sylvia Pankhurst, on the other hand, suggested that her workmates tried to persuade her not to stand for election, 'Many of her fellow-workers advised her against this step: "Don't go in for it, Miss Kenney! They are a drunken lot; they talk about nothing but whippet racing and hold their meetings in a public house!"'[33] Annie Kenney herself claimed that after hearing her speak on women's suffrage, a union official asked her to spend two weeks working for the union recruiting new members.

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[28] Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (London, 1992) p. 204
[29] Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes c.1880-1930*, pp. 59 – 64, Joanna Bornat, 'Lost Leaders: Women, Trade Unionism and the Case of the General Union of Textile Workers, 1875-1914', in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800-1918* (Oxford, 1986), Deborah Thom, 'The Bundle of Sticks: Women, Trade Unionists and Collective Organisation Before 1918', in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800-1914* (Oxford, 1986), Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Citizenship* (London, 1994) p. 105-106
[30] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 183
[31] Kenney, *Westering*, p. 23
[32] Pethick-Lawrence, *Annie Kenney*, p. 4
[33] Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p.187

This alerted her to the need for women representatives on local committees: Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst then asked her to stand for election herself.[34] These descriptions vary in the details, but collectively signal an important point about chronology. It seems clear that Annie Kenney became more actively involved with her union after, and not before, joining the WSPU. The assumption that Annie Kenney followed a trajectory from workplace to union to WSPU is therefore both inadequate and misleading.

Though the family may have relied on the mill for income, none of the siblings saw themselves working there for life. On the contrary, they actively resisted this, and instead consciously developed strategies which would give them greater choice and wider employment opportunities. The eldest brother, Reg, became a travelling commercial bookseller. Rowland, on the other hand, was so desperate to escape the mill that he took the first alternative that presented itself, going to work as a 'chain-horse lad', on the railways. His father attempted to encourage him to remain within the factory, suggesting that he would soon be promoted with the prospect of higher wages. Rowland, however wrote that 'nothing could have kept me any longer in the factory'. This was the start of a precarious, hand-to-mouth existence, relying on odd-jobs, labouring, and seasonal employment.[35] Neither of these options, however, were realistic prospect for women, whose choices were subject to far greater restraints, imposed not just by local labour market opportunities, but also gendered ideas about acceptable and respectable employment for women. Their choices were, however, expanding rapidly towards the end of the nineteenth century, thanks to new white-collar work, especially in teaching and clerical positions, which were increasingly accessible to women of their socio-economic position.[36]

Jane, Caroline and Jessie all decided that they wanted to become teachers, and Jessie hoped to set up a school on the moorlands for children who could not get to the main school in Hey.[37] Teaching was a common aspiration for women seeking white-collar employment, partly because there were few other realistic choices, and because teachers were greatly in demand in the expanded primary schooling system established after 1870.[38]

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[34] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 31-32
[35] Kenney, *Westering*, p. 33-34
[36] Gill Sutherland, 'Self-education, Class and Gender in Edwardian Britain: Women in Lower Middle Class Families', *Oxford Review of Education,* 41/4 (2015) p. 520, Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England, 1880-1915* (Chichester, 1995) p. 34
[37] Jessie as a young girl, JK/4/2/2/3
[38] As one of the women interviewed for the Edwardians project said: 'I was expected to be a teacher. There was nothing else I was fit for. But – the – the occupations possible … to young women then were very limited.' Thompson, P., University of Essex. Department of Sociology, Lummis, T., University of Essex. Department of Sociology: "Interview with Miss Corke" in "Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918, 1870-1973" 7, UK Data Service [distributor], 2009-05-12, SN:2000, Para. 104. http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-2000-1,

But it was not simply a default option. On the contrary, it was a positive choice, offering the prospect of increased status, respectability and authority. The sisters were also pragmatic, and took whatever opportunities were available. Mollie, for example, became a 'domestic' in nearby Lees before moving to work in a shop in Accrington; Nell went to work in a shop in Bingley, and she and Caroline also ran a shop in Waterhead.[39] Owning a shop was a prized dream, since it offered not only the ability to remain independent from the power and whims of an employer, but also the possibility that the siblings might work together in a shared endeavour. Collaboration in a family business offered greater security than striking out individually, and thus was a relatively common strategy.[40] The Kenneys hoped, for example, that Rowland's youthful stint as a paper-boy might be the first step towards owning 'a small stationers and newsagents' shop'.[41] Sally Mitchell has noted that wages and working conditions were not the only factors which influenced young women's decisions about work: they often preferred dressmaking or shop work to domestic service or factory employment despite the fact that these were not necessarily better paid.[42] For these sisters too, the relatively high wages available from factory employment were not sufficient to compensate for its other drawbacks. Moreover, their aspirations were not unrealistic: Jane and Caroline's efforts were ultimately successful and they became teachers in a school in Accrington.[43] Caroline continued her studies beyond qualification, later impressing Mary Blathwayt by winning a 'First Class Prize in Higher Physiology', and Fred Pethick-Lawrence with her knowledge of mathematics.[44]

It is not clear from their later accounts whether as girls the Kenneys saw paid work as a temporary or permanent phase of their life. Neither Jessie nor Annie discussed youthful aspirations towards marriage in their autobiographies, though Jessie mentioned her older siblings courting in her autobiography.[45] Joanna Bourke, among others, has demonstrated the extent to which working-class women increasingly valued staying at home after marriage, partly as a demonstration of affluence, but also, as Paul Thompson suggests, because it gave

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https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/QualiBank/Document/?cid=q-7b860bdd-d108-4893-bf54-3726e65b1acb (1 May 2016). See also Mitchell, *The New Girl*, p. 42

[39] 1901 England Census, Class: RG13; Piece: 3781; Folio: 40; page: 22 (accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk 1 November 2014) Kenney, *Westering,* pp. 89-100, KP/JK/4/2/2/4

[40] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, "The Hidden Investment': Women and the Enterprise ', in Pamela Sharpe (ed.), *Women's Work, The English Experience, 1650-1914* (London, 1998) p. 284

[41] Kenney, *Westering*, p. 21

[42] Mitchell, *The New Girl*, p. 34

[43] JANE – character Sketch (sic) and her Montessori schools and teaching, KP/JK/4/2/2/3:

[44] Mary Blathwayt's diary (MB), 2 November 1909, Gloucester, Gloucestershire Archives, Blathwayt Family of Dyrham D2659/27 and Chapter – Annie, Jane, Rowland, Nell, Self, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

[45] KP/JK/4/2/2/3 and KP/JK/4/2/2/4

women access to a degree of status they did not have as single women.[46] Yet it seems clear that, however long they anticipated working for, the Kenney sisters looked for more stable and better quality work opportunities than those offered by the mill, within the limits imposed by the local labour market and cultural expectations.

Formal and informal education

The obvious route to achieving these career goals was through education, which would allow the Kenney sisters to access white-collar opportunities. But their schooling was not an especially positive experience. For most of the children, school was combined with work from the age of ten, when they became 'half-timers', attending school in the morning and work in the afternoon, and vice versa the following week. This lasted until the children became full-time workers at the age of thirteen. Aside from the practical difficulties of combining education and work, the siblings felt that the schooling itself was inadequate. Annie Kenney believed that school had not taught her what she needed to know, and claimed her knowledge of geography and arithmetic was poor as a result.[47] For Rowland, meanwhile, school did not signify learning so much as violence and isolation. He disliked his teachers and was constantly in trouble for fighting. He felt that school was not preparing them for anything other than factory work, and wrote in his autobiography that 'we were facing a life of severe toil and hardship, and we needed hardening at an early age'.[48] This dislike of school was not uncommon: Ellen Wilkinson, for example, developed a phobia of schools, and described this as 'a weird commentary on the results of our machine educational system on a girl who loved books and really cared for knowledge'.[49] These may, however, have been problems associated with their particular institutions: the youngest children, Jessie, Bert and Harold, went to a different school: larger, more modern and apparently kinder.[50] Furthermore, the fact that some of the sisters aspired to becoming teachers indicates that some of them did value the education system, albeit in the context of limited employment options. They may have seen the potential for education to be more than that which was currently offered and – as chapter five discusses in more detail – even aspired to change it themselves.

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[46] Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, p. 63, Thompson, *The Edwardians*, p. 62
[47] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 18
[48] Kenney, *Westering*, p. 9
[49] Ellen Wilkinson, 'Myself When Young', in Margaret Oxford (ed.), *Myself When Young* (Plymouth, 1938), p. 409
[50] Jessie at School, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

Several of the sisters attended vocational courses at night school to further their education and develop skills which would enable them to enter into alternative forms of employment. As adolescents and young women, 'we were studying hard, to become pupil teachers, or go in for shorthand and typing, not to mention a lot of reading, grammar classes (sic),' stated Jessie.[51] As Jonathan Rose suggests, embracing adult education as a family enterprise helped deflect potential criticism from neighbours who might see this ambition as a threat: he also indicates that participants often had broader political concerns as well as an individual desire for self-improvement.[52] This ethic of hard work and striving was understood in moral as well as economic terms: Jessie claimed that 'my older brothers and sisters fought to call their souls their own'.[53] Annie Kenney makes clear that night school was a common experience within their community, with people attending 'technical classes, cookery class, [and] dressmaking courses' in order to gain practical skills that would improve their lives. She recognised how difficult this was for many people, since 'after a hard day's work in a hot cotton factory you have very little life left'.[54] Annie, however, felt that she did not have the same academic ability or drive as her sisters and did not join them at night school. It was not until she embarked on her brief career as a union activist that she chose to pursue further study. She put the money she earned towards a correspondence course on the history of unions at Ruskin College, though this was never completed.[55]

Far more important than their institutional education was their education at home. Jonathan Rose's work has highlighted a rich tradition of working-class autodidactism in this period which helps to contextualise the Kenneys' experience, tracing the links between the pursuit of knowledge, the study of literature, and the development of politically engaged and active communities.[56] As Kelly Mays has suggested, building on Rose's work, 'by facilitating mental liberation, reading can function both as a means of resistance and as the prelude to public activism aimed at promoting collective social, political, and economic emancipation … reading encourages one not only to recognize present injustices, but also to experience oneself as an agent capable of working to change them'.[57] Kate Flint and Laura Nym Mayhall have both pointed to the centrality of reading in developing a specifically feminist

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[51] KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[52] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp. 282-288
[53] Jessie In Retrospect, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[54] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 18
[55] Records of Annie Kenney's studies at Ruskin were lost when their archives were destroyed in 2012. http://newruskinarchives.org.uk/wp/?page_id=483 (accessed 1 July 2016)
[56] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, see also David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: a Study of Nineteenth-century Working Class Autobiography* (London, 1981)
[57] Kelly J. Mays, 'Domestic Spaces, Readerly Acts: Reading(,) Gender, and Class in Working-Class Autobiography', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts,* 30/4 (2008), p. 343

consciousness, helping to construct a community linked by a shared knowledge of specific texts and ideas.[58] Kirsty Bunting has also identified the centrality of reading to the political awakening of Ada Nield Chew, who believed literature was as significant as food and sleep for 'those of us who are determined to live like human beings'.[59]

If the emphasis at night-school was on improving their economic prospects and employability through the acquisition of practical skills, the Kenneys' reading at home had a quite different purpose, facilitating personal intellectual development and access to new ways of thinking about and understanding the world. 'The reading of books made me more serious,' Annie Kenney wrote.[60] Reading was considered to be an improving and uplifting practice, and Jessie claimed that 'there was nothing read of the squalid, the sexy and the sordid'.[61] Reading was not only a pursuit or an activity but became central to the Kenneys' sense of identity.

The siblings read extensively in several distinct genres. First, they read literature in its broadest sense. James Taylor, Annie Kenney's husband, told Brian Harrison in the 1970s that 'they were all encouraged and brought up on the classics'.[62] Reg Kenney, for example, liked Thackeray, Trollope, Brontë, Eliot, Dickens and Scott.[63] Shakespeare was a general favourite, and poetry was read, admired and recited by nearly all the siblings. Nell Kenney favoured Browning and Caroline Kenney had a fondness for Milton: both Annie and Rowland Kenney could recite Omar Khayyam. Alice Kenney was the exception. Jessie wrote that Alice 'did not think much of poetic licence and I think used to wonder sometimes if we younger children would not get a bit addled in the head by all this reciting'.[64] The Bible was read for its language and poetry as well as its moral lessons, and Jessie stated that 'it was not thought at all eccentric in our family life for my brothers to start disclaiming (sic) on chapters of Job, Proverbs or Ecclesiastes'.[65] The siblings also read and enjoyed contemporary works by Ouida and George du Maurier.[66] It is, however, worth

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58 Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford, 1993), Laura Nym Mayhall, 'The Making of a Suffragette: The Uses of Reading and the Legacy of Radicalism', in George K. Behlmer and Fred M. Leventhal (ed.), *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia and Identity in Modern British Culture* (Stanford, 2000)

59 Ada Nield Chew, 'A Living Wage for Factory Girls at Crewe', 5 May 1894, in Ada Nield Chew, *The Life and Writings of Ada Nield Chew* (London, 1982), p. 76, Kirsty Bunting, '"Thank God for the Public Press, Which Sheds Its Strong White Light on All the Dark Corners of the Earth!" Ada Nield Chew's Journey from Factory Girl To Author-Activist', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 132/1 (2017), pp. 142-145

60 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 18

61 The Kenneys of Shelderslow, Jessie in Retrospect, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

62 Interview with James Taylor, conducted by Brian Harrison on 23 October 1974, London, LSE Women's Library Collection, 8/SUF/B/020. Note that this is incorrectly catalogued as an interview with 'Joseph' Taylor.

63 REG – REG – REG, KP/JK/4/2/2/3, Jessie in Retrospect, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

64 KP/JK/4/2/2/3

65 Chapter 3 Sunday Feb 16th, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

66 Chapter 3 Sunday Feb 16th, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

noting that they do not mention the Hesba Strettons and Susan Warners that were beloved of working-class girls, nor the Louisa May Alcotts and Charlotte Yonges which were the staple reading of middle-class girls; nor do they mention Olive Schreiner, whose *Story of an African Farm* was often a central text for feminists of this period.[67] In other words, they did not read books specifically for and about girls and young women, but rather read more broadly across classic and popular literature. As Rose suggests, young women did not find these books off-putting or irrelevant.[68] Rather, like their brothers, they might identify with the characters, and find reading these books liberating and empowering.

The siblings also read a great deal of non-fiction, including philosophy and science. Annie Kenney, for example, refers to 'the elders of the family' reading 'Haeckel, Spencer, [and] Darwin'.[69] Rowland, who became a devoted reader of work published by the Rationalist Press Association, read Tyndall, Huxley and Spencer, as well as the lesser known authors, Grant Allen, Edward Clodd and Winwood Reade.[70] Jessie also read Ruskin and Thoreau.[71] Samuel Smiles, however, was not popular with the sisters. His *Self-Help* (1859) had sold thousands of copies and was profoundly influential on working-class conceptions of co-operation and mutual aid as a route to increasing prosperity and improved living standards.[72] But though Reg Kenney was taken with Smiles' ideas, Jessie thought that he was out of fashion and wrote that her sisters were 'rather inclined to smile' at his book.[73] Smiles was hostile to the idea of women working, and the sisters may well have found his ideas irrelevant.[74]

Finally, and most significantly, the Kenneys were profoundly influenced by explicitly political and socialist literature of the day, especially by the views of Robert Blatchford, as expressed in his newspaper, *The Clarion*. Blatchford had a lifelong influence on all the siblings.[75] In his eighties, Reg Kenney was still quoting 'that old philosopher and friend of the Kenney family'.[76] Annie Kenney praised his 'downright honesty, simple sincerity, public courage, his great intellect and his big heart', while Rowland Kenney suggested that 'the man

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[67] Mitchell, *The New Girl*, p. 142-3
[68] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 18
[69] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 21
[70] Kenney, *Westering*, p. 20
[71] Jessie and Annie: Sunday School and Hey Church, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[72] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 68
[73] KP/JK/4/2/2/3 and REG – REG – REG, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[74] Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 2013) p. 120
[75] In part, because he supported the First World War and so was not viewed with the same suspicion and hostility as other socialists. Jessie Kenney, *The Price of Liberty*, London, LSE Library Collections, 7/JKE, p. 11 (also available in the Kenney Papers)
[76] Birthday letter p. 4-5, KP/RK

who could write such things was not of common clay. He knew. He understood.'[77] Robert Blatchford was not just one among many of the authors read by the Kenneys, but a father-figure, teacher and prophet whose lessons needed to be fully absorbed and principles lived by. *The Clarion* became their great weekly treat, introducing them to new writers and thinkers on the aesthetics, morality and spiritual dimension of socialist thinking, such as Whitman, Emerson, Morris, and Carpenter.[78] Blatchford's importance to their emerging political consciousness is discussed further below.

Reading was neither a passive nor an individual pursuit in this family. As Jonathan Rose has suggested, it is better understood as a collective endeavour.[79] For the Kenneys, this sense of a collective experience was far more involved than simply listening together to a story read aloud. For them, the point was not simply to read texts, but to debate, discuss and even argue over them. 'They would walk for miles over the hills and discuss everything, every book and every subject that was written,' James Taylor said.[80] Jessie saw their 'searching for truth about Whence, Why and Whither' as directly related to their political discussions 'about the class distinctions'.[81] As a result, the sisters became used to constructing an argument, defending a point of view, and making themselves heard in a chaotic and raucous environment.

Some scholars have argued that women faced greater barriers to reading than men, not least because their families may have been opposed to their reading.[82] Kelly Mays further claims that reading was a profoundly gendered experience, 'one in which the home is much more battle-front than safe haven'. She suggests that Annie Kenney's experience of reading, like that of Hannah Mitchell and Kathleen Woodward, offers insight into 'the peculiar way in which working-class women's texts link reading to solitude, privacy, and secrecy … that exclude the family and induce feelings of worry and guilt rather than pride'.[83] In fact, the Kenney autobiographies suggest the opposite interpretation. The Kenney sisters did not face any restrictions or difficulties in access to literature. Indeed, once he had acquired a job as a travelling bookseller, Reg Kenney positively encouraged his sisters by bringing them books home. Female literacy appears to have been a recent acquisition in this family. It appears that Agnes Kenney could not read, since Rowland Kenney read *The*

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77 Kenney, *Westering*, p. 20
78 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 23
79 Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 87
80 Interview with James Taylor
81 Rebellion in Wham's House, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
82 Flint, *The Woman Reader*, p. 192
83 Mays, 'Readerly Acts', p. 355

Clarion to her.[84] Agnes spent her money on political newspapers and magazines, and encouraged the children to read.[85] Ann Kenney read stories to her children, but signed her marriage certificate with a cross, suggesting that she could read, but perhaps not write.[86] She encouraged the girls to read, to study and to debate alongside their brothers. As discussed further below, her support was a crucial influence over the sisters' political awakening. It both created space for the girls to develop their ideas and gave them a sense of where their possibilities reached their limit.

Religion, faith and doubt

While the role of faith in the emerging labour movement has been widely studied, the role of faith in the women's movement has primarily been perceived as a middle-class phenomenon and as a key driver of social concern and philanthropic intervention.[87] Later chapters will show, however, how central faith and spirituality were to the Kenney sisters' politics. The exploration, and embrace or rejection, of religious ideals, were a natural extension of the family interest in philosophy and politics, but with even greater significance for their sense of self.

Many of the siblings were devout and saw regular attendance and participation in religious worship as central to their family identity. Reg and Alice paid for the siblings to rent a pew in Hey Church, and Alice ensured that the children learned 'collects, catechism, Litany'. Ann taught them Ancient and Modern standard hymns as well as those by Wesley: more importantly, she offered a model of 'Christian love [and] charity … which she had known how to exemplify in her daly lofe [daily life]'.[88] The social and collective aspects of church life were as important as private devotion. Christian festivals marked the rhythm of the year, memorable for the special treats, hats and food.[89] Reg and Alice sang in the choir, where they met their future spouses, and Jane played the organ.

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[84] Kenney, *Westering*, p. 20
[85] Beatrice Clarke to Warwick Kenney Taylor, 6 August 2000, KP/CLA/3. It is also possible that Agnes suffered from failing eyesight given that she was in her seventies at the time Rowland was reading to her.
[86] Though see, for example, David Vincent, 'The Invention of Counting: The Statistical Measurement of Literacy in Nineteenth Century England', *Comparative Education,* 50/3 (2014), as a recent reminder of the difficulties in relying on 'marks' as a proxy for literacy.
[87] Leonard Smith, 'Religion and the ILP', in David James, Tony Jowitt, and Keith Laybourn (eds.), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party* (Halifax, 1992), Leonard Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour: Nonconformity and the Independent Labour Movement in Lancashire and the West Riding, 1880-1914* (Keele, 1993), Graham Johnson, 'British Social Democracy and Religion, 1881-1911', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 51/1 (2000), Vicinus, *Independent Women*, Richardson, *Political Worlds*
[88] The Shelderslow Sunday School, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[89] KP/JK/4/2/2/3, Kenney, *Memories*, p. 13 and 8

Many of the siblings took a leading role in organising the Church Sunday School. Though more commonly associated with non-conformist churches, and by this point declining in significance nationally, involvement in Sunday Schools often predated later political activism. Emma Griffin, for example, has noted the strong links between Sunday School teaching and Chartist sympathy, arguing that they gave working men 'the ability and confidence to interact with their neighbours, and opened up for such men the possibility of shaping the world in which they lived'.[90] While Sunday Schools had often previously been imposed on the working-classes from above and used as an instrument of social control, increasingly they were run from within the working-classes themselves and became important expressions of the self-help movement.[91] Since the 1870 Education Act, their role in developing literacy was less important, but they continued to play a central role in the social and moral life of the local community, and working-class attendance, Paul Thompson suggests, was near universal even into the Edwardian period.[92] Jessica Gerrard has recently suggested that the association of these schools with ethical and moral socialism has meant they have been frequently seen as less significant in developing political consciousness than traditional forms of political activity and union organisation. She, however, asserts the importance of recognising their critical political and social significance.[93] Certainly, the Sunday School played an important role in the Kenneys' political development. Annie, Jane and Jessie all taught classes, and Reg had an overall leadership role. According to Jessie, it was 'slightly heretical, very undogmatic, but a very happy school … most successful'.[94] Annie read *The Clarion* to her class instead of the Bible. Though not one of the socialist Sunday Schools explicitly grounded in British socialist politics, under the Kenneys' leadership it adopted and inculcated their views. As such, it was not only an opportunity for the aspiring teachers to practise their skills, but also a place to proselytise their alternative beliefs.

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[90] Emma Griffin, 'The Making of the Chartists: Popular Politics and Working-class Autobiography in Early Victorian Britain', *English Historical Review,* 129/538 (2014), p. 588-589

[91] Thomas W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (London, 1976). For a more sceptical view, see Malcolm Dick, 'The Myth of the Working-class Sunday School', *History of Education,* 9/1 (1980)

[92] P.B. Cuff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England, 1780-1980* (Redhilll, 1986), K.D. Snell, 'The Sunday-School Movement in England and Wales: Child Labour, Denominational Control and Working-Class Culture', *Past & Present,* 164/1 (1999), Thompson, *The Edwardians*, p. 41

[93] Jessica Gerrard, '"Little Soldiers" for Socialism: Childhood and Socialist Politics in the British Socialist Sunday School Movement', *International Review of Social History,* 58/1 (2013), p. 83

[94] The Shelderslow Sunday School, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

The siblings did not accept church teaching unquestioningly, nor adhere to church doctrine rigidly. On the contrary, many of the siblings had profound religious doubts and underwent intense spiritual struggles, especially as they sought to reconcile religious faith with the secular and socialist values of Robert Blatchford. 'The breeze of Rationalism which blew through Wham's House did us a lot of good for it drove us to look deeper into our religious faith,' wrote Jessie, who had profound concerns with the idea of God as three in one, culminating in anguish over whether she could therefore be confirmed.[95] Her spirituality was deeply informed by art, music and nature, which offered her examples of the 'beauties of God'.[96] Annie, who felt involved in a personal relationship with God, embarked on an intense year of 'self-contemplation, deep meditation and secret communion with my higher self,' which left her with new 'spiritual poise'.[97] Other siblings lost their faith entirely. Mollie and Rowland were heavily influenced by Robert Blatchford's rejection of religion. Rowland agreed with him that it kept working people 'drugged', though he always enjoyed the poetry of the services.[98] Mollie attended alternative chapels before developing an interest in spiritualism.[99] Their grandmother, Agnes, was Catholic, and the local Catholic priest, was a regular visitor to the house.[100]

As a result, though the Kenneys were not part of the non-conformist movement which was so central to nineteenth century politics, they shared some of the same spirit of questioning received wisdom and suspicion of authority.[101] Jessie, for example, believed that under their leadership, the Sunday School 'introduced the real spirit of Christian brotherhood and a seeking after a broader basis of Christian teaching than we had experienced in Church and school'.[102] This questioning of religious authority was an important forerunner to their questioning of political authority. Jessie and Annie Kenney's faith was all the stronger for having undergone a process of intense internal critique, and therefore provided an important foundation for their sense of self and their later activism.

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95 KP/JK/4/2/2/3
96 Jessie and Sunday and Sundays (sic) at Wham's House, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
97 Kenney, *Memories*, pp. 20-23
98 Kenney, *Westering*, pp. 26-31
99 Kenney, *Westering*, p. 85-6
100 Father Hanrehan and The Rev. John Howard, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
101 See, for example, Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: A Biography* (London, 2002) p. 3, Wilkinson, 'Myself' pp. 401-5
102 Religion at Sea, KP/JK/4/2/2/10

Practising the 'religion of socialism'

Given their deep engagement with religious, spiritual and moral questions, intense interest in Robert Blatchford's work, and limited involvement with formal workplace politics, it is unsurprising that the sisters came to strongly identify with the political and social movement known as 'the religion of socialism'. As articulated by Blatchford and understood by the Kenneys, this was not primarily about the material and economic organisation of society. Rather, it involved an intense personal commitment to a transformative way of life, formulated in religious, moral and aesthetic terms, and finding collective expression in social and cultural organisations offering fellowship and mutual aid.[103] Stephen Yeo has argued that this is the most appropriate framework for understanding the meaning and experience of socialism during the 1880s and 1890s, the period when the Kenney sisters matured from girlhood to young womanhood.[104] David James suggests it is particularly useful for understanding the development of socialism in places where union activism was weak, a finding which is reinforced by the Kenneys' lives.[105]

Initially, this interest in the 'religion of socialism' was a purely family affair. Robert Blatchford himself saw socialism as a family enterprise: 'a family gathering, a brotherly – and sisterly, if you like – jollification, not a political conference'.[106] Unlike other socialists and labour activists such as Jennie Lee, who grew up immersed in an active trade unionist culture where socialism was embraced both at work and home, the Kenneys found themselves isolated in their beliefs.[107] Rowland suggested that among their immediate neighbours, 'a Socialist was either a lunatic, or a poisonous and dangerous creature to be shunned, denounced or guarded against'.[108] Access to an imagined community of fellow believers through reading *The Clarion* was thus even more critical. Unlike the *Labour Leader* – which Jessie called 'the dull Labour paper that seemed to think of reform only in narrow channels and economic prospects'[109] – *The Clarion* made a powerful argument for a wholescale transformation in society which appealed to the Kenneys' sense of morality and ethics.

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[103] Matthew Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England, 1832-1914* (Basingstoke, 2009), Martin Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Oxford, 2011), Martin Wright, 'Robert Blatchford, The Clarion Movement, and the Crucial Years of British Socialism, 1891-1900', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism,* 13/1 (1990)
[104] Yeo, 'A New Life', p. 7
[105] David James, *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town: Keighley 1880-1914* (Keele, 1995) p. 158
[106] Robert Blatchford, *The Clarion*, 25 May 1895, quoted in Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1990) p. 171
[107] Jennie Lee, *This Great Journey* (London, 1963) pp. 13-52
[108] Kenney, *Westering*, p. 24
[109] KP/JK/4/2/2/3

Ideas introduced by *The Clarion* were passionately debated among the Kenney siblings. But these were not abstract, intellectual conversations carried on indoors. The Kenneys took their political conversations out onto the moors, seeking distance from urban and industrial life. Access to the open countryside gave them a sense of freedom and liberation which they associated with the prospect of socialism. They felt that Blatchford himself would approve of their outdoor politics, since, in Jessie's words, his work 'carried with it the clean fresh air of the countryside, and the simplicity of Nature'.[110] The vision of 'Merrie England' developed not only by Blatchford but also by Ruskin and Morris was, as Clare Griffiths suggests, 'a place and time uncorrupted by the pollution of capitalist industry'. This was not an imagined future utopia but an ideal which pre-dated industrialisation.[111] This resonated strongly with the Kenneys, who reflected on the ways that industrial capitalism shaped not only their lives but their landscape. As Jessie said, 'the whole of Lancashire must have been a beautiful county before the Industrial Revolution befouled and bedrabbed it'.[112]

Though their socialist beliefs were partly a response to their workplace experiences, then, they were developed and discussed outside the factory: through books, at home, and in the countryside. Kathryn Gleadle has shown that even in very politically engaged households, girls and women might have been excluded from debate and expected to conform to more conventional gendered roles.[113] Here, though, it is very clear that the girls took, and expected to take, an equal part in these discussions.

Their political engagement did not always stay within the family, however. Jessie argued that 'a time was to come when my older brothers and sisters were to feel the need for not only thinking it out, but talking it out, and seeing it through'.[114] As young women, the sisters sought out opportunities to meet with like-minded people outside their own family. Annie, Jane and Jessie all joined the Clarion Choir, so that, in Annie's words, 'I should meet others whose ideas were very much like my own, which really meant they were *Clarion* readers'.[115] Political development was thus inseparable from friendship and leisure.[116] These sorts of activities also went far beyond simple recreation: socialists saw them as

[110] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 24
[111] Clare V. J. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The Politics of Rural Britain* (Oxford, 2007) pp. 24-28
[112] KP/JK/4/2/2/3, p. 4
[113] Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, p. 100
[114] Chapter – Annie, Jane, Rowland, Nell, Self, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[115] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 24
[116] Roberts, *Political Movements*, p. 136

helping to bring about the fundamental changes needed for individuals and their communities.[117]

Some siblings now found in the ILP an opportunity to debate these ideas in a more formal setting. Once Rowland found stable work in his early twenties, he joined both the ILP and the Shop Assistants' Union.[118] Jessie and Nell also joined local ILP branches. As a young woman, Nell was an active member of the Bingley ILP and served as the literature secretary in what presumably would have been an organisation with close links to the original ILP branch in nearby Bradford.[119] She also became a member of the National Union of Shop Assistants in Shipley.[120] For Jessie, attending ILP meetings and *Clarion* events was part of a process of entry into independent young womanhood. Engaged with 'the Clarionettes and Vocal Union, the ILP socials and meetings, the night school, the art gallery', she implies a direct connection between her social life and recreational activities, and her intellectual and political development. All these drew her into 'a fellowship with those who were seeking to redress some of the wrongs of our social and political life'.[121] But ultimately, the ILP was to prove an unsatisfactory outlet for the expression of their political beliefs. Nell eventually left the ILP on the grounds that it was not doing enough to advance the cause of women.[122] Many women came to feel frustrated by a form of socialism which did not seem interested in the disadvantages they experienced as women, and which had far less to say about how to create a socialist society than what that idealised society would look like.[123] It is also worth noting, given that Annie Kenney is so often described as part of the group which transitioned from ILP activism to WSPU membership, that she herself does not actually mention belonging to the ILP or attending its meetings.

While Yeo suggests that the growth of the ILP precipitated a decline in the social and cultural activities associated with the 'religion of socialism', for the Kenneys, the ILP did not replace but rather enriched their existing activities. Moreover, while Yeo sees the 1890s as the high point of the 'religion of socialism', the Kenneys were active participants and fervent believers well into the new century. They continued to admire Robert Blatchford

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117 Waters, *British Socialists*, especially pp. 97-121 on the central role of music
118 Kenney, *Westering*, p.103
119 *Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury*, 15 September 1907, p. 6. There are no remaining records for the Bingley ILP held either within the main archival collection at the LSE or at the local West Yorkshire Archive, though private communication from the latter suggests the branch was founded in 1904, and was known to have 130 members in 1909. Nell Kenney's ILP membership card is at MS-1029 File 11.
120 Membership card at MS-1029 File 11
121 Chapter – Annie, Jane, Rowland, Nell, Self, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
122 *Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury*, 15 September 1907, p.6
123 Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p. 5, June Hannam, 'Women and the ILP, 1890-1914', in David James, Tony Jowitt, and Keith Laybourn (eds.), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party* (Halifax, 1992)

and embrace his writing throughout their lives. Indeed, Annie Kenney considered that he had been as significant in her life as Christabel Pankhurst, and Jessie said he 'had lit the flame that would not be extinguished'.[124]

Their adherence to the 'religion of socialism' is therefore crucial in understanding the form their political activism took. Despite their lifelong socialist beliefs, none of the Kenneys found conventional labour politics an adequate vehicle through which to work for change. Rowland Kenney became not only an increasingly vocal critic of the Parliamentary Labour Party, but also frustrated with the limitations of party politics more broadly, eventually finding a fulfilling outlet for his beliefs in the teachings of Ouspensky and Gurdieff.[125] He and Reg also became involved with the social credit movement.[126] It is unsurprising that the Kenney sisters were also attracted to new forms of politics. From the religion of socialism, they had acquired a belief in the importance of personal transformation as well as collective struggle, a high-minded emphasis on morality and spirituality, as well as total and all-encompassing commitment to a new way of life. As Yeo says, 'giving up all for the cause, including one's life … was what it would take to make socialism'.[127] The Kenneys' understanding of politics itself was thus derived from the religion of socialism, not from union organisation, committees or electioneering. For them, it was about the pursuit of values, grounded in an emotional response to current circumstances, as well as an intellectual analysis, and was a social activity as well as an earnest endeavour.

Learning the meanings and expectations of gender

'Neither my sister Annie, my sister Jane, or my sister Nell ever felt strong feminists – nor were we ever anti-man,' Jessie Kenney claimed. 'We had no reason to be so at Wham's House, because we were all studying together, and striving together'.[128] Despite the strong family ethic of mutual support and collective effort, the Kenneys still grew up with a strong sense of the way that gendered expectations imposed particular burdens on girls and

[124] Kenney, *Memories*, p. vi, Chapter – Annie, Jane, Rowland, Nell, Self, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[125] Kenney, *Westering*, pp. 311-345
[126] Kenney, *Westering*, pp. 286-303, Brian Burkitt, Frances Hutchinson, and Brian Bunxitt, *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism* (London, 1997), pp. 13-21 and 152-160. Both these points are discussed in chapter six.
[127] Yeo, 'A New Life', p. 16
[128] Notes about the Kenney Family, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

women. The models offered by their parents both constructed, and demonstrated the limitations of, contemporary roles for men and women.

The 'male breadwinner' model of family life was increasingly held up by contemporaries and defended by trade unions as the ideal. Yet it often bore no resemblance to life in textile communities where women and children made essential contributions to the household.[129] In the Kenney household, it was even more inappropriate, since their father, Horatio, made little or no economic contribution to the household. 'Head trouble' developed in the 1890s forced him to retire from the mill.[130] Instead, he embarked on a series of small-scale enterprises, first selling 'washing-liquor' invented by his mother, then newspapers. But according to Rowland, Horatio had 'no more business sense than one of his own birds' and each venture failed.[131] Increasingly he spent his time in masculine leisure pursuits, racing pigeons, raising livestock and visiting the pub.[132]

This had implications for the family which went far beyond the loss of income. As Julie-Marie Strange indicates, contemporary understandings of fatherhood were closely linked to their role as providers. Her reading of working-class autobiographies suggests that children often looked back to fathers who were unable to fulfil this role with a sense of empathy and pathos.[133] Margaret Bondfield, for example, whose father also lost his job, wrote that 'by the time I was old enough to talk to him … he was haunted by the fear of the workhouse'.[134] Horatio Kenney's inability to provide, and thus to live up to what it meant to be a man and a father, made him almost irrelevant to the lives of his children. Ann had to go out of her way to ensure that the children still respected their father and perceived him as the head of the household.[135] She was not very successful in this. Rowland was scathing about his father's capacity to fulfil the role of head of the household, portraying him as unreliable, irresponsible and devoted to drink.[136] Annie and Jessie were more forgiving, but ultimately still saw him as weak and peripheral to their lives. 'Father never seemed to have any confidence in his children, and he had very little in himself,' wrote Annie, 'had he possessed this essential quality, perhaps the whole course of our lives would have been

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129 Sara Horrell and Deborah Oxley, 'Crust or crumb?: Intrahousehold Resource Allocation and Male Breadwinning in Late Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review,* 52/3 (1999), p. 495
130 KP/JK/4/2/2/3, p. 7, Kenney, *Westering*, p. 15
131 Kenney, *Westering*, p. 16
132 My Mother Again, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
133 Julie-Marie Strange, 'Fatherhood, Providing, and Attachment in Late Victorian and Edwardian Working-Class Families', *Historical Journal,* 55/4 (2012) pp. 1017-8
134 Margaret Bondfield, *A Life's Work* (London, 1949) p. 23
135 KP/JK/4/2/2/3
136 Kenney, *Westering*, p. 5

changed'.[137] Jessie suggested that Horatio 'loved to be with his children until they [were] about twelve years of age, and began to have ideas, and air them'.[138] While he exerted very little influence over his children, however, even this weakness offered his children an important lesson. Growing up without a male provider, they understood the importance of ensuring that women could provide for themselves. While Olive Banks has argued that fathers often played a central role in their daughters' political awakening, Horatio Kenney's influence was more ambiguous and indirect.[139]

Their mother Ann, on the other hand, was a powerful influence and her example shaped their sense of what women could and should be. She was disciplined, and had high and exacting standards. Jessie, for example, said that they had twelve commandments to live by, adding 'thou shalt not be late' and 'thou shall not forget'.[140] Given the number of children and the demands on her time, it is unsurprising that they stressed her role as a disciplinarian rather than recalling expressions of affection.[141] Nevertheless, she was clearly deeply loved by the children and devoted to them: Jessie remembered only one occasion when she was absent 'and then to me it seemed as though the sun had gone out'.[142] She told Christabel Pankhurst that 'we realise more and more what a wonderful mother we had … She hated meanness, cowardice, deceit and disloyalty, and loved generosity, courage, utter frankness and loyalty'.[143] The siblings believed she was admired by others in the community, sought out for her no-nonsense, common-sense advice by women of greater wealth and higher status.[144] She emphasised their obligations of duty and service to others: Annie said, 'one thing above all other my mother impressed upon us – always to fight for the weak'.[145] Jessie, though, felt this gave them 'an almost morbid sense of personal responsibility'.[146] Ann Kenney, in a number of complex ways, illustrated that being a woman did not have to mean being subordinate. A woman might have power and authority in her own right, especially in the domestic sphere.

Ann Kenney's support for her daughters' education and intellectual development was particularly significant. She always ensured that they had money for school fees, slates and pencils, suggesting the importance she placed on their education, which was, as

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137 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 9
138 Reg. Character sketch of Reg, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
139 Banks, *Becoming a Feminist*, chapter 3
140 KP/JK/4/2/2/3
141 Thompson, *The Edwardians*, p. 43-44
142 17 March 1952, KP/JK/2
143 Jessie Kenney to Christabel Pankhurst, 13 October 1935, KP/JK/3/PankhurstC/9
144 Father Hanrehan and the Rev. John Howard, KP/JK/4/2/2/3, Kenney, *Memories*
145 Pethick-Lawrence, *Annie Kenney*, p. 1
146 KP/JK/4/2/2/3

Rowland describes it, 'a serious matter for a poor housewife with a large family'.[147] There is no sense here of the conflict between mother and daughter, often expressed through maternal constraint on the daughter's education. This factor is central to many other working-class autobiographies of the period, including, as Kate Flint noted, Hannah Mitchell and Kathleen Woodward, as well of those of women such as Catherine Cookson, Helena Swanwick and Alice Foley.[148] Rather, Ann Kenney's support for the girls' reading and education suggest that she saw this as a vital part of their longer term efforts to find more secure employment outside the mill. Their mother also played an active role in encouraging family debate and discussion. Annie Kenney stated that Ann 'allowed us great freedom of expression on all subjects' including religion, politics and philosophy.[149] She kept the younger children quiet so that the older ones were free to develop their ideas, only intervening when discussion turned into outright argument.[150] In contrast, Horatio did not participate. They only saw him involved in political activity when he went to vote, which was memorable because he dressed up to do so. But to Jessie 'this voting business seemed to be a mysterious affair and we never knew whether he was a Liberal or a Conservative'.[151]

The Kenneys saw their mother as an intelligent, capable and hardworking woman, conscious of her role as a neighbour and friend, yet saddled with an intense domestic burden. Focusing on the interwar period, Selina Todd has argued that maternal example was a powerful factor in shaping women's relationship to the labour market. Young women strove to avoid repeating the deprivation of their mothers' lives.[152] This appears very evident in the Kenney family. It is particularly worth noting that Ann Kenney had twelve children in nineteen years, and that her domestic burden was thus exacerbated by near constant pregnancy and nursing. Her own children generally chose to have small families. Four of them had only one child and four others had none at all. As later chapters will demonstrate, Annie Kenney made great use of her observations of her mother's life in her rhetoric, frequently referring both to her strengths and her frustrations to illustrate the reality of working-class women's lives.

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147 Kenney, *Westering*, p. 7
148 See, for example, Carolyn Steedman, 'Kathleen Woodward's Jipping Street', *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (London, 1992) 119-125, Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up,* p 17-18, Caine, 'The Making of Catherine Cookson's Autobiography', Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood* (Manchester, 1973) p. 44-56, also Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England, 1880-1939* (Oxford, 1989) pp. 22-28
149 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 1
150 REG – REG – REG, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
151 Chapter 2, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
152 Selina Todd, 'Poverty and Aspiration: Young Women's Entry to Employment in Inter-war England', *Twentieth Century British History,* 15/2 (2004), p. 139, see also Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and '30s'

Given the numerous demands on their mother's time and energy, it is not surprising that the Kenneys came to rely not on her, but on each other. While to date most historical analysis has focused on parent-child relationships, there is a growing recognition of the crucial role of siblings in offering emotional and practical support, not only in childhood, but across the lifecycle.[153] The Kenneys were a 'long' family, in that they were so large that the elder and younger siblings were effectively from different generations.[154] Jane Humphries describes the burdens this placed on the older siblings: though they might start with advantages of attention and education, they also had to contend with greater expectations and responsibilities.[155] In the Kenney family, the older children shouldered a significant burden for their younger siblings. The income they brought home spared the younger children the need to enter the labour force so early: Jessie Kenney, for example, did not have to work until much later than her siblings, and her work in 'reeling' was significantly less demanding, allowing her to devote time and energy to her studies.[156] The older children also sought to support their younger siblings in other ways. Reg and Mollie, for example, both attempted to help Rowland find more stable and rewarding employment than his labouring work.[157] Alice, meanwhile, put her life on hold until her youngest siblings were settled, delaying her plans to marry and emigrate until Jessie had acquired a secure secretarial job.[158] Such close and affectionate ties between older and younger siblings were not inevitable in families of this size. Margaret Bondfield, herself one of eleven children, 'did not regard the older members of the family as 'belonging" and formed a distinct unit with only three of her siblings.[159]

The older children also acted in lieu of their semi-absent father and over-stretched mother by taking on some of the parental duties. Reg, 'the life and soul of any little party gathering,' came to take his father's place in the family, bringing home puzzles, games, food, books and presents for his siblings.[160] Alice became their 'deputy mother,' supervising sums in the week, and taking over domestic duties on Sundays so that their mother could have a rest.[161] Recreation too was gendered. As Claire Langhamer has shown, women and girls'

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153 Sara Scott and Sue Scott, '"Our Mothers' Daughters: Autobiographical Inheritance through Stories of Gender and Class"', in Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography* (London, 2000), Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*

154 See Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*. For other examples of how the long family operated in practice, albeit in middle-class families, see Caine, *Destined to be Wives* and Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury*

155 Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, p. 191

156 KP/JK/4/2/2/3

157 Kenney, *Westering*, pp. 89-100

158 KP/JK/4/2/2/3

159 Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, p. 36

160 The Shelderslow Sunday School, KP/JK/4/2/2/3 see also REG – REG – REG, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

161 Jessie as a young girl and My Mother again, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

leisure cannot be simply understood in opposition to work. Girls' time outside work was often taken up with necessary activities such as dressmaking.[162] Though the siblings shared interests in singing and certain games, more frequently their leisure pursuits reflected gendered expectations.[163] The younger girls played with dolls and learned the piano while the older girls practiced millinery and developed interests in fashion and dancing.[164] The boys played marbles, hopscotch, football and cricket, and indulged in 'group fighting' and torturing frogs.[165] At Christmas, the girls received wax dolls and the boys acquired wooden horses.[166] The girls' activities were also constrained by their clothing. Jessie greatly admired her elder sisters' ability to jump a skipping rope while wearing the long skirts characteristic of the time.[167] Annie chafed at these clothing restrictions. Mollie told her that 'you must suffer to be beautiful' and Annie replied, 'I would rather be comfortable'. Mollie tightened the stays further: Annie simply took them off.[168] While their parents might not have conformed to traditional gendered norms, traditional sexual division of labour is evident in the siblings' roles within the household.

The sheer size of their family also had an influence on their collective subjectivity as well as shaping their individual sense of self. In the context of rapidly declining birth rates in textile communities, as well as high infant mortality rates, the Kenney family, with eleven surviving children, was unusually large: numerous enough to be mistaken for a Sunday School outing.[169] They therefore stood out, and turned inwards. With so many siblings on hand for support and play, the Kenneys became, in Jessie's phrase, 'sufficient unto themselves'.[170] Their sense of being 'Kenneys', in relationships characterised by loyalty and obligation, but also genuine love and affection, would be a source of ongoing support for the sisters, especially notable during the suffrage campaign, but also across their lifespan.

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[162] Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60* (Manchester, 2000)
[163] REG – REG – REG, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[164] ANNIE'S WEAKNESSES, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[165] Kenney, *Westering*, p. 8 and 13
[166] My Mother Again, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[167] 24 March 1952, KP/JK/2
[168] More of Grannie, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[169] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 6, Carol Dyhouse, 'Working-Class Mothers and Infant Mortality in England, 1895-1914', *Journal of Social History,* 12/2 (1978)
[170] KP/JK/4/2/2/4

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the Kenneys are not best understood through a focus on their experiences in the workplace but through close examination of their lives at home. While they have almost uniformly been perceived, labelled and analysed as 'mill-girls' they themselves saw factory work as a temporary phase and did not define themselves by their occupation. Rather, it was their experiences at home, where reading, religion, and socialism were all central to their daily lives, which informed not only their politics but the formation of their subjectivity and selfhood. From the rich and related traditions of autodidactism and ethical socialism which characterised their home life, the Kenneys developed an idealistic and optimistic belief in the possibility of change, an understanding of socialism as rooted in social and cultural life, and a determination to work collectively for their mutual advancement.

Jessie Kenney herself, however, claimed that 'it was certainly nothing to do with our home life' that she and her sisters had become militant suffragettes.[171] Here, she is clearly thinking of the opportunities that she and her sisters had, their ability to read, debate and participate as equals with their brothers. Girls and young women were by no means treated as inferior in the Kenney household. What she implies, then, is that the Kenneys were not acting out of resentment or a sense of overt oppression. On the contrary, they had a strong sense of women's capacities, and believed that women had an equal part to play in working for a brighter future. Annie Kenney argued 'that men and women should be comrades to help each other and improving (sic) the social and economic conditions of the people'.[172] At the same time, however, the sisters were acutely aware of the practical constraints and heavy responsibilities which shaped women's lives, not least through their own dual burden of paid work and housework. As chapter two will suggest, part of the significance they attributed to the vote was its power to both protect and emancipate working-class women.

Understanding this crucial formative experience gives lie to the notion that the Kenney sisters, and particularly Annie Kenney, were simply passive recipients of Christabel Pankhurst's ideas. On the contrary, they were evidently an extremely political family, actively engaged in thinking about the possibilities for social change. As a result, it is more appropriate to suggest that the Kenneys were receptive to her arguments because they made sense in the context of their previous experiences. The socialist ideas which they had

[171] Rebellion in Wham's House. Reg and Rowland, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[172] *The Scotsman,* 18 June 1913, p. 9

developed continued to inform their outlook, but feminist ideas gave them new tools with which to understand their lives. All this is only visible when their home life is brought into focus. Moreover, this changed perspective more accurately reflects the sisters' own self-understandings. 'Wham's House and Hey Church and Shelderslow Sunday School and the moorlands, would stay with us all throughout the year (sic) to come,' wrote Jessie.[173] These are all spaces outside the factories. In paying close attention to the multiple factors at play in the formation of working-class feminists, this chapter has challenged simplistic notions of a straightforward link between work and politics, instead offering a more complex and revealing account of the Kenneys' political development.

[173] The Shelderslow Sunday School, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

Chapter two: 'Behind "Votes for Women" stirs the spirit of reform': an analysis of Annie Kenney's claims for the vote[1]

Annie Kenney's autobiography, *Memories of a Militant*, is largely a justification of militant tactics which explains *how* the WSPU sought to win the vote for women. It has very little to say about *why* she herself wanted the vote. Yet to understand why she and her sisters devoted their time, energy and attention to the vote for so many years, it is necessary to examine why this particular cause came to assume such significance for them. This chapter accordingly uses contemporary statements and autobiographical evidence to critically analyse why she wanted the vote, what she believed it would achieve, and what role it played in her broader understandings of citizenship and reform. The focus is necessarily on Annie Kenney as there is far more evidence for the nature of her political beliefs, particularly in public speeches and statements. While attentive to the particularities of her own interests, this chapter nevertheless helps bring to the fore reasons why other working-class women might be attracted to the WSPU and its political rationale.

This chapter argues that Annie Kenney's claims for the vote fell into three broad categories: the benefits to working-class women in terms of improved working and living conditions, the benefits to women collectively through their involvement in a campaign grounded in spiritual and moral principles, and the benefits to the nation which would accrue from women's devoted service. While it does discuss some of the ways her beliefs were manifested in her decisions and actions, it does not address questions of why she and her sisters engaged in militancy – that is, how they intended to achieve their aims – which are considered in chapter four.

This chapter first identifies the defining principle of Annie Kenney's beliefs – the centrality of gender, rather than class, to women's lives – and discusses its significance. It then shows how, based on her own experience, she believed that working and living conditions for working-class women would be improved. However, she did not seriously engage with the critiques of those who thought that the WSPU was focused too narrowly on the vote, nor offer a coherent argument as to how this political tool would solve the essentially economic and social problems which these women faced. Despite the lack of specificity and detail in terms of practical measures, she saw the campaign as a transformative experience which would strengthen womankind collectively, regardless of class. This belief was underpinned by the interests in religion, faith, and spirituality which, as

[1] 'West of England Campaign', *Votes for Women (VFW),* 27 August 1908, p. 1094

chapter one indicated, were central to her emerging political consciousness. Finally, this chapter demonstrates that ideas of service to nation were crucial to her arguments about why women should have the vote. The ideals of duty and responsibility which she invoked drew on longstanding feminist arguments about women's unique capacity to contribute to the nation, reiterated with renewed urgency during the war. As such, the following pages reveal the range and significance of the concerns which motivated her, the connections between them, and the limitations and consequences of her political vision.

There has been a lively historiographical debate around how far the WSPU should be understood as a single-issue pressure group, interested only in acquiring the vote.[2] Historians critical of the WSPU, developing the arguments advanced by contemporary critics, have argued that the organisation became fixated on the vote – and even on militancy – rather than on more wide-ranging reforms.[3] Other historians have argued that, regardless of official policy which required members to focus on the vote, the WSPU was engaged in a more fundamental challenge to the meanings of womanhood, the organisation of society, and the nature of citizenship. They have shown that many individual campaigners continued to work for several different causes at once.[4] Important scholarship has also broadened the focus away from the vote to consider the wider significance of women's citizenship.[5]

As Ben Griffin has pointed out, Gareth Stedman Jones's work has forced historians to reconsider the connections between experience and political outlook. This has affected understandings of gender as much as class, as the 'linguistic turn' has prompted closer attention to the languages that women used to articulate their experiences.[6] As a result, there has been a re-examination of the languages of feminist politics and their relationships to liberal and radical discourse.[7] One of the most significant studies of WSPU discourse, by

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[2] Neale, 'Working-Class Women', p. 144, Garner, *Stepping Stones,* p. 52-53, Bearman, 'An Army', p. 862, Rachel Monaghan, 'Single-Issue Terrorism: A Neglected Phenomenon', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* 23/4 (2000)
[3] Pugh, *March of the Women,* p. 125, Jose Harris, *Public Lives, Private Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1993), p. 29, Bearman, 'An Army'
[4] Stanley Holton, '"Average Woman"', Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, Cowman, "Incipient Toryism'?'
[5] Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, Nicoletta Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (Basingstoke, 2002), Ian Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine (eds.), *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race*, Keith McLelland and Sonya O. Rose, 'Citizenship and Empire, 1867-1928', in Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge, 2006), Ruth Rubio-Marin, 'The Achievement of Female Suffrage in Europe: On Women's Citizenship', *International Journal of Constitutional Law,* 12/1 (2014)
[6] Ben Griffin, 'Women's Suffrage', in David Craig and James Thompson (eds.), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2013)
[7] Jane Rendall, 'Citizenship, Culture and Civilisation: The Languages of British Suffragists, 1866-1874', *Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan* (Auckland, 1994), Roberta Kay Carson, 'From Teacups to Terror: The Rhetorical

Cheryl Jorgensen-Earp, has shown that, despite the suffragette emphasis on 'deeds not words', effective suffragette rhetoric was essential to 'justify actions that on their face seem unjustifiable.'[8] More recently, Kathryn Gleadle and Zoë Thomas have called for renewed attention to the specificity of feminist ideologies, concepts and vocabularies in different movements, and an understanding of how these developed as part of an international interchange of ideas on women's empowerment.[9] However, the assumption that working-class women were rarely present in militant suffrage – discussed further in chapter four – and an apparent lack of personal testimony from such women, means their claims to the vote have rarely been scrutinised beyond an assumption that there was a direct connection between their work and home life, and their desire for the franchise. This makes a striking contrast with the close attention which has been paid to, for example, working-class women's motivations within the radical suffragist or socialist traditions.[10] This chapter thus develops the literature on the discourses of political activism, with a specific focus on working-class feminism.

Close analysis of Annie Kenney's thinking on the significance of the vote reveals that while her interest in the vote was certainly shaped by her understanding of working-class women's lives, this was only one aspect of her belief in the importance of the vote. She believed that through the suffrage campaign, working-class women would be politically educated, activist women would be spiritually enriched, and shared experience of womanhood would draw together women across classes to fortify and rejuvenate Britain and her Empire. As such, Annie Kenney did not perceive the vote in utilitarian terms, but invested it with a range of deeply significant meanings. On the other hand, her statements do not indicate that she had a specific set of ideas for reforms and proposals which would improve women's lot. In other words, she possessed an ambitious vision of emancipated and liberated womanhood, with the vote as the central means for realising this vision.

Strategies of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1915', (PhD thesis, University of Iowa, 1975), Kathryn Dodd, 'Cultural Politics and Women's Historical Writing: The Case of Ray Strachey's The Cause', *Women's Studies International Forum,* 13/1-2 (1990), Laura E. Nym Mayhall, 'The Rhetorics of Slavery and Citizenship: Suffragist Discourse and Canonical Texts in Britain, 1880-1914', *Gender and History,* 13/3 (2001), DiCenzo, Delap, and Ryan, *Feminist Media History*. In the case of the WSPU, such studies most frequently focus on the language of the Pankhursts, such as Marcus, *Suffrage and the Pankhursts*, Sandra Stanley Holton, '"In Sorrowful Wrath": The Romantic Feminism of Emmeline Pankhurst and Suffrage Militancy', in Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot 1990), Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*

[8] Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, *"The Transfiguring Sword": The Just War of the Women's Social and Political Union* (London, 1997) p. 6

[9] Kathryn Gleadle and Zoë Thomas, 'Global Feminisms, c.1870-1930: Vocabularies and Concepts - A Comparative Approach', *Women's History Review,* (2017)

[10] Liddington and Norris, *One Hand*, Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, Louise Raw, *Striking a Light: The Bryant and May Matchwomen and Their Place in Labour History* (London, 2009)

However, she had little to say about the intervening steps which might be necessary, including specific proposals or policies which would help achieve this, instead placing her faith in the suffrage campaign itself to transform society in ways which would benefit women.

Annie Kenney's statements and speeches, primarily as reported and recorded within the suffragette newspapers, are the main source for this chapter, though autobiographical evidence also suggests that these views remained consistent beyond the campaign. She did not write polemics, pamphlets or articles and her limited correspondence is usually focused on the day-to-day business of campaigning, written with little need to influence the reader on broader principles. This does raise important questions about the extent to which her public statements reflected her private priorities: that is, whether she said exactly what she believed, or whether her statements reflected the ideas which she believed would be most persuasive and effective. However, with this important caveat in mind, there is still much that can be understood about Annie Kenney's political philosophy through the sources analysed here.

The use of gender and class in feminist rhetoric

Many studies have explored how working-class women understood the relative significance of class and gender in their personal politics.[11] Increasingly, scholars have questioned the binary division between those who prioritised class through labour activism and those who prioritised gender through feminist politics, instead paying close attention to the ways in which politically active women constantly renegotiated their allegiances and redeployed their energies in response to changing circumstances and priorities.[12] Annie Kenney, however, rejected the politics of class entirely, instead offering a vision of a shared experience of womanhood which she saw as the basis for a transformative politics to unify and benefit all women. This section analyses how this shaped and limited her political analysis.

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[11] Pamela Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics, 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1994), Anne Phillips, *Divided Loyalties: Dilemmas of Sex and Class* (London, 1987), Harold L. Smith, 'Sex vs Class: British Feminists and the Labour Movement, 1919-1929', *Historian,* 47 (1984)

[12] Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, June Hannam, 'Women as Paid Organisers and Propagandists for the British Labour Party Between the Wars', *International Labor and Working-Class History,* 77 (2010), Pat Thane, 'Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism, 1906-1945', in Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 1990)

Annie Kenney's belief in the significance of gender and the relative unimportance of class is central to understanding her membership of the WSPU, her belief in the significance of the vote, and how she approached political activism. She told Constance Lytton, for example, that 'I, who am a working-class woman, have never known class distinction and class prejudice stand in the way of my advancement, whereas the sex barrier meets me at every turn.'[13] Jessie Kenney attributed this to the form of socialism that the family had embraced in their youth: 'she detested the class war. But then of course the family had followed the Socialism of Robert Blatchford.'[14] In other words, Annie Kenney's understanding of socialism was based on the possibility of fellowship, not the inevitability of conflict, and this belief similarly informed her commitment to suffrage. Further, Jessie claimed that a central aspect of their political awakening was a rejection of class politics. 'Now there was to be rebellion in Wham's House,' she wrote in her autobiography, '[we] … refused to accept the class consciousness and the class barriers which found expression even in some of the teachings of the Christian Church'. Jessie disliked all those 'who believed in keeping people in their proper stations'.[15] For her, rebellion did not entail aligning herself with members of her class in order to overturn the class system, but rather, open up that system so that merit and work rather than wealth and privilege determined opportunity.

Annie Kenney also believed that a shared experience of womanhood and commitment to the vote enabled women to transcend all other personal affiliations and facets of identity, arguing that 'no nationality, no political creed, no class distinction, divides us as women'.[16] Drawing on her personal experience in her interview with WT Stead, she argued that

> when we girls were old enough to go to the mill, the same injustice prevailed. Both boys and girls put their weekly wages into the family purse. When we received back our pocket-money, the boys were given much more than the girls. Why was that? Our needs were the same. But the girls were stinted and the boys had plenty. *And so it seems to me it is everywhere.*[17] (Italics mine).

This sense of shared oppression as women was, in her view, far more significant than the divisions of social class. She even professed astonishment that class was such a divisive force:

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[13] Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners* (London, 1914) p. 11
[14] Annie's weaknesses, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[15] Book 3, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[16] 'To the Women of Germany', *VFW*, October 1907, p. 3
[17] W.T. Stead, 'Character Sketch: Miss Annie Kenney, The Suffragette', *Review of Reviews,* (1906), p. 584

> The fear which creeps over people when they are to meet some people in an exalted position or highly placed in the social world, has always been to me a source of wonderment and surprise … Supposing I make a mistake and shake hands when I should not … or fold my table napkin at the wrong moment, or sit on the floor because I am the most comfortable there, or go without gloves, having lost them on the Underground, well, if they are thoroughbreds they will understand.[18]

Class here is dismissed as manifested in trivialities, manners and appearances. This understanding gave her a degree of self-confidence which enabled her, for example, to take a seat next to Henry Campbell-Bannerman when she came across him on a train, or to write personal letters to Arthur Balfour. But it does mean that she did not appear to take seriously the more fundamental imbalances in money, power and resources which underpinned social and cultural difference. This sense of sisterhood across class lines made her unusual among working-class activists. Gerry Holloway's study of the women's trade union movement suggests that while middle-class feminists often passionately believed in 'the idea of an essential womanliness', working-class women were more sceptical and alert to the material inequalities which structured women's daily lives.[19] Despite her observation and experiences of these inequalities, however, Annie Kenney insisted that the best way to overcome them was through a feminist politics which united women across class lines.

This did not mean, of course, that she disregarded the particular significance of the vote for working-class women. Indeed, her position as the most visible and significant working-class woman within the WSPU meant that she frequently discussed the benefits working-class women would secure from the vote. This argument was grounded in her personal experience of inequality and injustice, which many scholars have shown, was central to developing a feminist consciousness and political commitment.[20] She claimed, for example, that 'I know what it is for women to work in a hot, stifling factory side by side with the men at the weaving sheds, and then to go home and have the housework to do. And merely because they were women they have no voice at all in the laws they as well as the men have to obey.'[21] This personal experience, she indicated, had led her to conclude that the vote was the only means by which working-class women could protect themselves. Kenney argued that:

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[18] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 60
[19] Holloway, 'United We Stand', p. 137
[20] See, for example, Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, Banks, *Becoming a Feminist*, Stanley Holton, '"Average Woman"', Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family*, Bunting, '"Thank God for the Public Press"'
[21] 'Suffrage Day at Earls Court', *VFW,* 30 July 1908, p. 343

> it was my work in the Factory, and living my life among the Women and girls in the industrial world, that made me realise how necessary it was for Women as well as men to have the protection that the Vote gives to the Enfranchised men in the world of Labour (sic).[22]

This notion of protection was frequently emphasised in her rhetoric. She described the vote to Arthur Balfour as a 'Political Weapon, that the working men fought for to protect them in the industrial world'.[23] In her view, women were simply asking for the same degree of protection that men had, and for the right to protect themselves, rather than to have those protections defined and structured by men who did not understand their lives.

Annie Kenney's emphasis on the vote as a means of protection shaped her contribution to debates on the question of married women's work. This was the focus of significant attention during the years in which the militant suffrage campaign operated. John Burns, a member of the Liberal Government, caused controversy when claiming that the solution to many social ills was to prevent married women from working.[24] Though some feminists such as Ethel Snowden supported legislation which purported to 'protect' women, others, like Eva-Gore Booth rejected any such measures on the ground that the effect would be to restrict their ability to work.[25] Annie Kenney frequently discussed these proposals, since she understood the vital contribution that women's wages made to the family income and security. 'Am I not right in saying that if your labour is taken away from you women, your home conditions will suffer, and you and your children will be far worse off than they are today?' she asked rhetorically in 1907.[26] She reiterated this to Arthur Balfour in 1909:

> Proposals are being made to interfere with the livelihood of thousands of our Women to day (sic). All in the name of protection but they are really classes (?) of Restriction. Domestic Reform is being discussed, but the Women are never instructed, never consulted, about the Reforms dealing with Home and with children. Every thing (sic) is discussed from a mans (sic) point of view. The only barrier against starvation for a woman as well as a man, is the right to sell our Labour in the Labour market, if that is interfered with what are we to do? We must work in order to live.[27]

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[22] Annie Kenney to Arthur Balfour, 18 December 1909, London, British Library, Balfour Papers, ADD/49793
[23] Annie Kenney to Arthur Balfour, 30 January 1910, ADD/49793
[24] Gerry Holloway, "Let the Women be Alive!': The Construction of the Married Woman in the Industrial Women's Movement', in Eileen Yeo (ed.), *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere* (Manchester, 1998), p. 177, Angela V. John, 'Radical Reflections? Elizabeth Robins: The Making of Suffragette History and the Representation of Working-Class Women', in Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson, and Stephen Roberts (eds.), *The Duty of Discontent* (London, 1995), June Hannam, *Isabella Ford* (Oxford, 1989)
[25] Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth*, pp. 102-107 and 117-130, Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921* (Basingstoke, 2014) p. 42
[26] 'To the Married Women Textile Workers', *VFW*, 21 May 1908, p. 182
[27] Annie Kenney to Arthur Balfour, 18 December 1909

Here, she related the specific threat of these proposals to her wider claims that the vote was the only tool which would allow women to protect themselves.

However, she appears less interested in the immediate threat to women's work, than on the fact that this threat politicised women, alerting them to the significance of votes for women. 'Proposals to curtail their employment and the example of the militant Suffragettes have stirred the North of England women to a new and greater interest in the vote, and they flock to our meetings in a way they have never done before,' she claimed in 1908.[28] In 1911, a similar threat to the rights of pit brow workers led her to Wigan to organise a deputation of these workers. Leading this deputation, Annie Kenney claimed that 'the day has gone by forever when women's work can be interfered with or decisive things said against them without women banding themselves together and actively protesting against such attacks,' and that 'the present Liberal Government ever since they came into office had been interfering with the work of women'.[29] Here she placed the threat to women's livelihoods in the context of the WSPU's wider claims about the dangers posed by the Liberal Government, and the power of women's collective action. Only the vote would enable women to exercise that power and effectively defend themselves against the political establishment, a point which was made explicit in *Votes for Women*. A meeting to discuss the deputation took the opportunity to 'call upon the Government to give them the only real safeguard against these attacks upon woman's right to work – i.e., the Parliamentary Vote'.[30] A similar concern for the pit-brow workers led Eva Gore-Booth to work among them for a short period, to organise with and for them, and to develop a far-sighted analysis of restrictive gender roles.[31] Annie Kenney, in contrast, focused entirely on the vote as an answer to their problems, with no interim suggestions or broader solutions.

Annie Kenney was concerned with working-class women's position at home as well as at work. She argued that their restricted position, limited rights and lower pay at work translated into a lack of respect and status in the home. Therefore, acquiring the vote, with the increased political and economic power she believed it would bring, would also enhance their status within the family. Jutta Schwarzkopf has argued that women who had worked in cotton factories often shared this belief. Relative equality at work alerted women to other

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[28] *VFW*, February 1908, p. 70
[29] 'Miss Kenney's Report', *VFW*, 27 October 1911, p. 59, see also 'Albert Hall', 16 November 1911, p. 118-9 for further discussion in the same vein.
[30] *VFW*, 13 October 1911, p. 21
[31] Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth*, p. 144-5

aspects of their lives and demonstrated how far such inequalities were socially constructed.[32] Annie Kenney claimed that:

> from the time I was a little girl … I was impressed with a sense of the injustice of the way in which things were arranged to the disadvantage of women. My mother and my father worked in the mills. When father came home he spent the evening reading, or in company at the club or at public meetings, educating himself and having a good time. But mother had all the housework to do … never had she an evening in which to read or to cultivate her mind. It was work, work, work: until at midnight she would still be at work darning stockings. It did not seem to me fair, and the sense of the unfairness of it to mother has never ceased to rankle.[33]

While her father had time and money to engage in leisure, her mother's life was entirely defined by domestic and paid work. She did not have the same time to read or think that either her husband or her children enjoyed. Yet Annie Kenney did not accept this as either natural or inevitable, instead questioning the division of labour which imposed an unequal burden on women. 'Why was the mother the drudge of the family, not the father's companion and equal?' she asked elsewhere.[34] The vote, she implied, would also protect and enhance women's status within the home.

However, cause and effect is almost entirely absent from Annie Kenney's claims for the franchise. 'The Vote for Women means as much to the working Women, as it meant to the Working men, when they were fighting for the right of Representation. It is a Bread and Butter question to the Women of our Country,' she told Arthur Balfour.[35] This fails to address several crucial issues. First, that many working men themselves lacked the vote – a point frequently made by those campaigners who believed that full adult suffrage was the truly democratic objective. Second, that votes for women on the same terms as men would exclude many working-class women. Third, that the existing limited franchise had by no means addressed the difficulties faced by working men. She was clear that the vote would lead to improvements in women's working lives, but had almost nothing to say about how, exactly, this would happen. She said in 1907:

> It was natural … that I should begin to ask myself "How can I help the women of Great Britain to obtain a greater measure of happiness and freedom in their life?" … [Emmeline Pankhurst] showed me more clearly than I had ever seen before that the only way to help the women was to get the vote by which women could help themselves.[36]

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[32] Schwarzkopf, *Unpicking Gender*, p. 11
[33] Stead, 'Character Sketch', p. 584
[34] 'To the Women of Germany,' *VFW,* October 1907, p. 3
[35] Annie Kenney to Arthur Balfour, 18 December 1909
[36] 'To the Women of Germany', *VFW*, October 1907, p. 3

Yet this raises a number of significant questions: why the women of Great Britain, rather than the women within her own factory and community, needed her help, and how, exactly, the vote might increase women's happiness and freedom. Indeed, she had very little to say on the particular reforms which women might champion. She stated that the franchise would enable women to 'say what laws we want to have, and … protest against laws that are unjust and unfair to them', but she always had more to say on the latter than the former.[37] Beyond rejecting proposals to curb working-class women's right to vote the only specific policy she advocated – and only in brief passing comments - was prison reform, a direct outcome of her own experiences and hardly relevant to the lives of most women.[38]

In contrast, women in other organisations, such as the Women's Co-Operative Guild, called for the vote as a way to bring about positive changes for working-class women, and developed a significant policy programme to improve conditions at work and at home, through housing reform, childcare initiatives, and legislation on divorce, parental rights, and entitlement to income.[39] Other feminist activists shared Kenney's belief that the vote would improve working conditions, but perceived it as only one of many other urgent and vital reforms. Some, such as Sylvia Pankhurst, prioritised the vote as the most significant of such reforms, and a necessary step towards achieving other goals, while others, such as Eva Gore-Booth, continued campaigning on a broad range of social issues. Mollie Murphy 'saw the fight of the WSPU for the enfranchisement of women was a very positive part of the human struggle for socialism and not something separate from it'.[40] For these women, the vote was a crucial aspect of a positive and ambitious programme of economic, social and political reforms, and they possessed a clear sense of the tangible and practical benefits it might bring. All were clear, however, that campaigns for the vote alone would be insufficient. Writing in the 1890s, Ada Nield Chew's proposals for addressing poor working conditions were more direct and immediate. She suggested:

> as an ultimate, and not necessarily remote, means of remedy, that we, that is the factory girls of Crewe, and any other class of female workers who may join us, first organise ourselves into one strong united body, and further, that we affiliate with some already existing union of workers, and thus, when the time is ripe, we shall not only speak with an effective voice ourselves, but shall also have the help of other workers in the redress of our grievances, and on our part shall in turn be able to help others.[41]

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[37] 'To the Married Textile Workers', *VFW*, 21 May 1908, p. 182
[38] Annie Kenney, 'Suffrage Day at Earl's Court', *VFW*, 30 July 1908, p. 343, 'The Case of Miss Emily Wilding Davison', *VFW*, 5 July 1912, p. 649
[39] Scott, *The Women's Co-operative Guild*, p. 64
[40] Murphy, *Molly Murphy*, p. 28
[41] Ada Nield Chew 'Life in a Crew Factory', 14 July 1894, quoted in Nield Chew, *Life and Writings*, p. 105

This ambition found political expression within groups such as the Women's Trade Union League, Nield Chew's later employer, or the National Federation of Women Workers. In the context of increasing industrial agitation, both of these groups primarily sought to tackle injustice and exploitation through greater organisation.[42] Conventional unionisation or collective workplace action, however, had no place in Annie Kenney's political vision. Again, this underlines the fact that gender, not class, was the defining principle of her politics. As chapter one indicated, labour politics had not been a central element of her formative political education, and her hostility to trade unions only increased with her perception that the labour movement was failing to advance women's interests or support women's emancipation. Indeed, in 1912, she claimed that suffrage supporters would soon have to prevent Labour MPs becoming elected, because – with the exception of George Lansbury – they were as indifferent as the Liberals and 'must be looked upon as the enemies of women equally with the Liberals themselves'.[43]

Some women doubted that the vote would secure the benefits that Annie Kenney and the WSPU anticipated. Teresa Billington-Grieg, for example, argued in her 1911 critique of the militant suffragettes that suffrage would not be a 'panacea for all evils'.[44] In *The Freewoman*, Ada Nield Chew noted that 'most of these women are quite sincere in their desire to use the vote, when obtained, to abolish sweating and misery, inequalities and injustices amongst their poorer 'sisters': but they have only the vaguest ideas as to how their having a vote is to enable them to do this.'[45] Another writer in *The Freewoman* argued that the vote was being invested with a significance that it simply did not possess. In contrast, this writer claimed to aspire to a 'far-reaching revolution'. Mere votes were 'nothing more than an instrument of protection' and not 'even a symbol of freedom'.[46] The optimistic belief promulgated by Annie Kenney and the WSPU – that a political solution would address the economic, social and cultural challenges which working-class women faced – was not necessarily widespread beyond the organisation.

Annie Kenney's belief in the shared experience of womanhood also helps explain her commitment to the WSPU's claim for the vote: votes on the same terms as men. This was also a hotly contested position which raised issues of principle and pragmatism across various organisations, and became increasingly heated as successive bills which would secure

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[42] Hunt, *National Federation of Women Workers*, Israel, *Names and Stories*
[43] *The Suffragette*, 25 October 1912, p. 18
[44] Teresa Billington-Greig, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Emancipation in a Hurry* (London, 1911) p. 3
[45] Ada Nield Chew, 'Let the women be alive' in Nield Chew, *Life and Writings*, p. 235
[46] 'Notes of the Week', *The Freewoman*, p. 3. On this critique, see Lucy Delap, "Philosophical Vacuity and Political Ineptitude': *The Freewoman*'s Critique of the Suffrage Movement', *Women's History Review,* 11/4 (2002)

only a limited franchise were presented to Parliament. Some women, including Ada Nield Chew, Margaret Bondfield and Mary MacArthur were in favour of adult suffrage, arguing that anything less was not only anti-democratic, but also counter-productive.[47] They saw no reason why enfranchising wealthier women would benefit working-class women. Ada Nield Chew directly criticised Christabel Pankhurst, arguing that the WSPU's work would enfranchise 'the entire class of wealthy women' when 'the great body of working women, married or single would be voteless still'.[48] These fears were, in fact, ultimately realised: Anna Muggeridge has estimated that two million women were eventually excluded from the franchise in 1918, and that these were primarily the poorest women.[49] However, other women, including Margaret Llewellyn Davies and Sarah Reddish of the Women's Co-Operative Guild, believed that achieving full adult suffrage in one stroke was too ambitious and that a limited extension of the franchise was a necessary interim step towards it.[50] This, as June Hannam and Karen Hunt put it, reflected the belief that 'half a loaf was better than no bread'.[51]

The WSPU's position was also grounded in this stance. The organisation was at pains to point out the numbers of working-class women who would be enfranchised by different bills.[52] However, in advocating their position, they also revealed complex views on the nature of womanhood and of representation, as well as class. Writing in *Votes for Women*, for example, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence articulated what she believed to be the position of working women:

> we know that all working women will not have the vote, just as all working men do not possess a vote at the present time, though the great majority of women voters will be workers – just as the great majority of men voters are the workers of the nation. Even if that were not so, we working women should be taking part in this movement for the uplifting of our sex. As for the woman of property, we do not wish to see her excluded from her rightful liberties, which are today enjoyed by men of property. She is a woman, she will understand our need better than men have understood it.[53]

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[47] Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists: the Social Democratic Feminism and the Woman Question, 1884-1911* (Cambridge, 1996), Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, pp. 105-128, Hunt, *National Federation of Women Workers*
[48] Ada Nield Chew, *The Clarion*, 30 December 1904, quoted in Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 84
[49] Anna Muggeridge, 'The Missing Two Million: The Exclusion of Working-Class Women from the 1918 Representation of the People Act', *French Journal of British Studies,* XXIII/1 (2018)
[50] Scott, *The Women's Co-operative Guild*, p. 81
[51] Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p. 116
[52] On the Conciliation Bill, for example, see *VFW*, 12 August 1910, p. 756, 26 August 1910, p. 780, 25 November 1910, p. 119, 3 March 1911, p. 356
[53] *VFW*, 3 September 1908, p. 425

Pethick-Lawrence's argument was that many working-class women would be enfranchised by the vote, and those who were not could be more effectively represented by middle-class women than men. This was grounded in a belief that a shared experience of womanhood was more significant than the supposed divisions of class, a belief that Annie Kenney also subscribed to. Her own arguments on this point were equally revealing:

> Widow women, who would have votes under any Bill, are the very poorest and worst-paid. I have seen widow women sewing 384 buttons on a card in an hour, and being paid a penny an hour for doing it … once women get political power we shall be able to bring about laws which will affect these women in their everyday life, and save them from having to live the sordid, miserable life that they are having to live at the present time.[54]

Here, working-class women – and 'the very poorest and worst-paid' of them – would still be the prime beneficiaries of the vote. However, the tone and emphasis of her words suggests that she had adopted the language of middle-class philanthropists and social reformers, rather than believing in the capacity of working-class women to improve their own lives. Annie Kenney's belief that the vote represented a means by which working-class women could protect themselves has here become the suggestion that middle-class women could protect working-class women. As Gerry Holloway argues, a belief in sisterhood and shared experienced did not necessarily reflect a belief in equality. Rather, she argues that 'feminists appear to have regarded their poorer sisters as younger, more vulnerable sisters in need of big sisters' guidance and advice'.[55]

Spirituality, faith and the meaning of the struggle

This chapter has so far suggested that while Annie Kenney herself was convinced that the vote would directly improve working-women's lives, she paid scant attention to the process by which this would occur. This would indeed seem to suggest that her political vision was limited to this single issue. However, the chapter now widens in scope to consider her belief in the transformative potential of the vote for *all* women. This section thus indicates how important the *campaign*, and not just the vote, was for these women. Annie Kenney believed that the process by which the vote was gained was crucial, since it would transform not only politics, but women themselves. This was a spiritual as well as a political belief, and reflected the enduring, and increasingly significant, role of faith in Annie Kenney's life. Her politics cannot be understood without appreciating their links to her

[54] 'The Right to Rebel,' *The Suffragette*, 4 July 1913, p. 6
[55] Holloway, 'United We Stand', p. 140

conception of religion, morality and spirituality, and so this chapter now examines these issues.

A number of scholars have demonstrated the varied and extensive links between religious belief, feminist politics and activism in the early women's movement: from the Evangelical, Unitarian and Quaker traditions, to Josephine Butler's Christian-inspired campaigning, to the religious women who were so central to the settlement movement.[56] As Jacqueline de Vries has argued, many women 'tended to see religion not only as compatible with feminism, but also as a very real, or at least a potential, catalyst for women's emancipation'.[57] Scholars such as de Vries and Stephen Yeo have argued that it is wrong to assume that activists whose beliefs and ideals are grounded in religion are inevitably less radical than secular campaigners.[58] Several scholars have drawn attention to the similarities between militant suffragism and particularly intense, expressive forms of religious fervour, informed by Christian ideas of conversion, sacrifice and martyrdom.[59] Beyond the formal women's movement, important studies have also drawn attention to women's use of religious practices to claim space, agency and power. Alex Owen's work on spiritualism and mysticism, for example, has shown how women used religious practices to disrupt traditional gendered hierarchies.[60]

Like other suffragettes who gained strength and inspiration from faith and who were immersed in religious language and imagery, Annie Kenney frequently grounded her rhetoric in Christian imagery. For example, she argued that 'the Christ spirit has been awakened in thousands of souls, and the revival of the great universal cry for liberty against

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[56] The recent historiography is comprehensively summarised in Jacqueline de Vries, 'More than Paradoxes to Offer: Feminist, History and Religious Culture', in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline De Vries (eds.), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (London, 2010); see also Clare Midgley, 'Women, Religion and Reform', in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline De Vries (ed.), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (Abingdon, 2010), Anne Summers, *Female Lives, Moral States: Women, Religion and Public Life in Britain, 1800-1930* (Newbury, 2000), Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movements, 1831-51* (Basingstoke, 1995), Anne Summers, *Christian and Jewish Women in Britain, 1880-1940: Living With Difference* (Basingstoke, 2017), Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Emancipation, England 1830-1914* (Manchester, 2013)

[57] Jacqueline de Vries, 'Challenging Traditions: Denominational Feminism in Britain, 1910-1920', in Billie Melman (ed.), *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930* (London, 1998), p. 266, see also her review essay Jacqueline de Vries, 'Rediscovering Christianity After the Postmodern Turn', *Feminist Studies,* 31/1 (2005)

[58] Yeo, 'A New Life', de Vries, 'Transforming the Pulpit'

[59] Vicinus, *Independent Women*, pp. 247-280, de Vries, 'Transforming the Pulpit', de Vries, 'Challenging Traditions', Harrison, 'The Act of Militancy', p. 44-45, Carolyn Christensen Nelson, 'The Uses of Religion in the Women's Militant Suffrage Campaign in England', *The Midwest Quarterly,* 51/3 (2010), Kabi Hartman, "What Made Me a Suffragette': The New Woman and the New (?) Conversion Narrative', *Women's History Review,* 12/1 (2003), Jorgensen-Earp, *"The Transfiguring Sword"*, pp. 100-110

[60] Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1989), Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Oxford, 2004) especially chapter three, 'Sexual Politics'

oppression is once again ringing in in the air'.[61] Drawing on such rhetoric helped to resist narratives of suffragettes as immoral, violent and dangerous, instead giving women the authority and legitimacy to disregard unjust human laws in obedience to divine justice. It also allowed Annie Kenney to place the suffragettes' campaign within a religious tradition as well as a progressive reformist history. 'If Christ were on earth to-day (sic) and putting His principles into practice, the people who are hooting us who would hoot Him!' she claimed. 'We believe, as the early Christians and all the great reformers of the past believed, that there is nothing nobler than to do battle on the side of right and wrong.'[62] This line of argument gained increasing force and relevance over the course of the campaign as increasingly dramatic strategies required explanation and justification. For example, Annie Kenney claimed that the hunger-striking Rachel Peace and Mary Richardson were 'responding to the teaching of Christ by serving humanity and helping those who are too weak and too sorely oppressed to help themselves'.[63] Jessie Kenney wrote that 'never was there a movement since the early days of Christianity where the members of it gave such loving and hard work which lasted for years, without any thought of reward except what they got for the work itself'.[64] This constant use of Christian imagery positioned the suffragettes as the inheritors of true Christian ideals, in contrast to the established church authorities which refused to intervene on their behalf.

Annie Kenney was also increasingly influenced by theosophist ideals, which were likewise reflected in her rhetoric. As Jacqueline de Vries has argued, while the women's movement was grounded in Christian rhetoric, it was also receptive to other traditions and ideas, creating fluid and hybrid systems of belief.[65] Many progressive people – from George Lansbury to Edith Nesbit and WB Yeats – were attracted to theosophy in the early twentieth century because of its claims to unite science and faith, Eastern philosophy and Western ideas, thus creating balance and wholeness, particularly as the First World War engendered both a sense of spiritual crisis and a loss of faith in science's capacity to advance humanity.[66] Theosophists often saw themselves as having peculiar insight into political and

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[61] 'Christmas Greetings', *VFW*, 24 December 1908, p. 216
[62] 'Miss Annie Kenney replies to the Bishop of Winchester', *The Suffragette*, 31 October 1913, p. 51
[63] 'Miss Annie Kenney replies to the Bishop of Winchester', *The Suffragette*, 31 October 1913, p. 51
[64] One chapter on CO-ORDINATION and CORRELATION, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[65] Jacqueline de Vries, 'Sounds Taken for Wonders: Revivalism and Religious Hybridity in the British Women's Suffrage Movement', in Lucinda Matthews-Jones and Timothy Willem Jones (eds.), *Material Religion in Modern Britain: The Spirit of Things* (Basingstoke, 2015) p. 102
[66] Joy Dixon (ed.), *Modernity, Heterodoxy and the Transformation of Religious Cultures*, J.M. Winter, 'Spiritualism and the First World War', in R.W. Davis and R.J. Helmstadter (ed.), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society* (London, 1992), Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars* (Manchester, 2000). Robert Blatchford, who remained a major inspiration for Annie Kenney and her siblings, became converted to spiritualism in the 1920s when his wife died.

social problems, and rejected a social analysis grounded in class conflict in favour of an emphasis on universal brotherhood, mutual respect, and spiritual enlightenment.[67]

Feminists in particular were often drawn to theosophical teachings, since both sexes were considered equal, and because through a process of reincarnation, souls would come to understand both the male and female experience and ultimately transcend gender entirely.[68] This depth of this interest is made clear by the sheer numbers of women who were simultaneously engaged in feminist politics and pursued theosophical beliefs: Joy Dixon estimates this at around ten per cent.[69] The most famous example was Annie Besant, but theosophists were active across the women's movement, from Frances Swiney to Charlotte Despard.[70] Theosophists in the WSPU included prominent members such as Leonora Cohen, Elsie Howey, Marion Wallace Dunlop and Gertrude Colmore, and even those who did not formally join the society often read the texts.[71] Mary Gawthorpe, for example, felt deeply moved by the literature, writing that 'something in me went out to what was read, recognizingly (sic)'.[72]

As chapter one indicated, Annie Kenney had a highly developed religious sensibility which pre-dated her involvement in feminist politics. As a young woman, she embarked on 'a year of self-contemplation, deep meditation and secret communion with my higher self. At the end of the year I had arrived at certain conclusions about life which I have never departed from. I had gained a spiritual poise which helped me.'[73] Though the nature of these conclusions is never explained, she clearly believed that she had arrived at some kind of revelation of divine truth. Jessie wrote that 'in the Suffragette days she had as one of her bedside books the Bghvad Gita (sic), alongside with (sic) Thomas a Kempis, Imitations of Christ'.[74] Her interest in spirituality was an extension, rather than a rejection, of her existing beliefs, and co-existed with more traditional Christian faith. As a regional organiser in the West of England, Annie Kenney continued to pursue these interests in the company of her fellow activists, Clara Codd – who ultimately became the Theosophical Society's first

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[67] Joy Dixon, 'Gender, Politics, and Culture in the New Age: Theosophy in England, 1880-1935', (PhD thesis, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, 1993), pp. 255-277

[68] Dixon, 'Theosophy in England', pp. 103 – 109, Diana Burfield, 'Theosophy and Feminism: Some Exploration in Nineteenth-Century Biography', in Pat Holden (ed.), *Women's Religious Experience: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (London, 1983)

[69] Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, p. 5-6

[70] Delap, *Feminist Avant-Garde*, footnote on p. 98

[71] For a useful list and summary of many of these overlaps see Kevin Tilney, 'The British Women's Suffrage Movement - Theosophical Connections', (unpublished paper, delivered September 2016, Theosophical History Conference, London)

[72] Mary Gawthorpe, *Up Hill to Holloway* (Penobscot, 1962) p. 193. Like Millicent Browne, she also had connections to A. R. Orage.

[73] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 23

[74] KP/JK/4/2/2/4

organiser – and Millicent Browne, a theosophist who was a close associate of Orage.[75] Clara Codd wrote that:

> sometimes, as we lay in bed, the mystical side of Annie's character got its chance. She would ask me to tell her about Theosophy, especially about the Adepts, the 'Masters of the Wisdom.' When we got out in the morning, she would say: "Come on, Clara, I've no time for the Masters now."[76]

The pursuit of religious truth may have had to take second place to the demands of political campaigning, but the two were not incompatible. In 1912, Annie Kenney joined the Theosophical Society, sponsored by two suffrage activists, Countess de la Warr and Mary Dodge.[77] These women had been introduced to theosophy by Constance Lytton's sister Emily Lutyens and were very important to the society because of their immense wealth.[78] In the same year they gave financial support to George Lansbury in purchasing the *Daily Herald*, then being run by Annie's brother Rowland. Clearly many of the Kenneys' associates were interested in the same religious as well as political questions: their political and spiritual networks were tightly interwoven.

Theosophy had two important implications for Annie Kenney's politics. First, it justified her involvement in active public campaigning. Her belief in 'reincarnation and the law of cause and effect' and in God – so important that it was placed on the first page of her autobiography – was the foundation of her political beliefs.[79] Theosophy taught that individuals could only strive towards knowledge of, and union with, the divine, by cultivating kindness, goodness and generosity towards others. By working on behalf of others in this life, Annie Kenney believed that she would be rewarded in the next. Her concepts of duty, responsibility, and service, discussed further in the final section of this chapter, were grounded in this religious belief.

Secondly, theosophy shaped her understanding of the campaign and its conduct. For Annie Kenney, militant suffrage was 'not only a political Movement, but a great spiritual Movement, that will lift humanity up to higher thoughts and nobler ideals'.[80] 'Much depends on the private thoughts and actions of women,' she argued, 'and we must examine ourselves to see that no selfishness, that no thoughts save pure and high ones cross our mind. We must keep this Movement pure and bright.'[81] As such, the campaign was clearly much more

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[75] Millicent Price, *This World's Festival*, p. 49-50
[76] Codd, *So Rich a Life*, p. 47
[77] Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, p. 165
[78] Emily Lutyens, *Candles in the Sun* (London, 1957) pp. 33-4. Lutyens eventually came to feel this wealth corrupted the spiritual purposes of the Theosophical Society.
[79] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 1
[80] 'Christmas Greetings', *VFW*, 24 December 1908, p. 216
[81] 'Christmas Greetings', *VFW*, 24 December 1908, p. 216

than a political movement for a political goal. It was, in Annie Kenney's words 'the movement we all think more of than life itself'.[82] Further, she claimed that 'that is one of the reasons why the Government hate us. *It is because they are afraid of the effect that the WSPU will have on private life and public life after the Vote is won*' (emphasis in original).[83] She expressed 'joy at the great awakening among women, and hope that this awakening is leading to a fuller and more perfect life'.[84] Rather than the sectarian divisions which she perceived within class politics, she saw militant suffrage as creating a new form of politics, grounded in genuine collaboration and co-operation, and accompanied by changes in the way that women experienced themselves and interacted with the world around them. This helps to explain why Annie Kenney appeared to have so little interest in the practical aspects of politics and policy. She was preoccupied instead with its more fundamental shift in terms of women's natures and behaviours, which she perceived as a significant challenge to the status quo. Her politics was that of spiritual principles, not substantive detail.

Christabel Pankhurst, however, did not share the interest in theosophical ideas which were so common among suffragettes. She saw Annie Kenney's interest in theosophy as threatening, rather than complementary, to her political work, and demanded that Kenney leave the Theosophical Society. This appears to have been the only serious disagreement between Kenney and Pankhurst over the course of the campaign and caused both intense emotional distress.[85] It is not clear why Christabel Pankhurst responded with such vehemence when Annie Kenney's interests were shared by many of their associates. It may, however, be an indication of Annie Kenney's importance in the organisation as well as to Christabel Pankhurst. As chapter three will demonstrate, Annie Kenney was increasingly presented as an idealised suffragette, entirely committed to the cause and wholly obedient to the leadership. Any indication that her loyalties were divided between causes – however closely intertwined – would have been unacceptable. Though Annie Kenney acquiesced, she did not give up her interests in the religious and spiritual, and she continued to make use of theosophical as well as Christian ideas in both her rhetoric and action. For example, Annie Kenney's subsequent focus on shaming church leaders – a tactic discussed further in

[82] 'West of England Campaign', *VFW,* 13 August 1908, p. 382
[83] 'The One Union', *The Suffragette*, 31 July 1914, p. 281
[84] 'A Word of Cheer From Annie Kenney', *The Suffragette*, 27 December 1912, p. 163
[85] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 127, KP/JK/4/2/2/9. June Purvis reads this rather differently, claiming that 'the loyal Annie had no difficulty in agreeing to the request and the two parted, on the best of terms.' Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 362. She sees the resulting emotion as a manifestation of the more general pressure that Pankhurst was under in this period.

chapter four – is an indication of her ongoing preoccupation with religion and its wider salience with suffragettes.

This conflict over theosophy is an important reminder that while Annie Kenney was intensely loyal to Christabel Pankhurst, she certainly did not replicate her agenda without question. Beyond a few passing supportive references to her leader's work, Annie Kenney did not share her preoccupation with 'white slavery,' the 'moral crusade', purity, marriage, venereal disease or celibacy.[86] None of these issues were referred to in *Memories of a Militant*. Jessie Kenney typed up *The Great Scourge*, Pankhurst's major work on these issues, and commented admiringly on her breadth of insight, but had nothing substantial to say about the validity of its content.[87] Neither were the Kenneys as explicitly woman-centred, separatist or anti-male as Christabel Pankhurst: Jessie Kenney in particular was very supportive of men's role within the suffrage campaign, writing an entire chapter in her autobiography 'dedicated to men only'. Although June Purvis's recent study of Christabel Pankhurst's life suggests that Pankhurst herself began using religious imagery from around 1911, this section has made clear that for Annie Kenney, religion, faith and spirituality occupied a very different, more consistent, and much more longstanding place in her political activism. In this, she was more similar to Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence than to Christabel Pankhurst.[88]

This divergence is made even clearer through a comparative reading of their respective autobiographies. Despite Christabel Pankhurst's later immersion in religion, *Unshackled* is very much a political autobiography focused on a political movement. In *Memories of a Militant,* however, Annie Kenney's faith is presented as the essential foundation for her political activism. Indeed, as Rebecca J. Wright suggests, though her autobiography is consistently read as a political text, it is equally possible to understand it as a spiritual autobiography, informed by her overlapping beliefs in traditional Christianity and modern theosophy.[89] For example, her account of her early life focuses on the development of her religious consciousness much more strongly than her political conscience, describing her

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[86] For example, at the time Pankhurst was publishing *The Great Scourge*, Kenney referred to prostitution as an inevitable outcome of unemployment and sweated labour, 'The Right to Rebel,' *The Suffragette*, 4 July 1913, p. 634.

[87] June Purvis, 'Fighting the Double Moral Standard in Edwardian Britain: Suffragette Militancy, Sexuality and the Nation in the Writings of the Early Twentieth Century British Feminist Christabel Pankhurst', in Francisca De Haan et al. (eds.), *Women's Activism: Global Perspectives From the 1890s to the Present* (Abingdon, 2013)

[88] Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part*, Linda Martz, 'Mary Neal and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence: From Mission to Activism', *Women's History Review,* 23/4 (2014), Ellen Ross, 'St Francis in Soho: Emmeline Pethick, Mary Neal, the West London Wesleyan Mission, and the Allure of "Simple Living" in the 1890s', *Church History,* 83/4 (2014)

[89] Rebecca J. Wright, 'Heroic Transgressions: Female Heroism, Suffragette Autobiography and the Public/Private Divide', (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2002) pp. 121-129

intimate, personal and intense connection to God.[90] The end of her feminist campaigning is likewise presented as both a moment of connection with mystical forces – 'I felt as though a thousand unseen hands were holding me down, and my inner voice spoke to me, "Don't fight. Relax. You have finished"' – and in terms which draw on traditional Christian imagery – 'I had been on the social pilgrimage for fourteen years. In stony fields I had had to sow seed and plough rock.'[91]

This section has demonstrated the central role of belief – both orthodox and unorthodox – in Annie Kenney's feminist activism, and the ways this differentiated her outlook from Christabel Pankhurst's. It suggests that rather than thinking about the specific policies and processes by which women might benefit from the vote, she was more focused on its intangible and less quantifiable benefits. Rather than a policy programme, she had a spiritual belief in the significance of the vote which emphasised the ways that it would strengthen and purify women. This was particularly important to her because concepts of service, duty and responsibility occupied a central place in her political thinking. Hence, the campaign promised to develop women's capacity to carry out an enhanced role in the public sphere. This chapter now turns to examine these concepts more closely, considering how Annie Kenney considered and applied these notions in both the campaign for the franchise and in war.

Women's desire and capacity to serve: strengthening the race, nation, state and Empire

Laura Mayhall has argued that women's campaigns for the vote should be understood 'as part of the consolidation of liberal democratic citizenship'.[92] The campaign for women's suffrage is often dated to the 1866 petition initiated by Barbara Bodichon and presented to Parliament by JS Mill, grounding it in a tradition of liberal thought which emphasised rights – especially property rights – freedom and justice.[93] For these liberal women, the vote was essential to unlock and enable women's participation in the public sphere, and their efforts to secure it were closely linked to other campaigns for equal opportunities in education and the professions. They emphasised notions of duty,

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[90] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 4-5
[91] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 287-8
[92] Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, p. 30
[93] On this tradition see, for example, Jane Lewis (ed.), *Before the Vote Was Won: Arguments For and Against Women's Suffrage, 1864-1896*, Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford, 1997), Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke, 1985)

responsibility, and public service, which reflected middle-class women's longstanding philanthropic interventions, and stressed their involvement in political and social causes such as temperance and abolition, to indicate that women's presence would improve public discourse and policy.[94] As liberal ideas evolved towards the end of the nineteenth century, anticipating a more active role for the state in response to the problems of urban poverty, women highlighted their capacity to make a unique contribution to this project, based on maternalist ideas about women's capacity for care and nurture.[95] Campaigners thus increasingly grounded their claims in the notion that women were essentially different, but not inferior, to men – a position which Karen Offen has termed 'equality-in-difference' – and that, as a result, their presence would improve the public sphere.[96]

This chapter now considers how and why these ideas influenced Annie Kenney's politics, how she utilised them in her public campaigning, and how she sought to put them into practice during wartime. Again, this reflects Annie Kenney's genuine belief that gender, rather than class, was the most salient factor which shaped her own life. Class was perceived to be a divisive force, which might pit women against one another. Gender solidarity, on the other hand, was predicated on a belief in a shared sense of womanhood. For Annie Kenney, a shared commitment to serving the nation was one way in which women could transcend sectional interests and coalesce around common goals. As Ben Griffin has argued, contemporary understandings of the constitution and political discourse were frequently framed around the notion of representation of specific class-based interests. It was therefore essential that suffrage activists demonstrated that women were a distinct and coherent class of their own, with common needs and interests, which could not adequately be represented by men.[97] Demonstrating women's desire to participate in the political life of the nation was also crucial to illustrating women's active interest in claiming the vote, in the face of consistent assertions by critics that women were uninterested in politics. Emphasis on the nation, race and empire therefore served a dual purpose: creating solidarity and shared purpose and demonstrating women's selfless commitment to serve their country through assuming the burdens of full citizenship. It also chimed with wider contemporary discourses

[94] Lucy Delap, 'The 'Woman Question' and the Origins of Feminism', in Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 346
[95] Seth Koven, 'Borderlands: Women, Voluntary Action and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840-1914', in Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (ed.), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (London, 1993)
[96] Karen Offen (ed.), *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*, p. 102
[97] Griffin, 'Women's Suffrage', pp. 175-180

on the importance of national duty, in the context of increasing nationalism and international competition.

Annie Kenney therefore consistently argued that emancipating women by giving them political power would liberate them to do what they most desired: serve the nation. As she asked Arthur Balfour, 'how can a Nation thrive and prosper that holds its women in Political Subjection, and forces its Women to fight in order to win its freedom?'[98] She constantly argued that it was in the national interest to grant women the vote, emphasising women's desire to serve their country as men did. 'I believe that none of the great evils will ever be really remedied, until you get the mass of the women of this country helping each other in alleviating the conditions of the industrial world, and also in political life',[99] she claimed.

Much of this rhetoric was expressed in terms of women's capacity and desire as mothers to serve the nation. Annie Kenney's frequent references to mothers in general, and her own mother in particular, points to the strength and significance of maternalist discourse during this period. Maternalist discourses, emphasising the role of women as mothers, and their capacity for care and nurture, were among the most powerful tools available to feminists in this period. Maternalist rhetoric not only legitimised their entrance to the public sphere, but stressed the peculiar and unique benefits that would accompany women's involvement in politics.[100] Annie Kenney told Arthur Balfour, for example, that:

> until you hear the women's voice to help you in questions concerning the Nation's welfare you will never make any real progress, and your children will die in their thousands as they do to day (sic) before they reach the age of five years … can you wonder at the miserable undergrown children you see in your towns and cities and when the children grow to man and Womanhood, they will be a drain on the Nation instead of a help, and they will be a blot on our National honour.[101]

The working mother was the subject of frequent and significant concern in the first decade of the twentieth century.[102] Her supposed deficiencies in motherhood were blamed for a wide range of social ills, including poverty, malnutrition and ill-health. Addressing her apparent shortcomings was perceived to be crucial to overcoming these issues and subject to a range of advice, instruction and interventions, often by women of a higher social

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[98] Annie Kenney to Arthur Balfour, 30 January 1910
[99] 'I am a Rebel', *The Suffragette*, 20 June 1913, p. 597
[100] Sonya Michel and Seth Koven (eds.), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, Anne Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970* (Basingstoke, 2005)
[101] Annie Kenney to Arthur Balfour, 30 January 1910
[102] Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth*, p. 81

status.[103] John Burns' proposals to prevent married women working, discussed above, arose from these concerns. Where other commentators attributed social problems to women's ignorance, Annie Kenney blamed their lack of power and control over their lives. 'I cannot tell you how my heart aches for these poor, depressed, sad women – the mothers of our people,' she said in one speech to married textile workers.[104] Equipped with the vote, however, these women would be able to fulfil their maternal duties more effectively, and thus their duty to the nation.

Annie Kenney also claimed that the demands of working for the cause meant that suffragettes were especially well equipped to serve the nation. In particular, since suffragettes were already deeply immersed in politics, and conscious of the demands and responsibilities of citizenship, they were ideally placed to educate others. Describing the WSPU's electioneering tactics, she wrote that:

> For the first time the electors in Manchester were told of the states that Bills had to go through; of the responsibilities of those who were chosen as Cabinet Ministers; all the tricks of the political profession, in fact, were discussed and debated at the street corner and in every schoolroom and hall where there were women speaking. This in itself was a revolution in election tactics.[105]

Through the campaign, women had acquired 'political knowledge to fit us for the work that lay before us,' which meant that suffragettes' knowledge of the current political climate far outstripped that of existing voters.[106] As such, their participation would enrich the democratic process not because of any moral characteristics peculiar to women, but because those women would help create a more informed citizenry, better educated about their rights and responsibilities, and better equipped to scrutinise politicians. Indeed, Annie Kenney claimed this was one of the reasons the government was so hostile to the suffragettes: 'because of the fine educational work we are doing, and the fine education work we shall do when we have the Vote in our own possession'.[107] Women's participation in politics was therefore not beneficial simply because they were women, but because they could prepare other women for the duties of citizenship.

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[103] Steedman, *Margaret McMillan*, Ellen Ross, 'Good and Bad Mothers: Lady Philanthropists and London Housewives Before World War I', in K. D. McCarthy (ed.), *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy and Power* (New Brunswick, 1990), Michel and Koven (eds.), *Mothers of a New World*
[104] 'To the Married Textile Workers', *VFW*, 21 May 1908, p. 182
[105] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 50
[106] 'The Mission of the "Suffragette"', *The Suffragette*, 3 April 1914, p. 557
[107] 'The One Union', *The Suffragette*, 31 July 1914, p. 281

Annie Kenney claimed that the extent of suffragette militancy was a mark of the sincerity and intensity of their desire to serve. 'It is for the interests of our country that we women are prepared to suffer imprisonment to win for our sex political liberty'[108] she claimed, framing imprisonment as honourable self-sacrifice rather than the irresponsible self-indulgence which their critics alleged. It demonstrated women's 'splendid devotion' and 'unselfishness.'[109] During the period when militancy was at its height, she claimed that

> We are all better women for fighting in this Movement. We are all more capable of not only taking care of ourselves, but taking care of other people also. We shall all be better women when we grow older, and all be more useful servants of the community; and what is there more beautiful and more wonderful in life than to serve the country in which you were born?[110]

As Lucy Delap notes, however, more radical suffragists rejected the notion of service and self-sacrifice – whether for the cause of militancy, or for the state – altogether, claiming that it kept women subservient and trapped within their traditional roles.[111] Notions of service to the nation also strongly echoed middle-class ideas of responsibility, philanthropy and intervention, which were largely absent from languages utilised by many other working-class suffrage campaigners. There is no suggestion, for example, that other working-class activists, such as Hannah Mitchell, Ada Nield Chew, or Selina Cooper thought or argued in terms of service to the nation.

This emphasis on service to the nation also highlights the tensions between national solidarity and international collaboration within the global women's movement. On the one hand, the Kenneys clearly perceived themselves to be part of an international women's movement engaged in a global struggle for justice, or what Annie Kenney called 'the great human movement for individual liberty'.[112] 'The movement was international; one could hear the quickening of the sap in all countries,' she told the Albert Hall in 1910.[113] She also sometimes drew on the rhetoric of international sisterhood to argue that just as gender could transcend class, so could it transcend nation. 'Women of every land are to-day crying out for justice, which is liberty and equality. No nationality, no political creed, no class distinction, no difference of any sort divides us as women,'[114] she told a German audience in 1907, and later claimed that 'when women get the vote, instead of having so much

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[108] 'In the Interest of the Country', *VFW*, March 1908, p. 82
[109] 'Mass Meeting in the Albert Hall', *VFW*, 21 June 1912, p. 614
[110] 'All in the Day's Work', *The Suffragette*, 25 July 1913, p. 701
[111] Delap, "Philosophical Vacuity", p. 620-1
[112] 'West of England', *VFW*, 15 October 1908, p. 44
[113] 'A Monster Meeting at the Albert Hall', *VFW*, 24 June 1910, p. 635
[114] 'To the Women of Germany', *VFW,* October 1907, p. 3

international quarrelling, we can have a real fraternity of all nations, all striving together to do the best for the human race'.[115] *Votes for Women* carried regular comments on the changing situation for women abroad and featured messages of support which had been written from other countries to create what Diane Atkinson calls 'a sense of international sisterly solidarity'.[116] However, Annie Kenney's interest in the international women's movement appears to have been largely abstract. There is no indication, for example, that she expressed interest in the increasingly vocal international institutions which linked national women's movements.[117]

Moreover, the international women's movement was not considered to be a movement of equals. Annie Kenney clearly perceived both Britain and the WSPU as possessing a unique role within the global struggle. As one of the instigators of militancy, Annie Kenney herself was a subject of international fascination and scrutiny, and used this interest to make the case for militancy on the global stage. However, when she addressed international audiences, her speeches were more focused on the importance and righteousness of militancy than on the potential to build an international coalition of women. For example, an international meeting of suffrage societies in April 1909, addressed by Annie Kenney, was important not only because of the 'impetus to the movement all over the world' but 'the more intimate knowledge which [delegates] will have gathered of the meaning of the militant campaign must lead to still greater understanding and sympathy'.[118] This desire to persuade women around the world of the righteousness of their strategy reflects broader WSPU assumptions about British superiority and global leadership. *Votes for Women* asserted the 'world-wide significance of the movement,' while claiming 'it is not the women of Great Britain we are fighting for, it is the womanhood of the world'.[119] Indeed, Kenney was keen to use this assumption to castigate the British government for failing to live up to its imperial responsibilities. On a deputation to Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, for example, she argued that 'we are supposed to be the mother country and lead the others'.[120]

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115 'A Real Fraternity', *The Suffragette*, 15 August 1913, p. 763
116 Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!* p. 76
117 The histories of these institutions are analysed in Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, 1997), Marie Sandell, *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism: Identity and Sisterhood Between the World Wars* (London, 2015)
118 *VFW,* 30 April 1909, p. 595
119 *VFW*, 23 April 1909, p. 565
120 'Mr Harcourt Sees a WSPU Deputation', *VFW,* 2 February 1912, p. 276

One of the most significant recent developments in suffrage historiography is the recognition of the way the movement was shaped by nationalist, colonial and imperial attitudes, underpinned by unexamined assumptions of the significance of the Empire, and the superiority of whiteness.[121] As Lucy Delap, Louise Ryan and Teresa Zackodnik have argued, nationalism and feminism 'came together as mutually constitutive' movements, and were prevalent across suffrage organisations. Maternalist discourse which emphasised women's role as mothers became tied to concerns about Britain's future as an imperial nation, epitomised in the concept of 'race motherhood'.[122] Annie Kenney was not immune from these ideas, nor did she problematise them: indeed, she embraced notions of racial difference and British superiority. It has already been shown that Annie Kenney frequently deployed maternalist concepts in relation to working-class mothers: she also sometimes linked them with eugenicist concepts. For example, she promised to 'work and give myself to the great women's movement … until I saw a better country for the mothers of the race' and spoke of her desire to 'develop the best and the highest to bring forth a strong and intelligent race'.[123] Such attitudes were manifested in the Kenneys' crude racial stereotyping. 'We have no more fear of death than the savages in the Soudan,' claimed Annie Kenney, while Jessie praised a fellow worker for her ability to 'work like a black'.[124] In Annie Kenney's autobiography, she also discussed 'the problem of mixed races' arguing that 'the blood of two distinct races' caused insurmountable problems for the resulting children.[125]

These attitudes were not, of course, unique to Annie Kenney or even to the WSPU. Nevertheless, as Nicoletta Gullace has shown, the links between nationalism and feminism within the WSPU which had become increasingly visible during the campaign were even more prominent during wartime, as 'feminists made explicit the links between national service and female citizenship'.[126] The decision by Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst to

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121 Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture* (London, 1994), Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power* (London, 2000), Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (London, 2007), Caine, *English Feminism*, Bolt, *Sisterhood Questioned*, McLelland and Rose, 'Citizenship and Empire, 1867-1928', Caroline Bressey, *Empire, Race and the Politics of Anti-Caste* (London, 2013), Ida Blom, 'Feminism and Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century: A Cross-Cultural Perspective', *Journal of Women's History,* 7/4 (1995)

122 Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood in History', *History Workshop Journal,* 5/1 (1978), Jorgensen-Earp, *"The Transfiguring Sword"*, p 49-55. It is worth noting that there was not an inevitable link between maternalist discourse and imperial aggression. Other feminists used the language and ideal of motherhood to position women as pacifists. See, for example, Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (London, 1999) pp. 157-165

123 'To the Women of Germany', *VFW*, October 1907, p. 3, 'Suffrage Day at Earls Court', *VFW,* 30 July 1908, p. 343

124 'Our Spirits Are Eternal', *The Suffragette*, 18 July 1913, p. 675

125 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 260-1

126 Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, p. 118

devote all their energy to supporting the government and winning the war prompted significant divisions among WSPU members. It has since provoked equally sharp disagreement within the historiography as to the best way to interpret this stance.[127] Jo Vellacott for example, argues that their decision was a reflection of a politics which was essentially limited to 'a demand to be admitted to the existing male political system, unchanged'.[128] Susan Kingsley Kent, in contrast, argues that their wartime policies – insisting on women's ability to contribute in factories or even on the front line – represented a feminist stance, in contrast to other suffrage organisations who simply encouraged women to participate in traditional feminine ways, through caring, nursing or knitting.[129] Scholars such as Angela Smith and Cheryl Jorgensen-Earp have drawn attention to the continuities between WSPU rhetoric during the suffrage campaign and during wartime to demonstrate the compatibility of their stance.[130] These studies, however, primarily equate 'the Pankhursts' with 'the WSPU' and, usually due to an apparent lack of sources, do not consider the perspectives of other members. The exception is Gullace, who, for example reflects on the meanings of Jessie Kenney's trip to Russia and the significance of Annie Kenney's campaign among industrial workers.[131]

The remainder of this chapter extends Gullace's analysis with a more detailed consideration of Annie Kenney's wartime work, as well as that of her siblings. Wartime offered WSPU supporters not only the chance to prove their desire and capacity to serve, but through this service, the opportunity to position themselves as more deserving of the vote and of citizenship than those disloyal men who attempted to shirk their duties.[132] The idea that women received the vote as a reward for wartime service has often been challenged, particularly since the young women working in munitions factories were not

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127 For a recent summary, see Marc Calvini-Lefebvre, 'The Great War in the History of British Feminism: Debates and Controversies', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique,* XX/1 (2015)

128 Jo Vellacott, *Pacifists, Patriots and the Vote: The Erosion of Democratic Suffragism During the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 48, also Jo Vellacott, 'Feminist Consciousness and the First World War', *History Workshop Journal,* 23/1 (1987). The literature on this subject is extensive: see, for example, Jacqueline de Vries, 'Gendering Patriotism: Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and World War One', in Sybil Oldfield (ed.), *This Working-Day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945* (London, 1994), Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War* (Aldershot, 2005), Marc Lefebvre, 'Feminism and the Challenge of War: Responses of the British Women's Suffrage Movement to the Great War', (PhD thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2009)

129 Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Chichester, 1993) p. 20

130 Jorgensen-Earp, *"The Transfiguring Sword"*, especially p. 150; see also Carson, 'From Teacups to Terror', Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, p. 227-237, Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 402

131 Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, pp. 118-141

132 The suffragettes use of the white feather to shame those who would, or could, not volunteer to fight is the most notorious example of this tactic. See Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, pp. 73-97 and Nicoletta Gullace, 'White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War', *Journal of British Studies,* 36/2 (1997) for a study of this gesture. There is no evidence that the Kenneys engaged in this practice.

enfranchised.[133] Gullace, however, qualifies this assessment by demonstrating how citizenship was redefined such that 'loyal service, patriotic sentiment, and British blood came to seem more important than manhood, majority or property'.[134] For Annie Kenney, it offered an ideal opportunity to demonstrate what she had consistently argued: that women both desired to, and were capable of, serving the nation in a range of ways.

Many members of the Kenney family were mobilised in wartime. Both their brother Bert, and their brother-in-law George Dixon, married to their eldest sister Molly, were wounded while on active service. Bert Kenney also worked as an 'engineer telephonist' at the postwar Paris Peace Conference.[135] Rowland Kenney was working in Norway, first studying Norwegian attitudes to war, and then in propaganda and espionage: his employment with the news agency Reuters was a cover for his work for the British Foreign Office.[136] Their sisters were obviously excluded from opportunities for conventional wartime service. Although they did not argue that women themselves should be called up, their belief in women's potential abilities to fight is reflected in Jessie Kenney's admiring comments on the 'splendid heroism and bravery' of the women's battallions in Russia.[137] Instead, they embarked on a diverse range of activities, conceived and justified in terms of patriotism, duty, and service. 'We threw ourselves into every kind of War effort,' wrote Jessie, 'the idea being that if we had to have Wars, the sooner they were over the better!'[138]

'Every kind of war effort' is an apt description of the range of war work that the Kenney sisters embarked on. Jane and Caroline Kenney for example, were the central figures in Emmeline Pankhurst's plans to care for 'war babies', a project more fully analysed in chapter five. While this particular project, as that chapter argues, represented the sorts of caring work often associated with women's traditional roles, the Kenneys also took the opportunity to stress the importance of paid work for women in factories. The 1915 Munitions March and subsequent deputation to David Lloyd George was a key moment in this process.[139] Annie Kenney claimed that 'this was the beginning of munition-work for women, and this is how the seed was sown which afterwards grew to be a tree whose fruit was Votes for Women'.[140] Significantly, however, as the imagery and presentation of this

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133 Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 82, Cheryl Law, '"The Old Faith Living and the Old Power There: The Movement to Extend Women's Suffrage", in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (eds.), *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester, 1998), p. 204
134 Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, p. 119
135 Bert Kenney to Jessie Kenney, 15 December 1964, KP/JK/3
136 Kenney, *Westering*, pp. 219-236
137 'The Story of Botchkareva', *Britannia*, 27 July 1917, p. 60
138 Jessie Kenney to Mr Wall, 30 June 1964, KP/JK/3/3
139 For a discussion of this event, see Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, p. 127-8
140 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 271

march was orchestrated by the WSPU, we know very little about the motivations of the participants. It should not be assumed, then, that their desire to serve the nation was more pressing than their need for well-paid, stable work.

Service to the nation could also be expanded onto the international stage. During the war, both Jessie and Annie Kenney engaged in informal international diplomatic campaigns, at a period when all but a tiny handful of expert women were excluded from formal diplomatic work.[141] Both sisters initially went to America: Annie Kenney as a leader in exile, in case Britain was invaded; Jessie as an advance party to organise Emmeline Pankhurst's campaign to persuade Americans about the need to support Serbia.[142] Subsequently, Annie Kenney immersed herself in the intricacies of the Balkan situation in order to campaign on this issue, further illustrating her belief in women's responsibility to educate the wider public. Eventually, she even went to Australia in a failed attempt to persuade their Prime Minister to join the British Cabinet.[143] The fact that he had no interest in doing so, nor had he been invited to, did not deter her. This is an indication of her belief that the WSPU leaders had much more insight into the needs of the nation than its ostensible leaders. Jessie Kenney, meanwhile, went with Emmeline Pankhurst to Russia to attempt to persuade Bolshevik women to support the Allied cause.[144] This, she believed, gave her a greater appreciation for, and insight into, the 'notorious traitors to the Allied Cause' among the Bolsheviks than the British government, and she perceived it as her duty to alert the nation to the dangers.[145] Later, she attended and reported on an 'Inter-allied Labour and Socialist conference' arguing that such events were not only 'futile and useless' but positively dangerous, allowing for the expression of 'Bolshevik intrigue'.[146] These efforts thus represented both women's interest in, and capability for, international affairs, and an opportunity to reiterate their patriotic credentials. Jessie presented these developments as essential to women's ongoing education in the responsibilities of citizenship:

> The Pankhursts saw that if women were to use the vote intelligently, they must now extend their consciousness to the understanding of foreign politics. In national and international wars, women had been passive onlookers long enough; furthermore, throughout the centuries their fate in war had been one of degradation.[147]

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141 For a study of women's formal entry into this particular role, see Helen McCarthy, *Women of the World: The Rise of the Female Diplomat* (London, 2014)
142 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 255, The Serbian Mission, KP/JK/4/2/2/7
143 Kenney, *Memories*, pp. 270-283
144 Kenney, *The Price of Liberty,* is her account of this mission. See chapter six for a discussion of what this event meant to her. For a broader discussion of its significance, see Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, pp. 117-140
145 'Kerensky – A Danger to the Allied Cause', *Britannia*, 5 July 1915, p. 31
146 *Britannia*, 20 September 1918, p. 134
147 Kenney, *The Price of Liberty*, p 6

In wartime, Annie Kenney's claim that women longed to serve the nation was heightened further by positioning women as far more patriotic than men: particularly men within the labour movement. Her longstanding antipathy to trade unions and to the Labour Party, grounded in resentment about their refusal to commit to votes for women and suspicion that many union representatives would in fact prefer women not to work, was given added depth by the suspicion that socialist commitment to internationalism made trade unions automatically problematic. Germans, she claimed, ultimately had control of international socialist organisations and the results were evident.[148] 'We have some of the people in the Labour Party practically talking pro-Germanism and making speeches on behalf of Germany more than on behalf of their own country,' she argued.[149] In the febrile wartime climate, such men could easily be portrayed not only as hostile to the women's cause but as unpatriotic: indeed, these could be presented as one and the same. Thus, Annie could state 'I hope that the new Government will not be afraid of certain men, Trade Unionists. There is a certain section of people who are terrified lest the middle class and leisured women should take her place in the national work.'[150] Men's resentment at women's inclusion was framed as a hindrance to the war effort.

Yet it was not only trade unions who bore the brunt of Annie Kenney's suspicion. She perceived German influence and German intrigue everywhere, and her rhetoric epitomises the worst excesses of jingoism. She called, for example, for the imprisonment of those seeking a negotiated peace within the Union of Democratic Control.[151] Cabinet Members including Lord Haldane, Sir Edward Grey, and Asquith were singled out as either half-heartedly committed to the war effort or actively disloyal.[152] Not coincidentally, these men were also committed anti-suffragists, and accusations of 'betrayal' of the country echoed the criticisms that the Government had betrayed women before the war, again implicitly linking the women's cause with the nation's cause. As the end of the war approached, fears of Germany were matched by fears of Russia, and Annie Kenney became one of the driving forces behind efforts to counter industrial unrest. In the pre-war period, as chapter three will demonstrate, Annie Kenney was ideally placed, by virtue of her working-class background, to engage with working-class audiences on the value of the vote. Now, she utilised these credentials to attempt to persuade working-class women to reject the evils of Bolshevism:

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148 'The German Peril', *Britannia*, 29 June 1917, p. 30
149 'Miss Annie Kenney', *The Suffragette*, 25 June 1915, p. 172
150 'Universal Obligatory War Service Demanded', 11 June 1915, p. 138
151 'Miss Annie Kenney', *The Suffragette*, 25 June 1915, p. 172
152 'Wanted! A Cromwell', *Britannia*, 12 November 1915, p. 59, *Britannia,* 17 March 1916, p. 149

> As a Lancashire woman, one who has worked with you in the mills and for you outside the mills, I have the fullest faith in you, and firmly believe you will not allow those desperate moles to undermine the constitution … through an indefinable circumstance Lancastrians have permitted themselves to take, with the honey-coating, the poison the Bolsheviks mixed for them. Again the salvation must come from the women.[153]

By the end of the war, Annie Kenney was claiming that only the Women's Party could counter 'the dangerous activities of the Bolsheviks, Pacifists and Pro-Germans.'[154]

During the war, Annie Kenney was adamant that women's suffrage should be set aside for the good of the nation. A wartime séance during which a German malevolent spirit attempted to persuade her to return to suffrage activism to distract her from the war effort was reported on the front page of *Britannia* as a matter of fact.[155] On behalf of Christabel Pankhurst, she wrote to Lord Milner asking if he could ensure that a proposed book by Lord Curzon and Lord Cromer did not discuss the subject, since 'it will only open old controversies that ought to be put on one side until this terrible world crisis is over'. Yet this same letter also reported Christabel Pankhurst's view that 'probably a few intelligent and informed women would have seen through the German game, and the failure of the men to have the country prepared for War, and the laxity and apathy which have had the effect of still leaving us unprepared at the end of eleven months, practically disqualifies men from claiming any political superiority and wisdom over women'.[156] This is a striking illustration of the ways in which women continued their campaign by other means despite claiming to have suspended their campaign.[157]

Annie Kenney believed that this stance was what eventually won women the vote. Calling for donations for the Women's Party, she claimed that 'the WSPU by its pre-war crusade for the Vote, followed by its patriotic stand and national service during the War, has won the greatest political victory on record'.[158] Indeed, she seems to have believed that even greater rewards might be in order. Following a conversation on an unspecified topic with David Lloyd George, she and Christabel discussed his dilemma and the two concluded that

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153 'Shatter Germany's Big Strike Plot!' *Britannia*, 18 October 1918, p. 167

154 Annie Kenney letter, 18 April 1918, London, LSE Women's Library Collections, 7HFD/B/1/33

155 'The Latest German Method', *Britannia*, 17 March 1916, p. 147. Later, though, as Annie Kenney came to develop her ideas on reincarnation, she rejected spiritualism. There would be no reason for a soul to return to earth and attempt to contact people after 'having left its early home' and having 'completed its mission for one earth life.' Annie Kenney, *And All the Yesterdays,* p. 81, KP/AK/3/2. For a discussion of the séance, see Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, pp. 1-2

156 Annie Kenney to Lord Milner, 29 June 1915, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS Milner dep 41-42

157 For discussions of this suggestion see de Vries, 'Gendering Patriotism', Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, Law, *Suffrage and Power*, Smith, *Suffrage Discourse*

158 'The Women's Party', Annie Kenney and Flora Drummond, 23 February 1918, London, LSE Library Collections, Autograph Letter Collection: Women's Suffrage, 9/01/1157

the solution to his difficulty would be to appoint a woman to the War Cabinet. Magnanimously, Pankhurst even indicated her continued desire to serve the nation by serving within Cabinet:

> for naturally we claim that it is one of the Women's Party who shall join the War Cabinet, no other Women's organisation have qualified itself in the same way. I need not tell you that our wish to have a woman in the War Cabinet is prompted by the most perfect loyalty to you … we know that if one of us were in the War Cabinet we could do more to help.[159]

Throughout the suffrage campaign, the Kenney sisters consistently argued that the race, nation and Empire would greatly benefit from women's suffrage, since women ardently and selflessly desired to serve the nation. The war provided the opportunity to prove this in practice. As this section has shown, however, noble and high-minded rhetoric about women's duties and responsibilities not only rested on uncomfortable assumptions about white British superiority, but led to a whole-hearted embrace of an excessive and uncritical nationalist agenda.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explain Annie Kenney's desire for the vote with close attention to her ideas about gender and class, faith and spirituality, service and the nation. In doing so, it has shown that although her experiences at work and at home informed her politics, they did not define them. Indeed, she found class-based politics deeply problematic, and aspired to an idealistic form of politics which would not only unite but also transform women. However, this chapter has also highlighted the problems inherent with this analysis: particularly her lack of attention to the means by which the vote might bring about further reforms, and use of a concept of service which led her towards an uncritical patriotism. Nevertheless, though this chapter has shown that class was not a significant aspect of her individual identity or political analysis, her experience working in the mills made her a particularly visible and useful member of the WSPU, and the organisation sought to utilise this in a variety of complex ways. The next chapter seeks to analyse this in more detail.

[159] Christabel Pankhurst to David Lloyd George, 6 July 1918, London, Parliamentary Archives, The Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/94/3/60 (written from Tower Cressy, discussed in chapter five).

Chapter three: The politics of the clogs and shawl: the representation, meaning and experience of class in the Women's Social and Political Union

'If you have any class feeling you must leave that behind when you come into this movement,' asserted the first edition of *Votes for Women,* since 'the women who are in our ranks know no barriers of class distinction'.[1] Both leaders and members of the WSPU consistently claimed they were part of a 'classless' organisation, and that by working together for the benefit of their sex, women could transcend the divisions of class. From different ends of the social spectrum, Grace Roe could argue that 'there was no such thing as class with me, I never had a feeling about class' and Hannah Mitchell could find 'a unity of purpose in the suffrage movement which made social distinction seem of little importance'.[2] Such optimistic pronouncements held out an idealistic prospect of women collaborating, regardless of education, background, and experience, in a movement based on mutual respect and regard, and a shared understanding of female experience.

As suggested in the introduction, however, historians have often been sceptical of the degree to which these assertions reflected the organisation's real policies or attitudes. The dominant historical narrative has been based around a sharp break with the labour movement and a rejection of militancy by working-class women, ultimately limiting the WSPU's impact and influencing the long-term relationship between the labour and feminist movements.[3] More recently, however, historians have returned to women's own accounts and, rather than dismissing them as propaganda, used these to develop a more nuanced analysis of attitudes to class within the WSPU. June Hannam, for example, uses the diaries of WSPU members Emily and Mary Blathwayt, and their relationship with Annie Kenney, to show that the WSPU created a space where class hierarchies could be overcome in certain circumstances.[4] Chapter two argued that Annie Kenney saw class as far less relevant to her own life than gender and that, like Mitchell and Roe, she genuinely believed in the

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[1] 'The Battle Cry', *VFW*, 17 October 1907, p. 10

[2] Interview with Grace Roe, conducted by Brian Harrison, 4 October 1974, London, LSE Library Collections, 8/SUF/B/013, Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell* (London, 1968) p. 159

[3] Rover, *Women's Suffrage*, p. 75, Neale, 'Working-Class Women', Rowbotham, *Hidden From History*, pp. 77-100, Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 76 and 243, Liddington and Norris, *One Hand*, pp. 203-205, Garner, *Stepping Stones*, p. 52-53, van Wingerden, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, p. 77, Cowman, 'A Footnote in History?', Jane Martin, 'Sproson, Emma (1867–1936)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, September 2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/63890 (accessed 23 January 2016), Pugh, *March of the Women*, pp. 171-233. In contrast, the literature often notes the central role played by working class women in other suffrage organisations. See, for example, Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, p. 68, Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper, 1864-1946* (London, 1984). Leah Leneman, however, found no evidence of working-class involvement in in the NUWSS in Scotland. Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, p. 94.

[4] Hannam, 'Suffragettes Are Splendid'

possibilities for cross-class collaboration and unity within the WSPU. Yet women could not simply dismiss or erase the structures and significance of class so easily, when it exerted such a powerful influence on economic opportunities, social hierarchies, cultural life, and individual identities beyond the organisation.

This chapter argues that Annie Kenney's suffragette career offers fresh insight into the way that class was represented, understood, and experienced within the WSPU. Initially, the WPSU made much of Annie Kenney's social origins, a strategy which was particularly effective in attracting press attention. However, positioning her as a representative of, and advocate for, all working-class women, was problematic, since this assumed a homogeneity of experience which simply did not exist. As a result, Annie Kenney often struggled to understand and build meaningful connections with the very women she was supposed to represent. But as WSPU policy shifted towards recruiting middle-class women, these difficulties largely ceased to matter. Instead, the WSPU sought to celebrate Annie Kenney's exceptional commitment to the cause, to inspire wealthier women to follow suit. The relationships she formed with these middle-class women are best understood as substitute families. Yet though the depth of these relationships was extraordinary in the context of contemporary class relations, they remained exceptional rather than typical. This chapter thus demonstrates that the significance of class within the WSPU was fluid and shifting rather than fixed and static.

As the introduction showed, recent feminist scholarship has challenged the previously dominant idea that working-class women were irrelevant to the WSPU.[5] In particular, Krista Cowman's work has been invaluable in rejecting simplistic notions about the 'break' between the labour movement and the WSPU and in illustrating the complexities of class affiliations and identities.[6] However, historians including Laura Schwartz and Sandra Stanley Holton have also demonstrated that class remained a significant source of tension throughout the women's movement, while Cathy Hunt has demonstrated how class tensions hampered the Women's Trade Union League.[7] The supposedly classless WSPU was by no means immune from these tensions. Sue Thomas, for example, has argued that

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[5] John, 'Radical Reflections', Purvis, 'The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes', Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, p. 52, 94, 111, 131, Liddington, *Rebel Girls*, Murphy, *Molly Murphy*, Smart, 'Jennie Baines', Cowman, *Mrs Brown*, Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst* highlights the ongoing correspondence between Pankhurst and Jennie Baines.
[6] Krista Cowman, "Crossing the Great Divide': Inter-organisational Suffrage Relationships on Merseyside, 1895 - 1914', in Joan Ryan and Laura Ugolini Clare Eustance (ed.), *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History* (London, 2000), p. 143, Cowman, "Incipient Toryism'?', Cowman, *Mrs Brown*, Cowman, *The Right Spirit*
[7] Schwartz, 'A Job Like Any Other?', Stanley Holton, 'Jessie Craigen', Hunt, *National Federation of Women Workers*, p. 28

solidarity was 'fetishised' in complex ways: suffragettes celebrated unity at the same time as stereotyping and marginalising working-class women.[8] Class, then, clearly continued to fracture and shape relations, even as women attempted to overcome these divisions and pursue a common goal.

Analysing Annie Kenney's public representation and private relationships helps demonstrate how women themselves attempted to navigate this complicated terrain. Though specifically focused on Annie Kenney, this chapter raises broader ideas about the role and representation of working-class women within the WSPU and the fight for women's suffrage, indicating both the potential for, and barriers to, meaningful and lasting cross-class collaboration.

The construction, uses and reception of Annie Kenney's image



Figure 5: Annie Kenney posed in 'mill girl' attire c. 1907
Museum of London, 50.82/1290

Kristina Huneault's study of the visual representations of working-class women in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods has shown that images of working-class women 'destablised major categories of social taxonomy', disrupting middle-class notions of both

[8] Thomas, 'Scenes in the Writing', p. 53

gender and class.[9] Her research teases out different meanings associated with different forms of work, but is focused on visual culture, and on how the middle-class viewer was likely to read and interpret the various ways working-class women were represented. This section develops her work by considering how visual representations of Annie Kenney were both reinforced and complicated by her words and actions, and the often contradictory meanings which both she and the WSPU sought to utilise.

The suffragettes' uses of imagery, iconography and propaganda as they set out to make themselves, and by extension, their cause, shockingly visible, has been well documented.[10] Suffragettes countered stereotypes of bluestockings, harridans and hooligans with images of idealised womanhood. Images of working-women, as Lisa Tickner has shown, had particular value and meaning: both advocating for the vote so that working-class women could be better protected, and demonstrating that the campaign was inclusive and diverse. In this context, Annie Kenney had enormous symbolic power for the WSPU.[11] She was supposed to be, in Diane Atkinson's words, their 'working-class heroine'.[12] Annie Kenney's visual appearance, with the clogs and shawl which identified her as a working-woman, was therefore celebrated by the suffragettes, turned into postcards and displayed in shop windows.

Annie Kenney's image resonated beyond the organisation itself. She was easily distinguished from other suffragettes, and newspapers rarely missed an opportunity to comment on her appearance. One described her as 'a romantic and defiant figure in the shawl of a millhand',[13] while another wrote that she 'appeared in the garb of the cotton operatives, wearing her hair in a plait down the back, and having her feet shod with the wooden clogs peculiar to the mill girl'.[14] Such novelty meant that 'Miss Kenney made a remarkable impression on her first London audience'.[15] Annie Kenney herself expressed this appeal simply as the allure of difference: 'We are all interested in the thing we do not possess! Mystery is always attractive … the clogs and shawl would attract not only the public

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[9] Kristina Hunealt, *Difficult Subjects: Working Women and Visual Culture, Britain 1880-1914* (Aldershot, 2003) p. 5
[10] Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, John Mercer, 'Making the News: Votes for Women and the Mainstream Press', *Media History,* 10/3 (2004), Katherine E. Kelly, 'Seeing Through Spectacles: The Woman Suffrage Movement and London Newspapers, 1906-1913', *European Journal of Women's Studies,* 11/3 (2004), Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, Green, *Spectacular Confessions*
[11] Brian Harrison who is sceptical about Annie Kenney's importance to the WSPU, nevertheless concludes her value lay in this symbolic power. Harrison, 'Annie Kenney'
[12] Diane Atkinson, 'Six Suffragette Photographs', in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (ed.), *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester, 1998), p. 90
[13] *London Daily News*, 21 March 1907, p. 7
[14] *Fife Free Press & Kirkcaldy Guardian,* 23 March 1907, p. 2
[15] *Portsmouth Evening News,* 23 February 1906, p. 4

but Parliamentarians, who, like all people, look forward to a change'.[16] Yet the political resonance of her image went well beyond novelty value. Like the Chartists' use of the fustian jacket and the cap of liberty, the clogs and shawl were clearly what Katrina Navickas has called 'political clothing … an articulation of both individual self and collective identity'.[17] The clogs and shawl were a vital part of the suffragettes' strategy to claim legitimacy through appeals to historical precedent.[18] Annie Kenney was well aware of the strategic significance of her appearance and prepared to capitalise on it.

Her dress not only identified her as working-class but carried a variety of meanings. On the one hand, the mill-girl could be a romantic, even heroic, figure, distinguishable from the 'sweated' worker by her spirit, dignity and independence, and even envied for these qualities by middle-class women.[19]At the same time, however, she possessed an unstable, even unruly quality. As Amy Montz has argued, obvious and visible difference from the middle-class observer or reader meant that suffragettes identified as working-class could be forgiven 'any unorthodox or militant methods … because she might not know any better'.[20] *En masse,* then, working-class women could be seen as hostile, and Annie Kenney – 'the fiery card-room operative'[21] – was not afraid to exploit this; for example, promising to march a thousand working women to Parliament. Several newspapers rightly called this a 'threat'.[22] Others described a contingent of working-class suffragettes as 'Mill Girl Amazons'.[23] 'We can't do with your kid-gloved methods,' she told one audience, rejecting the genteel tactics of polite protest which had dominated suffrage campaigning until the militant intervention.[24] She told another audience that 'she would not rest content until the clogs of Lancashire and Yorkshire women rattled on the floor of the House of Commons'.[25] Sometimes she would situate this threat in a tradition of radical working-class protest, again

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[16] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 113-4
[17] Katrina Navickas, '"That Sash Will Hang You": Political Clothing and Adornment in England, 1780-1840', *Journal of British Studies,* 49/3 (2010), p. 543, see also Paul Pickering, 'Class Without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement', *Past & Present,* 112 (1986)
[18] Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, Hilda Kean, 'Public History and Popular Memory: Issues in the Commemoration of the British Militant Suffrage Campaign', *Women's History Review,* 14/3-4 (2005)
[19] On the power and resilience of these images, see Billie Melman, "A Lass of Lancashire': The Mill Girl as Emblem of Working-Class Virtues', in Billie Melman (ed.), *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties* (Basingstoke, 1988)
[20] Amy L. Montz, 'Dressing For England: Fashion and Nationalism in Victorian Novels', (PhD thesis, Texas A&M University 2008) p. 211
[21] *Leeds Mercury,* 21 May 1906, p. 5
[22] *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 31 May 1907, p. 7, *Leeds Mercury*, 31 May 1907, p. 5, Bolton Evening News, 31 May 1907, p. 2
[23] *London Daily News*, 17 August 1907, p. 6, *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 17 August 1907, p. 3, *Western Gazette*, 22 March 1907, p. 12
[24] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 10 September 1906, p. 6
[25] *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 8 March 1907, p. 5

making the links to Chartism explicit. In 1907, for example, long before the suffragettes' arson campaign started, Annie Kenney said that 'they had not yet attacked Bishops and burnt down churches as the Chartists did but they would stop at nothing'.[26] As such, Annie Kenney's clogs and shawl were not just a benign signal of her working-class origins, but carried an implicit menace.

The clogs and shawl also provided Annie Kenney herself with a licence for dramatic action. On an early deputation to Campbell-Bannerman, for example, she felt daring enough to shout her disapproval of his lukewarm reception. Mary Ann Rawle, another suffrage activist, commented admiringly on her daring: 'Miss Kenny (sic) (the only Lady with clogs and shawl on) got up on her cane bottomed chair and called out, "Sir Henry We are not satisfied and the fight will go on" (sic).'[27] Similarly, in March 1906, she jumped on a car in Downing Street while part of a deputation.[28] Interviewed that year for an article which claimed the women 'fought like men', 'little Miss Kenny' (sic) was portrayed as enjoying pitched street-battles, showing off her bruises, describing the 'splendid time' she was having in fighting, and threatening further action against Asquith.[29] The clogs and shawl, which implied a capacity for rowdiness and violence, could be used to justify this behaviour.

As a WSPU organiser, however, Annie Kenney tended to wear factory girl clothing on particular occasions, rather than on a daily basis. When Hannah Mitchell first met Annie and Jessie Kenney they were 'wearing dark costumes of excellent quality,' and she said that when Annie addressed crowds in London 'in a frock of pale lettuce green silk [she] looked more like an aristocrat from the West End than an Oldham factory girl'.[30] Here, Annie Kenney drew on an alternative WSPU strategy, which emphasised respectable femininity, as another means of resisting stereotypes of suffragettes.[31] Jessie Kenney wrote that 'their physical appearance was so different from the picture the public had left to form in advance. They were all depicted as large aggressive ill-clad agitators and were surprised to see slight girls of small stature … dressed quite simply and attractively.'[32] Cicely Hamilton noted that 'all suggestion of the masculine was carefully avoided … due, in part to dislike of the

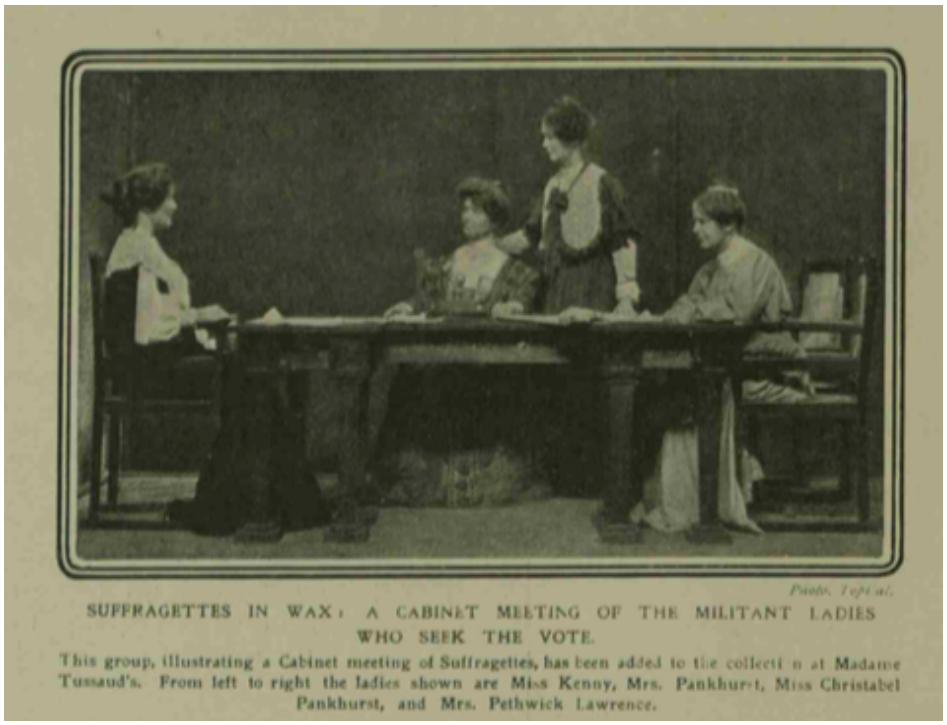
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[26] *London Daily News*, 1 February 1907, p. 12
[27] Mary Ann Rawle, 'A Report of the Day's Proceedings in London on the 19th of May 1906', London, LSE Library Collections, 7/MAR/04/11,
[28] Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 65
[29] *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 18 June 1906, p. 2
[30] Mitchell, *Hard Way Up*, p. 127
[31] Katrina Rolley, 'Fashion, Femininity and the Fight for the Vote', *Art History,* 13/1 (1990), Maria Dicenzo, 'Militant Distribution: Votes for Women and the Public Sphere', *Media History,* 6/2 (2000), p. 122-3, Montz, 'Dressing For England', p. 200-223, Wendy Parkins, "The Epidemic of Purple, White and Green': Fashion and the Suffragette Movement in Britain, 1908-1914', in Wendy Parkins (ed.), *Fashioning the Body Politic: Dress, Gender and Citizenship* (Oxford, 2002)
[32] KP/JK/4/2/2/4

legendary idea of the suffragette, as masculine in manner and appearance – many of the militants were extraordinarily touchy on this point'.[33] Annie Kenney believed that women's clothing also needed to be practical as well as attractive. As noted in chapter one, for example, she was very resistant to the restrictions of women's stays. 'Annie thought dress and deportment very important,' Millicent Price wrote:

> The dress she and Mary [Blathwayt] devised and which adopted, was very pleasant to look at, and particularly kind to non-corsetted figures. It was really a pinafore frock, with a white top to the purple or green slip smocked fully at the waist. We liked it for the freedom it gave us, and because it was short enough to collect no dust nor did it need a protective braiding.[34]

When Annie and other leading suffragettes were sculpted in wax for Madame Tussaud's, her dress was not as elaborate as those of the other figures, but neither was she dressed in clogs and shawl. This suggests that she was increasingly recognisable even without these symbols, though the sculptor may not have produced a good likeness. Mary Blathwayt noted 'they are very badly done, but Annie's is simply dreadful'.[35]



SUFFRAGETTES IN WAX: A CABINET MEETING OF THE MILITANT LADIES WHO SEEK THE VOTE.

This group, illustrating a Cabinet meeting of Suffragettes, has been added to the collection at Madame Tussaud's. From left to right the ladies shown are Miss Kenny, Mrs. Pankhurst, Miss Christabel Pankhurst, and Mrs. Pethwick Lawrence.

Figure 6: The Madame Tussaud's tableaux of WSPU leaders, 1908
Illustrated London News, 5 December 1908, p. 812[36]

[33] Cicely Hamilton, *Life Errant* (London, 1935) p. 75
[34] Millicent Price, *This World's Festival*, p. 123
[35] MB diary, 16 April 1909
[36] These figures were lost in a fire in 1925 (private correspondence with Madame Tussaud's archivist, 2 June 2015)

The clogs and shawl which had made Annie Kenney so distinctive were now worn selectively: at national meetings, on deputations to the Prime Minister, and on marches through London.[37] Some contemporary commentators perceived this as inauthentic. One suggested 'that her brand-new woollen shawl and her coquettish clogs bore about as much resemblance to the everyday articles of the Lancashire streets as a field-marshal's uniform bears to the working clothes of the militiaman after a month's training'.[38] There was an element of spectacle and performance to her attire which some found cynical. Wendy Parkins has therefore argued that she wore 'the traditional costume of the mill-worker on strategic occasions as a consciously communicative act, rather than an expression of an authentic identity'.[39] This, however, overstates the case: it was both a strategic decision *and* an expression of authentic identity. Her decision not to dress in clogs and shawl on a daily basis during her work in London and the West of England was pragmatic. It indicates that Annie Kenney was in control of her image, and would choose when to make herself distinctive.



Figure 7: Annie Kenney and Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy
Review of Reviews, 1906, p. 587

[37] See, for example, comments on Annie Kenney's appearance in Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 67 and 82
[38] *Leeds Mercury*, 21 May 1906, p. 5
[39] Wendy Parkins, 'Taking Liberty's, Breaking Windows: Fashion, Protest and the Suffragette Public', *Continuum,* 11/3 (1997), p. 45

The clogs and shawl were all the more powerful when juxtaposed with other symbols and icons. This picture of Annie Kenney in clogs and shawl alongside Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy links the plight of the working-woman with longstanding campaigns for equal rights, and locates the pair as the past and present of a women's movement which transcended age as well as class. The accompanying text by WT Stead compared her to Josephine Butler and to Joan of Arc, situating Kenney as the inheritor of a tradition of radical action carried out without regard to personal gain or safety.[40] She was also positioned as equal and opposite to Christabel Pankhurst. They were described in *Votes for Women* as signifying on the one hand, the 'highly educated womanhood of modern times, on the other, the toiling millions of the manual workers'.[41] In Teresa Billington-Greig's words:

> One of them was a mill-girl who had bitter experience of the restrictions to which working women are subjected. The other was a daughter of a lawyer, herself studying to be a lawyer. Together they represented the two forces which are the life of this new women's agitation: the need of women as typified by Annie Kenney; and the rebellion of the educated women against restrictions … represented by Christabel Pankhurst.[42]

This emphasis on the 'need of women', in Billington-Greig's phrase, suggests that the WSPU largely saw working-class women as passive victims who needed their help, rather than active forces for change in their own lives. In part, this reflected unease about the dangers inherent in the 'factory girl' image. Ada Nield Chew had claimed that 'we factory girls are aware of the public opinion of us. That we are regarded as quite the lowest class of female workers. As a noisy, cheeky, idle, ignorant, shallow, class of girls.'[43] From a more sympathetic standpoint, the factory girl might represent independence, strength and capability. Yet she could also stand for women's vulnerability and need of protection, or, conversely, appear potentially alarming and threatening.[44] The WSPU was not the only organisation which grappled with these contradictions: as Gillian Scott has noted, the Women's Co-Operative Guild struggled to present working-class women as 'strong, capable and assertive' while also drawing attention to their need for help.[45] Navigating these conflicting messages was fraught with difficulty.[46]

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[40] Stead, 'Character Sketch'
[41] *VFW*, 9 June 1911, p. 610
[42] *Aberdeen People's Journal*, 16 March 1907, p. 5
[43] Ada Nield Chew, 'Life in a Crewe Factory', 9 June 1894, quoted in Nield Chew, *Life and Writings*, p. 83
[44] Lynn Abrams, *The Making of Modern Woman, Europe 1789-1989* (London, 2002) p. 18, *Rover, Women's Suffrage*, p. 35-6
[45] Scott, *The Women's Co-operative Guild*, p. 65
[46] See Hunealt, *Difficult Subjects*, pp. 193-203, for an analysis of other strategies.

As a result, the WSPU was keen to present Annie Kenney as someone who would not have seemed out of place in a drawing room. 'With a keen perception of the beautiful and delicate in nature and in art, with a love of poetry and literature, Miss Kenney is one of the sensitive women of the day,' wrote Fred Pethick-Lawrence, while WT Stead reassured readers that 'she is a woman of refinement and of delicacy of manner and speech'.[47] Presenting Annie Kenney as an educated woman was essential to this strategy. It was reported that while in prison, she attended church services, and read religious texts and improving literature including Shakespeare and Scott, while *Votes for Women* claimed 'her love of good books, and her reflective mind, made the mill her high school and her factory her university'.[48] The WSPU thus attempted to both utilise and subvert popular images of the 'factory girl'. While Annie Kenney was represented as 'typical' in her work experience, she was also positioned as 'exceptional' in her literacy, articulacy and sensitivity. The WSPU did not attempt to challenge middle-class assumptions about, and stereotypes of, working-class culture. In her autobiography, for example, Kitty Marion was keen to assert that suffragettes were 'intelligent, educated, (Upper class not "low hooligan") women (sic)'.[49] Rather, in general, the organisation suggested that Annie Kenney was a rare and extraordinary individual. Only Hannah Mitchell, herself a working-class woman, suggested that Annie Kenney might embody a broader and more positive construction of factory women, describing her and Jessie Kenney as 'fine examples of the self-respecting Lancashire mill-girl, intellectual and independent'.[50]

This sense of Annie Kenney's exceptionalism was also reflected in the popular press. Newspapers highlighted the distinctions between stereotypes of factory girls and suffragette 'hooligans' and the reality of the thoughtful and engaging woman on the platform. One wrote:

> Miss Kenney's personality offers a striking contrast to the popular conception of the suffragette. Slight – even frail – in figure, one finds it difficult to reconcile her with the strenuous part which has to be played … this lady, ordinarily gentle in manner, and possessing a temperament responsive and sympathetic, has been one of the most fearless in the rough pioneer work of the movement.[51]

Ingrained assumptions about uneducated factory girls meant that newspapers were often surprised by 'the eloquence of the Lancashire Lass'[52] who 'proved herself a female

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[47] Pethick-Lawrence, *Annie Kenney*, p. 2, WT Stead, 'Character Sketch', p. 584
[48] *London Daily News*, 15 August 1906, p. 12, 'The Speakers', *VFW*, 18 June 1908, p. 251
[49] Autobiography of Kitty Marion, p. 170
[50] Mitchell, *Hard Way Up*, p. 127
[51] *Western Daily Press*, 1 April 1908, p. 5
[52] *Portsmouth Evening News,* 23 February 1906, p. 4

Demosthenes on many public platforms'.[53] Another commented that she 'speaks the King's English perfectly with a delightful roll, the effect of which is heightened by her vivacity and her intense earnestness'.[54] Clara Codd stated that she approached audiences 'as a homely Lancashire lass would', and much was made of her regional accent and vocabulary.[55] The effect was compelling, especially when reinforced with all that was implied by the clogs and shawl. Part of her appeal to observers lay in the contrast between her apparent vulnerability – Mary Richardson called her 'that fragile figure with the dancing eyes' – and her evident resilience and determination in the face of hostility.[56] Her attractive appearance also helped demonstrate, as Jessie Kenney said, that 'militancy was not carried out by tight lipped grim ugly women but by many young and charming women who would … [appeal to] large crowds of men by just smiling and winning them over to their cause'.[57] Again, then, Annie Kenney's femininity and its contrast with public expectations was an important aspect of her image.

The clogs and shawl were clearly a potent reminder of Annie Kenney's early experiences as a factory worker. Yet implicit in the use of this powerful symbol is the assumption that factory workers were synonymous with working-class women. The reality was very different. Though factory workers made up a large proportion of working-class women, their experiences were peculiar and specific. Compared with many other working women, factory workers had a high degree of independence and high wages, were often politically engaged and organised, and had a discrete set of concerns around working and domestic life. Their experiences bore little resemblance to other groups of working women: whether lower middle-class women in precarious white-collar employment, domestic servants, or sweated workers. Barbara Green and Laura Schwartz have both highlighted that these alternative experiences were marginalised in WSPU representations of working-class women.[58] As such, positioning Annie Kenney as an archetypal working-class woman was problematic. This chapter now turns to examine how working-class women themselves responded to Annie Kenney.

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[53] *Western Daily Press*, 28 June 1909, p. 3
[54] *Portsmouth Evening News*, 3 September 1906, p. 3
[55] Codd, *So Rich a Life*, p. 49, Hesketh, *My Aunt Edith*, p. 50
[56] Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance*, p. 81
[57] Suffragette Outrages!!!!!????? (sic), KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[58] Green, *Spectacular Confessions*, pp. 30-35, Laura Schwartz, 'The Wrong Kind of Working-Class Woman? Domestic Servants in British Suffrage Novels', (unpublished paper, delivered November 2016, North American Conference on British Studies, Washington DC)

The uses and limitations of common experience as the basis for common cause with working-class women

Annie Kenney played a central role in the WSPU's early efforts to recruit working-class women to the militant cause. At ILP meetings and factory gates she made speeches that emphasised the strength of working-class women, and the power they could exhibit through organising under the auspices of the women's movement. She argued that 'the women's movement was a great one, and if they had the whole-hearted sympathy of every working woman their efforts would come to speedy fruition.'[59] Annie Kenney's credibility with these audiences derived from her life-experience in the factory, and her arguments about why women needed the vote were grounded in her understanding of factory life. She said that 'she had been trained in the bitter school of experience, and her duty as a worker lay among the workers'.[60] Wearing clogs and a shawl while addressing these audiences was a visual indication of shared experience.

In industrialised communities where the 'factory girl' experience was common, audiences could feel empathy with, and inspired by, Annie Kenney. She could easily be understood as a female ILP campaigner in the tradition of Enid Stacy, Caroline Martyn and others, albeit one who stressed gendered oppression.[61] Women who may not have previously been interested in suffrage listened to Annie Kenney and sometimes responded with deep emotion. Miss Armstrong from Preston, a mill-worker from the age of thirteen, saw her speak 'and became fired with a desire to throw herself heart and soul into the movement'.[62] Her ability to develop a connection with these audiences explains both why the WSPU was so keen to use her in particular communities – Mary Gawthorpe, for example, promoted her name and 'special leaflet' while working among textile workers – but also why Keir Hardie wanted Annie Kenney to campaign on his behalf at pit-brows and at trade union meetings.[63] Unsurprisingly, Annie Kenney felt most at home with women from Lancashire and Yorkshire, not just because of their common work experiences but because of their shared understanding of Labour politics, and respect for Robert Blatchford and Keir Hardie.[64]

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[59] *Lancashire Evening Post,* 26 June 1907, p. 4
[60] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 10 September 1906, p. 6
[61] On these campaigners, see Krista Cowman, "With a Lofty Moral Purpose': Enid Stacy, Margaret McMillan, Katharine St John Conway and the Cult of the Good Woman Socialist', in Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren (ed.), *Heroic Reputations, Exemplary Lives* (Manchester, 2000)
[62] *Preston Herald,* 27 March 1907, p. 4
[63] *VFW*, 11 June 1908, p. 230, Kenney, *Memories*, p. 57
[64] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 115

Yet even ILP audiences could interpret Annie Kenney as a celebrity rather than a comrade. One reporter wrote of 'Miss Annie Kenney, the famous suffragette, whose eloquence, sincerity and unanswerable logic was keenly appreciated' at a Barnsley ILP meeting.[65] Despite a shared past, her position as a 'famous suffragette' separated her from other working-class women in the present. She told another audience that 'it is my duty, because I lived and worked amongst you in the cotton trade for many years, to point out to you as clearly as possible the danger which threatens your right to work' and explaining the consequences, as if women were unaware of these issues.[66] Here, she underlined both her similarity to, and difference from, her audience. The knowledge she had gained from her political campaigning had given her a new means of understanding and analysing her experience, which, she implied, women unenlightened by the women's movement did not have access to.

Annie Kenney struggled to understand in any meaningful way the lives of women outside industrialised communities whose experience was significantly different from her own. On arrival in London, for example, she set out to study the needs of the most deprived women she could think of: vagrants and tramps. But while she saw the individual humanity in each woman – 'all were greatly interesting, and to me human souls' – she also had a tendency to romanticise and sentimentalise their experience.[67] Her suggestion that she herself looked forward to a similar itinerant life once the vote was won indicates that she failed to appreciate the genuine hardship and poverty experienced by homeless travellers.[68] Annie Kenney was not immune from the WSPU's tendency to use stereotyped images of working-class women. In her autobiography, Lancashire women were patronisingly praised for their housekeeping and East End women were characterised as downtrodden in ways which drew on regional as well as class-based clichés.[69] Similarly, a series of vignettes she wrote after coming out of prison in 1906 reduced her fellow-prisoners to caricatures: mother of illegitimate baby, older woman in poverty, matriarch trying to make ends meet.[70] To her, these women were victims and symbols of oppression, rather than individuals with agency and power.

Annie Kenney had sufficient self-awareness to sometimes express discomfort at her failures of understanding. On arrival in London she spent some time working with the

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[65] *Barnsley Chronicle*, 1 June 1907, p. 8
[66] 'To the Married Women Textile Workers', *VFW*, 21 May 1908, p. 182
[67] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 62
[68] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 111
[69] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 131-2 and see below
[70] Pethick-Lawrence, *Annie Kenney*, pp. 9-12

nascent WSPU branch at Canning Town. Here, she was perceived as an outsider. 'Miss Kenney Came (sic) among us as angels do' read the minutes for one meeting.[71] In retrospect, Annie Kenney recognised that the vote may not have been the answer to these women's needs. 'How I had the courage and audacity to talk Votes for Women to those thin, sallow, pinched, pain-stricken, poverty-lined faces I do not know,' she wrote in her autobiography.[72] But this did not stop her offering a glib and patronising assessment of the WSPU's efforts in Canning Town. 'Poor oppressed, unawakened East-Enders – every reformer using them for his own ends, and we were doing just the same!'[73] Unlike, for example, Sylvia Pankhurst, Annie Kenney found it too difficult to live and work among these women as an equal. Indeed, she argued that:

> those who have a real desire to help the suffering masses in the East End should not live there … I have never seen such hopeless despair, such agonising poverty, as I saw in the East End of London. I felt like it was one big long funeral … they were the dead of lost endeavour, of lost faith, courage, and of all the qualities that go to make a consciously free man.[74]

Annie Kenney appears to have had little faith in working-class women's ability to bring about their own emancipation. In *Votes for Women*, she described 'the great responsibility we have taken on our shoulders to free the women'[75] of Lancashire and Yorkshire, suggesting she doubted their capacity to free themselves. She also described Constance Lytton's 'passion for the working-class women in the movement … she loved them and they loved her'.[76] Here, she frames working-class women as 'them' rather than 'us', implicitly positioning herself outside the working-classes while simultaneously staking a claim for class solidarity.

During the early years of campaigning, the WSPU used Annie Kenney's experience as a factory worker, particularly as an elected trade union official, to claim that she represented working-class women in the organisation, and could effectively represent them to the wider world. She announced to one audience, 'I am Miss Annie Kenney and I have come specially from Lancashire, where I represent sixty-nine thousand women cotton operatives'.[77] In Sylvia Pankhurst's words, she was 'Annie Kenney, a mill girl, who had gone to work in a cotton factory at ten years of age, a working woman, the child of a working

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[71] Minute Book of the Canning Town WSPU, 10 April 1906, London, Museum of London, 50.82/1133
[72] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 68
[73] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 68
[74] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 71
[75] 'Feeling in Lancashire and Yorkshire', *VFW*, February 1908, p. 74
[76] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 88
[77] *Manchester Courier,* 3 March 1906, p. 7

woman, whose life had been passed amongst the workers … the representative of thousands of struggling women, and in their name she asked for justice'.[78] Yet both Annie Kenney and the WSPU appear to have assumed that she would be able to represent not only this particular group of working-class women, but all working-class women. In doing so, they underestimated the degree of variation in, and specificity of, working-class experience. They overlooked occupational, local and cultural distinctions which were also hugely significant, and made the assumption that the concerns of the factory workers that Kenney knew best were common to all working-class women. This is surely attributable to Annie Kenney's insistence that class divisions were not as important as female solidarity: her disinterest in these distinctions meant that she did not appreciate their ongoing significance.

Constructing the model suffragette

As suggested in the introduction, arguments that the WSPU made a definitive break with the labour movement do not accurately reflect all the complexities of the organisation's relationship with working-class women, especially at a local level. Nevertheless, it is possible to see distinctive changes in the way that Annie Kenney was positioned within the organisation as the WSPU set out to recruit more middle-class women. There were, of course, a number of complex reasons why the organisation embarked on this strategy, particularly the pragmatic need for members with the time and money to devote to the cause. But it is also worth noting that Christabel Pankhurst came to believe that parades and processions of middle-class women would create a more impressive visual spectacle than those of working-class women, since they had even greater novelty value.[79]

In this context, the WSPU celebrated Annie Kenney's commitment to the suffrage cause rather than her prior experience in the factory. Her interventions took on almost mythical importance, and were situated as defining moments in the narrative of suffrage militancy. Her 'interruption' of Sir Edward Grey in October 1905, her subsequent prison sentence, and her move south to 'rouse London' were regularly repeated in *Votes for Women* to encourage other women to become militant. It was the power of this myth rather than its strict accuracy that mattered. 'Two women against the whole world – that was the start of this movement,' proclaimed *Votes for Women* in 1908.[80] Laurence Housman wrote a poem memorialising this event which was performed by Decima Moore: it began 'high of heart

[78] 'The History of the Suffrage Movement', *VFW*, 1 October 1908, p. 3
[79] Pankhurst, *Unshackled*, p. 67, Kelly, 'Seeing Through Spectacles', p. 335
[80] 'The History of the Suffrage Movement', *VFW*, 3 December 1908, p. 163

when others were down/came Annie Kenney to London Town'.[81] The 'clogs and shawl' which had made Annie Kenney so distinctive were less visible, and she increasingly spoke to 'At Homes' and assembly rooms rather than at ILP meetings and factory gates. In the 1910 'Prison to Citizenship' procession, Annie Kenney chose to identify herself not as a working woman but as a prisoner, dressed in white and equipped with a silver-tipped arrow, rather than the clogs and shawl with which she had previously been synonymous. This changed public image signalled dignified endurance, and was underscored by her public example of spirited bravery. Supporters commented on her 'indomitable spirit,' even in prison, where 'she whistled and always encouraged her colleagues with smiles and cheering remarks'.[82] As such, she personified the courage and wholehearted commitment which the WSPU hoped to inspire among its members.

Annie Kenney's own experiences in the WSPU informed her belief that a shift in policy was necessary. In the early years of the campaign, she had urged the Canning Town women to fully participate in militant demonstrations. Two members of the branch – one elderly, and one lame – were arrested with her in 1907.[83] Dora Montefiore argued that "'going to prison" for East End suffragists was a far worse ordeal in some respects than it was for their West End sisters. Those East End women lived, if not in slums, on the borders of "slumdom" where the inhabitants were ignorant and often intentionally cruel in their judgements.'[84] Implicit in this is the criticism that Annie Kenney did not appreciate the risks and consequences these women faced in going to prison.

On the contrary, however, Annie Kenney fully appreciated this problem and as a result, became an active proponent of the WSPU's strategy to recruit middle-class women. At the Women's Parliament in February 1908, she reminded delegates that before attending, working-women 'had to bake the bread, to do the washing, and prepare for their husbands and families … she urged the women of social standing present to fight for the cause themselves, and to go to prison if necessary and not to let the working-women do all the fighting'.[85] For Annie Kenney shifting middle-class women to the forefront of militancy did not represent a break with, or disavowal of, working-class women. Rather, it was a necessary response to the barriers they faced, which made militancy particularly difficult. Middle-class women would have to shoulder the burden instead.

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[81] KP/JK/4/2/2/4, "'Rise Up, Women!'", *VFW*, 22 April 1910, p. 480
[82] *London Daily News*, 18 February 1908, p. 9
[83] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 90
[84] Dora Montefiore, *From a Victorian to a Modern* (London, 1927) p. 50-51
[85] 'Women's Parliament and the House of Commons', *VFW*, March 1908, p. 82

This strategy was undoubtedly effective in recruiting the middle-class women which the WSPU aimed to attract. She 'talked turkey in a strong Lancashire accent to the bluest blood in England,' stated Ida Wylie, 'and the Blue Blood sat up and took notice'.[86] Many different women responded to her evident passion and emotional commitment to the cause and directly attributed their involvement to her inspirational example. Clara Codd, for example, spoke of Annie's 'inner mystic light' while Grace Roe said that 'Annie I looked upon as a leader, an inspired leader'.[87] Among those who directly cited Annie Kenney as a defining influence include major activists such as Mary Richardson, seasoned campaigners like Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, and perhaps most significantly, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, WSPU treasurer.[88] Mary Allen claimed that she 'converted me as she converted hundreds of other women and girls all over Great Britain' while Ida Wylie claimed that she was 'much closer to my human level' than Emmeline or Christabel Pankhurst, and so much more effective.[89]

After 1912, when the WSPU embarked on more extreme militant strategies, the tendency to emphasise her actions rather than her background was even more apparent. With Christabel Pankhurst in exile in Paris, Emmeline Pankhurst often in prison or America, and the Pethick-Lawrences ousted from the movement, Annie Kenney played an essential role in demonstrating to the members that they were not being abandoned or exploited by their leaders. She set an example of loyalty, discipline and commitment to the Pankhursts and encouraged other to follow her lead.

Annie Kenney's physical body remained central to her revised position as the ideal suffragette. Following her arrest on conspiracy charges in April 1913, she lived as a 'mouse' for more than a year. Since the clogs and shawl would give an obvious clue to her identity, she was disguised in a range of alternative costumes from a 'flashy East End coster type' to an 'ordinary' woman with 'furs and eye-glasses'.[90] Profoundly weakened by repeated hunger strikes, she was often unable to walk or speak, and was carried around on a stretcher, appearing theatrically on stage. The dramatic and staged quality of these encounters had a distinctly darker tone than her earlier public appearances. The frailty of her physical person

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[86] I.A.R. Wylie, *My Life With George: An Unconventional Autobiography* (New York, 1940), p. 168
[87] Codd, *So Rich a Life,* p. 45-6, Interview with Grace Roe, conducted by Brian Harrison, 23 September 1974, London, LSE Library Collections, 8/SUF/B/007
[88] Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance*, p. 81, Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy*, p. 192, Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part*, p. 147
[89] Mary S. Allen, *Lady in Blue* (London, 1936) p. 13, Wylie, *My Life*, p. 169
[90] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 252

was explicitly contrasted with the intensity of her commitment. For example, in August 1913, *The Suffragette* described her as:

> A little figure dressed in a long black coat, a little frail ghost of a thing with a face still and drawn from her four days' hunger strike – nothing left of it, it almost seemed, but the unquenchable courage and spirit which makes the movement indomitable.[91]

Suffragettes responded with adoration and outrage, interrupting services at churches and cathedrals to pray for her, and attempting to beat back police to protect her.[92] Her appearances were both a reward for the suffragettes' efforts in extreme militant actions such as arson, and an admonishment to do yet more. *The Suffragette* also asserted that 'the arrest of Miss Annie Kenney will inevitably be taken as a fresh incitement to militancy' – consciously echoing the charge of incitement she faced – and carried regular reports on her health in order to generate outrage at her treatment by the authorities.[93] After one surprise appearance in April 1914, Flora Drummond said to the assembled crowd, 'I wonder how many of you tonight have realised the determination that is behind the action of Miss Kenney in coming here. If I were to pick one of you to do as she has done, you would shrink behind your chair.'[94] Little wonder, then, that one newspaper called her 'The Champion Militant'.[95]


The
Suffragette
The Official Organ of the Women's Social and Political Union
Edited by Christabel Pankhurst
No. 82—Vol. 1 FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1913. Price 1d. Weekly
THE BRUTAL ARREST OF MISS ANNIE KENNEY.

Figure 8: Front page of *The Suffragette*, 10 October 1913, p. 897

Her smile and apparent willing submission are a marked contrast to the headline.

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91 'The Iniquitous "Cat-And-Mouse" Act Breaking Down', *The Suffragette,* 8 August 1913, p. 743
92 For example, *The Suffragette*, 21 November 1913, p. 130
93 *The Suffragette*, 11 April 1913, p. 419, and, for example, *The Suffragette*, 10 October 1913, p. 907, 28 November 1913, p. 144
94 Quoted in Raeburn, *Militant Suffragettes,* p. 245
95 *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 7 October 1913, p. 2

The only other woman who engaged in such extremely public demonstrations of suffering was Sylvia Pankhurst, who was likewise carried around on a stretcher as a visible rebuke to the government. Sylvia Pankhurst had by this point, however, left the WSPU to lead the East London Federation of Suffragettes. It is possible, therefore, to interpret Annie Kenney's public martyrdom not just as a reproach to the government, but also as a suggestion to supporters that the WSPU continued to be the most radical and militant organisation, thus preventing a loss of membership to Sylvia Pankhurst's alternative group. Kenney herself, however, preferred to make explicit comparisons not with Sylvia Pankhurst, but with another comrade: 'if it means – like Emily Wilding Davison – I have got to die to get the vote, I shall die to get the vote'.[96] As early as 1908, she publicly stated her willingness to die for the cause, and had told an audience in the West of England that 'Miss Pankhurst and I had decided [before going to prison in 1905] that we could do no good if we were not prepared to put all convention and every personal consideration aside; that if it came to the sacrifice of personal convenience or even of our life we would be ready to accept it'.[97] This was clearly not rhetoric, but a very real possibility.

Nevertheless, it is as important to see the continuities in Annie Kenney's public representation as the changes. Though her dress changed, she claimed she 'had no desire to dress up every day and carry a sunshade and wear white gloves'.[98] She never denied or rejected her 'working-woman' identity. Indeed, it remained strategically useful. In her trial for conspiracy in 1913, for example, she made several references to her childhood and work experience, and when travelling to the USA in 1914 for example, she attributed her warm welcome to the fact that she had previously been a trade unionist.[99]

The changing uses of Annie Kenney's image raises important and complex questions about agency and autonomy, such as what Annie Kenney understood her role to be, and how far she embraced it, or simply accepted it as necessary. Contemporary critics were clear that she was being exploited. Teresa Billington-Greig argued that 'at one time the propagandists of the movement made much publicity on 'Annie Kenney, The Suffragette Mill Girl' lines which she deeply disliked. Yet she bore it with patience for many years.'[100] Rowland Kenney published a scathing critique of working-class women in the militant movement in 1912. 'Their minds were easily played upon by the displayed smartness and

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[96] *Manchester Courier*, 18 June 1913, p. 7
[97] *Wiltshire Times and Trowbridge Advertiser*, 30 May 1908, p. 11
[98] 'I am a Rebel', *The Suffragette*, 20 June 1913, p. 9, Kenney, *Memories*, p. 277
[99] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 259
[100] Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland*, p. 313

wealth of their leaders,' he argued, 'they liked to be amongst women who were obviously clever, well-bred and in easy circumstances; it flattered their vanity and was a welcome change in life, which, God knows, they needed'.[101] Billington-Greig suggests that Annie Kenney acquiesced in her role: Rowland Kenney implies rather that she was being manipulated. Both suggest that Annie Kenney exemplifies the unthinking obedience and mindless devotion of the fanatical suffragette, which has been reflected in the historiography. David Mitchell, for example, called her a 'splendid marketable commodity'.[102]

In fact, Annie Kenney made ongoing pragmatic decisions about the most effective strategies to advance the cause, and how she might best contribute to these. Indeed, she herself told Teresa Billington-Greig that 'the excluded must use whatever weapons they can seize'.[103] Nor should we assume that the conclusions she reached were simply the result of Christabel Pankhurst's influence. There is no suggestion, for example, that Christabel Pankhurst either asked or expected Annie Kenney to risk her life through the trauma of repeated force feedings. Annie Kenney appears to have accepted the possibility of death in service of the cause, not because she was told to do so, but because she had independently reached the conclusion that it might be necessary.

Friendship, love, collaboration, and their limits

The relationships which Annie Kenney formed with middle- and upper-class women were far more meaningful than those which she developed with working-class women. In her autobiography, she seldom singles out working-class women as individuals – Minnie Baldock is a rare exception – but writes extensively about her friendships with middle-class women. Friendship has increasingly been seen as central to social and political change across this period, perhaps particularly for women who, lacking access to formal and institutional structures, relied on informal networks in their campaigning.[104] This was especially important within the WSPU, as it give women the confidence and courage to engage in militancy, as well as underpinning local activist networks.[105] As a result, Sandra

[101] Rowland Kenney, 'The Militant Movement in Ruins', *The English Review,* XIII (1912) p. 104
[102] Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, p. 214
[103] McPhee and Fitzgerald (eds.), *The Non-Violent Militant,* p. 99
[104] Marc Brodie and Barbara Caine, 'Class, Sex and Friendship: The Long Nineteenth Century', in Barbara Caine (ed.), *Friendship: A History* (London, 2009), Vicinus, *Independent Women*, Ross, 'St Francis in Soho', Liz Stanley, 'Feminist and Friendship: Two Essays on Olive Schreiner', *Sexual Politics,* 8/4 (1985)
[105] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, p. 155, Holton, *Suffrage Days*, p. 11

Stanley Holton has suggested the WSPU was underpinned by 'webs of love and friendship'.[106]

Yet historians have often been sceptical about the degree to which middle-class and working-class women were able to form friendships and alliances grounded in genuine recognition, appreciation and understanding: the social gulf was too great and sincere intentions might be experienced as patronising.[107] Friendship within the WSPU has also been read not as friendship, but as something suspect and deviant. George Dangerfield, for example, wrote of 'that dark journey into some feverish realm of the spirit where women secretly communed with women'.[108] Annie Kenney has been singled out in this regard. Andrew Rosen, for example, states that she 'apparently lacked interest in young men her own age' while Martin Pugh asserts that 'she slept so frequently with her female friends and colleagues that it would be surprising if her feelings were not those of a lesbian'.[109] Such assertions are clearly not an attempt to sensitively reconstruct women's intimate relationships, but rather serve to insinuate that women's political commitment to the WSPU was actually a personal commitment to its members.[110]

Yet as June Purvis has argued, there is very little evidence that this is the best frame through which to understand Annie Kenney's relationships with other women.[111] While Mary Blathwayt's diary does refer to Annie Kenney 'sleeping' with other women, she wrote very literally, and it seems more likely that 'sleeping' did not have sexual connotations. Clara Codd explained that she often shared a bed with Annie Kenney to save money.[112] It is clear that Annie Kenney did have extremely strong feelings for Christabel Pankhurst, claiming that 'there is a cord between Christabel and me that nothing can break – the cord of love'.[113] But as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg reminds us, such terms of endearment are not necessarily an indication of romantic love, but simply a reflection of the heightened language that women might use to describe intense friendships.[114] The rich literature on women's friendships in this period shows that women understood and expressed their relationships in

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106 Stanley Holton, 'Reflecting on Suffrage History', p. 30. Stanley and Morley, *Emily Wilding Davison*, shows this in operation.
107 Koven, *Match Girl*, Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (2004), Mark Peel, *Miss Cutler and the Case of the Resurrected Horse: Social Work and the Story of Poverty in America, Australia, and Britain* (London, 2012)
108 Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 154
109 Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 43, Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, p. 212
110 For example, Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, p. 212-3
111 Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst,* p. 143.
112 Codd, *So Rich a Life*, p. 46
113 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 289
114 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America', *Signs,* 1/1 (1975)

ways which bear little resemblance to contemporary understandings.[115] There were, of course, romantic relationships between women in the WSPU which a number of sensitive and thoughtful studies have brought to the fore.[116] Others have used the methodological approaches of queer studies to consider the ways that women resisted and inverted cultural expectations in their relationships, without seeking to impose modern understandings and vocabularies unavailable to the women involved.[117] However, Liz Stanley, who studied Emily Wilding Davison's relationships with other women in the WSPU, also argues that labeling these as 'lesbian' in its current understanding is as problematic as denying that such relationships existed.[118] These studies all insist that understanding women's relationships in their particular context is critical. This call for specificity is echoed by Krista Cowman and Heloise Brown, whose essay on suffrage friendship argues that it is not enough to identify and recover the networks involved: it is necessary to understand 'the meanings or consequences'.[119]

In fact, Annie Kenney's relationships with other women are best understood not as romantic relationships but as substitute families. This is particularly important in understanding how these friendships transcended generation as well as class. Annie Kenney constructed these families to give her the emotional and practical support she needed to manage the intensity of her daily life. She regularly drew on the descriptive language of family to convey the depth of her relationships with other individuals, calling herself the granddaughter of WT Stead and the 'adopted daughter' of the Pethick-Lawrences.[120] Her husband James Taylor even claimed that 'at one stage Keir Hardie almost wanted to adopt her as a daughter'.[121] The Pankhursts, however, were her most significant alternative family. After Annie Kenney was released from prison in 1905, Emmeline Pankhurst promised that Annie would always have a home with her.[122] This promise of a home so soon after her own

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[115] For landmark works on this issue, which take different positions on understandings of sexuality within friendship, see Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual', Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 1985), Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (London, 2004) Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Oxford, 2007)

[116] Stanley and Morley, *Emily Wilding Davison*, Stanley Holton, 'Jessie Craigen', Anna Kisby, 'Vera 'Jack' Holme: Cross-Dressing Actress, Suffragette and Chauffeur', *Women's History Review,* 23/1 (2014)

[117] For example, Cockin, *Edith Craig*

[118] Liz Stanley, 'Romantic Friendship? Some Issues in Researching Lesbian History and Biography', *Women's History Review,* 1/2 (1992) p. 197

[119] Heloise Brown and Krista Cowman, 'Exploring Suffrage Friendships', in Ruth A. Symes, Ann Kaloski, and Heloise Brown (eds.), *Celebrating Women's Friendship: Past, Present and Future* (York, 1999), p. 152

[120] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 65 and 72. A newspaper story that the Pethick-Lawrences were going to formally adopt her was, however, swiftly denied. *London Daily News*, 8 January 1907, p. 12. Fred Pethick-Lawrence was known more generally to the suffragettes as 'Godfather'.

[121] Interview with James Taylor

[122] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 41

mother had died and 'the cement of love that held the home life together disappeared' was a major factor in giving her the confidence and security she needed to continue with militancy.[123] These familial relationships became even more important as her own family was increasingly dispersed.

If Annie Kenney's role in the Pankhurst family was central to her place in the national organisation, her role in the Blathwayt family was equally important in enabling her work as a regional organiser. As previously highlighted, June Hannam's study of this relationship has highlighted how this relationship transcended barriers of class.[124] Mary Blathwayt became a combination of Annie Kenney's friend, sister, secretary and domestic servant. She lavished Annie with loving care, washing her hair, doing her mending, and carrying out numerous domestic chores. Yet this was not a relationship between the two women alone but a bringing together of two families. Annie, Jessie, Jane and Caroline Kenney were all absorbed into the Blathwayt family, and treated as surrogate daughters. Annie frequently went to stay with the Blathwayt parents – Colonel Linley and Emily – while Mary was away, and treated their home as her own, frequently staying in bed all day to recover from campaigning.[125] They had Jane and Caroline to stay for an extended period during 1910, arranging – and presumably paying for – their hospital care.[126] The Blathwayt home thus to a great extent became the Kenneys' home.

Annie was also embraced by the Lytton family, an aristocratic clan with close ties to the political elite and the royal family. As Diane Atkinson writes, 'Constance Lytton's 'family' expanded and diversified the moment she joined the WSPU'.[127] Constance Lytton admired Annie Kenney as a 'woman of great character, courage and ability,' who provided an intellectual and emotional rationale for women's suffrage that 'began to lift the scales of ignorance from my eyes'.[128] As Lytton recognised, while she was clearly Kenney's social superior outside the WSPU, within the organisation, the hierarchy was reversed. She asked Annie and Jessie to address her as 'Sister Conny' and signed herself as such in letters, though they did not take to the idea.[129] Annie Kenney worked with Constance's sister Betty

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123 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 26
124 Hannam, 'Suffragettes Are Splendid', p. 60
125 See, for example, Emily Blathwayt's diary (EB), 1 July 1909, Gloucester, Gloucestershire Archives, D2659/24
126 See MB and EB diaries for June and July 1910. MB's diary for 24 January 1911 indicates that Linley Blathwayt also paid for 'Kitty's teeth' which cost £15.
127 Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!* p. 139
128 Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners*, p. 11
129 KP/JK/4/2/2/3. Though 'sister' implies a close and familial bond, the Kenneys might also have heard the echoes of the 'sister' used by social reformers in mission work which carried connotations of status, hierarchy and religion. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, for example, was known as 'Sister Emmeline' to the women she worked with in the East End of London. Martz, 'Mission to Activism', Ellen Ross, 'St Francis in Soho:

Balfour to lobby her brother-in-law, Arthur Balfour, and developed an affectionate friendship with Constance's mother, Edith Lytton, which outlasted Constance's own death. Despite Edith's dislike of militant suffrage, she wrote with great fondness to Annie 'my dear daughter Con friend and my own also I hope as you are a sister of Con's & we can always find sympathy and help in each other (sic)'.[130] Loving personal relationships between a dowager Duchess and former Vicereine of India, and a militant suffragette and former factory worker were, of course, highly atypical.

The Kenneys derived many practical and material benefits from these relationships. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence showered Annie and Jessie with affection, buying Annie a prized dress from Liberty and taking Jessie on outings and holidays.[131] Helen Archdale allowed them to use her home, staff and money while she was in prison.[132] There were more intangible benefits in the form of social and cultural capital too. At the Blathwayt home, Linley taught Annie to drive; Jennie learned chess and Jessie learned billiards; and Mary gave Annie and Kitty lessons in swimming and French.[133] The warm welcome that the Kenneys were assured of in all these families offered them a guarantee of security and an opportunity for recreation and respite which was essential to helping them cope with the demands of their work.

It was Annie Kenney's evident commitment to the cause which enabled her to transcend the barriers of class and construct a place at the heart of these families. While working-class women experienced a gap between Annie Kenney's claims to represent them and her actual understanding of their lives, for middle-class women, the alternative image of Annie Kenney as the idealised suffragette rang absolutely true. As a result, they embraced her wholeheartedly. The historical literature on cross-class women's friendships is primarily focused on the friendships which arose as a result of social intervention programmes, since this is how the women would be most likely to meet.[134] Within the WSPU, however, women met Annie Kenney on different terms: as an equal and as a worker in the cause. Yet while this indicates some of the opportunities for cross-class collaboration within the WSPU, there were limits. Annie Kenney was understood as someone extraordinary, Jessie and Nell

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Emmeline Pethick, Mary Neal, the West London Wesleyan Mission, and the Allure of "Simple Living" in the 1890s', *Church History,* 83/4 (2014), 843-83

[130] Edith Lytton to Annie Kenney, 4 April 1924, KP/AK/2/LyttonE/1

[131] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 62, Jessie – Notes on Ethel Smyth, Mrs Pankhurst and Christabel, KP/JK/4/2/2/4, Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 218

[132] Deirdre MacPherson, *The Suffragette's Daughter: Betty Archdale: her Life of Feminism, Cricket, War and Education* (Kenthurst, 2002) p. 42

[133] EB's diary, 31 July 1910 and 14 July 1910

[134] Koven, *Match Girl*, Koven, *Slumming*, Peel, *Miss Cutler*

Kenney were admired for their devotion to the cause, and the Kenney name ensured that Jane and Caroline were also welcomed into the militant suffrage community. Yet such total commitment to the cause – enabled by their positions as paid organisers – was not available to the vast majority of working-class women. This suggests that women could, in some instances, transcend the divisions of class, but only when they 'earned the right'. As a result, within the contemporary political and social context, such collaboration was undoubtedly extraordinary, but remained exceptional.

Conclusion

Annie Kenney sincerely believed that the WSPU embraced and created opportunities for women to collaborate as equals. She claimed that 'a Girton girl or a charwoman, it made no difference' and 'we exclude no class – from the rag picker to the Queen of England'.[135] Yet analysing her own suffragette career has revealed many of the contradictions and complexities concealed beneath this aspirational rhetoric. Initially, the WSPU sought to highlight and celebrate Annie Kenney's working-class background, and particularly her work in the factory, to demonstrate that theirs was an inclusive movement which could effectively represent working-class women. However, once they had made the decision to recruit wealthier supporters, these objectives were no longer so important. Instead, Annie Kenney was repositioned as an example of the ideal suffragette, culminating in her visible displays of extreme suffering during the last phase of the militant suffrage campaign. 'Society made Annie Kenney a worker – but God made her something better still – a creator. She was born, then, for the job of setting the working woman's face to the dawn,' proclaimed *The Suffragette* in 1913, indicating the ambiguity of Annie Kenney's position within the organisation. She was a working-class woman, but unlike other working-class women.[136]

Annie Kenney did not passively accept these changes, but rather embraced and co-operated in changing policies. She was actively self-fashioning her own image through her clothing and her actions. When presented as an idealised suffragette she offered an inspirational example to middle-class women, but she was less effective in attracting long-term support from working-class women. Her ability to transcend the divisions of class was grounded in her exceptional commitment and sacrifice. This was not open to all women,

[135] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 124, 'Miss Kenney's Speech,' *The Suffragette*, 12 December 1913, p. 203
[136] 'Annie Kenney', *The Suffragette*, 24 January 1913, p. 221

and had the effect of further distancing her from the working-class women she claimed to represent. In Annie Kenney's representation and relationships, then, we see both the possibilities and limitations for cross-class collaboration in the WSPU.

Chapter four: 'No companionship can ever surpass the companionship of the Militants': collective identity and the meanings of militancy[1]

Militancy was the defining principle of the Kenneys' political activism and the cornerstone of their identity. Yet their understanding of militancy was entirely different from the narrow definition of the concept, synonymous with violence, which has come to dominate analysis of suffragette activity. The Kenneys were almost never violent, but consistently defined themselves as militant. How can this apparent paradox be understood?

This chapter seeks to answer this question by conceptualising militancy as a collective identity rather than a set of practices. Militant identity was expressed in a huge variety of ways but central to them all was a sense of serving the cause, belonging to the movement, and solidarity with its members. This chapter therefore explores what it meant to be a militant, not only through a discussion of the acts and practices it involved, but also the friendships and networks which enabled militancy and which created a collective militant identity. In doing so, it builds on the initial discussion of suffrage friendships introduced within chapter three to discuss their political implications. Analysing the connections between militant identity, community and actions helps to account both for the intensity of the Kenneys' commitment to the cause and the diverse forms that commitment took. The focus, then, is not just on the forms of militancy, but on its meanings.

Analysis of the Kenneys' understanding of militancy is complicated by several factors. There was, of course, no official definition of militancy, and the concept evolved over time, through individual innovations and rapidly changing circumstances. This meant that militancy was often improvised first and rationalised only later, though, as Krista Cowman has argued, earlier forms of militancy were not supplanted but continued alongside more dramatic acts.[2] As Laura Nym Mayhall has suggested, militancy therefore needs to be understood as a dynamic rather than a static phenomenon.[3] Moreover, although the Kenneys clearly understood militancy as extending far beyond violence and illegality, they also appreciated that contemporaries outside the organisation largely subscribed to this narrow definition. Annie Kenney herself, for example, distinguished between 'mild militancy' and 'extreme militancy', claiming that one built on the other, and both were essential to the functioning of the organisation.[4] Their own usage of the term 'militancy' is

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[1] Kenney, *Memories*, p. vii
[2] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, p. 121
[3] Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, p. 22
[4] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 190

thus slippery and inconsistent. Using militant identity rather than militant activity for analysis therefore enables a fuller understanding of all the work which made the women militant.

Militancy has had a long and powerful association with violence. As Laura Nym Mayhall has shown, some ex-members of the WSPU themselves helped to construct this narrow understanding of 'authentic suffrage militancy', by privileging accounts which emphasised imprisonment, especially sentences received for arson and window-breaking, hunger-striking, and force-feeding.[5] Engagement with, and acceptance of, violence and other illegal acts, was established in early histories as the central distinction between so-called 'constitutionalists' and 'militants'. Militancy is also generally presented as an escalating phenomenon, involving ever-more dramatic acts, culminating in the arson, bombings and attacks on property between 1912 and 1914.[6] Jill Liddington and Jill Norris argued that the WSPU's emphasis on violence was a major reason why working-class women became disillusioned with the organisation. They suggested that working-class women were unable to undertake the risks involved with militancy, and in any case, did not approve of this strategy, considering it incompatible with notions of respectability.[7] This is just one of the reasons why militancy has often been interpreted as increasingly counterproductive. Historians have also argued that it alienated the wider public, making it impossible for the government to extend the franchise without being seen as conceding to violence.[8]

Motivations for militancy have also been widely debated. Most notoriously, George Dangerfield characterised militancy as pathological behaviour, involving 'ardent and irrational females' working in cult-like conditions and following the orders of demagogic leaders.[9] Brian Harrison rejects explanations grounded in individual psychology, but nevertheless portrays militancy as the product of an organisation which discouraged critical judgement and inhibited independent thought.[10] More recently, Christopher Bearman has presented militancy as a strategy designed to force the government into a position of aggression from which women could claim to be innocent victims.[11]

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[5] Nym Mayhall, 'Creating the 'Suffragette Spirit'', see also Stanley Holton, 'Reflecting on Suffrage History'
[6] Accounts which typify this approach include Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, Strachey, *The Cause*, Rover, *Women's Suffrage*, Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*
[7] Liddington and Norris, *One Hand*, especially pp. 205-7
[8] Garner, *Stepping Stones*, p. 49, Rover, *Women's Suffrage*, p. 23-4, Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p. 318, Harold L. Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign* (London, 1998) p. 34
[9] Andrew Rosen, for example suggests that even when Annie Kenney was leading the organisation, she was nothing more than 'Christabel's agent, the medium through which Christabel continued to set Union policy.' Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p. 164. See also Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 143, and more recently, van Wingerden, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, p. 81 and Pugh, *March of the Women*, pp. 178-180
[10] Harrison, 'The Act of Militancy'
[11] Bearman, 'Suffragette Violence' and Bearman, 'An Army'

A substantial body of work has now challenged this narrow conception of militancy, arguing that it has rendered a great deal of activity and many women invisible. Several historians have drawn attention to the ways in which accusations of female madness, fanaticism and hysteria, used by contemporaries as a justification for withholding the vote, have been subsequently used to dismiss militancy.[12] Contrary to assertions that militant women simply did what they were told, Krista Cowman, Liz Stanley and Anne Morley have demonstrated that women exercised considerable judgement and autonomy over their individual practices of militancy.[13] Martin Pugh, though calling much militancy 'purely nominal and temporary', asserts the need for a better understanding of 'mild militancy' – the range of practices such as heckling and interruption which were non-violent yet experienced by contemporaries as peculiar and distinctive.[14] Jon Lawrence has shown how far militants adopted and adapted established existing political practice.[15] Krista Cowman and Sandra Stanley Holton have shown that the divide between 'constitutionalists' and 'militants' as 'non-violent' and 'violent', is largely artificial. In practice, many women considered themselves militant without being violent, and there was significant collaboration and co-operation between women from different organisations.[16]

Having challenged the association between militancy and violence, historians have sought to reconceptualise militancy in ways which not only reflect the totality of militant practice but also the self-conception of militants. Laura Nym Mayhall and Claire Eustance have argued for a far broader understanding of militancy, encompassing an extensive variety of practices.[17] In Krista Cowman's expansive definition, militancy was 'any form of action which took large numbers of women into the public sphere' and which was defined by 'transgressive potential' and contemporary audience reaction.[18] Rather than categorising acts as violent or non-violent, she suggests an alternative interpretative framework, dividing acts into those which transgressed gendered norms, those which were likely to lead to prison, and those which were absolutely illegal.[19] These reinterpretations are especially useful for

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[12] Paula Bartley, *Emmeline Pankhurst* (London, 2002) p. 29, Stanley and Morley, *Emily Wilding Davison*, p. 67, Gupta, *Representation*, p. 6
[13] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, p. 122, Stanley and Morley, *Emily Wilding Davison*
[14] Pugh, *March of the Women*, p. 185-197 and 224
[15] Lawrence, 'Contesting the Male Polity'
[16] Cowman, *Mrs Brown*, Cowman, '"Crossing the Great Divide"', Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, Holton, *Suffrage Days*
[17] Nym Mayhall, 'Defining Militancy', Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, Eustance, 'Meanings of Militancy', see also Krista Cowman, "A Party Between Revolution and Peaceful Persuasion': a Fresh Look at the United Suffragists', in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (eds.), *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester, 1998)
[18] Cowman, "Stone-Throwing", p. 175
[19] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, p. 121-2

their insistence on focusing on the meanings of particular acts, rather than the acts themselves.

Other scholars have sought to explain individual militancy in a broader context. Sandra Stanley Holton characterises militancy 'primarily as a cast of mind, a moral philosophy, a way of looking at the world, especially in terms of an understanding of history and the processes of social and political change which had preceded the early twentieth century'.[20] Mary Jean Corbett has noted that shared identity throughout the women's movement was forged through participating in shared activities.[21] Michelle Myall too has argued that 'militancy may be understood in relation to women's personal politics and in the context of their friendships, rather than as a response to official mandates.'[22] Liz Stanley and Anne Morley's study of the life of Emily Wilding Davison makes clear how essential these friendships were to sustaining militancy.[23] Gemma Edwards has mapped some of the networks of suffragette friendship using social network theory to indicate how the connections between women influenced individual decision-making around militancy.[24]

This chapter draws on both these reinterpretations, drawing attention to the breadth and diversity of militancy, and placing the Kenneys' individual acts within the context of their relationships. In doing so, it stresses the vital importance of collective identity as well as individual autonomy in the Kenneys' experiences of militancy. Their choices can only be understood in the context of their collective experience: that is, the emotional ties, sense of loyalty, and belief in solidarity which characterised their relationship to the WSPU and its members, as well as to each other as sisters. These friendship networks not only provided the context but increasingly, the motivation, for militancy, and were central to the development of a collective militant identity. This chapter further argues that militancy was thus a question of identification rather than practice. It stresses that militancy was, above all, created in the mind. This is significant because militancy is so often characterised as an act of the body: whether participating in deputations, harnessing the power of spectacle, or

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[20] Stanley Holton, '"In Sorrowful Wrath"', p. 10

[21] Mary Jean Corbett, *Representing Femininity: Middle-class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women's Autobiographies* (Oxford, 1992) p. 165

[22] Michelle Myall, '"No Surrender!": The Militancy of Mary Leigh, a Working-Class Suffragette', in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (ed.), *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester, 1998)

[23] Stanley and Morley, *Emily Wilding Davison*, see also June Purvis, '"Deeds, Not Words" The Daily Lives of Militant Suffragettes in Edwardian Britain', *Women's Studies International Forum,* 18/2 (1995), Alexandra Hughes-Johnson, 'Rose Lamartine Yates and the Wimbledon WSPU: Reconfiguring Suffragette History from the Local to the National', (PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2018)

[24] Gemma Edwards, 'Infectious Innovations? The Diffusion of Tactical Innovation in Social Movement Networks: The Case of Suffragette Militancy', *Social Movement Studies,* 13/1 (2013), Gemma Edwards and Nick Crossley, 'Measures and Meanings: Exploring the Ego-Net of Helen Kirkpatrick Watts, Militant Suffragette', *Methodological Innovations,* 4/1 (2009)

willingly subjecting the body to inhumane treatment within prison.[25] Yet no particular acts were required for women to consider themselves militant, or to be considered militant by others. 'If we all do what we feel to be right, we cannot go wrong,' Annie Kenney reassured Emily Blathwayt.[26] This chapter first discusses the formation of militant identity within various militant suffrage communities before turning to analyse how this shaped individual decision-making around militancy, and especially more extreme actions.

Militant identity and grassroots activism



Figure 9: Nell Kenney's WSPU postcard
London, Museum of London, Women's Suffrage Collection, NN22408

The development of regional and local scholarship on the suffrage movement has led to renewed attention to the importance of local communities and branches.[27] While those women working at the WSPU headquarters or already embedded within activist

[25] Green, *Spectacular Confessions*, Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, Caroline Howlett, 'Writing on the Body? Representation and Resistance in British Suffragette Acounts of Forcible Feeding', *Genders,* 23 (1996), Wendy Parkins, 'Protesting like a Girl: Embodiment, Dissent and Feminist Agency', *Feminist Theory,* 1/1 (2000)
[26] Quoted in EB's diary, 9 September 1909
[27] See, for example, Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland*, Leneman, 'A Truly National Movement', Cowman, '"Crossing the Great Divide"', Hannam, '"I Had Not Been to London"', Cowman, *The Right Spirit*

networks could benefit from frequent support, more isolated members might face indifference, discouragement or hostility from their existing networks. Local branches therefore became essential sites for women to develop and sustain their identities as militants. Krista Cowman's study of WSPU organisers has also demonstrated how essential this role was in shaping local understandings and experiences of militancy.[28] Though these communities were often dependent on energetic and enthusiastic paid organisers to galvanise, sustain and channel local efforts, organisers were equally dependent on a loyal and engaged set of local volunteers to further the cause locally. This chapter now considers how militant identity was developed and sustained locally and, by examining the contrasting experiences of the sisters as local organisers, underlines the importance of women's friendship networks in sustaining their commitment to militancy.

In 1907, Nell Kenney was appointed an itinerant organiser and Annie Kenney was moved from London to the West of England. Though most associated with work at the WSPU headquarters at Clements Inn, Jessie Kenney also acted as a local organiser in London branches, especially during the earlier years of the campaign.[29] Later, when local branches were struggling, she was sometimes sent to reinvigorate them.[30] These three women thus played an important part in developing local militant communities around the country. Women's first encounter with the militant suffragettes was usually through the experience of hearing a speaker – chapter three demonstrated how effective Annie Kenney was in this regard – but initial interest was developed into militant identity through a series of parallel processes. Militant identity found positive expression in serving the cause, but was also reinforced by negative reactions and hostility. Friendship, camaraderie and solidarity were central both to encouraging women's activism and to sustaining them through these difficulties. At the centre of local militant communities, organisers played a vital role in these processes.

The role of an organiser, especially outside London, was to build and then direct an enthusiastic army of volunteers, channelling their energy into propaganda efforts. Annie Kenney found this intensely rewarding. Teresa Billington-Greig claimed that after her assignment to the West of England, Annie Kenney had been 'gradually edged out of the

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[28] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*

[29] *VFW*, 18 June 1908, p. 256, 25 June 1908, p. 266, 2 July 1908, p. 286, 9 July 1908, p. 302, 3 September 1908, p 430, 17 September 1908, p 462, 19 March 1909, p. 460, testify to her work as the WSPU organiser for the London City branch. As a result, in the 1908 demonstration she was responsible for bringing women from from across Lambeth, Southwark, Camberwell, Brixton, Streatham, Bermondsey and Woolwich. KP/JK/4/2/2/4

[30] *VFW*, 6 October 1911, p. 27

public eye, silenced, exiled from the rest of the movement'.[31] This, however, was a reflection of her increasing criticism of the Pankhursts and cannot be sustained in the light of Annie Kenney's experiences. Kenney herself claimed in her autobiography that 'the happiest days of organising were those I spent in the West of England'.[32] In the West of England, Annie Kenney helped foster a tightly-knit community of engaged and dedicated women who often went on to prominent roles within the organisation.[33] Volunteers were offered varied and interesting work, entrusted with responsibilities and asked to exercise initiative and creativity which encouraged them to flourish. As Clara Codd stated, Annie Kenney was 'not one of those administrators who try to do everything themselves and to keep a finger in every pie … often did she say to me: "The business of the organiser is to make others work, not to do it all himself (sic)'.[34] Women such as Clara Codd and Mary Blathwayt, who proved ineffective at public speaking, were encouraged to take on other work, such as taking collections, selling newspapers and running the shop. However, rather than assigning all the more mundane work to her comrades, Annie Kenney was often to be found chalking pavements, posting handbills and writing letters to newspapers. Nell Kenney also paid close attention to the routine details of organising and campaigning. She kept an extremely detailed and specific set of notes on how to conduct large meetings, specifying everything from the time the doors should open to the amount of literature on sale, to the process of money collection and the importance of keeping different income streams separate.[35]

Studies of the WSPU have often centred on what made it different or distinctive from other political organisations rather than on its similarities. Yet as Krista Cowman has shown, the WSPU bore a great deal of resemblance to other political groups in many respects. The routine work of recruitment, publicity, fundraising and campaigning was absolutely central to the organisation.[36] Though not militant in itself, all this work was crucial to developing women's militant identity: often, it was the daily work of grassroots activism, rather than individual moments of drama, which characterised membership of the WSPU. Women such as Annie Kenney's friend Mary Blathwayt, for example, clearly identified as militant. The work that she did for the cause, however – working in the shop,

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[31] McPhee and Fitzgerald (eds.), *The Non-Violent Militant,* p. 172
[32] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 120
[33] On the Bristol campaign before Kenney's arrival see June Hannam, '"To Make the World a Better Place": Socialist Women and Women's Suffrage in Bristol, 1910-1920', in Myriam Bousshaba-Bravard (ed.), *Suffrage Outside Suffragism, Women's Vote in Britain, 1880 - 1914* (Basingstoke, 2007), and afterwards, see Lucienne Boyce, *The Bristol Suffragettes* (Bristol, 2013), Dobbie, *A Nest of Suffragettes*
[34] Codd, *So Rich a Life*, p. 46-47
[35] Notes as to the Conducting of Big Meetings of the Day, MS-1029 File 6
[36] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, especially pp. 37-115

advertising meetings, and participating in parades – would rarely be characterised as militant, either by contemporaries beyond the WSPU, or historians. Indeed, as Jessie Kenney argued, the militant movement depended for success on the efforts of those women who did not make newspaper headlines. She claimed that 'we had scores of young women who were prepared to give out handbills, chalk pavements or sell our paper at railway stations, or speak at open air meetings, and ask questions at meetings addressed by Cabinet Ministers'.[37] Volunteers thus formed the bedrock of the militant movement, and high profile, dramatic acts were by no means the only way that women could make an important contribution to the cause. *Votes for Women* reported that 'the secret of her [Annie Kenney's] success has been largely due to the splendid band of capable, efficient and dependable voluntary workers that have undertaken the various departments of the work'.[38] In her autobiography, Jessie Kenney stressed that:

> all voluntary workers felt as much a part of the tableau … as the official organisers themselves. Many there were who did self-effacing work which rarely got the publicity of militancy, but whose regard was just as great beyond the scenes … [some valued] the rich reward they had of contact with the piblich [public which] was more to them than the "limelight."[39]

As a result, Millicent Browne, one of Annie Kenney's closest associates in Bristol, was disappointed that a television broadcast on the suffragettes in the 1950s concentrated on 'the excesses of militancy':

> We regretted we did not see the Annie we knew in 1908 – 10: concentrated on the conversion of Bristol and the West, mothering Adela suffering from the loss of her brother and relieving her depths in poetry to Annie or wearing the simple sensible frock that she, Mary Gawthorpe and I devised and adhered too (sic), or talking earnestly to a Theosophist suffragette Clara Codd to whose outlook – non-violent and non-mystical – she adhered to the day of her death. I would have liked to have seen her nursing her remarkable organising capacity & deputing the more ephemeral activities to me and others like me.[40]

To Millicent Browne – whose commitment to the cause was such that she was known as 'Militant Browne' to Fred Pethick-Lawrence – it was the sense of community and shared collective identity which they developed which encapsulated the real meaning of the militancy.[41]

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[37] KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[38] 'Public-Spirited Bristol', *VFW*, 6 October 1911, p. 11
[39] One Chapter on CO-ORDINATION and CORRELATION! KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[40] Millicent Price to Verity Lambert, undated copy, MPR/02
[41] Price, *This World's Festival,* pp. 117-162

Militant identity thus did not depend on any specific criteria or particular acts, and could be claimed, asserted and expressed in a variety of contexts. Caroline Kenney, for example, was never arrested and never took part in a deputation. There are no records of any public speeches that she might have made as part of the British campaign. Nevertheless, she participated in major processions and donated money, and, as chapter five will indicate, was clearly understood to be a valued member of the suffrage community.[42] In 1913, she moved to Montreal for work, which was then unpromising territory for more radical women. The Canadian suffrage campaign has usually been characterised as relatively conservative, and largely limited to well-educated, elite and professional women.[43] Those like Toronto-based journalist Flora Denison, who were sympathetic to militancy and joined the WSPU, were ostracised from the mainstream movement.[44] In Montreal, the movement was also hampered by socio-economic, cultural and linguistic divisions, and faced stringent opposition from the Catholic Church which exerted a powerful influence within the Francophone community.[45]

Nevertheless, in Montreal, Caroline asserted her militant identity with pride. She made a series of speeches defending militant tactics, including addressing conservative groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and was variously described in Canadian newspapers as 'an English suffragette of repute', 'one of the most eloquent of all the suffrage speakers', and 'a militant of some experience'.[46] She also associated herself with, and possibly helped found, the Montreal Equal Suffrage League. Very little can be firmly established about this organisation, which does not feature in standard histories of the Canadian suffrage movement, though fleeting references can be found in contemporary newspapers. The *Montreal Gazette* reported that 'the league includes both militant and non-

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[42] *VFW,* 23 June 1911, p. 629 indicates she donated to an appeal for £25 000. Emily Blathwayt asked Caroline to represent her at the 1910 Prison to Citizenship procession but Caroline elected to represent herself. EB's diary, 6 May, 8 May and June 1910

[43] Carol Bacchi, "First Wave' Feminism in Canada: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918', *Women's Studies International Forum,* 5/6 (1982), Carol Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists 1877-1918* (Toronto, 1983)

[44] Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brant, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History, 2nd Edition* (Toronto, 1996) pp. 216-7, Deborah Gorham, 'Flora MacDonald Denison: Canadian Feminist', in Linda Kealey (ed.), *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto, 1979), Janice Fiamengo, *The Women's Page: Journalism and Rhetoric in Early Canada* (Toronto, 2008) pp. 154-176

[45] Marie Lavigne, Yolande Pinard, and Jennifer Stoddart, 'The Federation Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the Women's Movement in Quebec', in Linda Kealey (ed.), *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto, 1979), Catherine Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto, 1974), Denyse Baillargeon, *A Brief History of Women in Quebec*, trans. W. Donald Wilson (Waterloo, 2014) pp. 73-102

[46] *The Canadian Jewish Times*, 4 April 1913, p. 25, *The Ottowa Journal*, 10 June 1913, p. 2, *The Ottowa Journal*, 16 June 1913, p. 12

militant woman suffragists, but the official policy is non-militancy'.[47] Group discussions went beyond militancy and suffrage to encompass broader feminist issues such as proposals for female elected officials and female police officers.[48] The group appears to have attracted a range of relatively prominent and radical women.[49] Rose Henderson, for example, who served as Vice Chair of the group, was a middle-class socialist and labour activist, a former probation officer and advocate of criminal justice reform for juveniles. She eventually stood as a candidate for Parliament, became an influential member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and took a leading role in education reform.[50] Another member was Mildred Bain, a disciple of Walt Whitman and supporter of Margaret Sanger, who was engaged in a range of political and social reform causes, and embraced unconventional relationships in her private life.[51] Though the group is almost entirely invisible now, it evidently achieved some international reputation, since in 1914, Charlotte Perkins Gilman visited Montreal to address the group. Caroline Kenney supported the proceedings, which were accompanied by a rendition of the suffragette anthem, *March of the Women*.[52] In September 1914, Caroline Kenney also helped the League stage a performance of Cicely Hamilton's suffrage play *How the Vote Was Won*, in collaboration with the more conservative Montreal Suffrage Association.[53] In unpromising circumstances, Caroline Kenney was able to carve out spaces within which she could claim to be militant, and express support for militancy, while apparently going no further than the act of public speech. This did not inhibit her ability to co-operate or collaborate with, non-militant women.

There has been some historiographical debate over whether militancy was a 'reactive' phenomenon, that is, the only possible response to government intransigence, or a 'provocative' strategy, in which women deliberately courted arrest in order to construct themselves as martyrs.[54] Christopher Bearman, the most recent proponent of the idea that

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[47] It is not mentioned in either of the major accounts, Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada*, or Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred,* and nor have I identified references to the group in more recent scholarship.
[48] '*The Montreal Gazette*, 20 December 1913, p. 11
[49] Charlotte Perkins Gilman Papers, 1846-1961, Folder 13: Letterheads and Lists, http://schlesinger.radcliffe.harvard.edu/onlinecollections/gilman/item/13662545/43 (accessed 1 April 2017)
[50] Peter J. Campbell, *Rose Henderson: A Woman for the People* (Montreal, 2010). Private correspondence with Campbell indicates that he was not able to trace any further evidence of her involvement with the League.
[51] Marylin J. McKay, 'Walt Whitman in Canada: The Sexual Trinity of Horace Traubel and Frank and Mildred Bain', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review,* 30 (2012)
[52] *The Montreal Daily Mail*, 20 March 1914, p. 6. Lucy Delap argues that Perkins Gilman was 'probably still the most influential figure within American feminism in the early years of the twentieth century.' Delap, *Feminist Avant-Garde*, p. 38
[53] *Montreal Gazette*, 30 September 1914, p. 3
[54] On reactive militancy, see, for example, Stanley and Morley, *Emily Wilding Davison*, Cowman, "Stone-Throwing"

militancy was provocative, focuses on the most dramatic incidences of militancy, such as the mass assembly of women in Parliament Square which prompted the events of Black Friday.[55] What Bearman does not acknowledge, however, is that as society policed the boundaries of acceptable behaviour for women so closely, even these far more limited expressions of militancy were likely to be met with a deeply hostile and disproportionate reaction. Jessie Kenney, for example, was 'dragged out of the hall and thrown out of the meeting like a sack of coal', simply for asking a question of Asquith at a political meeting. As a result, she believed that 'the one sure thing that would make a lukewarm sympathiser a converted and lasting Suffragette would be to send them to a Liberal meeting to ask a question'.[56] Selling *Votes for Women* was another especially testing experience. Kitty Marion's account makes it clear that it required tremendous resilience:

> one of the first things I learned was to sell the paper "Votes for Women", on the street. That was the "acid" test. All new recruits who were anxious to "do something" were told the b e s t (sic) thing they could do was to take a bundle of papers and show the "faith that was in them" by standing on the streets with it, even if they didn't sell any, as long as they held up "Votes for Women" to the public and advertised the cause. What a lesson in self-denial, self-abnegation, self-discipline![57]

As Leah Leneman has suggested, selling the newspaper was particularly arduous for women, and presented the risks of militancy – visibility which attracted either apathy or hostility – but few of the potential rewards.[58] Claiming militant identity – either in the local community or the national press – was by no means an easy step for women to take. Annie Kenney's associate Mary Blathwayt was a supporter of the WSPU for many months before feeling bold enough to wear a 'Votes for Women' badge in public, and then only after witnessing a mass arrest.[59]

Expressions of militant identity could run the risk of violence as well as hostility and the Kenneys often risked their safety when appearing in public. A large event that Nell Kenney organised in Nottingham turned into a near riot and resulted in mass arrests.[60] Close proximity of the crowds to the speaker meant that physical injury was a constant danger. Mary Blathwayt kept a record of confrontations in her diary, writing, for example, that

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[55] Bearman, 'Black Friday', see also Bearman, 'An Army', Bearman, 'Suffragette Violence'
[56] Suffragette Outrages!!!!!????? (sic) KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[57] Autobiography of Kitty Marion, p. 173
[58] Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, p. 107, and on the importance attached to paper-selling, see *VFW*, 28 May 1909, p. 718
[59] MB's diary, 14 and 15 February 1908
[60] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18 July 1908, p. 6, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 20 July 1908, p. 2, *London Daily News*, 20 July 1908, p. 6, *Manchester Courier,* p. 7, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 20 July 1908, p. 9, *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, p.1, *VFW*, 23 July 1908, p. 328

'Annie had a fearful time at Poole from the mob her cloak being torn to pieces & a large stone hurt her head (sic)'.[61] To win a fair hearing, Annie attempted to run decoy meetings to draw away rowdy crowds, holding the actual meeting at a distance. This was halted after the trick was discovered and Clara Codd was nearly stabbed in the resulting disturbances.[62] The hostility and violence which women faced for even relatively mild transgressions of the existing gender order indicated to women the disdain and lack of respect which characterised male views of militant women and their cause.

Support from other militant women was therefore vital to enable women to sustain their militant identity in the face of such opposition. As chapter three suggested, Annie was well supported in her work in Bristol, not only because of the substantial contribution of large numbers of volunteers, but also because the Blathwayts offered her the stability and security of a constant home. Nell Kenney was also loved and admired by comrades, in demand as a speaker, sought after by activists who wanted her to start up or consolidate local branches.[63] As a result, Annie could report to Nell that 'both Christabel and Mrs Lawrence think you are a most valuable worker'.[64] Unlike her sister Annie, however, Nell did not benefit from the practical and emotional support of a community around her. Instead, she lived a peripatetic lifestyle as an itinerant worker, constantly on the move.[65] As well as her activities in Nottingham, she worked with Adela Pankhurst in Yorkshire, and Gladys Keevil and Jennie Baines in Birmingham, and in Plymouth. In the run up to the 1908 Hyde Park demonstration, she visited major towns across Yorkshire and beyond, including Dewsbury, Ilkley, Bradford, Gomersal, Leeds, Birstall, Keighley, Shipley, Leicester, Loughborough, Kettering and St Helens, many of which received multiple visits, as well as North West Manchester, Northampton and Peterborough.[66] She had very limited autonomy, and her files contain not only instructions but also chastisements from WSPU headquarters.[67] Annie and Nell Kenney both struggled with the demands of financial management within their branches, but while Annie could depend on Mary Blathwayt to

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[61] EB's diary, 6 August 1909
[62] Codd, *So Rich a Life*, p. 51
[63] Gladys Keevil to Nell Kenney, undated, probably 1909, Glasgow organiser to Nell Kenney, 5 January 1908, F. Burrows to Nell Kenney, 7 January 1908, Sydney Millward to Nell Kenney, 22 June 1908; May Goodliff (?) to Nell Kenney, 9 January 1909, MS-1029, Files 1-5
[64] Annie Kenney to Nell Kenney, undated, MS-1029, File 5
[65] See also Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, pp. 37-64
[66] Nell Kenney's diary, April-May 1908, MS-1029, File 7
[67] Christabel Pankhurst to Nell Kenney, 8 June 1908, MS-1029, File 3

resolve these issues for her, Nell was warned by Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence that overspending would be deducted from her salary.[68]

In 1909, Nell Kenney began to take extended breaks, pleading ill-health, and resigned after developing cataracts, marrying and emigrating soon after. Emotional factors as well as physical symptoms clearly played a role in this decision. Nell wrote to one friend feeling that she 'only grumble[d] nowadays'.[69] Mary Gawthorpe, herself becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the WSPU, told Nell 'I give you this simple test. If you don't feel that you are quite happy in the work don't continue. That happiness is, I know, the crucial test. This work cannot be done – when (?) so demanding, so incessant, so tiring, so strenuous, unless real happiness is at base.'[70] Another friend from Nottingham wrote to her with great sympathy, 'what you must have endured mentally I can't think'.[71] Though Nell Kenney clearly had beloved friends and committed supporters across the country, her network was fragmented and dispersed. Unlike Annie or Jessie, her close friends were rarely near by, and this lack of readily accessible support appears to have made it difficult to manage the demands that were made of an organiser.

This section has indicated that militant identity was not dependent on carrying out particular acts, but rather on a sense of identification with the cause and solidarity with other women who defined themselves as militant. Women such as Caroline Kenney and Mary Blathwayt could self-define as militant and were respected and embraced by the organisation. Militant identity was deepened by the daily business of working for the cause, strengthened by encountering resistance and opposition, and sustained by the support of a local militant community. As Nell Kenney's experience indicates, militant identity was harder to sustain when women were constantly on the move. This chapter will now turn to consider how militant identity and friendship networks supported women as they moved on to more obvious acts of daring militancy.

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[68] Edith How Martin to Nell Kenney, 5 June 1907, Christabel Pankhurst to Nell Kenney, 5 June 1907, Christabel Pankhurst to Nell Kenney, 10 June 1907, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence to Nell Kenney, 3 September 1907, Christabel Pankhurst to Nell Kenney, 8 June 1908, Christabel Pankhurst to Nell Kenney, 13 July 1908, Christabel Pankhurst to Nell Kenney, 17 March 1909, MS-1029, Files 2-4

[69] Muriel Petty to Nell Kenney, 11 April 1909, MS-1029, File 4

[70] Mary Gawthorpe to Nell Kenney, 2 September 1908, MS-1029, File 3

[71] A. Porter to Nell Kenney, 25 April 1909, MS-1029, File 4

Friendship and militancy: Jessie Kenney and the 'Young Hot Bloods'



Figure 10: Jessie Kenney, second from right, with WSPU friends and comrades
Linton Park, Camellia Collection

In the 1920s, Jessie Kenney was asked by an acquaintance why she always used the word 'we' rather than 'I'. This shocked her into realising how far her individual identity was bound up in a sense of belonging to the WSPU. As a member of the organisation, she had never thought to use 'I' and she was saddened to realise that 'I should now be ploughing a very lonely furrow'.[72] Her life was deeply enriched by her relationships to other women and their shared political commitment and only possessed meaning in relation to them.

Jessie Kenney played a crucial role in the development of militant identity, both at a national and local level. One of her major roles within the WSPU was to organise the pageants and processions, which as extensive scholarship has demonstrated, was central to

[72] Notes For Book. Dedicated to Men Only. Preface, KP/JK/4/2/2/5

the construction, articulation and reinforcement of collective militancy, through creativity and artistry, and sophisticated marketing and public relations techniques.[73] Jessie was second only to Flora Drummond in facilitating these events – acting, for example, as Chief Marshal for the 1909 procession in London – and the two women worked closely together to execute Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence's vision.[74] Over just a few weeks in the spring of 1909, for example, *Votes for Women* describes her as the contact point for the advertising corps, as establishing a riding corps to support the advertising corps, as a co-ordinator for flower-sellers during Self Denial Week, and as founding a drum and fife band to be used in processions.[75] She also took an important role in planning and co-ordinating acts of militancy, keeping lists of militant women from different professional occupations in order to target their efforts appropriately, and had a shelf of photographs of Cabinet Ministers in her office so that militant women could effectively identify targets for future action.[76] During the last months of the campaign, Jessie Kenney's primary responsibility – as well as typing up Christabel Pankhurst's work on venereal disease, *The Great Scourge* – was to make regular visits from Paris to the UK to guarantee that their newspaper *The Suffragette* continued to be printed and distributed, despite government efforts at suppression.[77] This work, ensuring that feminist ideas continued to circulate, and to ensure that the militant community had a publication to coalesce around, may have been less high profile than the direct acts of extreme militancy, but was fundamental to the organisation's ability to function. All this both confirmed Jessie Kenney's own identity as a militant and helped to strengthen the militant community.

In their study of Emily Wilding Davison's militancy, Liz Stanley and Anne Morley clearly demonstrate that it can only be understood with reference to her friendship networks and connections to women such as Mary Leigh, Rose Lamartine Yates and Elinor Penn Gaskell.[78] The same is very much true of Jessie Kenney, who was part of a much younger group of women, all committed to ingenious and daring acts within the 'Young Hot Bloods' (YHB). The General Committee of the YHBs included Jessie Kenney, Vera Wentworth, Charlotte Marsh, Vera (Jack) Holme, Adela Pankhurst, Mary Home and Elsa Gye. Elsie Howey appears also to have been a member.[79] Its objectives were both 'militant' and 'social',

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[73] Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, Green, *Spectacular Confessions*, Thomas and Garrett (eds.), *Suffrage and the Arts*
[74] *VFW*, 16 April 1909, p. 551
[75] *VFW*, 18 February 1909, p. 347, 18 February 1909, p. 362, 26 February 1909, p. 378, 9 April 1909, p. 509
[76] Interview with Jessie Kenney, conducted by David Mitchell, 24 March 1964, London, Museum of London Suffragette Fellowship Collection, 73.83/48, The Young Organiser, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[77] Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!,* p. 479
[78] Stanley and Morley, *Emily Wilding Davison*, see also Hughes-Johnson, 'Rose Lamartine Yates'
[79] Anna Kisby calls Elsie Howey 'almost certainly' a member of the YHB. Kisby, 'Vera 'Jack' Holme', p. 126

that is, they would not only support the WSPU 'in any militant action' but would also 'promote a feeling of good comradeship between the younger members of the NWSPU and … form a centre of mutual help and social intercourse'.[80] In later life, Jessie summarised the organisation more succinctly: 'their job was to frighten Asquith'.[81] The only rule underlined to indicate its importance was that members 'must wear the Votes for Women button or badge' as a visual assertion of militant identity. Grace Roe, another member, told Brian Harrison that they were 'a sort of club, we sort of got together and it helped quite a bit I think. It didn't go on for very long and lots of our things were very flash in the pan.' She suggested that its workings were secret even from other members of the WSPU. 'They [unspecified] were so annoyed they didn't know the meaning of the word YHB. Nobody knew except us girls: for years we kept it a secret.'[82] The existence of the group was not a secret: in fact, its meetings were sometimes reported in *Votes for Women* as if it was just another branch and at the 1909 Women's Exhibition, members staged a huge photography exhibition celebrating the history of the militant movement.[83] But this secrecy meant that the scale, extent and significance of YHB activity is largely unknown, except for individual incidents that can be attributed to particular members.[84]

Jessie Kenney's friendship with Vera Wentworth and Elsie Howey had been cemented in prison, where they had bonded over their shared contempt for prison rules on silence and exercise and their subsequent punishment through solitary confinement.[85] This experience forged a friendship grounded in intense loyalty and unquestioning commitment to one another. When Jessie Kenney asked Vera Wentworth to accompany her on a particular adventure, Vera replied 'Any time, anywhere, for anything. Yours to a peppermint, Vera.'[86] Their friendship was lifelong, and Jessie Kenney wrote Vera's obituary for *Calling All Women*.[87] In 1909, Elsie and Vera were both working closely with Annie in the West of

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[80] Copy of YHB Statement, in Rex vs Kerr and others, Cambridge, Schlesinger Library, Records of the Women's Social and Political Union, MC 190
[81] Notes: Interview of Jessie Kenney by Barbara Morgan, KP/JK/8
[82] Interview with Grace Roe, 23 September 1974
[83] See, for example, *VFW*, 4 June 1908, p. 223, 28 January 1909, p. 290, 4 February 1909, p. 306, 18 February 1909, p. 336, 26 February 1909, p. 378 and 383, 9 April 1909, p. 533, 16 April 1909, p. 551, 23 April 1909, p. 586 and on the contribution to the exhibition, 5 March 1909, p. 401, 30 April 1909, p. 612, 14 May 1909, p. 653, 28 May 1909, p. 722, Paxton, *Stage Rights!* p. 30
[84] For brief discussions indicative of the lack of sources, see Raeburn, *Militant Suffragettes*, p. 112 and Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 139. Fern Riddell sees these women as central to the more extreme acts of militancy including bombing and arson, though there is no evidence that Jessie Kenney herself engaged in these tactics. Riddell, *Death In Ten Minutes*, pp. 160-3
[85] Chapter 2, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[86] KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[87] 'Vera Wentworth Obituary', *Calling all Women*, February 1958, p. 7

England.[88] In June, Elsie, Vera and Jessie followed the Prime Minister to Clovelly, to disrupt his holiday. They attempted to interview him as he left church, hid in his garden, followed him on to the golf course and decorated his holiday house with banners and copies of *Votes for Women*.[89] This action was carried out with friends, on behalf of friends. They interrogated Asquith about the prison sentence of another beloved comrade, Patricia Woodlock, and put up signs demanding that she be released.[90] In September, they repeated their efforts with renewed intensity: there was a scuffle on the golf course during which blows were exchanged, and later, the women scaled the walls of the castle where he was staying in order to shout at him and throw stones at the window during dinner.[91] Jessie Kenney found these experiences exhilarating, noting that 'it was a marvel that we did not have a fall or break our necks, but we always came out of these ventures quite unharmed.'[92] Evidently, as Heloise Brown and Krista Cowman have suggested, the 'thrill of militancy' was a central aspect of suffragette 'comradeship'.[93]


"GIVEN AWAY" BY HANDS, FACE, AND CAP:
THE TELEGRAPH-BOY-GIRL.
THE ALBERT HALL: MISS JESSIE KENNEDY, THE SUFFRAGETTE, AS A TELEGRAPH-BOY IN THE DRESS IN WHICH SHE SOUGHT TO GAIN ADMISSION TO THE ALBERT HALL.

Figure 11: Jessie Kenney dressed as a telegraph boy
The Sketch, 15 December 1909, p. 287

[88] *VFW*, 30 April 1909, p. 607. Vera Wentworth was in Plymouth and Elsie Howey in Torquay and Paignton.
[89] *VFW*, 4 June 1909, p. 758
[90] Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!* p. 148
[91] *VFW*, 10 September 1909, p. 1157. This incident prompted the resignation of Emily and Linley Blathwayt from the WSPU but the YHB members were unrepentant. EB's diary, 7 September 1909 and 18 September 1909.
[92] KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[93] Brown and Cowman, 'Suffrage Friendships', p. 129

Members of the YHB sought to outdo each other with act of audacity and daring to demonstrate their commitment to the cause and to one another. Sometimes, this required careful planning: Jessie Kenney famously dressed up as a telegraph boy to attempt to disrupt a meeting by Asquith at the Albert Hall. Though she was unsuccessful, *Votes for Women* called this a 'brilliant enterprise' and a similar tone pervades other accounts of her efforts, presenting her as a heroine with a sense of humour, and as a David taking on a Goliath.[94] On other occasions, she simply seized unexpected opportunities: once chasing the Cabinet Minister John Burns through a tram to lecture him on the treatment of hunger strikers (the conductor told her 'he isn't worth it').[95] Jessie remembered 'times when the voluntary worker's room became one of hilarious laughter when some of the women came in and began to tell the stories of what had happened when they had gone out to do some propaganda work. Una Dugdale as a sandwich man. Vera Holme as Queen Elizabeth (sic).'[96] As Krista Cowman has argued, suffragettes explicitly set out to use humour for a variety of reasons: to draw a contrast with more formal and staid masculine politics, to counter dissent and disruption by hecklers, and simply to let off some of the steam built up by the pressure of intense work in difficult conditions.[97] A good-natured spirit of competitive comradeship thus inspired women to undertake individual acts of militancy which would win the admiration of their friends and colleagues.

In some recent suffrage historiography, such actions have often been interpreted in the light of 'freelance militancy'. This concept, developed by Liz Stanley and Anne Morley, argues that it was the initiative and innovation of individual women which extended the scope of militancy.[98] This challenged the previously dominant understanding of the WSPU, which had emphasised the tight control dictatorial leaders had exercised over supposedly docile followers. More recently, however, Krista Cowman has emphasised the degree to which WSPU activity was organised and co-ordinated from headquarters.[99] Jessie Kenney's relationship to militancy needs to be understood not only in terms of her participation in this daring community, but also her position within the WSPU, occupying, metaphorically and literally, a central role at headquarters. Annie Kenney stated that 'Christabel insisted on Jessie's room being next to hers, as she looked upon her as absolutely indispensable for the

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[94] *VFW*, 17 December 1909, p. 180
[95] *VFW*, 1 October 1909, p. 10. This was the John Burns discussed in chapter two.
[96] KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[97] Krista Cowman, '"Doing Something Silly": The Uses of Humour by the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1914', *International Review of Social History,* 52/S15 (2007)
[98] Stanley and Morley, *Emily Wilding Davison*, Holton, *Suffrage Days*, p. 241, Myall, '"No Surrender!"', p. 74-5, Purvis, '"Deeds, Not Words"', p. 94
[99] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, p. 207

carrying out of her London plans'.[100] Jessie Kenney's more imaginative escapades were always discussed with Christabel Pankhurst. For example, before heading off to tackle Asquith, Jessie 'mentioned to Christabel that we had decided to do something along these lines'.[101] Indeed, sometimes she undertook such actions at Pankhurst's direct suggestion. One of her most famous interventions came in January 1909, when she 'posted' Daisy Solomon and Elspeth McLelland to Downing Street, an incident which typifies suffragette ingenuity and creativity. This was in fact Christabel Pankhurst's idea.[102]

The Kenneys considered discipline as important to the functioning of the WSPU as creativity. Annie Kenney argued that 'never did members have greater liberty of action, providing they kept strictly to the main policy laid down. The discipline the new members had to undergo was good for character building, but once they were proved to be "true blue" they had militant methods given to them to utilise as they thought best.'[103] The right to engage in fearless displays of daring therefore had to be earned. Jessie Kenney was also continually alert to the organisation's standing. In Paris in 1913, she decided not to tour the city by night in case anything might occur which would harm the WSPU's reputation.[104] As this indicates, there seems little use in positing either what Cowman rejects as 'a haphazard collection of sympathetic freelance militants' or a purely obedient army.[105] Women had multiple and overlapping loyalties, but as Jessie Kenney's friendships indicate, they need not be contradictory. Jessie Kenney's loyalty to her friends was not compromised by her relationship to Christabel Pankhurst, nor vice versa. On the contrary, her sense of militant identity was shaped both by her friendship group and by her place within the national organisation.

Identity, belonging and transformative moments of militancy

'At 21 Jessie Kenney went to prison for the Vote,' ran the first line of Jessie Kenney's profile in *Calling All Women*, the newsletter of the Suffragette Fellowship. This was a piece she herself wrote to sum up her contribution to the militant suffrage cause. Placing her incarceration first is indicative of the place which it held in her understanding of herself,

[100] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 87
[101] Clovelly – quite a Hoo-Ha, KP/JK/4/2/2/5
[102] Notable Prisoners and ?illeg? at Sheffield, KP/JK/4/2/2/4, Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 183
[103] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 110
[104] Wylie, *My Life* p. 203
[105] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, p. 207

her role, and the WSPU.[106] Prison sentences were the act which epitomised militancy for the Kenney sisters. As the introduction suggested, many scholars have rightly cautioned against seeing prison, violence and illegal activities as defining the totality of militant practice, and the rest of this chapter will seek to place their prison sentences in context.[107] However, it is clear that arrest and subsequent prison sentences marked the moment when the Kenneys felt they became true suffragettes, and, as Kabi Hartman has shown, this was a fairly common experience.[108] A prison sentence underscored commitment to the cause in a way that no other actions could. This section thus begins by analysing the multiple meanings of a prison sentence and the role that prison played in the formation of collective identity within the WSPU.

Prison sentences held a range of significant meanings for the suffragettes. Arrests were valued for the impact that they made on the press, and by extension, the public and the government. It was understood, especially in the earliest years of the campaign, that women being sent to prison captured the public imagination to an extraordinary degree, an effect which was only intensified when women were sent to prison in large numbers. As Jessie stated, 'a few days in prison had done what years and years of patient work had failed to do'.[109] Prison sentences often aroused intense sympathy for women prisoners. When Jessie Kenney was arrested, for example, her friends and supporters in Woolwich, where she frequently worked, were outraged. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence was able to capitalise on this by organising a rally and then a reception which brought supporters and observers together.[110] Militancy demanded an emotional response from the observer, and prison sentences were expected to generate compassion rather than condemnation. Notoriety made former prisoners deeply interesting. After Annie Kenney was released from prison for the second time in June 1906, she went immediately to campaign in Scotland, where, she noted, 'no other person … would have proved such a useful asset … as I, owing to my having been in prison twice. I repeatedly reminded the audience that I knew what I was talking about.'[111] At this early stage of the campaign, a prison sentence was both novel and deeply shocking, and was hugely effective in achieving the suffragettes' goal of raising public awareness of the cause.

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[106] *Calling All Women*, February 1964, p. 3
[107] Nym Mayhall, 'Creating the 'Suffragette Spirit'', Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, Hilda Kean, 'Searching for the Past in Present Defeat: The Construction of Historical and Political Identity in Inter-War British Feminism', *Women's History Review,* 3/1 (1994)
[108] Hartman, "What Made Me a Suffragette"
[109] KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[110] Into the Crucible Jessie No. 2, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[111] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 101

However, a prison sentence held far wider significance within the organisation. First, it was a key mechanism by which women proclaimed that they were militant. Jessie Kenney was keen to go to prison as soon as possible and put her name down as soon as she was allowed. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence had instructed her that she was not to go to prison until she was twenty-one, presumably to avoid the charge that the suffragettes were leading young and vulnerable women astray.[112] Jessie Kenney's first arrest during a deputation to Parliament in July 1908 and her appearance – on the back of a hansom cab – was particularly noted in the subsequent press coverage. Christabel Pankhurst reported to Nell Kenney that Jessie 'was very anxious to go to the demonstration, and went to prison very cheerfully'.[113] 'Of course I know that the fiery little Annie's sister would go like a shot to Holloway when she came to London,' Teresa Billington-Greig wrote to Nell when she was arrested herself. 'I am proud of you. I only regret not being there in London to share the sacrifice and the glory'.[114] As this indicates, women rejected the shame and stigma which would have usually been attached to prison, and transformed the experience into an assertion of pride. Jessie Kenney wrote that 'our critics might make acid comments about the "showmanship" of the WSPU but our women were not going to creep out of Holloway like criminals'.[115] Proving their commitment to the cause through a prison sentence was, the Kenneys believed, an essential precursor to full participation in the organisation, earning the right to trust and opportunities. Jessie, for example, attributed Nell's advancement in the WSPU to her willingness to go to prison. Having proved her commitment to the organisation with a prison sentence, Nell was appointed an official organiser on her release.[116]

Secondly, prison not only demonstrated but also intensified militant identity. As prisoners' secretary at WSPU headquarters, liaising between prisoners and their families, Jessie witnessed the powerful and transformative effect that prison frequently had on women.[117] It was often a watershed moment which only confirmed their commitment to the cause and strengthened their identity as militants:

> There is one thing that prison does for you, if you are in the second division as we were and treated as common criminals. If you have any sensitivity in you, it will cleanse you of all smugness and self satisfaction (sic). You can never be satisfied again with just doing the ordinary good works, of friendly pancake throwing.

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[112] Chapter 2, 6, KP/JK/4/2/2/4. They had been subject to particular criticism after the arrest of Dora Thewliss, the 'baby suffragette', in March 1907. Liddington, *Rebel Girls*, pp. 122-134
[113] Christabel Pankhurst to Nell Kenney, 3 July 1908, MS-1029, File 3
[114] Teresa Billington-Greig to Nell Kenney, 24 February 1907, MS-1029, File 6
[115] KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[116] Nell, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[117] Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, p. 110-2

> Suffragettes whose lives had been lived in security, the only demands being made upon them was social etiquette, the doing of little good deeds in a philanthropic way, asked themselves afterwards "What is the use of gentility if it cannot stand the fire." Being one amongst the many of the "lowiest (sic) and the lost" it brought home to many of us the feeling of how intolerable it would be if those prison gates were not opened, and if by some nightmare circumstance, we could be one of those branded when leaving prison, of having lost our good name, our livelihood, perhaps our friends and we were turned out to face the world alone handicapped.[118]

For all the bravado the sisters sometimes displayed about prison, and for all their acceptance of its necessity, they dreaded the experience. Annie approached each sentence with heavy anticipation, writing that prison 'is a death-trap to aspiration and inspiration. I was impressed by a fear that often swept over me, clutching at my heart and making it heavy.'[119] Jessie too found prison a desperately bleak experience. 'Although we know that there are people doing all they can outside, and that we shall be met and taken to a breakfast in our honour, there is a feeling that perhaps something may go wrong and we may not get out again.'[120] While the government aimed to use prison as a deterrent, it often led to greater determination, deeper immersion in the movement, and further acts of militancy.

Thirdly, serving a prison sentence was an expression of women's commitment to each other. Women were genuinely moved by the prospect of their comrades suffering behind bars. In 1908, Mary Blathwayt noted after a meeting that 'Annie Kenney said that she was ready to go to prison for 3 months. For a few minutes after this Mrs Pethick Lawrence, who is generally all smiles, nearly broke down. She had to lean forwards & cover her eyes with her handkerchiefs.'[121] Annie Kenney celebrated suffragette incarceration as the ultimate display of female solidarity and sacrifice:

> They [the public and the government] see women going to prison for the sake of other women. They see women tortured to save other women … women trusting each other, inspiring each other. This wonderful spirit of loyalty among women is one of the finest signs of our day.[122]

Prison sentences were supposed to strengthen the suffragette community, inspiring devotion and sacrifice from those who remained outside. Annie Kenney made this explicit in a 1913 speech, instructing them to 'Keep the flag of Liberty flying outside and we will keep the torch burning inside'.[123] She argued that since:

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[118] My Imprisonment, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[119] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 97
[120] Prison Prison Prison, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[121] MB's diary, 12 February 1908
[122] Documents found by Det. Inspr. Hawkins on 30 April 1913, in the front bedroom on 3rd Floor of 19, Mecklenburgh Square, WC, occupied by Miss Annie Kenney, London, TNA, ex. 107, DPP 1/19
[123] Documents found by Det. Inspr. Hawkins, on 30 April 1913, in Mecklenburgh Square, ex. 107, DPP1/19

> people who are in the vanguard of militancy are prepared to give everything and to do all we can to help the movement, you must also be brave and stand by your principles, even though we do not call upon you to go to prison or to suffer torture at the hands of the present government.[124]

Violent acts of militancy were not only a response to the government's refusal to grant the vote, but also an expression of horror at its treatment of their friends and comrades. For example, it is frequently noted that Mary Richardson's infamous slashing of the 'Rokeby Venus' in 1913 was a response to the treatment of Emmeline Pankhurst. Interestingly, Richardson's own account makes it clear that it was in fact Annie Kenney's outpouring of grief and concern for Emmeline Pankhurst that inspired her to act.[125] As the campaign intensified, acts of militancy were increasingly as much an expression of outrage as an attempt to further the cause. Constance Lytton's actions as Jane Warton were a response to her horror at the force-feeding of Selina Martin and Laura Ainsworth; Emily Wilding Davison's initiation of arson was a response to the injustice of Mary Leigh's perceived harsh prison sentence and Mary Gawthorpe's window-smashing was a response to the prison treatment of William Ball, who himself had been protesting against the treatment of Alan MacDougall.[126]

One expression of that moral outrage can be seen in the attempts to exert moral pressure on the Church of England during the last months of the campaign. This is an indication of the extent to which militant identity was increasingly framed as moral superiority to all other forms of authority: political, legal and religious. Throughout 1913, women had engaged in disruptive interruptions of church services throughout the country, praying loudly during moments of quiet for Annie Kenney and other suffragette prisoners. As Krista Cowman has argued, this tactic indicates how women continued to use non-violent protest right until the end of the campaign and simply conceiving of an 'escalation' in violence fails to capture the ongoing diversity of militancy. The only violence used in these instances was against the women themselves, who were summarily ejected from the church services.[127] The prominence given to this campaign in *The Suffragette* throughout 1913 suggests that Christabel Pankhurst was very supportive of these efforts, especially since it enabled women who did not themselves feel able to carry out extreme militancy to vocally express their support for those who did. Christabel Pankhurst believed that individual

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[124] 'A Cowardly Government', *The Suffragette*, 31 October 1913, p. 53
[125] Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance*, pp. 162-5
[126] Jenkins, *Constance Lytton*, pp. 143-155, Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!* p. 278 and 289
[127] Krista Cowman, 'What Was Suffragette Militancy? An Exploration of the British Example', in Irma Sulkunen, Sija-Leena Nevala-Nurmi, and Pirjo Markkola (eds.), *Suffrage, Gender and Citizenship: International Perspectives on Parliamentary Reforms* (Newcastle, 2009), pp. 307-8.

efforts might intensify this collective pressure and suggested to Annie Kenney that she might attempt to seek sanctuary at Lambeth Palace with the Archbishop of Canterbury.[128] The Archbishop denied her claims, however, and instead telephoned Scotland Yard who promptly arrested her. WSPU members wrote several letters to the Archbishop expressing their outrage at this decision. 'In refusing sanctuary to Annie Kenney, you have driven away your Lord from your doorstep,' one wrote, suggesting that 'if Annie Kenney dies you cannot acquit yourself of the awful responsibility of her death.'[129]

These militant acts were outpourings of love and loyalty which suffragettes claimed were unstoppable in their power. In 1912, Annie Kenney suggested that 'the power to prevent militancy had entirely passed out of the hands of the Union … The conspiracy trial, the physical and mental agony of the heroic women in prison, and the introduction of the Manhood Suffrage bill have naturally and inevitably roused the women who believe in militancy'.[130] Militancy had thus become something uncontrollable and all attempts to deter women would fail. Not even death could stop them: in fact, it would have the opposite effect. At a speech in 1913, Annie Kenney said that if one woman died in prison:

> Militants will be made by the hundreds. If the people hear that the dead body of one militant woman has passed out of the prison gates they will have something aroused within them that has never been aroused before. The militant movement will only have begun.[131]

Here, then, while the ultimate act of militancy is posited as martyrdom, it gained its power not just as an act of individual sacrifice but from the collective response which would inevitably follow.

Though the Kenneys attributed hugely significant meaning to their prison sentences, it is notable that in comparison with many of their friends and comrades, they were rarely imprisoned themselves. In fact, Jessie and Nell served just one sentence each, while Annie served four – in 1905, twice in 1906 and in 1908 – before being convicted in 1912 of conspiracy and serving multiple imprisonments under the terms of the 'Cat and Mouse' Act. This is a stark contrast with many of the most notorious suffragettes, who achieved this status through frequent prison sentences: Emily Wilding Davison and Kitty Marion were both arrested ten times, Mary Leigh and Mary Richardson, nine. Some of Jessie Kenney's

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[128] Kenney, *Memories*, pp. 248-250. This was attempted with the Bishop of London, though also to no avail.
[129] Alice Kidd to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 29 May 1914, London, Lambeth Palace Archives, Davidson 516 159-161
[130] *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 8 July 1912, p. 9
[131] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 24 February 1913, p. 5

closest associates in the Young Hot Bloods repeated these feats: Vera Wentworth was arrested ten times and Elsie Howey, seven. Jessie and Annie's beloved friend Constance Lytton, only an active suffragette for three years, nevertheless managed to serve four prison sentences.[132]

This discrepancy can be attributed partly to their own frequent ill-health, but also to their huge significance within the organisation. Krista Cowman has argued that increasingly, organisers who had originally been selected and celebrated for their daring were required to step back and let less valuable members of the organisation take the lead in the militant acts which led to prison sentences.[133] When Jessie Kenney informed Christabel Pankhurst of her plans to tackle Asquith at Clovelly during the summer of 1909, Pankhurst made her priorities very clear. 'Christabel's answer was invariably the same. Do not get arrested, do what you can to try and have a chat with him but do not get arrested.'[134] Neither Jessie nor Annie Kenney was permitted to attend what became known as Black Friday in 1910: the organisation could not afford to have all its leading figures in prison at once. This may well be why they do not appear to have engaged in the more extreme practices associated with the later phases of militancy. Strategies such as arson inevitably risked longer sentences and, after Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence had left the WSPU, Christabel Pankhurst was living in exile and Emmeline Pankhurst was often in prison herself, the WSPU could not afford to lose yet another prominent member to a sustained sentence. Indeed, it is significant that when Annie Kenney was sentenced in 1913, it was the first time that she had not set out to deliberately court arrest. Krista Cowman's case study of Dora Marsden demonstrates that not all organisers followed orders to stay out of prison and some continued to act on their own initiative by courting arrest.[135] The Kenneys, however, reluctantly acquiesced in this policy, while doing their utmost to indicate their ongoing commitment to the cause. Yet the Kenneys' sense of their own identity as militants meant they felt an acute sense of loyalty to other women. In 1908, Emily Blathwayt commented that 'Poor A was very anxious about the result of the "raid", the first time she has not been in one, & all her best friends are there'.[136] Annie and Jessie were deeply concerned that they might be perceived as shirking

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132 Home Office File 45/24665: Suffragettes: Amnesty of August 1914, Index of Women Arrested, 1906-1914, The National Archives. Accessed through ancestry.com. *England, Suffragettes Arrested, 1906-1914* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015. (accessed 1 February 2016)
133 Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, pp. 154-162
134 Clovelly – quite a Hoo-Ha, KP/JK/4/2/2/5
135 Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, pp. 154-162
136 EB's diary, 30 June 1908

their responsibilities, acting hypocritically by demanding other women endure prison, or simply letting their beloved comrades down.

Despite the historiographical attention given to the role of violence, especially against property, in the later part of the suffragettes' campaign, this was not part of the Kenneys' own practice of militancy. There is no evidence, for example, that any of the sisters took part in the mass violence involved in window-breaking, collaborative plots such as those involved in bombing, nor individual acts of violence such as arson. Nevertheless, they clearly accepted the escalation in tactics as not only essential but the only means through which they could achieve their ends. As Annie Kenney wrote in 1912:

> We see no possibility of increasing the effect of "constitutional" agitation which for vigour and magnitude is unequally by any other agitation of the present day. The Prime Minister does not even admit that any such agitation exists. We see no possibility of increasing the effect of "constitutional" agitation. Bigger meetings are impossible, because the bigger halls have already proved too small to hold suffrage audiences. We repeat that expansion on the constitutional side is not possible, and if it were possible how could it prove effective? It is, in fact, only in the direction of militancy that any real advance can be made.[137]

The Kenneys tended to use 'extreme militancy' as synonymous with 'violent militancy' and believed that increasingly dramatic acts were necessary to keep their cause continually in the public eye. As a result, Annie Kenney argued, in a speech which was used against her in her conspiracy trial, that militancy had become a moral obligation:

> Every woman ought never to go out without a hammer in her pocket and never to go out without at least touching [torching] one pill box … it is the duty of every suffragist and suffragette to go on attacking every pillar box throughout the country, and breaking every window they can without being caught.[138]

During the campaign, none of the Kenneys expressed any doubts about any aspect of militancy. They argued that without militant methods, the public, the press and the government were simply not interested in the issue of women's enfranchisement. The failure of the 'constitutionalists' to achieve their objective despite many years of campaigning, together with the attention that militancy attracted, were proof of this belief. 'As militancy was the one thing that was the nearest to "woman bites dog" the Press could get every kind of militancy reported [,] but not the patient work of educating the men of the country,' Jessie Kenney wrote, continuing:

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[137] Annie Kenney, 'The Policy of the Militants,' *The Guardian*, 21 August 1912, consulted in London, LSE Library Collections, 7/EWD/G/2/3

[138] Mr Bodkin's Opening Speech for the Prosecution, Rex vs Kerr & others, London, TNA, DPP 1/19

> Very little of our propaganda work was reported – only our militancy, and the biassed [sic) way in which much of our work was reported. Therefore it seemed an incitement to do militancy.[139]

Moreover, according to Jessie, militant women were only doing what they had been told to by the former Prime Minister. 'Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was so violently in sympathy [with our cause] that he actually instigated the militant methods for the conversion of his Cabinet. "Make yourselves a nuisance," he told the ladies deputation and they obeyed him like lambs,' she wrote in her autobiography.[140] Annie Kenney agreed, attributing the rise of the militant movement to the hypocrisy of politicians who supported the principle of votes for women, but made no moves to secure them.[141] When the militant campaign was suspended during attempts to pass the Conciliation Bill, she wrote that 'the public were not half so interested in us when we went back to constitutional methods'.[142] Militancy, then, was necessary in order to establish themselves in the public consciousness. Women could not be blamed for militant acts: they were simply responding to demand. In her autobiography, Annie Kenney continued to argue that militancy was both the necessary and sole route to success, given the context:

> Was it worth the trouble, the sacrifices made, the suffering endured? To me it was worth it all, as I believed extreme militancy necessary. Whether it could have been run in a different way it is difficult to say. Wars and revolutions are made up of surprises, hasty retreats, quick marches. This naturally destroys order for the time being, and yet there is at the head one who sees order where those in the midst of the fight see but confusion. Was extreme Militancy right, even though it was apparently justified? That is a question again which raises deep unsolved problems of Ethics. Each person can only answer the question as he sees or understands it. The day will come when War and Revolution will not only be thought wrong, but will not be necessary. But that time is not now…[143]

However, although during the campaign, Annie Kenney had been a vocal advocate of attacks on property in general and arson in particular, in her autobiography she was more ambivalent. She admitted that 'I was thankful when the burning days were over. I felt they were necessary, but I was never quite happy about them'.[144] Jessie Kenney too expressed concern about particular tactics, and was highly critical of the thirst strike. She described it as 'unmoral' (sic) and 'a sin against the body' writing that 'personally, if we had our time

[139] KP/JK/4/2/2/4, KP/JK/4/2/2/5
[140] KP/JK/4/2/2/5
[141] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 44
[142] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 150
[143] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 189
[144] Kenney, *Memories*, p 218

over again, knowing what I do now about the physiological effect of the thirst strike, I should have opposed it with all my heart and will'.[145] Yet during the campaign none of these doubts were publicly expressed. Brian Harrison has read this absence of dissent as symptomatic of the autocratic nature of the organisation, claiming that 'with companionship comes the pressure towards orthodoxy, the generation of a loyalty so intense as to stifle independent thought'.[146] Harrison here overstates the case. As Krista Cowman has argued, and as this chapter has indicated, throughout the campaign women continued to exercise considerable judgement about how far they were prepared to go for the cause, non-violent acts continued to be considered a vital part of militancy, and women did not have to undertake any particular act in order to define themselves as militant. However, Harrison is right to identify the central significance of belonging, solidarity and community within the militant suffrage movement. All these were crucial elements in the composition of suffragette identity, and the Kenneys' ongoing loyalty cannot be understood without this. Militancy was not just 'what they did', but 'who they were', and to question the value of militancy would be to question their whole lives. Chapter six will further analyse how militant identity continued to structure the Kenneys' sense of self long after the WSPU had ceased work.

Conclusion

> In her autobiography, Annie Kenney wrote that:
>
> The first part of the Movement was the genuine constructive part, the real Women's Movement. The structure was complete but the tower was lacking. The tower was built by the extreme Militants. They had a building upon which to work, but their task was more dangerous than that of the hundreds of thousands of women who had been employed in making the structure grand and imposing. Each group played its part and played it nobly; they were complementary to each other.[147]

Annie and her sisters clearly valued constructive militancy as equal in significance to more 'extreme' militancy. Yet writing to Grace Roe in the 1960s, Jessie Kenney expressed her annoyance that 'generally the people who [write about suffragettes] know so little about the suffragettes only their militancy'.[148] She clearly recognised, and was frustrated by, the gulf

[145] CHRISTABEL Kenneys of Shelderslow, KP/JK/4/2/2/8, Christabel and the ending of the Movement, KP/JK/4/2/2/8, Annie and I, The Three Phases of the Pioneer, KP/JK/4/2/2/8
[146] Harrison, 'The Act of Militancy', p. 42
[147] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 190
[148] Jessie Kenney to Grace Roe, 28 November 1967, London, LSE Library Collections, 7JCC/B/Survey/16

between the narrow range of acts which had come to define militancy and the rich range of meanings which were part of being a suffragette.

Therefore, understanding militancy as an identity not only helps to break the association between violence and militancy but also provides an inclusive means to appreciate the range and depth of practices which militancy encompassed. This more comprehensive understanding of militancy also better reflects its meaning to militant women themselves. A narrow focus on violence and imprisonment, or even on spectacle and processions, presents militancy as a series of acts and incidents. Militant women, however, considered themselves militant all the time, even when not engaged in 'militant' acts, and even if they *never* engaged in supposedly militant acts. Moreover, conceptualising militancy as a collective, rather than individual, identity places militancy within the context of women's relationships to one another. Chapter five now turns to examine how this network of feminist mutual support operated in a very different setting.

Chapter Five: 'It was a most difficult problem that Miss Kenney had to face': ideals and networks in the careers of Jane and Caroline Kenney[1]

This chapter argues that the lives of Jane and Caroline Kenney offers new insight into the relationships between suffrage, feminism and educational reform. Throughout their professional careers, these women contributed to, and sometimes led, a series of schools pioneering innovative and experimental forms of education. Analysing the ambitions and rhetoric around the progressive educational projects which Jane and Caroline Kenney were associated with reveals both how feminists and reformers conceived of education and its broader place in society, and how they sought to put their ideas into practice.

As feminist teachers, Jane and Caroline Kenney were part of a long tradition of reformers who saw education as perhaps the most significant tool to advance women's equality. Feminist reformers had long campaigned for increased access to schooling, education reform, and improved pay and status for female teachers.[2] Through their work, Jane and Caroline Kenney sought new answers to old questions about the value, purpose and nature of education, in response to the changing political, social and cultural context. This chapter also suggests that pragmatism as well as principle was necessarily central to their careers. Different priorities are evident at different times in their lives, illustrating not only the changing debates around education but how feminist teachers made decisions grounded in necessity and opportunity as well as informed by idealism and personal desire. Finally, this chapter demonstrates how feminist teachers used the personal connections developed within the suffrage movement to further their political vision and professional careers. The international network of like-minded reformers which they constructed and navigated was thus an instrument of their own social mobility as well as social reform.

The hugely significant links between the teaching profession and the women's movement on both sides of the Atlantic have long been recognised. The social acceptability of teaching as a profession for women in the nineteenth century meant that large numbers of women became teachers: in turn, by the twentieth century this meant that teachers had developed important professional networks, a coherent professional identity, and a strong set of professional demands.[3] For these teachers, as for many women, personal lives,

[1] Montessori Free Demonstration School, 1715 Fifteenth Street NW, Amsterdam, Montessori Archives
[2] June Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England* (Milton Keynes, 1991), Pam Hirsch and Mary Hilton, *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Progress* (London, 2000), Laura Schwartz, 'Feminist Thinking on Education in Victorian England', *Oxford Review of Education,* 37/5 (2011)
[3] Christina de Bellaigue, 'The Development of Teaching as a Profession for Women Before 1870', *The Historical Journal,* 44/4 (2001), Geraldine G. Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America*

professional careers, and political activism were inextricably linked.[4] As many scholars have identified, teachers therefore played a central role in the campaign for women's suffrage and many, politicised by their experiences in the workplace, joined the militant WSPU.[5] Indeed, Christabel Pankhurst made 'a special appeal to teachers' believing 'teachers who had had a fine education were just the women who ought to take a leading part in this movement for women's emancipation'.[6] Within the historiography, however, teachers' interests in suffrage are largely framed in terms of demands for equal pay, workplace rights and professional status. Hilda Kean notes that some teachers were simultaneously interested in pedagogical reform, but this is not the focus of her study. Indeed, she argues that 'the job of teaching children in the classroom did not seem to occupy their attention with the same intensity as the debates surrounding their role as activists for the feminist cause'.[7]

This chapter offers a rather different perspective. Caroline, and especially Jane Kenney, were preoccupied with the purpose and nature of education, and innovative educational reforms, and these interests were inseparable from their identification with women's rights, feminism and suffrage. The Kenney family and their activist associates understood Jane and Caroline's interest in education as an equally urgent and valid political

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(Baltimore, 2014), Tanya Fitzgerald and Elizabeth M. Smyth (eds.), *Women Educators, Leaders and Activists: Educational Lives and Networks*, Kathleen Weiler, 'Reflections on Writing a History of Women Teachers', in Kathleen Weiler and Sue Middleton (ed.), *Telling Women's Lives: Narratives in the History of Women's Education* (Buckingham, 1999), John L. Rury, *Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling* (London, 2009), Karen Leroux, '"Lady Teachers" and the Genteel Roots of Teacher Organisation in Gilded Age Cities', *History of Education Quarterly,* 46/2 (2006)

[4] Jane Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1999), Stanley Holton, '"Average Woman"'

[5] Hilda Kean, *Deeds Not Words: The Lives of Suffragette Teachers* (London, 1990), Alison Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900-39* (Manchester, 1996), Dina M. Copelman, *Class Acts: London's Women Teachers 1870-1930* (London, 1996) are the most extensive studies of these links in the UK, see also Trouve-Finding, 'Unionised Women Teachers and Women's Suffrage', in Myriam Boussahba-Bravard (ed.), *Suffrage Outside Suffragism* (Basingstoke, 2007). Kathleen Weiler, 'Reflections on Writing a History of Women Teachers', *Harvard Educational Review,* 67/4 (1997) provides a useful summary of the American context and changing historiographical debates, Patricia Carter, *'Everybody's Paid but the Teacher': The Teaching Profession and the Women's Movement* (New York, 2002) offers a more recent survey; see also Patricia Carter, 'Becoming the 'New Woman': The Equal Rights Campaigns of New York City Schoolteachers, 1900-1920', in Richard J. Altenbaugh (ed.), *The Teacher's Voice: A History of Teaching in Twentieth Century America* (London, 1992). Prominent WSPU members who had been teachers included Laura Ainsworth, Rachel Barrett, Teresa Billington-Greig, Edith New, Mary Leigh, Annot Robinson, Dora Marsden, Adela Pankhurst, Mary Gawthorpe and Emily Wilding Davison. See Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, pp. 15-6. There have been studies of many of these women including Myall, '"No Surrender!"', Les Garner, *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit, Dora Marsden 1882-1960* (Aldershot, 1990) Verna Coleman, *Adela Pankhurst: The Wayward Suffragette, 1885-1961* (Melbourne, 1996), Cowman, 'A Footnote in History?' and on Mary Gawthorpe in Holton, *Suffrage Days*. Women teachers and educators could, of course, also take on prominent activist roles outside specifically feminist contexts on both the national and international stage: see, for example, Siân Roberts, "In the Margins of Chaos': Francesa Wilson and Education for All in the 'Teachers Republic' ', *History of Education,* 35/6 (2006), Kate Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley* (New York, 2005), Emily Baughan, '"Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!" Empire, Internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in Inter-War Britain', *Historical Research,* 86/231 (2013)

[6] *VFW,* 14 October 1910, p. 26

[7] Kean, *Deeds Not Words*, p. 7

and social cause. In fact, within the Kenney family, it was believed that 'Jennie felt most strongly about the way in which women were treated and exploited,' and that she had 'strong views about the inferior position of women in the state and the rights they were denied as citizens'.[8] Yet though Jane Kenney was a strong supporter of women's suffrage, her social and political vision of equality was evidently much wider. As Lucy Delap has argued, it is misleading to equate feminism entirely with suffrage across this period, and it is important to identify the many and varied ways in which women worked for equality and reform.[9]

The international exchange of feminist ideas – in transatlantic, European, and global contexts – has become a source of increasing historical interest.[10] Scholars have drawn attention to the ways that informal links and personal connections laid the foundations for these exchanges, studied how these links were formalised in international institutions, and highlighted the problematic ways that attitudes to class, race, nation and empire disrupted possibilities for a truly international sisterhood.[11] Debates were not only centred around suffrage and other specifically feminist ideas, but encompassed a broad range of international issues, from socialism and the labour movement, to pacifism and humanitarianism.[12] Scholars have also become increasingly interested in the ways that

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[8] Kenney, *Recollections*

[9] Delap, *Feminist Avant-Garde*, p. 5.

[10] See, for example, Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism*, Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, Delap, *Feminist Avant-Garde*, June Hannam, 'International Dimensions of Women's Suffrage: 'At the Crossroads of Several Interlocking Identities", *Women's History Review,* 3-4/14 (2005), Patricia Greenwood Harrison, *Connecting Links: The British and American Woman Suffrage Movements, 1900-1914* (London, 2000), Melanie Daly and Caroline Nolan (eds.), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Ian Fletcher, '"Women of the Nations Unite!" Transnational Suffragism in the United Kingdom, 1912-1914', in Ian Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine (eds.), *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race* (London, 2000), Marie Sandell, 'Regional Versus International: Women's Activism and Organisation Spaces in the Inter-War Period', *The International History Review,* 33/4 (2011), Sandra Holton and Robert J. Holton, 'From the Particular to the Global: Some Empirical, Epistemological and Methodological Aspects of Microhistory with Regard to a Women's Rights Network ', in Karen Fricker and Ronit Lentin (eds.), *Performing Global Networks* (Newcastle, 2007)

[11] Christine Bolt, 'British and American Feminism: Personal, Intellectual, and Practical Connections', in Sylvia Palestschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (ed.), *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: a European Perspective* (Palo Alto, 2004), Mineke Bosch and Annemarie Kloosterman (ed.), *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1902-1942*, Jane Marcus, 'Transatlantic Sisterhood: Labor and Suffrage Links in the Letters of Elizabeth Robins and Emmeline Pankhurst', *Signs,* 3/3 (1978), Helen Dampier, "Going on With our Little Movement in the Hum Drum Way Which Alone is Possible in a Land Like This': Olive Scheiner and Suffrage Networks in Britain and South Africa, 1905-1913', *Women's History Review,* 25/4 (2016), Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, 'Forging Feminist Identity in an International Movement: A Collective Identity Approach to Twentieth-Century Feminism', *Signs,* 24/2 (1999). Important critiques of these networks have been put forward by, for example, Antoinette Burton, *British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (London, 1994), Sandell, *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism: Identity and Sisterhood Between the World Wars*, Sumita Mukherjee, 'The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian Women and their Leadership of a Pan-Asian Feminist Organisation', *Women's History Review,* 26/3 (2017)

[12] See, for example, Susan Pedersen, 'Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations', *History Workshop Journal,* 66 (2008), Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998)

educators participated in transnational debates, constructing professional and friendship networks through which ideas about the purpose of education were discussed across national boundaries, often inflected with the feminist ideas which characterised the profession.[13] The Kenneys' access to such a network was one of their most significant resources, and in combination with their own expertise, experience and reputation, it enabled them to pursue independence and self-determination as well as their educational and social reform ambitions. This chapter therefore situates these women and their work in a broader international network of feminists and reformers.

Jane and Caroline Kenney's lives are far less well documented than the lives of Annie, Jessie and Nell Kenney. This is not because Jane and Caroline considered their work less significant or important than their sisters'. On the contrary, though they were not autobiographers, they meticulously preserved details of their careers, self-consciously recording their achievements. Unfortunately, these records were destroyed after their deaths by a family member.[14] This relative lack of material has inevitably led to Jane and Caroline Kenney's exclusion from the historical record. For example, the Tower Cressy project has sometimes been attributed to Annie and Jessie, rather than Jane and Caroline.[15] Some of the conclusions in this chapter are therefore necessarily tentative and speculative. For example, while it is possible to analyse the effects of their network in action – in terms of their geographic and career moves – it has not been possible to identify exactly how the network itself was constructed, nor the terms on which it was based. Similarly, though it can be inferred that Jane and Caroline Kenney and their American employer, Jessica Cosgrave, may

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13 Kay Whitehead, 'Transnational Connections in Early Twentieth-Century Women Teachers' Work', *Paedagogica Historia,* 48/3 (2012), Lynne Trethewey and Kay Whitehead, 'Beyond Centre and Periphery: Transnationalism in Two Teacher/Suffragettes' Work', *History of Education,* 32/5 (2003), Kay Whitehead, 'Mary Gutteridge: Transnational Careering in the Field of Early Childhood Education', in Tanya Fitzgerald and Elizabeth M. Smyth (ed.), *Women Educators, Leaders and Activists: Educational Lives and Networks* (Basingstoke, 2014), Christine von Oertzen, *Science, Gender and Internationalism: Women's Academic Networks, 1917-1955* (Basingstoke, 2014), Anne Meis Knupfer and Christine A. Woyshner, *The Educational Work of Women's Organizations, 1890-1960* (Basingstoke, 2008), Kristen D. Nawrotzki, "Like Sending Coals to Newcastle:' Impressions From and Of the Anglo-American Kindergarten Movements', *Paedagogica Historia,* 43/2 (2015), Peter Cunningham, 'Innovators, Networks and Structures: Towards a Prosopography of Progressivism', *History of Education,* 30/5 (2001), Joyce Goodman, 'Cosmopolitan Women Educators, 1920-1939: Inside/Outside Activism and Abjection', *Paedagogica Historia,* 46/1-2 (2010), Joyce Goodman, 'Working for Change Across International Borders: The Association of Headmistresses and Education for International Citizenship', *Paedagogica Historia,* 43/1 (2007), Anne Taylor Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten, Education and Women's Movements in Germany and the United States* (Oxford, 2017)

14 Mary Kenney, the niece who inherited the papers, acknowledged that future Montessori scholars would probably approach her for material and felt she was 'burning history'- but did not have space to retain the collection. Mary Kenney to Jessie Kenney, 11 November 1964, KP/JK/3

15 Bartley, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, p. 195, who takes her cue from Ethel Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden* (London, 1934) p. 243. Jessie and Annie both lived at Tower Cressy for a time, but they were not involved in running the school. Jessie Kenney could barely remember any relevant details when she came to write her autobiography, and only the visits of notable individuals stood out. See for example, Jessie Kenney to Princess Alice, 4 January 1964, KP/JK/3

have been drawn together through their shared interest in suffrage as well as their commitment to education, it is not possible to establish how, when, and where this came about. The lack of personal testimony means that it is only possible to speculate about the women's subjective experience and self-understanding.[16]

Despite these restrictions, it has nevertheless been possible to reconstruct a great deal of Jane and Caroline Kenneys' career trajectories. This research therefore breaks new ground in identifying new links between suffrage activism and movements for education reform. Though at least one scholar has correctly identified that the Jane Kenney working as a Montessori teacher in Washington DC in the early twentieth century was a sister of the more famous Annie Kenney, no previous work has been done to consider the significance of this link, to trace their subsequent careers, or to analyse the broader implications of these connections.[17]

Yet as Sheila Rowbotham has recently argued, though it is often difficult to establish the connections and relationships of forgotten figures who embarked on transatlantic journeys and careers, doing so can open up revealing new perspectives on established movements.[18] Scholars have often used a biographical approach to reconstruct and analyse how women teachers and educationalists experienced and confronted institutional, social, economic and political constraints to develop what were often very rewarding careers.[19] Others have followed Linda Eisenmann's call to focus on women's institution-building, in order to highlight their capacity for resistance and agency outside mainstream institutions.[20] The analysis which follows draws on both these approaches to reveal the complex and intricate ways that these women simultaneously pursued their political vision and rewarding

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[16] For an analysis of the different ways in which teachers might construct their subjectivities and self-understanding, see Kay Whitehead, 'Vocation, Career and Character in Early Twentieth Century Women Teachers' Work in City Schools', *History of Education,* 34/6 (2005)

[17] Nicola Chisnall, 'Montessori Education in Aoteraroa-New Zealand: A Framework for Peace and Social Justice', (PhD thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2011) p. 181. Jane Kenney's leadership is noted in Gerald L. Gutek and Patricia A. Gutek, *Bringing Montessori to America: S.S. McLure, Maria Montessori, and the Campaign to Publicize Montessori Education* (Tuscaloosa, 2016) but without comment or analysis, p. 115. David Mitchell also describes the leadership of 'Jane Kenney, one of Mme Montessori's favourite pupils' but does not mention that she was Annie Kenney's sister. Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts*, p. 72

[18] Rowbotham, *Rebel Crossings*, p. 3

[19] Craig Kridel, *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research* (London, 1998), Jane Martin, 'The Hope of Biography: The Historical Recovery of Women Educator Activists', *History of Education,* 32/2 (2003), 219-32, Steedman, *Margaret McMillan*, Hirsch and Hilton, *Practical Visionaries*, Jane Martin and Joyce Goodman, *Women and Education, 1800-1980* (Basingstoke, 2004), Jane Martin, *Radical Connections: A Journey Through Social Histories, Biography and Politics* (London, 2010),

[20] Linda Eisenmann, 'Creating a Framework for Interpreting US Women's Educational History: Lessons From Historical Lexicography', *History of Education,* 30/5 (2001), Tanya Fitzgerald, 'Networks of Influence: Home Scientists at the University of New Zealand', in Tanya Fitzgerald and Elizabeth M. Smyth (ed.), *Women Educators, Leaders and Activists* (Basingstoke, 2014), Anne Durst, *Women Educators in the Progressive Era: The Women Behind Dewey's Laboratory School* (Basingstoke, 2010), Christopher Watkins, 'Inventing International Citizenship: Badminton School and the Progressive Tradition Between the Wars', *History of Education,* 36/3 (2007)

individual careers. The sisters' reformist agenda was underpinned by feminist, democratic, humanitarian and egalitarian ideals, and were both a response, and an innovative contribution, to ongoing educational debates. The decisions and experiences of these women may have been neither typical nor representative, but their careers are suggestive of the possibilities open to feminist teachers who were committed to political, professional and personal advancement, and who had the resources and opportunities to pursue their goals.

The benefits of suffrage activism for feminist teachers

As chapter one suggested, several of the Kenney sisters had seen a career in teaching as a route into more secure, better paid, and more personally rewarding work. Though very little can be firmly established about the early part of their careers, Caroline was certified as a Board teacher for elementary schools in 1908, and by 1910, she and Jane were both teachers at the Holy Trinity School, in Oswaldtwistle, near Accrington.[21] Like many other teachers, they were committed to the WSPU, its objectives, and its members, and their professional careers were combined with suffrage campaigning. As chapter four suggested, Caroline Kenney does not appear to have been a speaker for the WSPU, though she participated in processions and attended major events. Jane Kenney, however, was more deeply involved with the organisation. At the 1908 Hyde Park demonstration, for example, she spoke on the same platform as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. Publicity for the event simultaneously stressed her credentials as a professional and an activist, saying she was 'one of the first of the militants, and helped to build the Manchester Union in its early days. She is a teacher and a member of the Teachers' Union.'[22] Jane was greatly admired, and Jessie stated that Christabel Pankhurst 'had tried hard to get hold of my sister Jane'.[23] Jane's apparent resistance to becoming a full-time activist indicates her desire to pursue a rewarding professional career and her belief that there were other ways to pursue a feminist agenda.

Jane and Caroline's involvement in the suffrage campaign, together with their connection to their more famous sisters, Jessie, and particularly Annie, meant that they built up a network of friends and connections who would provide invaluable personal and professional support in their personal lives and careers. The benefits of this network are immediately clear in the militant suffrage community's response to a crisis in Jane Kenney's

[21] MB's diary, 28 July 1910
[22] *VFW,* 18 June 1908, p. 251
[23] The Three Phases of the Pioneer, KP/JK/4/2/2/8

life. In 1910, an operation went seriously wrong – within the family, it was believed that the surgeon scheduled to remove her appendix was drunk and conducted a hysterectomy by mistake – and she suffered serious complications.[24] Suffrage activists rallied round to support the woman they affectionately called 'The Infant'.[25] AEthel Tollemache, the Blathwayt family, the Pethick-Lawrences, Dorothy Pethick and Millicent Price were among the women who nursed and cared for Jane during a long convalescence.[26] As part of their efforts to support her, and Caroline, their friends attempted to find them new and less strenuous work within easier reach. Emily Blathwayt thought that Jane's current employment was exacerbating her illness because 'there are very rough noisy children & she gets so much pain Kitty cannot keep them from getting on her nerves'.[27] Consequently, Lady Constance Lytton and the Blathwayts' chaplain found a new school for Caroline Kenney in Surrey.[28] Jane Kenney, meanwhile, was hired by Helen Archdale to be a governess to her son and daughter.[29] The daughter Betty – who herself went on to be a feminist teacher and captained the first English women's cricket team – claimed that all their governesses were 'suffragettes having a rest'.[30] Theoretically, this was an ideal position, enabling Jane to continue her work as an educator without the physical demands of teaching large classes of children, though it meant that Jane had to manage the house while Helen Archdale was in prison.[31]

While working for the Archdales, Jane Kenney was able to begin to develop her interest in progressive pedagogical reform, and especially the Montessori movement, an interest which was shared by many educationalists and reformers in the immediate pre-war period.[32] This was the latest manifestation of a longstanding feminist interest in progressive education, especially for younger children, that had begun with the circulation of Frobelian ideas in the 1870s.[33] Dr Maria Montessori's ideas, pioneered among the disadvantaged

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[24] Beatrice Clarke to Kent Kenney, May 2001, KP/CLA/3
[25] EB's diary, 19 July 1911, 18 March 1912, 27 December 1912
[26] EB's diary, June to August 1910 and 31 October 1910, Price, *This World's Festival*, p. 149
[27] EB's diary, 8 June 1910
[28] EB's diary, 11 February 1911 and 7 October 1911. This post did not work out, but Caroline was able to find work at another school close by.
[29] Helen Archdale, *An Interfering Female*, Chapter III, unpublished autobiography, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 9091, Box 2, Item 2
[30] MacPherson, *The Suffragette's Daughter*, p. 44
[31] EB's diary, 18 March 1912
[32] Cunningham, 'Innovators, Networks and Structures', p. 441-2, Peter Cunningham, 'The Montessori Phenomenon: Gender and Internationalism in Twentieth-Century Innovation', in Mary Hilton and Pam Hirsch (ed.), *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Progress, 1790-1930* (London, 2000), Marion O'Donnell, *Maria Montessori* (London, 2014) pp. 25-7
[33] Jane Martin, 'Jane Chessar (1835-1880): From 'Surplus' Woman to Professional Educator ', in Jane Martin and Joyce Goodman (ed.), *Women and Education, 1800-1980* (Basingstoke, 2004), Joyce Goodman, 'Mary Dendy (1855-1933) and Pedagogies of Care', in Jane Martin and Joyce Goodman (ed.), *Women and Education, 1800-*

children living in communities around the *Casa dei Bambini* in Rome, were startlingly different from mainstream concepts of education. Rather than focusing on the acquisition of information or even skills such as reading and writing, the Montessori method emphasised children's moral, spiritual and personal growth. In a home-like environment, and with the involvement of parents, children were given the freedom to pursue their own interests and in doing so, to gain the self-discipline and self-control needed to become self-directed learners. This fundamentally transformed the teacher's place in the classroom. Her role was first to observe, then to nurture, encourage and guide: she was emphatically not to discipline, instruct, or even 'teach' the child in any way which would be recognised in conventional practice.[34] Montessori considered her approach to be a scientific method grounded in universal truths, and thus expected her student-teachers to follow her instructions to the letter.[35]

Jane Kenney's attraction to this method was grounded in her concern for children whose lives were blighted by poverty and deprivation. 'Jane had always felt deeply the vulnerability of children who would drink in like sponges so much that went on around them,' Jessie wrote. 'A whole generation of properly educated children from the very outset of their young lives could do much to bring about a regenerated way of life. How many … children born, not only in poverty, but in the unwholesome nearness of grownups coarsened and selfish should be maimed mentally and morally before they had begun life at all.'[36] Montessori education, based on work with exactly these sorts of children, seemed to Jane Kenney to offer opportunities to meet their needs which mainstream education did not.

Jane's concerns were shared by many of her connections in the suffrage community.[37] Hilda Kean has argued that the Montessori method was of particular interest to feminists in this period because 'it was in Montessori's work on pedagogy that feminists recognised the same spirit of freedom which characterised their own political struggle'.[38] It is no surprise, then, that members of Jane Kenney's wider circle shared her interest in

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1980 (Basingstoke, 2004), Taylor Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten*, Jane Read, 'Frobelian Women: Networking to Promote Professional Status and Educational Change in the Nineteenth Century', *History of Education,* 32/1 (2003), Kevin J. Berhony, 'English Revisionist Frobelians and the Schooling of the Urban Poor', in Mary Hilton and Pam Hirsch (ed.), *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Progress, 1790 - 1930* (London, 2000)

[34] Rita Kramer, *Maria Montessori* (Oxford, 1978) p. 121, O'Donnell, *Maria Montessori*, p. 14, and p. 68-9

[35] Stacy Kell Zell, 'Characterizing the Conversation: A Historical Re-View of Maria Montessori's Visits to the United States, 1913-1918', (PhD thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1997) pp. 9-12, Gutek and Gutek, *Bringing Montessori to America*, pp. 45-9

[36] Jane and Montessori, KP/JK/4/2/2/13

[37] The first edition of *The Suffragette*, 18 October 1912, carries an advert for *The Montessori Method* on p. 3

[38] Hilda Kean, 'Women Teachers, Experience and Theory', *Oxford Review of Education,* 23/3 (1997) p. 409

pedagogical reform. The Earl of Lytton, for example, who Jane Kenney knew not just through his formal position as the chair of the Conciliation Committee, but also on a personal level through her family's relationship with his sister Lady Constance Lytton, chaired the educational conference which discussed progressive education over the next few years.[39] Helen Archdale too shared Jane Kenney's interest in pedagogical reform, and held advanced and progressive ideas on schooling. She sent her children to Bedales, and was interested in education beyond her direct concern for her own children's development, at one stage considering opening 'a home for children, to bring them up in the open air & make gardeners & farmers of them' with Adela Pankhurst.[40]

Helen Archdale's support was therefore essential to further Jane Kenney's interest in Montessori education. Opportunities to study and implement the method were limited to those who could afford to travel themselves and the very small number who were able to receive formal and institutional backing. Jane's association with Helen Archdale, however, gave her the time, resources and opportunity to pursue her interest without the need to finance herself or rely on union or local authority support. Helen Archdale had determined to leave England for a period of time in order to take a rest from the demands of militant activity, and the family lived a nomadic lifestyle along the borders of Switzerland and Italy. Governments of these countries had formally adopted the Montessori method in 1911 so there were many opportunities to observe the practice and effects.[41] The Archdale children attended these institutions while Jane studied how the schools functioned, and she wrote enthusiastically to the Blathwayts about her discoveries and plans to establish her own school.[42] Even more significantly, with Helen Archdale's support, Jane was able to enrol in a course of study with Dr Montessori. This was crucial to her future credibility and authority, especially as Montessori only recognised the legitimacy of teachers she had trained herself. As such, Jane Kenney's place within the militant suffrage movement, and her relationships with its members, were the starting point for her career development and progression outside it. Through Jane's connections, Caroline was also able to study directly with Dr Montessori – first in Barcelona, and later in New York.[43]

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[39] Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, p. 243, Cunningham, 'The Montessori Phenomenon', p. 213
[40] EB's diary, 10 January 1912
[41] Helen Archdale, *An Interfering Female,* Chapter V
[42] EB's diary, 9 October 1913
[43] On Barcelona, see Mary Kenney to Jessie Kenney, 8 December 1964, KP/JK/3 and telegram from Jane Kenney to Eladi Homs, Eladi Homs personal archive (received in a personal communication from Dani Canuigueral Vinals, 2 February 2018). Caroline's certificate from the Montessori Normal College in New York City where she studied during the autumn and winter of 1916-1917 is at KP/JK/4/2/2/13.

Montessori education, and its benefits for children, community and nation



Figure 12: Maria Montessori with Jane Kenney (in window) Rome, 1914
KP/CK

Jane Kenney set out her interest in the Montessori method in a speech she made at Montessori's International Training School in 1914. She argued that she and her fellow teachers were living in 'an era which will be greater than its predecessors because this era is for the uplifting and refining of humanity … this era will give us the seeing and the understanding not just for a few but for humanity all down the ages'. In the Montessori method, 'the foundation is laid for the greatest of all Sciences, the Science of the development of humanity's potentialities'. 'In England,' she said:

> the first news of this discovery was received with a frenzy of joy. That little children not only learn quickly, but without fatigue, nay, with a passionate joy, those things which are considered necessary for little children to learn: That we ourselves, loving freedom as we do and benefitting by it, could leave our children free, and they also would be benefitted: these things seemed almost too ideal for reality … all hope that before long the Montessori Method will be established in England as THE educational method for the training of little children. We students from England are proud to be enrolled as some of the foremost to take this new path, proud to be students and disciples of this great and wonderful woman, Dottoressa Montessori,

> who is the Founder of the greatest of all sciences, and we shall be proud to do what little lies in our power for the furthering of this new science.[44]

In her speech, Jane Kenney not only echoed sentiments that were commonly expressed by acolytes of the Montessori method – the emphasis on a scientific approach, the academic benefits to children, and devotion to Dr Montessori herself – but did so in terms which shared a striking rhetorical similarity with arguments in favour of suffrage made by members of the WSPU. The sense of being at the dawn of a new era, the emphasis on freedom and liberty, and the belief in human progress and perfectibility all mirrored the more optimistic pronouncements of suffrage campaigners. Again, this underscores the point that for Jane Kenney, her interests in feminism and her interests in progressive education were inseparable. Indeed, Montessori herself had been centrally involved in the Italian and the international women's movement in the early part of her career. Though scholars have usually argued that she became less interested in women's rights as she turned her attention to education – and she specifically denied being a militant – others have suggested that she anticipated her system would liberate women as well as educating their children, freeing them to enter the workplace.[45] It seems likely that this shared interest in feminism would have provided another foundation on which to build their professional and personal relationship.

Dr Montessori held Jane Kenney in exceptionally high regard and singled her out for particular attention. Jessie Kenney considered that Dr Montessori 'looked upon her [Jane] as her chief disciple'.[46] The speech cited above, for example, was made when Queen Margherita, the Queen Mother of Italy, visited the Montessori School. Jane Kenney was presented to her and asked to introduce the other English speaking women to the Queen.[47] Not only was this a significant honour in its own right, it was also a direct echo of a moment in Montessori's earlier career, when she herself had been presented to Queen

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[44] 'On the occasion of the visit of the Queen Mother of Italy to the Casa dei Bambini, June 17th, 1914, the following speech was given by Miss Kenney, as representative of the English students of the M.I.T.C.' KP/JK/4/2/2/13

[45] Montessori was directly asked about militancy on her visit to the USA during 1913, and while rejecting it herself, she said that 'anything that broadens the race and broadens the individuals must be approved,' *New York Times*, 13 December 1913 and discussed in Phyllis Povell, *Montessori Comes to America: The Leadership of Maria Montessori and Nancy McCormick Rambusch* (Plymouth, 2010) p. 26 and 47 and Gutek and Gutek, *Bringing Montessori to America*, p. 127. On Montessori's feminism more generally, see Valeria Babini, Sarah Morgan, and Daniel Pick, 'Feminism and Education: The Early Work of Maria Montessori', *History Workshop Journal,* 49 (2000), and Patricia Giardiello, *Pioneers in Early Childhood Education: The Roots and Legacies of Rachel and Margaret McMillan, Maria Montessori and Susan Isaacs* (London, 2014) pp. 79-82

[46] Jessie Kenney to Princess Alice, 9 January 1965, KP/JK/3

[47] KP/JK/4/2/2/14

Margherita.[48] Putting Jane Kenney forward to repeat this honour was clearly a symbolic passing of the torch. Dr Montessori appears to have considered several possible roles for Jane Kenney in the international Montessori movement, but, partly influenced by the outbreak of war in Europe, she was eventually assigned the task of becoming the main demonstrator of the Montessori movement in the United States.[49]

This was especially significant because Dr Montessori considered progress in the United States as central to the overall success of the movement. Montessori education had been introduced to the United States in 1910 by the newspaper proprietor Samuel McClure, the feminist reformer and writer Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and the teacher, Anne George. It received an immediate and overwhelmingly positive response among parents and educators, since it chimed so strongly with Progressive Era educational ideals. Often championed by women teachers and philanthropists, these promoted child-centred education, pedagogical reform, and the capacity of schools to secure positive social change.[50]

Alexander Graham Bell and his wife Mabel Bell were among the many people attracted to the method, at first because it seemed to offer new possibilities for educating the deaf, but increasingly owing to its wider possibilities for social reform. In September 1912, they opened a school in their own house, first under Roberta Fletcher and then under Anne George, both of whom had studied directly with Dr Montessori. Together with Margaret Wilson, daughter of then-President Wilson, the Bells, McClure, Canfield Fisher and George formed the nucleus of a committee, the Montessori Educational Association, which also brought in prominent Washington DC leaders, reformers, philanthropists, and educators who hoped to establish the movement in the capital and promote it nationwide. Montessori's visit to the USA in 1913 had been greeted with media adulation, large crowds and significant interest from the educational establishment, and the Bells' Association alone boasted approximately 700 members.[51] Jane Kenney thus moved to the United States at a time when the movement seemed to be on the cusp of a major impact.

Jane Kenney's training with, connection to, and endorsement by, Dr Montessori gave her immediate entry into progressive and reformist circles in Washington DC. The

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[48] Povell, *Montessori Comes to America*, p. 30

[49] One archival note states that Dr Montessori 'appointed me to be demonstrator in England, but the course had to be abandoned because of the WWI' while another claims that 'Montessori appointed me to be her demonstrator throughout Europe, but World War I broke out.' JANE KENNEY: The History of Jane and her Montessori work, KP/JK/4/2/2/3; Back of a photograph of Maria Montessori with children. KP/CK/3/3

[50] On women's roles in these debates, see William J. Reese, *Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grass-Roots Movements During the Progressive Era* (London, 1986), Robyn Muncy, *Creating A Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (Oxford, 1991), Rury, *Education and Social Change*

[51] Gutek and Gutek, *Bringing Montessori to America*, p. 192

Bells hosted receptions for Jane Kenney where she met their wealthy and influential friends who shared their interests.[52] In January 1915, for example, a number of reformers gathered at their home to hear her give a lecture series on 'The Modern Education of Little Children,' covering 'Liberty,' 'The Aim of Education,' 'The Education of the Senses,' 'Intellectual Education,' and 'Discipline'. 'Miss Kenney,' the advertising announced, 'is a graduate of the Montessori School in Rome, and has made a special study of the Montessori Schools which are now in operation in Switzerland, Italy, France and England'.[53] By this period, several American teachers had made their way to Italy to study under Dr Montessori. Few, however, possessed Jane Kenney's direct knowledge of how Montessori education was being implemented in the wider European context. This cemented her credibility and authority.

Jane Kenney's role in the United States was not simply to persuade wealthy and influential reformers of the benefits of Montessori education, but to demonstrate those benefits in practice. She had been appointed Directress of the Free Demonstration School, run under the auspices of Mabel Graham Bell's Montessori Educational Association, and as such, was running one of the most visible and significant experimental schools in the country. The school was first based at Friendship House, a settlement house in Washington DC. It was run by Lydia Burklin – described by friends as the 'Jane Addams of Washington' – offering social programmes for local residents in need, though excluded the large African-American population.[54] As in England, the settlement movement in the United States was driven by a concern for poverty and injustice, and a belief in women's particular role in alleviating this through living and working within working-class communities. Beginning as a philanthropic movement, then, it also created new vocational opportunities for women and informed the development of the social work profession and the welfare state more broadly.[55] Jane herself appears to have entered into a settlement-style way of life, establishing communal living arrangements with several other women who had trained under Montessori. They formed a small community based around their shared professional interests, with communal meals and leisure time.[56]

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[52] *The Washington Post*, 30 May 1916, p. 7
[53] KP/JK/3/6
[54] Lindsay M. Silver, '"The Nation's Neighbourhood": The People, Power and Politics of Capitol Hill Since the Civil War', (PhD thesis, Brandeis University, 2007) p. 111-2
[55] Peel, *Miss Cutler*, Kathryn Kish Sklar, 'The Historical Foundations of Women's Power in the Creation of the American Welfare State, 1830-1930', in Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (ed.), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (London, 1993)
[56] The Serbian Mission, KP/JK/4/2/2/7

The care and education of children was central to the broader mission of Friendship House. It had a longstanding kindergarten class and claimed to have the longest running day care programme for the children of working or ill parents in Washington DC. Lydia Burklin recognised 'the need for more adequate provision for training the pre-school child' and offered Friendship House to Alexander Graham Bell for a Montessori School for those who could not afford private Montessori education.[57] In contrast to many other early American Montessori schools, such as the Tarrytown School in New York and the Bell's own school in their home, the Demonstration School served a similar population and demographic to the children attending Montessori's original school at the *Casa dei Bambini*, and was more closely aligned to her educational and social vision.

This emphasis on the needs of especially vulnerable children was made even more explicit when, in 1917, the school moved to the Foundling Hospital, and worked specifically with orphaned or abandoned children. Here, in addition to its other educational and social functions, Jane Kenney claimed Montessori education was making the children into better candidates for adoption, by reducing violence, promoting self-discipline, increasing self-control, and fostering 'constancy to work … kindness …[and] infinite love for each other.'[58] Interestingly, then, though the method was grounded in a belief in individual freedom, publicity for the school in fact stressed its capacity to socialise children, instilling socially acceptable values and altering their behaviour. Her nephew wrote that Jane Kenney was preoccupied with 'good behaviour, deportment and manners' and 'did not entirely approve of our northern accents'.[59] Education could not fully help children overcome the disadvantages of birth unless it also made those disadvantages invisible. This belief in the power of education to create 'good' citizens is vividly demonstrated by the following image from a 1917 leaflet advertising the school. The caption describes 'a five year old child settled down to self chosen (sic) intellectual work, after dusting cupboard, brushing teeth, washing hands and face, buttoning apron and combing hair'. Montessori education had apparently prompted the child to adopt standards of cleanliness which would have been attractive to the wealthy readership targeted by publishers of the leaflet.

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[57] Lydia A. H. Burklin, A Brief History of Friendship House From 1909 to 1950 (unpublished, 1950) p. 8-9, Washington DC, George Washington University, Melvin Gelman Library, Friendship House Association Records, Box 2, Folder 12

[58] Montessori Free Demonstration School

[59] Kenney, *Recollections*

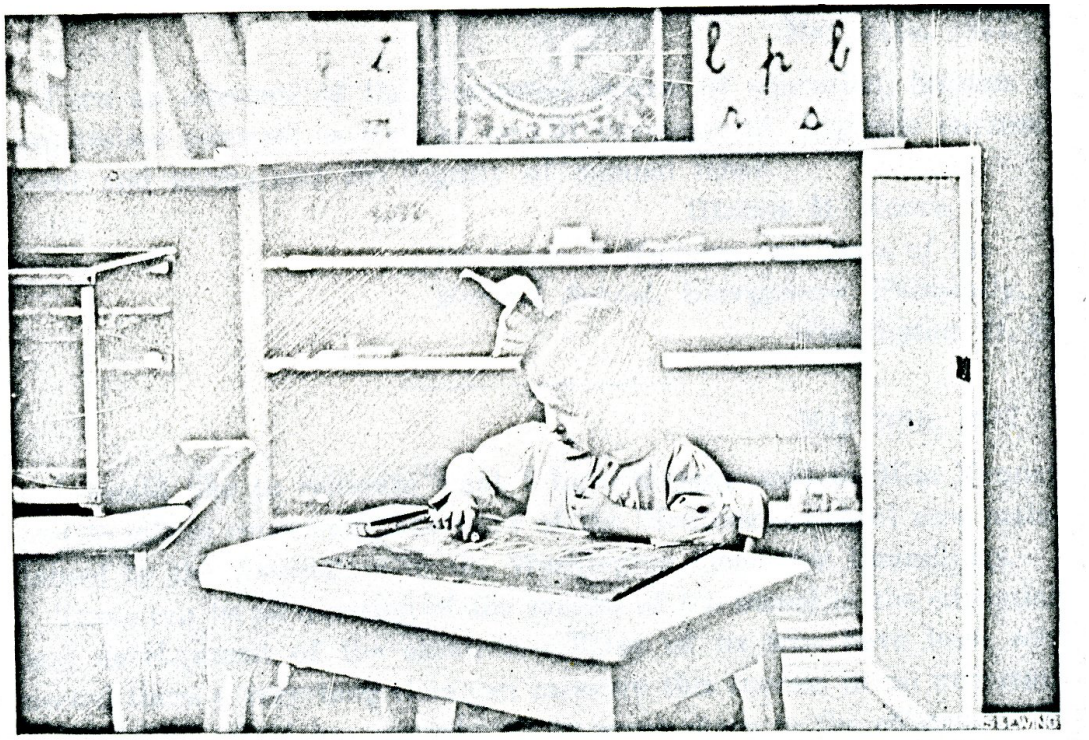


Figure 13: Image used in publicity for the Montessori Free Demonstration School, 1917 Amsterdam, American Montessori Archives

The wartime context brought new urgency to debates around the meaning of good citizenship. As chapter two suggested, many feminists sought to use the opportunities offered by the war to create new space for their arguments about the benefits of female intervention in the public sphere. 'At a time like the present we realise more and more fully the value of moral and spiritual strength,' Jane asserted in the same leaflet, concluding:

> Nations are uniting, and pouring forth lives and treasure, in order to maintain for our little children and for the future generations, the freedom we highly prize. In this time of National stress, let us not forget the heirs to such a costly heritage, but let us rather hold their little hands and strengthen their tottering footsteps, in their eager strivings after the manhood and the womanhood which will carry with it the most terrible responsibilities a race has ever handed on to its successors. SAVE THE CHILDREN![60]

Evidently, Jane Kenney believed that if children were to be fully and effectively prepared to take on the demands of citizenship in the post-war world, then they needed an education system which would give them the support and strength to do so. Moreover, she clearly envisioned women taking on an equal burden in this new world, and as a result, here, she claims an equal right to education for girls, to prepare them for this responsibility. Her

[60] Montessori Free Demonstration School

urgent call for investment in education which promoted 'moral and spiritual strength,' therefore reflected not just her belief in the power of education, but her deeply-felt feminist beliefs.

Such statements, then, reveal the ambiguous nature of Jane Kenney's educational vision in this period. On the one hand, she clearly believed that it offered a potentially transformative role for individual lives and prospects and was especially important for girls and women. On the other, the ethic of mutual improvement and collective striving which had characterised her own education had all but disappeared. As chapter one demonstrated, the Kenneys' original interest in education developed both within an idealistic socialist tradition which saw education as central to individual and collective improvement. Acquiring knowledge was a means to addressing inequality by opening access to greater economic opportunities, and by creating a more articulate and politically engaged workforce, but it was also desirable as an end in itself, a source of beauty, insight and joy.[61] Education had been central to the Kenneys' desire to achieve more stable, secure, prosperous and intellectually fulfilling lives. Here, though, this expansive vision of the possibilities of education has been replaced with a narrower ambition: to develop respectable citizens.

It is also worth noting Jane Kenney's ambiguous relationship to working-class children themselves. Perhaps particularly because these were urban, orphaned and very obviously 'poor' children, Jane Kenney does not appear to feel any sense of identification with them. Her construction of education is something that is done to, and for, these children, not with them. This seems much closer to the interventionist ideas of middle-class reformers than to an ethic of working-class solidarity. Jane Kenney's own self-construction now appears to place her much closer to the middle-class reformers who were her professional associates, creating some of the same sense of difference and distinctiveness from working-class communities which were discussed in relation to Annie Kenney in chapter three. There is, however, little suggestion that Jane Kenney experienced any of the same anxieties or difficulties as her sister. Unlike Annie Kenney, who simultaneously attempted to position herself within and without working-class communities, Jane Kenney clearly saw herself, by virtue of her own education, as apart, and her career progression would only accelerate this trajectory.

As a this was a 'demonstration' school, it was expected that Jane Kenney would regularly allow others to witness the process and the effects of the Montessori method. This did not simply mean welcoming individual visitors: sometimes the entire class was moved

[61] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 299

into theatre-like conditions, where large audiences would sit and watch the children play, work, eat and clean up.[62] Jane Kenney also spoke to large audiences on the benefits of the system and the impact of the movement around the country.[63] In advocating for the method, Jane Kenney described the startling benefits it offered for individual children and for the group of children as a whole, and hinted at the social advances which would be possible if the method were replicated on a broader scale. Montessori education could not only compensate for, but also overcome, the obstacles of poverty and disadvantage within the communities served by Friendship House and the Foundling Hospital. Leading a demonstration school, Jane Kenney not only had the responsibility for the children within her own care, but also for promoting and marketing the movement as a whole. She believed that she had been very successful in this endeavour, writing that 'schools have been opened in some places directly owing to the faith and inspiration gained during a day's visit to the school.'[64]

Jane Kenney's self-belief was underscored by resounding endorsements from the philanthropists and reformers who backed the school. Doctors, judges, academics, and philanthropists were sought out to endorse the method, the school, and Kenney herself. Members and supporters of the Montessori Educational Association agreed that under her leadership, the school was 'definitely proving its value as a factor in the social service to the community'. They were 'greatly indebted to Miss Kenney, who voluntarily offered her services through a most generous desire to help us. This … shows a particularly fine spirit of devotion, which we greatly appreciate.'[65] Margaret Wilson, the President's daughter – also a suffrage supporter – became a regular visitor. Writing in support of the project, Wilson commented that:

> it was a most difficult problem that Miss Kenney had to face at the Foundlings' Hospital, one that few teachers would have dared to undertake, but Miss Kenney took hold and worked with such courage and wisdom that the school was more than successful, thus proving both the worth of Madame Montessori's ideas and Miss Kenney's own qualities as a teacher.[66]

As a result of these perceived successes, and Jane Kenney's ongoing loyalty to Dr Montessori, it is clear that Montessori envisioned Jane Kenney taking on an even larger and

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[62] *The Washington Post*, 31 March 1915, p. 5
[63] *The Washington Post*, 18 December 1914, p. 9
[64] Montessori Free Demonstration School
[65] Freedom for the Child: Montessori Educational Association, Vol II. No. 1, April 1915, Amsterdam, Montessori Archives
[66] Montessori Free Demonstration School

more significant role in the American Montessori movement. Both Dr Montessori and her son Mario continued their association with Jane Kenney after she had left Italy, visiting her when they were in the United States.[67] Once more, this indicates how intertwined professional opportunities were with personal connections. The precise nature of this new role is unclear, though Montessori seems to have envisioned Jane Kenney becoming a national leader and demonstrator of the movement. However, Jane Kenney herself declined: largely, it seems, because the internal tensions in the Montessori movement were becoming too frustrating, and she was happy in her new work at the Lenox School, described below.[68] '"Politics" was rife in the American Movement' she wrote.[69] Instead, Helen Parkhurst took up this role, but as Jane Kenney wrote, 'she did not understand and later started her own idea, a wild idea, which has had serious results in the world, as she is a first class publicist. It was denounced by Montessori.'[70] The 'serious results' that Jane Kenney alludes to refers to the well-documented conflicts between Dr Montessori and many of her former American supporters which, many scholars have argued, were central to the collapse of the Montessori movement.[71]

By 1917, escalating tensions and disagreements between the Montessori Educational Association and Dr Montessori herself meant that the Bells were in the process of dissolving their organisation. Though the Demonstration School continued for a few more years, it would have been obvious to Jane that the method she firmly believed in was subject to increasing scepticism and outright attack, even by former supporters. As a result, when a new opportunity arose to apply the method for the benefit of children who needed it most, in collaboration with those she trusted and with whom she shared political interests, she left America to return to England. Perhaps owing to this abrupt move, Jane Kenney is almost entirely absent from the many studies of Montessori education in America during this

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[67] A copy of a telegram from Mario Montessori dated 6 June 1917 inviting Jane to join the Montessori Association of San Diego can be found at KP/JK/4/2/2/3

[68] One note states that 'Later she appointed me to be her demonstrator for her American Courses, but I declined as I was established in New York' (Back of a photograph of Maria Montessori with children. KP/CK/3/3) while another states that 'she offered me through her son the position of demonstrator of her method, with her, when she came to [the] USA after World War I was over … I declined and Helen Parkhurst took up the work' (JANE KENNEY, KP/JK/4/2/2/3). The precise details of these statements do not quite match the progress of the movement in America. Montessori did not in fact visit the USA after the war (though her son did) and Helen Parkhurst had begun working for Montessori in 1916.

[69] Back of a photograph of Maria Montessori with children, KP/CK/3/3

[70] JANE KENNEY, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

[71] Gutek and Gutek, *Bringing Montessori to America*, pp. 186-209, Povell, *Montessori Comes to America*, pp. 100-7, Kell Zell, 'Characterizing the Conversation', pp. 33-49

period.[72] The evidence here, however, suggests she played a hugely significant role in shaping its reception, especially in Washington DC.

No evidence has yet been found to suggest that Jane Kenney was active in Washington suffrage activism in the ways that Caroline Kenney had been active in Montreal, described in chapter four. Towards the end of the war, American militants led by Alice Paul were picketing the White House, courting mass arrest and embarking on hunger strikes. It seems unlikely that Jane Kenney would have associated herself with such direct action, given that she had not done so in England, and that Annie Kenney felt ambivalent about Alice Paul.[73] Nevertheless, she continued her association with British suffragettes, not least, of course, through her sisters. She remained supportive of the WSPU even when she disagreed with specific policies. When, in 1915, Emmeline Pankhurst and Jessie Kenney arrived in the USA to promote the Allied war effort, especially in the Balkans, Emmeline Pankhurst turned to Jane Kenney for support. She asked Jessie Kenney to arrange a meeting in Washington DC, with Jane's help, to raise awareness of the Serbian cause. Jane Kenney was deeply concerned about this meeting, since she believed Americans generally blamed Serbia for the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, her loyalty to Emmeline Pankhurst overrode her misgivings, and she persuaded her teacher friends to advertise the meeting and to act as stewardesses. Alice Paul and other suffrage activists also participated.[74]

Despite Jane's scepticism about this particular venture of Emmeline Pankhurst's, she remained committed to her broader political and social vision. As a result, when Emmeline Pankhurst sought a principal for her proposed home for 'war babies', Jane Kenney was the obvious choice. In 1917, Jane became Directress of the new Tower Cressy Montessori Day School, with Caroline working alongside her.[75] Once again, therefore, it was connections within the suffrage community which provided Jane with new professional opportunities. Jane and Caroline Kenney were inseparable for the remainder of their careers and indeed their lives, an indication of how significant sisterly support was to the Kenneys professionally, as well as personally and politically.

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[72] As previously stated, Jane Kenney's leadership is noted in Gutek and Gutek, *Bringing Montessori to America* but without comment p. 115. Chisnall, 'Montessori Education', p. 181 is the only study which has noted Jane Kenney's links to other reform movements.

[73] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 257

[74] The Serbian Mission, KP/JK/4/2/2/7

[75] The WSPU may have hoped, in turn, to capitalise on Jane Kenney's connections with the wealthy supporters of the Montessori movement in America. In 1917, Annie Kenney sent a telegram urging Jane to return to London. 'Do all you can with regard to raising funds for school but we offer you hospitality until you get started.' Undated Western Union Cablegram, 'Annie Kennedy to Jane Kennedy' (sic) KP/JK/4/2/2/13. Caroline Kenney returned to England from New York, where she had been working for Jessica Cosgrave at the Lenox School, a project discussed further below.

War-time service and post-war citizenship: the ideals and realities of the Tower Cressy Montessori Day School

The problem of 'war babies' was a subject of intense public debate during the early months of the war, reflecting more generalised concerns about public morality and especially women's behaviour, during wartime.[76] Rowland Kenney was among the many commentators who discussed the subject, vehemently disagreeing that payments and allowances should be restricted to married couples, writing sarcastically that 'we must make our soldiers and their dependents moral, if we starve them to death in the process'.[77] The WSPU, however, was less interested in these adult relationships than in their resulting children.

The 'war babies' home had first been announced by Emmeline Pankhurst in May 1915, when she set out a 'work of social reform' which would address the 'evil' of illegitimacy. 'Ever since there has been a woman's movement and perhaps longer, the problem of the illegitimate child has weighed upon women's mind and heart,' she claimed, later arguing that 'whether you believe in women taking part in politics or not, you all agree that it always has been and always will be their business to care for children and that they by nature and by circumstances are the best to deal with these children'.[78] The Pankhursts' proposals thus drew on longstanding feminist rhetoric which claimed a role in the public sphere based on their unique nurturing capacities. As Seth Koven has argued, middle-class reformers often worked in the 'borderlands' between state and civil society, establishing experimental and voluntary welfare state programmes which helped lay the foundations for government intervention.[79] The WSPU reframed this maternal role for a wartime context, by claiming that it was a contribution to the war effort which only women could make: 'a special piece of social service which we could do as war service'. Describing the prospective children as 'the nation's babies' not only indicated the nation's collective shared responsibility towards them, but also positioned WSPU members as 'the nation's mothers.'[80]

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[76] Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, pp. 89-103
[77] Rowland Kenney, 'Soldiers' Dependents', The English Review, vol. XIX, December 1914-March 1915, p. 117
[78] 'A Message from Mrs Pankhurst', *The Suffragette*, 14 May 1915, p. 69, 'Universal Obligatory War Service Demanded', *The Suffragette*, 11 June 1915, p. 138
[79] Koven, 'Borderlands'
[80] "Women and War Service,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 June 1915, p. 10

As many scholars have argued – and chapter two reiterated – it was not the case that Emmeline Pankhurst and members of the WSPU set aside their demands for emancipation during the war, whatever their rhetoric. On the contrary, they set out to reframe debates around the grounds on which to claim citizenship and demonstrate women's capacity and ability to participate as full citizens.[81] Yet scholars usually stress that in doing so, the Pankhursts resisted traditional ideas of women's capacity to serve in wartime: rejecting, for example, knitting and nursing for an emphasis on women's contribution to industry.[82] The war babies home, however, suggests that the Pankhursts still sought to claim certain territory, especially the care of children, as women's particular responsibility.

The project was also clearly influenced by the WSPU's pre-war preoccupation with sexual behaviour, morality and purity. Children were not to be held responsible for their parents' behaviour, but parents themselves could certainly be judged. Those parents who had been prevented from marrying by force of circumstance – such as the father being on the front line – were to be viewed with sympathy. On the other hand, fathers who 'seduced' innocent girls should be punished with prison. The most morally complex cases, however, were parents who brought children into the world without a 'spiritual bond or affection', especially since the mothers as well as the fathers were responsible for this 'wrong and anti social (sic) behaviour'. The WSPU made it very clear that supporting the children did not mean they condoned the 'sexual laxity and promiscuity' which led to their existence.[83] They reassured readers of *The Suffragette* that supporting women who were victims of circumstance would not 'lower women's moral standards and increase illegitimacy among women'.[84] On the contrary, by supporting illegitimate children appropriately, it would prevent these children from falling 'into a life of degradation later on and thus becom[ing] a source of incalculable social evil'.[85]

The WSPU were keen to stress that the children would be brought up on 'modern' lines, using scientific ideas of development, but also with a home-like atmosphere, individual care and attention, and a focus on their 'happiness and full development'.[86] To deliver this objective, Emmeline Pankhurst turned to the Montessori Method. The *Washington Post*

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[81] See, for example, Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, Smith, *Suffrage Discourse*, Lefebvre, 'Feminism and the Challenge of War: Responses of the British Women's Suffrage Movement to the Great War'
[82] June Purvis, 'The Pankhursts and the Great War', in Alison S. Fell and Ingrid Sharp (ed.), *The Women's Movement and the Great War* (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 146
[83] 'Review of the Week', *The Suffragette,* 7 May 1915, p. 51
[84] 'Review of the Week', *The Suffragette*, 4 June 1915, p. 115
[85] 'A Pioneer Work', *The Suffragette*, 21 May 1915, p. 83
[86] 'Special Announcement', The Suffragette, 7 May 1915, p. 49

reported her plans in terms which linked Montessori education directly with concerns about the health of the race and nation:

> The babies are to be brought up among eugenic lines. They will be cared for by trained nurses. The Mme. Montessori system of education then will be adopted. The latest ideas for healthy development, for food and for clothing will be utilized … We intend to demonstrate that our solution will develop these children into superwomen. They will be developed according to their demonstrated adaptability, no branch of genius being permitted to go unaided through life.[87]

Here, Emmeline Pankhurst developed Montessori's claims that her approach was modern, scientific and progressive, and took them into new territory. Underlying the dramatic language was a specifically feminist philosophy which would prepare girls for their future roles in society. In Ethel Smyth's words 'she wanted to see what could be achieved by bringing up four children in ideal conditions towards fitting them to play a worthy part in the new world she saw opening up to women'.[88]

The WSPU were keen to celebrate a positive initial response to their proposals, both in terms of the money which had been raised – noting a significant donation from the Duchess of Marlborough - and in terms of endorsements from 'social workers, doctors, and others whose opportunities of observation have given them special authority to speak on such a matter'.[89] The proposals were widely reported, with interest centred both on the modern methods proposed, and also that girls, rather than boys, were to be adopted.[90] However, after the initial interest, the scheme quickly disappeared from public view. Many former supporters were disappointed by the WSPU's apparent determination to set aside suffrage campaigning for the duration of the war, increasingly alarmed at the ultra-nationalistic course that Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst seemed determined upon, and concerned about the use of WSPU resources for projects that apparently had little to do with suffrage.[91] As a result, funds for the home were in short supply, though Pankhurst was keen to stress Jane Kenney's credentials within the suffrage community, especially through her relationship to Annie Kenney.[92] Emmeline Pankhurst also attempted to set an example by adopting four young children of her own, but also continued to press ahead with her wider ambitions.[93]

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87 *The Washington Post*, 7 May 1915, p. 4
88 Smyth, *Female Pipings*, p. 238
89 *The New York Times*, 4 June 1915, p. 4, 'A Generous Response', *The Suffragette*, 28 May 1915, p. 99
90 See, for example, *Manchester Courier,* 6 May 1915, p. 5, *The Times*, 6 May 1915, p. 5, *Lichfield Mercury,* 14 May 1915, p. 7, *Western Daily Press,* 18 May 1915, p. 7
91 Vellacott, *Pacifists, Patriots and the Vote*, p. 20, Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, p. 279-280
92 *New York Times*, 7 June 1918, p. 6
93 Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, p. 279

However, when the project eventually came to fruition in 1918, promotional materials for the school made no reference to the new Women's Party or to women's suffrage. In *The Times,* for example, it was described as a 'Home School for Young Children from three to 10 years of age whose fathers have fallen, or been incapacitated, in the war.'[94] From supporting all illegitimate children, then, the focus had narrowed to those children who were most obviously 'respectable' and 'deserving' of social concern, avoiding controversial debates around morality. The school's own advertising card left out these charitable and philanthropic motives entirely. Instead, it announced simply that 'In response to many enquiries, a Montessori School for Day Pupils will be opened in October at Tower Cressey' and 'A Montessori Day School, in ideal surroundings, will open shortly for children from 3 to 6 years of age'.[95] All references to the WSPU, the Women's Party, Emmeline Pankhurst and even the social reform aspects of the project had been excised, presumably with the hope of attracting parents who would not be put off by these elements. If Jane Kenney hoped to run the school as a successful and self-sustaining enterprise which might also serve as a model for other progressive institutions, it is not surprising that she attempted to reposition the enterprise in ways which created distance from its more controversial aspects. According to Caroline Kenney, Jane 'had the business head and could be uncompromising where the Montessori Method was involved'.[96]

Nevertheless, the Montessori philosophy which Jane Kenney brought to its operation was clearly an influence on the Woman's Party's approach to education. In *Britannia*, a statement claimed that:

> the children constitute the greatest of all national assets, as they are the nation's hope and link with the future. To keep the national inheritance during the war and after, safe for the children, to give them all possible help and opportunity to develop their inborn powers, to surround them with beauty at home and at school – that is the glorious task of enfranchised women.[97]

This is remarkably similar to Jane Kenney's own statements on the wartime purpose of education cited earlier, now specifically assigned to 'enfranchised' women. In policy terms – clearly influenced by Maria Montessori's principles – this meant that the Women's Party took a holistic approach to children's health, welfare and education. The Party programme, as reported in *Britannia*, included the following promise:

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[94] *The Times*, 15 June 1918, p. 1, EB's diary, 18 June 1918
[95] Copy of card, KP/JK/4/2/2/13
[96] Notes by Me about Jane and Caroline, KP/JK/4/2/2/13
[97] 'Women Voters and Child Welfare', *Britannia*, 8 February 1918, p. 1

> Every child to be guaranteed by the community from birth until it becomes a fully grown and self-supporting member of society the material conditions of life, the medical supervision and treatment, and the general education followed by specialised education, necessary to render the child a worthy citizen.[98]

Christabel Pankhurst called education 'in its own way a vital question of national defence' and set out a programme which sought to appeal to the teachers which had been such a bedrock of WSPU support, including better pay and working conditions.[99] Interestingly, however, while the Women's Party made education a central element of their emerging policy platform, it did not make reference to its own involvement in the Tower Cressy School, perhaps to avoid further discussion of the funding controversies.[100]

It is worth explicitly stating that it was the Kenney sisters who shaped the Pankhursts' views on education and the Montessori method, not vice versa. Ethel Smyth suggested that Emmeline Pankhurst was 'a keen student of the Montessori and other educational systems'[101] and Paula Bartley extrapolates this to suggest that the Kenney sisters adopted the Montessori system 'under Emmeline Pankhurst's guidance.'[102] David Mitchell claims that it was Christabel Pankhurst who 'had for some time been interested in the Montessori system'.[103] Clearly, however, Jane and Caroline Kenney had significantly more knowledge both of the theory and practice of the Montessori method and it is much more likely that their influence and experience informed the Pankhursts' interest.[104]

The Tower Cressy project has been parodied in the historiography as a hopelessly impractical project, symbolic of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst's hypocrisy and grandiosity, and an indication that they were increasingly out of touch with public attitudes, including those of former supporters.[105] Ethel Smyth's remarks that Tower Cressy 'was the best place to commit suicide from that I had ever seen' and that 'it had been furnished with ridiculous luxury, elaborate armchairs, *chaise-longes* and so on,' are quoted to suggest that the project was subject to huge over-spending and a failure to understand children's real

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98 'Education', *Britannia*, 2 November 1917, p. 172
99 'The Women's Party and Education', *Britannia*, 1 February 1918, p. 278, see also 8 February 1918, p. 301 and 15 February 1918, p. 308-10
100 On the Women's Party's policies, see June Purvis, 'The Women's Party of Great Britain: A Forgotten Episode in British Women's Political History', *Women's History Review,* 25/4 (2016)
101 Smyth, *Female Pipings*, p. 238
102 Bartley, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, p. 195, Garner, *Stepping Stones*, p. 58, Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts*, p. 72
103 Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, p. 263
104 Sylvia Pankhurst had also become interested in Montessori education, and was working with Muriel Metters, a Women's Freedom League Member who had also studied with Montessori in Barcelona, to use the Method at the East End nursery she had founded. See, for example, Connelly, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 75, Wainwright, *Muriel Matters*, pp. 303-329
105 Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, pp. 336-7

needs.[106] Yet it may also suggest that Jane Kenney, as principal, took Maria Montessori's focus on creating the right environment and surroundings for children, especially disadvantaged children, seriously. Advertising made clear that it was roomy, expansive and well-lit, well-decorated inside and with beautiful views outside.[107] Where Ethel Smyth saw unnecessary luxury, Jane Kenney may have seen the modern, light and open spaces necessary to creating the best possible environment for learning. Certainly Jessie Kenney disagreed with this assessment, claiming that Lady de la Warr 'was a very candid person and she soon would have told my sister if she had seen anything that she thought was ridiculously luxurious'.[108] There may also, however, have been less lofty ideals at play: Jessie Kenney, saw their new surroundings as a reward for the many years she and Annie had spent in temporary accommodation, noting that 'Christabel … was keen that Annie and I should have a really nice flat for once'.[109] The Tower Cressy project thus combined personal, professional and political interests for both the Kenneys and the Pankhursts.

Despite promising signs in the early months, the Tower Cressy project was ultimately short-lived. The school attracted visits from, in Jessie Kenney's words, 'quite a few distinguished people' who were interested in the opportunity to see the Montessori method in action, as well as its benefits for the children housed at Tower Cressy. These included the progressive aristocrats Lady Gosford and Lady de la Warr, and the political leaders George Lansbury, and William Hughes, the Australian Prime Minister, as well as Dr Montessori herself.[110] Annie Kenney's husband, James Taylor, who visited the school many times while courting Annie, said that 'they were educating children from unmarried mothers, and it was amazing to see what they were doing with those children, it was just out of this world. Their education was first class, the whole atmosphere that was built up … with this Montessori background and principles, it was amazing'.[111] However, the school attracted neither the funds nor sufficient numbers of children to make it viable. Within a very short time, Christabel Pankhurst gave Tower Cressy to Clara Andrew, founder of the National Children's Adoption Association. During the war, Andrew had been a driving force in finding children orphaned by the war new homes, and she was a central voice in post-war

[106] Smyth, *Female Pipings*, p. 233-4
[107] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 June 1917, p. 1, *Western Mail*, 23 June 1917, p. 2
[108] Jessie Kenney to David Mitchell, 1 January 1965, London, Museum of London, David Mitchell Collection, 73.83.48
[109] KP/JK/4/2/2/13
[110] Jessie Kenney to Princess Alice, 9 January 1965, KP/JK/3
[111] Interview with James Taylor

debates about professionalising adoption and incorporating it into state bureaucracy.[112] Princess Alice, as President of the Association, became the freeholder of Tower Cressy and it was run as a home for unmarried mothers with their babies and as accommodation for children prior to adoption.[113]

Educating girls for womanhood in post-war America



Figure 14: Jane and Caroline Kenney, c.1927, at the Lenox School, New York
KP/CK

In 1919, Jane and Caroline Kenney returned to the United States and embarked on the final phase of their career. America seemed to offer greater professional opportunities, and Jessie Kenney agreed. 'The USA has done far more for them than had their own country, for the class consciousness and snobbery of their own Mother Country, had never been prepared to give them a dog's chance to show what they could do in education'.[114] She wrote to them saying 'they would never have been able to fulfil their true destiny here [in

[112] Jenny Keating, 'Struggle for Identity: Issues Underlying the Enactment of the 1926 Adoption of Children Act', *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History* 3 (2001)
[113] Princess Alice to Jessie Kenney, 5 January 1965 KP/JK/3, Jenny Keating, *A Child for Keeps: The History of Adoption in England, 1918 - 1945* (Basingstoke, 2008) p. 48
[114] JANE: Kenneys of Shelderslow, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

England]'.[115] That 'destiny' now took a rather different turn. Their involvement with the Montessori movement had been specifically geared towards the education of vulnerable children: those disadvantaged by social and economic circumstances. Educating these children was a means of ameliorating their disadvantage. Their later work, however, had a very different purpose.

Henceforth, Jane and Caroline would work in schools designed to offer the daughters of the wealthy upper-middle-class an education which would prepare them for modern womanhood. This move towards elite education should not necessarily be interpreted as an abandonment of their progressive ideas. Rather, it should be understood as a pragmatic response to the changing political, social, cultural and educational backdrop: the end of the Progressive Era, the associated decline in innovative pedagogical methods and the near-total disappearance of American interest in the Montessori movement. Within this context, the Kenneys turned to an alternative set of political concerns: the appropriate purpose, nature, and form of education for girls.

This situates the Kenneys as contributors to longstanding debates about women's education which had preoccupied feminists since the earliest days of the women's movement: specifically, what should education prepare women for, and what should they study? Such questions were grounded in even more fundamental concerns about women's natures and role in society, and, in the 1920s, were shaped by both women's increased political and legal rights, but also by ongoing political and social debates which sought to reassert more traditional roles for women within the family.[116] The remainder of Jane and Caroline Kenney's careers indicates how feminist teachers addressed these questions at this particular historical moment, by expressing an educational philosophy grounded in compromise. The schools which the Kenneys taught at for the remainder of their careers stressed both women's distinctive nature and particular qualities, justifying women's presence in the workplace and the broader public sphere in terms of the benefits women might bring. Again, this echoes an older feminist tradition which emphasised women's innate maternal nature and their capacity to contribute to broader social welfare.[117] Yet their philosophy was not simply grounded in a sense of women's 'difference.' Indeed, Jane Kenney held longstanding beliefs about the importance of equal education for boys and girls. Staying with her brother Reg and his family during the pre-war era, she 'made it quite

[115] Notes by Me about Jane and Caroline, KP/JK/4/2/2/13
[116] These debates took place across Europe as well as in America: see, for example, Birgitte Soland, *Becoming Modern: Young Women and the Reconstruction of Womanhood in the 1920s* (Oxford, 2000)
[117] The ways that feminists drew on these discourses to extend and legitimise women's involvement in the public sphere are analysed in Michel and Koven (eds.), *Mothers of a New World*

clear that whatever girls learned and had to do of these things [domestic chores] boys must learn to[o] and not expect to have these things done for them'.[118] These beliefs were important throughout her career. As such, the schools where the Kenney sisters worked were attempting to prepare young women for a range of careers and opportunities which went beyond the philanthropic, welfare and caring roles more usually associated with wealthy young women. As such, these progressive schools sought to redefine the limits of acceptable employment opportunities for women.[119]

The Kenneys continued to work with and for women who shared their reforming interests and to draw on connections formed within the suffrage community. The first step in this later phase of their career was their appointment at the Lenox School, New York, under Jessica Cosgrave.[120] For Jessica Cosgrave, as for Jane and Caroline Kenney, education, suffrage and women's rights more generally, were inherently linked. She was a member of the first class of women to graduate from Barnard College and – barred from Columbia University because she was a woman – earned a law degree from New York University. A self-defined 'headstrong radical' in her youth, she considered herself an '"Orthodox" socialist and feminist' and was elected President of the New York Equal Franchise Society in 1912.[121] In this capacity, she was particularly concerned with the needs and rights of working women and published a pamphlet arguing that working women needed the vote in order to directly influence the legislation which shaped their lives.[122] Even late in life, she told a reporter that 'if there is any sensation more exquisite than walking up Fifth Avenue to music in a parade for an unpopular cause, I fail to know what it is'. Though she may not have used the language of militancy, she participated in and relished direct forms of action. Taking part in a parade in which rotten eggs and vegetables were thrown at participants, for example, she so enjoyed the experience that she returned to the start of the parade to experience it again.[123] Jessica Cosgrave, and Jane and Caroline Kenney clearly shared a political philosophy informed by the needs and rights of women, as well as a sympathetic association with direct action, which informed their work as teachers and educational leaders.

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118 Kenney, *Recollections*
119 Rury, *Education and Social Change*, pp. 65-6
120 Born Jessica Garretson, she was known as Jessica Garretson Finch during her first marriage to James Wells Finch, and Jessica Cosgrave after her second marriage to John O'Hara Cosgrave.
121 *Washington Post*, 11 November 1945, p. S3
122 Jessica Garretson Finch, *How the Ballot Would Help the Working Woman*, Pamphlet produced by the Equal Franchise Society of New York City, 1909, Cambridge MA, Schlesinger Library Collections, History of Women, no. 8980
123 *New Yorker,* Profile, 13 April 1946, p. 35

Jessica Cosgrave founded two schools: Finch School, in 1900, and the Lenox School in 1916, as a feeder school for Finch, which gained a reputation as 'one of the country's most famous "finishing" schools' and attracted the daughters of New York's wealthy and elite families.[124] At first, Cosgrave was unhappy that many of the girls who came to Finch were from privileged backgrounds. Later, she grew to feel that these children, 'perhaps more than others, needed the humanizing influence of well-planned schooling'.[125] For Cosgrave, then, educating the daughters of the elite was underpinned by a democratic impulse, a chance to ensure that these young women would grow up with a sense of social responsibility and the desire and capacity to exercise it. As she told a reporter: 'My chief object is to awaken social consciousness in the girls. I want my graduates to become powers in their communities, not idle, fashionable women'.[126] She had a well-developed and clearly defined philosophy on the purpose of education for women once they had acquired the vote:

> Now that women must bear their share in political life, and the multitude of their votes will either prove democracy a failure or a success … it is doubly necessary that they should be trained in responsibility while they are young and carry it out into life with them: responsibility for social justice, as the great purchasing power of the world, responsibility for good home-making and civic housekeeping, responsibility for the social standards in their own social and those influenced by them, and responsibility for the souls of the children God may entrust to them.[127]

In other words, Cosgrave saw women's increased political participation as an opportunity to extend their existing roles, as housekeepers, wives and mothers. 'The care of children, the sick, the poor, have always been in her province. The new ideals of social justice, the conviction that every one, and especially the child, should have full opportunity to develop to the full extent of his capacities … who should be able to do it half so well as mature women who have made successes of their own homes and children,' she wrote, adopting the longstanding discourse of maternalism.[128] However, she did not believe that it was possible for women to effectively combine motherhood with a career. Rather, she expected women to give up paid work when they had children. 'Women, like men, need to work and to love, but woman, unlike man, in order to fulfil her love must interrupt her work and change its nature entirely,' she claimed.[129] Nevertheless, once the children were grown, Cosgrave

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[124] Obituary of Jessica Cosgrave, *New York Times*, 1 November 1949, p. 27
[125] *The Washington Post*, 11 November 1945, p. S3
[126] *New Yorker* Profile, 13 April 1946, p. 46
[127] Jessica G. Cosgrave, *Mothers and Daughters* (London, 1926) p. 49
[128] Cosgrave, *Mothers and Daughters*, p. 71
[129] Cosgrave, *Mothers and Daughters*, p. 29

expected that women would once more join the workforce: not only to continue with their public duties and responsibilities, but to ensure that they themselves were intellectually and personally fulfilled.

Cosgrave therefore developed a novel approach to the competing demands of women's lives based around different stages of their lives.[130] She envisioned specific careers as being most suited to this model and designed the curriculum accordingly. Finch was specifically designed to allow women to study the humanities and pursue a career in the arts: to that end, the school gained a substantial art collection and eventually established a leading museum.[131] Most students at Finch divided their time between academic study and creative pursuits, though in 1913 the school was the first in New York to introduce typing and shorthand for young women.[132] It was not until World War II that Cosgrave reformed the curriculum and introduced vocational training, including commercial art and design and secretarial work as well as 'domestic work'.[133]

Jessica Cosgrave believed that Jane and Caroline Kenney shared her educational philosophy entirely. 'Their educational ideals are so exactly my own, and the technique by which they carry them out so fine, that I am associating them with me in the management of the whole school,' she wrote.[134] In consequence, the Kenneys had significant responsibilities, autonomy and independence over all aspects of the school. The Board was not permitted to develop new policies without Jane and Caroline Kenney's involvement, and they were guaranteed jobs for life as principals as well as generous provision in the event they became ill.[135] Jane and Caroline Kenney were given the responsibility of preparing the youngest students to embark on the path laid out for them by Cosgrave, first as directors, then associate principals, and finally joint principals of the Lenox School. Here, girls took the 'college preparatory and general courses' which would prepare them for this education, including 'Athletics, Music, Art and French'.[136] For Jane and Caroline Kenney, this work was more than a career, and more than a vocation, inseparable from their personal lives. Board Members of the school were expected to note and recognise 'the building up of the Lenox School by the Misses Kenney, since it involves their very life and strength'.[137] They were

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130 *New Yorker,* Profile, 13 April 1946, p. 37, Cosgrave, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 64-73
131 *Washington Post*, 11 November 1945, p. S3
132 *New Yorker* Profile, 13 April 1946, p. 39
133 Obituary of Jessica Cosgrave, *New York Times*, 1 November 1949, p. 27
134 Jessica Cosgrave to unnamed recipient, 19 March 1923, KP/JK/4/2/2/13
135 Extract from Agreement offered to the Misses Kenney in 1924 (edited copy made by Jessie Kenney) KP/JK/4/2/2/13
136 *Vogue's School and Camp Directory*, 1 July 1928, p. 17
137 Extract from Agreement offered to the Misses Kenney

considered a great success by the Board, faculty and parents alike, and under their leadership the school expanded from a handful of students to 170 pupils. On their departure, parents wrote a generous tribute to the Kenneys which asserted that 'the school during the last five years under your active principalship (sic) has achieved a reputation for its sound training, thorough work and high ideals … Your unselfish and unfailing devotion over a long period of years to the school and everyone connected with it has made for you a host of admirers and a body of loyal and devoted friends.'[138]

But Jane and Caroline Kenney did not simply implement Jessica Cosgrave's vision: they brought their own educational ideals and practice to the Lenox School. They took the emphasis on moral, spiritual and emotional development which was so central to the Montessori method and applied this in a new context. Parents and staff alike believed that the Kenneys' strength lay in their psychological understanding of individual children. 'I can truthfully say that I have never seen such splendid understanding and psychological analysis of each child's problem which the invariable solution of that problem in a way that means achievement in studies and happiness and serenity of mind,' Cosgrave asserted. She also told the sisters that their work was:

> unique in the intellectual world. The first emphasis, and the first result is spiritual, which to my mind should be the essence of all educational development. When one secures in addition to this the complete happiness of the pupil based upon poise and evenly developed progress, and the quite remarkable advancement of the individual pupil, it seems to fulfil all that we mean, or should mean by education.[139]

These views were shared by parents, faculty and the Board of the school. As principals, the Kenneys were responsible for more than twenty other teachers, who expressed thanks for the 'valuable leadership which has meant to them individually the most generous consideration, the warmest personal sympathy and the heartiest co-operation in all their efforts'.[140] The Board too 'heartily commend[ed] the excellent work of the Misses Kenney for the untiring services which they have rendered to the Lenox School and for the high standard of education and for the building of character which they have given to the pupils'.[141] Commenting on the 'justice and righteousness' which created a 'serene atmosphere,' parents wrote collectively that:

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[138] A copy of a[n] appreciation from the present and past parents of the students of the Lenox School to The Misses Kenney, Principals of the Lenox School, KP/JK/4/2/2/13
[139] Jessica Cosgrave to the Misses Kenney, 1 January 1921, KP/JK/4/2/2/13
[140] Letter from the Faculty to the Misses Kenney, 24 January 1929, KP/CK
[141] Resolution from the Board of the Lenox School, 2 January 1929, KP/CK

> You had made a name for yourselves in New York as instructors and directors of exceptional ability before you became principals. The unique methods of education you have invented and introduced among the young pupils added to your own sympathetic and psychological understand of their unfolding minds, secure poise and serenity in addition to most unusual progress.[142]

Within the school community, then, the Kenneys were perceived as educational visionaries with innovative methods and deep insights. Their approach to education was valued in and of itself, and as the essential foundation from which girls could realise Jessica Cosgrave's vision of ideal womanhood.

Their final school, however, offered an alternative vision of womanhood, more directly grounded in ideas of women's 'equality' rather than 'difference'. The Rydal School, Pennsylvania, was a joint boarding and day school for children from nursery to eighth grade, linked with the Ogontz School and its associated Junior College such that many students spent their entire education within the family of schools. Like Lenox and Finch, Rydal and Ogontz were very consciously targeted at the daughters of a wealthy elite, and the schools can be seen on the same advertising pages of *Vogue*.[143] It had a similar reputation as a superior finishing school – with afternoon tea at 3pm – and for many years, was so exclusive that prospective students needed a recommendation from an existing contact at the school.[144] Boarding at Rydal in the 1920s cost $1400 a year, and the day school $350; riding was extra, and the school was, of course, therefore small, with eleven students in a typical graduating class.[145] Like Jessica Cosgrave, the principal, Abby Sutherland, was alert to criticisms of elitism, and argued that education was a way of countering privilege in order to instil a sense of social responsibility. 'Often a family of wealth and position in the American plutocracy seems to feel its superiority … but daily school attitude, held firmly by leaders, can evolve true democracy'.[146]

Abby Sutherland also shared Jessica Cosgrave's interest in new educational ideas. Advertising for the school stressed that 'the ideals of modern, progressive education are applied throughout the grades'.[147] However, she had rather different ideas about the purpose of education and the future life course of students under her charge. Where Lenox and Finch envisioned women entering careers in the arts and humanities, and offered courses

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142 A copy of a[n] appreciation
143 *Vogue's School and Camp Directory*, 13 April 1929, pp. 50-1
144 James M. Farron, 'Retrospect' (Unpublished Penn State Pamphlet, 1960), p. 23, Pennsylvania, Penn State Abington, Ogontz School Archives
145 Rydal: Junior department of the Ogontz School, 1920s Catalogue, Ogontz School for Young Ladies, Series 9, Pennsylvania, Penn State Abington, Ogontz School Archives
146 Abby Sutherland, *100 Years of Ogontz* (1958) p. 7
147 Rydal Catalogue

accordingly, Rydal and Ogontz anticipated women entering a far wider range of possible careers and developed a broader curriculum with a much stronger focus on academic subjects and college preparation. At Rydal, for example, students studied French and Latin – the essential precursor to higher education – while Ogontz encouraged students to study maths, chemistry and astronomy.[148] Sutherland offered the advanced courses which enabled students to transfer to college, modelled on the curriculum offered at Vassar.[149] She also placed a great deal of emphasis on girls' physical wellbeing. Ogontz had been the first school for girls in the country to introduce military drills and became nationally known for its military-style parades. Younger students were expected to benefit from regular swimming, eurhythmics and riding, while older students participated in gymnastics, athletics, baseball, basketball, hockey, golf and tennis.[150] Within limits, older students were also expected to critically consider what it meant to be a woman in 1930s America. One speaker who visited in 1929 'maintained the old adage that woman's place is in the home, but also contended that times are changing and feminine interests need not be wholly confined within those walls'.[151] An essay competition asked students to consider 'The Business of Being a Woman,' on the basis that 'husbands don't always fall off Christmas trees to every girl who wants one'.[152]

The education and expectations established at Rydal and Ogontz led graduates into several male-dominated professions, including medicine, banking and law. A surprising number became pilots, inspired by Ogontz's most famous graduate, Amelia Earhart, who returned to campus several times while Jane and Caroline were in residence. Cornelia Fort and Winnabelle Coffee Pierce were among those who became pilots in World War II. Elizabeth Gillies became an aeronautics instructor and Cornelia Hort was both the first witness to Pearl Harbor and the first American woman to die on active military service. The ethos of the schools, the subjects available, and the role models created through alumni networks all held out possibilities and opportunities unknown to previous generations of students, and Abby Sutherland took great pride in their unusual career successes, not least as they challenged class as well as gender stereotypes.[153] 'The number who distinguished

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148 Frank D. Quattrone, *Penn State Abington and the Ogontz School* (Charleston, 2016) p. 21
149 Laura Fattall, 'A Gracious Age: Female Education at the Ogontz School,' (Unpublished Catalogue, 1987) p. 9, Pennsylvania, Penn State Abington, Ogontz School Archives
150 Rydal Catalogue, Quattrone, *Penn State and Ogontz,* p. 109
151 Ruth Bryan Owen, 16 October 1929, Ogontz Memory Book, 1929-1930, Pennsylvania, Penn State Abington, Ogontz School Archives
152 Ada Pierce McCormick to Abby Sutherland, 25 May 1927, Ada Pierce McCormick Series, Pennsylvania, Penn State Abington, Ogontz School Archives
153 Quattrone, *Penn State and Ogontz,* p. 67

themselves in the professions, arts and the business world is a surprising reversal of the general opinion that the *jeunesse doree* are idlers and pleasure seeker,' she wrote.[154]

There were, however, limits to this vision of expanded and enhanced education. Abby Sutherland recognised that, as independently wealthy women, not all her students would choose a professional career. Important stress was therefore placed on students' future role in their communities as charitable and philanthropic leaders, echoing maternalist ideas about women's unique capacity for these roles.[155] Students were encouraged to develop a sense of civic consciousness: Abby Sutherland noted in her official history of the school that they had 'knit and wound bandages for the Civil War, the Spanish American war, and two World Wars' such that 'public spirit and patriotic devotion characterized this group of privileged girls'.[156] A course on 'The Art of Living' asked students to consider challenges which would affect them personally and the society in which they would live, including 'work, children, money, sorrow, housing, and the problems of the unmarried'.[157] Students continued to study more traditionally feminine subjects including domestic science, art, music and nature.[158] Motherhood itself was also a subject of scientific and practical study: each year an orphan and a nurse came to live on campus, and students took turns to care for the baby.[159] A former teacher argued that 'the Ogontz School educated young women aggressively in all aspects of their lives, yet it was reticent on the beneficial political implications of that education. The *Mosaics* [school magazines] of the early twentieth century … made no mention of the women's suffrage movement.'[160] While students might, on an individual basis, seek to challenge gendered norms and expectations through their career choices, the school thus still also upheld more traditional ideas of womanhood and chose to avoid more controversial areas of debate on women's roles.

Abby Sutherland saw teaching as an exceptionally demanding role which left little space for separation between professional and personal lives:

> The teachers of private boarding schools, in my experience, have been women of rare devotion to their subject and to their students. The life of the home and the school combined leave no place for time-servers or pretenders. The teacher is not only an instructor, she is a guide, a friend in loco parentis. She is living with her students and must command their respect as a well-bred lady at table, in the dining room, as well as a trained student in some line which she excels.[161]

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154 Sutherland, *100 Years*, p. 46
155 Sutherland, *100 Years*, pp. 50-55
156 Sutherland, *100 Years*, p. 48
157 Laura Fattall, 'A Gracious Age', p. 11
158 Rydal Catalogue
159 Quattrone, *Penn State and Ogontz*, p. 93
160 Laura Fattall, 'A Gracious Age', p. 18
161 Sutherland, *100 Years*, p. 3

Her concept of teaching recalls long-standing ideas of the sacred nature of teaching and women's particular fitness to carry it out, but also chimes with Jane and Caroline Kenney's complete blending of personal and professional life. Sutherland had high expectations of her staff and prided herself on the quality of her faculty. Evidently well-connected, she was friends with both WB Yeats and Carl Sandberg, and persuaded them both to address the students. Rabindrath Tagore, the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, also visited, and later Sigmund Freud's son was an algebra teacher.[162] Jane and Caroline Kenney were among very few faculty members who did not have degree-level qualifications and many of the teachers held advanced graduate degrees from elite colleges. Among those appointed at the same time as Jane and Caroline were graduates of Cambridge, Bryn Mawr, and the University of Pennsylvania.[163] This is an indication of the increasing professionalisation of the teaching profession, which Kate Rousmaniere has argued had the effect of excluding the working-class women who would have formerly used a teaching career as a strategy for social mobility, as Jane and Caroline themselves had done.[164]

In this context, then, the Kenneys needed to draw on strategies which extended beyond their formal teaching capabilities. The school's advertising noted not just their wealth of experience but also presented them as English ladies with the particular qualities that represented. As their niece explained:

> They had to be IN CHARGE at all times and it had to be apparent to parents and children, to gain their confidence, but it had to be shown in a NICE way. Their asset was that they were English (in this cosmopolitan age that may sound odd, but it was undoubtedly a factor could teach these daughters of the wealthy to speak "nicely," could teach them good manners, and all that, along with the academic side).[165]

The Kenneys were thus appreciated for their ability to socialise the daughters of the wealthy, instilling 'correct' manners, accent and behaviour, as well as their skills as teachers. This concern for manners extended to their own family. Jane commented that her brother Bert's grandchildren 'were nice children, bright minds, but manners not special'.[166] These norms were clearly shaped as much by expectations of class as gender; but the Kenneys do not appear to have resisted these norms. Indeed, their careers as a whole indicate their consistent belief that part of the purpose of education was to teach children to behave in

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[162] Quattrone, *Penn State and Ogontz*, p. 9 and 107, James M. Farron, 'Retrospect', p. 22
[163] Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher*, p. 27 and 204. She indicates that this was evident from the 1890s but accelerated after the First World War.
[164] *Ogontz Mosaic*, November 1929, p. 26, available online at https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/ogontz-mosaic (accessed 1 March 2017)
[165] Beatrice Clarke to Kent Kenney, May 2001, KP/CLA/3
[166] KP/CLA/5

ways which adhered to particular standards of respectable behaviour. They may have been feminists, but they were not revolutionaries.

Conclusion

In recovering the work of Jane and Caroline Kenney, and situating them in the broader suffrage and education landscape, this chapter has highlighted unknown connections between previously disconnected projects, and thus strengthens historical understanding of the links between various strands of social reform. Jane and Caroline Kenney's careers offer a different perspective on the motivations and interests of feminist educators in the early twentieth century. The surviving evidence suggests that rather than practical concerns with equal pay and professional status, these women were motivated by ideological concerns about the meaning and purpose of education. As Jane told Annie, 'a teacher can be a dope, but an educationalist is always a teacher'.[167] Their interests in Montessori were grounded in their belief in the power of education to alleviate and ameliorate social and material disadvantage. In their later work, the Kenneys turned to the specific challenges of teaching young girls to become adolescents and young women during a period in which concepts and expectations of, and opportunities for, women and girls were rapidly changing. Their different priorities at different times reflect pragmatic decisions about their careers and available opportunities as well as their beliefs and principles.

However, the consistent theme within their careers is their desire to develop practical solutions to contemporary educational preoccupations: from pedagogical reform, to the acute needs of disadvantaged children, to the appropriate curriculum for elite women. The schools that the Kenneys taught at were all very different, but all were self-consciously modern, progressive, and idealistic, and gave the Kenneys space and freedom to develop their own particular education practice. It is clear, however, that their careers should not be understood as a heroic narrative of achievement against the odds. Compromise, disappointment and even failure were equally important experiences in their careers. Evidently, some aspects of their reform agenda were more acceptable than others. While at least some elite American parents appeared keen to ensure their daughters received a broad education which encompassed new subjects and anticipated new roles, the Kenneys' more

[167] Jane Kenney to Annie Kenney, 6 September 1949, KP/AK/2/KenneyJane/2

controversial experimental projects did not succeed in showcasing the effectiveness of progressive ideals in the ways that they had hoped.

This chapter has also demonstrated that the relationships forged on the basis of shared political interests, especially suffrage, gave the Kenneys access to new opportunities and resources. Through these connections, the Kenney sisters were able to develop a series of partnerships centred around new educational ideas and philosophies. It is evident that, although they were always the more 'junior' partner in these relationships, they were held in great esteem by the internationally and nationally-known figures – Emmeline Pankhurst, Maria Montessori, Alexander Graham Bell, Margaret Wilson, Jessica Cosgrave and Abby Sutherland – with whom they worked. This network of like-minded progressives was evidently a driver of social mobility as well as social reform, giving the Kenneys access to rewarding career opportunities which took them an extraordinary distance – geographic and social – from their starting point. Nor were the Kenneys ever wholly subordinate in their partnerships. They had a wealth of resources – not just in their professional and personal connections, but also in their direct training in the Montessori method, their increasing experience, and even, at the Rydal School, their very 'Englishness' – which underpinned their credibility and cemented their professional reputations. Their career decisions demonstrate their independence, agency, and a willingness to leave the security of their relationships when they were no longer effective or fulfilling. They had a strong sense of their own self-worth and value. As Jessie wrote, 'I feel sure that Jane made up her mind that the labourer was worthy of his hire and that where her work lay in future, even for Dotoressa Montessori herself that she would have everything in "black and white" and proper renumeration'.[168]

Jane and Caroline were greatly respected by their family members and associates. Jessie, for example, called the Lenox School 'one of the most daring and original ventures in the United States'.[169] They were perceived as pioneers in more ways than one: Nell's daughters remembered admiring their spirit of adventure as they regularly criss-crossed the Atlantic, and even drove themselves to California during the late 1920s, when female drivers were still perceived as unusual.[170] Emmeline Pankhurst was a great admirer of both Jane and Caroline, and told Jessie 'how much she had admired Jennie and Kitty; how wonderfully they had used the opportunities given to them; how meagre the sum of money that had been spent on their education compared to what she had spent on Sylvia and Adela and

[168] Notes by Me about Jane and Caroline, KP/JK/4/2/2/13
[169] Chapter – Annie, Jane, Rowland, Nell, Self, KP/JK/4/2/2/3
[170] Beatrice Clarke to Kent Kenney, May 2001, KP/CLA/3

how constructive their lives had been'.[171] Their move towards more exclusive and elite education was not seen as a shift away from their more obviously socially conscious work, but rather as a testament to their professional abilities. The final chapter will show how this work was incorporated into the family's collective self-conception and self-construction as pioneering reformers.

[171] Jessie Kenney to Christabel Pankhurst, 12 October 1935, KP/JK/3/Pankhurst

Chapter Six: 'My name, no doubt, has long been forgotten': constructing alternative identities and creating legacies in the aftermath of suffrage[1]

'After I left [the militant suffrage movement] what happened is not part of my life,' wrote Annie Kenney in her autobiography, implying that her years as an activist were the sum total of her life and work.[2] Subsequent historians have largely taken this at face value, focusing their studies on her life before 1918 and distilling the following 34 years into a few paragraphs.[3] Their conclusions emphasise several common features: that she lived a quiet life with her husband and son, found solace in esoteric religion and became entirely detached from contemporary politics. Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Suffragette Movement* quotes the suffragette Beatrice Harraden saying that 'We thought it impossible that she could live long – yet now she has married and got fat,' implying in dismissive and hurtful tones that Annie Kenney was now entirely irrelevant to the women's movement.[4] Yet any understanding of women's suffrage activism must be incomplete if it does not take full account both of the Kenneys' lives after the vote was won, and how they remembered and understood their work. As Caroline Howlett has suggested, since Annie Kenney's comments cannot literally be true, they seem to point towards a shift in the relative significance of collective identity to individual selfhood at the moment that she left the WSPU.[5] This study thus concludes with an analysis of how this shift was experienced and expressed in the Kenneys' lives.

This chapter first identifies the reasons the Kenney sisters took no further part in organised feminist politics after 1918, before turning to examine their – largely unsuccessful – attempts to create renewed purpose in their lives outside the formal women's movement. As they became increasingly distant from the women's movement and contemporary politics, they became more preoccupied with the past. Their post-war work therefore needs to be understood as a response to their increasing marginalisation. Confident assertions of their own value and importance are the products of anxiety, loss and uncertainty. Locating themselves firmly as actors in significant historical events was a way of creating a coherent narrative and shape to their lives. In drawing attention to this ambivalence, this chapter complicates more optimistic assessments of the aftermath of suffrage, indicating that not all

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1 Annie Kenney to Mr Owen, 20 June 1951, KP/AK/3/3/1
2 Kenney, *Memories*, p. 289
3 Abrams, *Freedom's Cause*, p. 58, Bouffard-Gilbreath, 'Annie Kenney', p 84. Cooper, 'Annie Kenney', pp. 76-84 notes her interest in theosophy and suffrage history but sees 1918 as 'the end of the crusade'. (p. 75)
4 Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p. 185
5 Caroline Howlett, 'Gender, Identity and Collectivity in the Writings of the British Suffragette Movement 1906-1959', (PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1996) p. 21

former participants shared a sense of achievement, nor of confidence and hope for the future. This also underlines the significance of collective identity in these women's lives. Disconnected from the support and solidarity available through participation in contemporary politics, the Kenneys returned to their own history to reassert the significance of their lives. Unable to influence the present, they instead attempted to shape the presentation of the past.

Historians have traditionally seen the inter-war period as particularly difficult for the women's movement, characterising these years as a period of abeyance between first and second-wave feminism. Many have taken the post-war restructuring of the labour market as evidence of a broader social backlash against gender equality, and seen a conservative reassertion of traditional roles for women.[6] Others have argued that the feminist movement struggled in this context, finding it difficult to forge a new and coherent identity without the unifying campaign for the franchise and that it failed to drive through radical and far-reaching change.[7] Dominant understandings of feminist activity as proceeding in 'waves' has meant that the campaign was perceived as largely dormant after the vote was won – albeit with the significant but temporary disruption to gender roles wrought by the Second World War – until the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement towards the end of the 1960s.

More recent scholarship has challenged the 'wave' metaphor and significantly revised established narratives of feminist activism during the twentieth century.[8] Understandings of inter-war feminism in particular have been substantially revised.[9] Where previous historians saw fragmentation, a new generation has identified diversity, thriving local cultures of activism, and a proliferation of groups campaigning for women even though they may not have identified as feminist.[10] They do not seek to make unhelpful

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[6] Susan Kingsley Kent, 'The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War I and the Demise of British Feminism', *The Journal of British Studies,* 27/3 (1988), Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace*, Deidre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars, 1918-1939* (London, 1989)

[7] 'The study of British women's history during this period leaves behind an impression of unrealized potential and wasted talent,' is a typically bleak assessment by Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p 323. See also Harold L. Smith, 'British Feminism in the 1920s', in Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 1990), Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain Since 1914* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 32-218, Garner, *Stepping Stones*, p. 111

[8] Clare Hemmings, 'Telling Feminist Stories', *Feminist Theory,* 6/2 (2005), Jo Reger, 'Finding a Place in History: The Discursive Legacy of the Wave Metaphor and Contemporary Feminism', *Feminist Studies,* 43/1 (2017)

[9] For an analysis of these schools of thought see Joanne Workman, 'Wading Through the Mire: A Historiographical Student of the British Women's Movement Between the Wars', *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History,* 2 (2001)

[10] Zoë Thomas, 'Historical Pageants, Citizenship, and the Performance of Women's History before Second-Wave Feminism', *Twentieth Century British History,* 28/3 (2016), Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (London, 1997), Scott, *The Women's Co-operative Guild*, Pat Thane, 'The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture, 1918-1939',

comparisons with the intensity of the pre-war struggle, but instead articulate how campaigners responded to the changed context.[11] This perspective has recast this period as characterised by possibility rather than pessimism, noting the landmark legislative achievements and significant shifts in policy which can be attributed to the influence of the women's movement and female voters.[12] While still recognising how much remained to be done, this seems to be more in keeping with how many women activists themselves saw their achievement.[13] Important legislative successes, the results of ongoing effective political campaigns, and the evolution of new forms of feminist politics to address new challenges, is testament to the ongoing salience of women's collective identity and activism beyond the suffrage movement. The Kenneys, however, had only a very indirect connection with the women's movement in any form after 1918. To conclude this study of their lives, then, we need to understand why that was, what else they occupied themselves with, and how they invested their lives with new meaning.

It is perhaps not surprising that the lives of militant activists in the years up to 1918 have received far more attention than those afterwards. Though many former militants did continue in some form of active national political campaigning – through, for example, the Six Point Group[14] – they are usually perceived as far less significant in contemporary politics than former members of the NUWSS.[15] The Pankhursts' embrace of other causes – particularly Christabel Pankhurst's turn to millenarianism – as well as the fact that a few members later became attracted to the British Union of Fascists, is often cited by those historians especially critical of the WSPU and its tactics in order to undermine their pre-war

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in Julie V. Gottleib and Richard Toye (ed.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke, 2013), June Hannam and Karen Hunt, 'Towards an Archaelology of Interwar Women's Politics: The Local and the Everyday', in Julie V Gottleib and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain 1918-1945* (Basingstoke, 2013), Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane (eds.), *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century*. Helen McCarthy locates this shift in a broader transformation of political culture, emphasising non-party activity. Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal,* 50/4 (2007). Other scholars, such as Alison Light and Claire Langhamer, have analysed broader cultural trends which opened up new opportunities for women. Alison Light, *Forever England: Feminism, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London, 1991) Langhamer, *Women's Leisure*

[11] Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914-28* (Basingstoke, 1989)

[12] Law, *Suffrage and Power*, Maria DiCenzo, "Our Freedom and Its Results': Measuring Progress in the Aftermath of Suffrage', *Women's History Review,* 23/3 (2014), Pat Thane, 'What Difference did the Vote Make', in Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, 2001)

[13] Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *The Women's Victory - and After: Personal Reminiscences* (London, 1920), Ray Strachey (ed.), *Our Freedom and Its Results*

[14] Law, *Suffrage and Power*, p. 209, Krista Cowman, *Women in British Politics, c.1689-1979* (Basingstoke, 2010) p. 153-4. Lady Rhondda and Helen Archdale were perhaps the most prominent members of this group, but Charlotte Marsh, Stella Newsome and Dorothy Evans were also deeply involved.

[15] Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p. 45, see also p. 319

work.[16] Undoubtedly, it is easier to write about women whose lives seem to follow a clear, coherent and consistent political path.[17] This may be one reason that, for example, Charlotte Despard has received less historiographical attention than other prominent activists who followed a more straightforward trajectory.[18] Yet in her study of the suffragette Mary Richardson, Hilda Kean rightly rejected the notion that 'coherence and unity should be privileged above eclecticism and confusion'.[19] It is equally important to analyse those lives which defy easy categorisation: not necessarily to attempt to impose order and logic but to acknowledge the contradictions and complexities of women's lives.

Sources for this period of the Kenneys' lives are much more fragmentary and less comprehensive. It is no longer possible to draw on extensive coverage in the newspapers nor on their own speeches and propaganda work, and a great deal of material was destroyed after Annie Kenney's death. Nevertheless, it has been possible to reconstruct a great deal about their post-war lives, interests and beliefs which offers insight into this ongoing process of self-construction and search for meaning in a post-suffrage world. As chapter five explored Jane and Caroline Kenney's post-war activities in some depth, the focus of this chapter is on Annie and Jessie Kenney's lives, with reference to other siblings where possible.

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[16] Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts*, Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p. 35-6, Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p. 46. As Hilda Kean notes, the numbers of ex-suffragettes who campaigned against fascism were far more significant. Hilda Kean, 'Some Problems of Constructing and Reconstructing a Suffragette's Life: Mary Richardson, Suffragette, Socialist and Fascist', *Women's History Review,* 7/4 (1998), p. 486

[17] See, for example, the important studies which follow women's activism beyond 1918 while avoiding the sense of disappointment discussed above. Whitelaw, *Cicely Hamilton*, John, *Elizabeth Robins*, John, *Evelyn Sharp*, John, *Turning the Tide*, Hall, *Stella Browne*. Significantly, though, all these women continued with more obvious political and public work beyond 1918 than the Kenneys.

[18] Though Charlotte Despard frequently receives brief mentions in the literature, both discrete studies of her life were written in the 1980s and she has not benefited from more sustained investigation in recent suffrage scholarship.

[19] Kean, 'Some Problems'

Retirement, seclusion and isolation?



Figure 15: Annie Kenney with her son Warwick Kenney-Taylor (undated, probably 1940s) suggests the impact which diabetes had on her health
KP/AK/9/19

There were clear reasons that Annie and Jessie Kenney did not continue to engage in national political campaigning after 1918. The first and most important was their health. Both women were worn out from their long years of campaigning. Jessie's suffrage career had been periodically interrupted by her need to travel abroad in search of a better climate, and she was especially ill after returning home from the trip to Russia with Emmeline Pankhurst, where she developed a kidney condition which gave her lifelong trouble.[20] (Frances Stevenson arranged for Jessie to have extra rations to help her recover).[21] Annie, meanwhile, continued to suffer the after-effects of her repeated forced feedings. 'I could work no longer, I was exhausted to death … For the first time in my life I yearned for death,' she wrote in *Memories of a Militant*.[22] Annie's health problems would only continue to increase: the weight gain which Beatrice Harraden and Sylvia Pankhurst cruelly pointed out was the consequence of undiagnosed diabetes, a condition which greatly affected the rest of her life.[23] Neither sister had the strength or capacity to continue working with the same

[20] Interview with Jessie Kenney, 24 March 1964
[21] Jessie Kenney, *The Price of Liberty*, p. 133
[22] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 288
[23] This was not diagnosed until 1951. James Taylor attributed this condition to her force-feeding experiences. Interview with James Taylor, conducted by Brian Harrison

intensity that had been necessary over the previous fifteen years. In the short term, they needed to rest and recover.

The financial costs associated with voluntary political campaigning were another major barrier to their continuing in political activism. Both Jessie and Annie were proud of the fact that everything that they earned had been ploughed back into suffrage activism. It was a mark of their commitment that they left the movement without a penny to their name.[24] But this clearly made the necessity of earning a living more acute. Without the WSPU salary which had facilitated their careers in suffrage, the Kenneys simply did not have the resources to continue their work in a voluntary, unpaid capacity. This draws attention to the material structures which continued to shape women's ability to engage in politics.[25] As Jo Vellacott has argued, both feminist organisations and feminist activists in the inter-war period were often impoverished, creating difficulties for women who had the 'indelicacy' to require appropriate compensation for their professional work.[26] Though, as chapter four suggested, Jessie and Annie had profoundly benefited from the social and cultural capital derived from their associations with middle-class women in the suffrage movement, they did not share the financial security of many of their associates.

There were ideological as well as practical reasons why Jessie and Annie Kenney took no further part in national campaigns. After Christabel Pankhurst failed in her bid to be elected as MP for Smethwick, both Annie and Jessie strongly urged her that the Women's Party should take advantage of this opportunity to thoroughly reflect and develop a comprehensive policy platform.[27] 'What was needed is a philosophical basis for a new political party. Mrs P & CP might have supplied this, but we needed a [illeg] of complete rest and reflection. Annie and I saw this,' Jessie wrote.[28] They had a clear opportunity to develop their ideas beyond the day-to-day demands of campaigning. In Jessie's words, Annie proposed:

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[24] Kenney, *Memories*, p. 288

[25] Social class was, of course, no guarantee that former activists would be able to financially support themselves. See, for example, the difficulties experienced by Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst as documented in Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts*, p. 125, Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, p. 358 and 394, Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, p. 338, Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 429-30

[26] Jo Vellacott, 'A Place for Pacifism and Transnationalism in Feminist Theory: The Early Work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom', *Women's History Review,* 2/1 (1993), pp. 47-9

[27] On the Smethwick election and the Women's Party, see Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, pp. 32-5, Nicoletta Gullace, 'Christabel Pankhurst and the Smethwick Election: Right-Wing Feminism, the Great War and the Ideology of Consumption', *Women's History Review,* 23/3 (2014), Purvis, 'The Women's Party', Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, pp. 400-427

[28] 11 January 1952, JK/2

> another Movement for the rehabilitation of the men from the front and the women who had played such a great part in helping to win the war. There would have been an outline of our political programme, our social problems programme, and an appeal on the lines outlined in our industrial programme. We could then line up with the progressive forces and positive forces in the country … I feel that if Christabel had listened to my sister's outline for the future, we could have later started another campaign throughout the country on positive lines. But Christabel did not see things this way.[29]

Christabel Pankhurst's rejection of Annie Kenney's proposals marked the end of their partnership and the Kenney sisters' formal immersion in the women's movement.

The departure of Christabel Pankhurst and Emmeline Pankhurst from feminist activism and from the UK not only meant the disintegration of the formal organisational structures around them but also the informal networks which had provided such essential emotional support throughout the campaign. Like their sisters, Jane and Caroline, Annie and Jessie were at first able to benefit from the connections forged through their activism. For example, David Lloyd George's Private Secretary, Ernest Evans, gave Annie Kenney a letter to facilitate travel around Europe.[30] Yet these connections could not be relied upon indefinitely, especially as their friends had difficulties of their own to manage. Emily and Mary Blathwayt, for example, struggling to manage housekeeping after the war, had to write and tell Annie Kenney that she and her new baby would not be able to stay with her.[31] The Kenneys do not seem to have been able to recreate the extensive community of supportive friends and allies which had been so central to their lives. They had been so closely associated with Christabel Pankhurst and her ideas, that they may have found it difficult to form new alliances with those who might have been uncomfortable either with their pre-war militancy or their war-time extreme patriotism. They did stay in touch with some former friends – such as the Lyttons – and later restablished contact with the Pethick-Lawrences, and Jessie was often in contact with the Suffragette Fellowship.[32] However, there is no doubt that, for women whose lives had been defined by a sense of collective identity, total commitment to a cause, and complete immersion in tightly knit networks, this represented a significant change to their way of life. Neither sister writes explicitly about the challenges to their sense of self, but their increasing assertion of the importance of the individual –

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[29] KP/JK/4/2/2/9
[30] Ernest Evans, 18 May 1919, KP/AK/1/7
[31] MB and EB diaries, 16 November 1921
[32] The friendship with the Lytton family outlasted Constance Lytton's death in 1923. Correspondence with Edith Lytton refers several times to Annie visiting the Dowager Duchess: their home at Knebworth was not far from Letchworth. Fred Pethick-Lawrence's sister, also named Annie, lived her last years in a nursing home close to where Annie Kenney lived.

discussed further later in this chapter – is an indication of the anxieties and diminished confidence this loss of social and emotional support appears to have provoked.

Instead, family relationships took on renewed significance. Annie and Jessie were frequently reliant on the relative prosperity of Jane and Caroline who had stable jobs and incomes. For example, they paid for Jessie's professional training – discussed further below - and helped support her financially before she began earning.[33] They also attempted to arrange for James Taylor to meet with the celebrated tenor Enrico Caruso – his daughter was one of their pupils in New York – though he died before the relationship could lead to any sustained benefits.[34] Later, during World War II, the parcels they sent from America were essential to Annie Kenney's comfort. When in England, Jessie Kenney lived with Annie and her family until 1940.[35] Four of the other Kenney siblings – Bert, Mollie, Jane and Caroline – as well as Alice's family also lived in close proximity in a small town in California. Their relationships were characterised by ties of obligation and responsibility, genuine love and affection, and a strong sense of 'being Kenneys' all of which profoundly shaped their emotional connection to one another.

Annie Kenney's life was further changed by her marriage to James Taylor in 1920, and the birth of her son, Warwick Kenney-Taylor, in 1921. Her family, and especially her son, were her foremost priority from this time onwards. Speaking with Brian Harrison in 1974, Taylor said, 'once we were married, she dropped, if that's the right word, all her activities in the industrial world, in the political world, and devoted the whole of her energies and efforts on Warwick and myself (sic).'[36] Feminists had long sought to construct new forms of relationships which would allow them to pursue political interests within mutually supportive relationships, and they continued to press for new opportunities for women's entry into the public sphere, including campaigning against the marriage bar.[37] Nevertheless, while paid work and political activism were perceived as compatible with marriage, few thought it was a realistic prospect for women to combine a career with motherhood.[38] Neither did many feminists seek to challenge the family as an institution.[39] However, domesticity need not have been as restrictive as it had previously been. As Judy

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33 To follow on "What made you go to sea?" KP/4/2/2/10, EB's diary, 25 January 1922
34 Interview with James Taylor
35 Interview with Jessie Kenney, 24 March 1964
36 Interview with James Taylor. Warwick Kenney-Taylor concurred, writing 'In 1920 she married Mr James T Taylor and since then has devoted herself to family life, looking as it were, from the outside on the achievements and social improvements', KP/AK/6/2/1
37 Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family*, p. 42. Annie Kenney would have had the opportunity to observe such a marriage in the Pethick-Lawrences.
38 Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p. 7
39 Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family*, p. 5

Giles has shown, 'domestic modernity' was thought to offer a new sense of 'dignity and self-esteem' through various social and technological changes and the advent of consumerism, while, as Alison Light has argued, home and family itself took on renewed importance to national culture and identity in the inter-war years as the bedrock of national stability and prosperity.[40] The family, as Elizabeth Roberts and Claire Langhamer have suggested, remained the central focus of life for married women.[41]

It does not appear that Annie Kenney sought to challenge this idea in her private arrangements. Rather, she embraced a traditional nuclear family structure and division of labour. James Taylor's comments are ambiguous about the degree to which this was out of choice or necessity. 'I decided or we agreed that after Annie completed the last chapters of her book, that the whole of her attention and activity would be devoted to Warwick,' he told Brian Harrison.[42] There is clearly a world of difference for understandings of power and autonomy as to whether this was an outcome of negotiation and compromise or a unilateral decision by Taylor. However, as this thesis has noted, while working for the WSPU Annie Kenney had often struggled with finances, and her domestic arrangements were frequently taken care of by others, such as Mary Blathwayt and Louie Hatfield. There is a suggestion that this reliance on others remained a feature of her early married life: Grace Roe arranged her first marital home, and she wrote desperately to Emily Blathwayt asking if she and Warwick could come and live with the family again.[43] Financial hardship and a lack of practical housekeeping skills thus complicated her early married life.

As James Taylor's remarks indicate, it was motherhood specifically which became the focus of Annie Kenney's energies. Chapter three highlighted how significant ideas and concepts of motherhood were in shaping suffragette arguments in favour of the vote. This was not abstract rhetoric, however: but a deeply felt belief about the importance of the maternal role. In the 1920s, cultural ideas about the significance of motherhood gained additional traction with a reassertion of the importance of home and family life.[44] Annie and her sisters were particularly committed to this idea, since they saw their own mother as a shining example of womanhood and attributed their work to her influence. On a more

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[40] Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Feminity and Modernity* (Oxford, 2004) p. 11, Light, *Forever England*. See also Giles' comments on the limitations of assuming that domesticity is always restrictive in Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p 19 and Judy Giles, 'A Home of One's Own: Women and Domesticity in England 1918-1950', *Women's Studies International Forum,* 16/3 (1993)

[41] Langhamer, *Women's Leisure*, p. 135, Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford, 1984) p. 203

[42] Interview with James Taylor

[43] James Taylor's notes on meeting Annie Kenney, KP/JT/4

[44] Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty*

personal level, Annie Kenney may have believed she was unlikely to have other children and thus wanted to devote herself wholeheartedly to her son. She was 41 when her son was born and it was a difficult birth which necessitated an emergency caesarean section.[45] Warwick Kenney-Taylor also appears to have had experienced developmental challenges which may have intensified her concentration on his needs.[46]

All these factors indicate why political activism might have been more challenging: they do not, however, suggest that political activism was impossible. For example, many of the women who participated in the Six Point Group had taken very different stances on militancy and the WSPU's war effort: the Group created a space where these women could be reconciled and collaborate productively once more. A more direct comparison is even more suggestive. In the late 1920s and early 1930s Sylvia Pankhurst also moved to the suburbs and embraced late motherhood, made even more complicated by her single parenthood, and marked by equal interest in her son's educational development. Yet she did not withdraw from public life. On the contrary, this period was marked by energetic literary output, including her monumental *The Suffragette Movement*, together with new campaigns against fascism and for Ethiopian independence. *Save the Mothers* – a call for practical measure to reduce maternal and infant mortality – is just one example of how she drew on her changed private experience in her ongoing political concerns.[47]

There are some indications, however, that Annie Kenney did not necessarily expect to make such a marked withdrawal from public life. Indeed, in the 1920s she was sometimes prominently featured in the newspapers. Her marriage in 1920 was widely reported, often referring to her past association with suffragette violence. Her autobiography likewise received significant attention and was serialised in the *Sunday Post*.[48] In 1928 she wrote an extensive article refuting objections to the so-called 'flapper vote' and giving her whole-hearted support to further extension of the franchise.[49] She commented approvingly on the social changes that were already underway – a reconfiguration of marriage and the family, for example – and argued that young women would only make a positive contribution to national public life, since 'the heart of woman always beats in sympathy for the aged, the

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[45] EB's diary, 5 February 1921
[46] Interview with James Taylor, conducted by Brian Harrison
[47] Shirley Harrison, *Sylvia Pankhurst: The Rebellious Suffragette* (Newhaven, 2012) pp. 302-343, Connelly, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, especially pp. 123-7
[48] *Sunday Post*, 28 August 1921 to 13 November 1921
[49] Adrian Bingham has argued that opposition was driven by anti-socialism rather than anti-feminism: but though Annie Kenney continued to be deeply suspicious of, and hostile to, socialism, she obviously did not think that young women were especially likely to be susceptible. Adrian Bingham, "Stop the Flapper Vote Folly': Lord Rothermere, The Daily Mail and the Equalisation of the Franchise, 1927-28', *Twentieth Century British History,* 13/1 (2004)

sick, and the oppressed'.[50] In 1929, she was reported to be campaigning for the Liberal Party.[51] This suggests that she still retained a degree of visibility in public life. However, newspapers increasingly presented her as a figure from the past. Contemporary articles in the mainstream press tended to stress 'how completely the leaders of that famous constitutionless body, the WSPU, have faded out of the public eye'.[52] She was usually described with reference to her first prison sentence, in 1905, and as such, was clearly considered of historic, rather than contemporary, interest.

Nevertheless, the fact that Annie Kenney and her husband moved to Letchworth suggests that she did not necessarily anticipate a movement away from political life. Letchworth had been explicitly established for political and social purposes and had attracted many progressives, radicals and utopians.[53] Jessie Kenney described it to David Mitchell as 'quite a colony of Hampstead Garden Suburbish, Quakers, Rosicrucians, etc.'[54] Contemporary political questions of justice, equality and new ways of living were ever-present concerns among Letchworth's forward-thinking residents. Annie Kenney's former theosophist friend and WSPU comrade from Bristol, Millicent Browne (now Millicent Price) had been a leading member of the Letchworth WSPU and after her marriage, became an active member of the ILP and associated with the artists, intellectuals and bohemians also drawn to the town.[55] Price saw it as the most likely place for realising the form of socialism expressed in the beliefs of William Morris. Kenney may have shared an interest in this possibility. Letchworth was also closely associated with theosophy.[56] The theosophical school at Letchworth was opened by Annie Besant in 1921, and Kate Harvey, the WFL activist famous for her tax-resistance activities during the suffrage campaign, was heavily involved in the school's activities.[57]

After her move to Letchworth, Annie Kenney appears to have developed an increasing appreciation for the significance of local politics and life. In a letter to Jane and Caroline reflecting on a play which her son had taken part in, she expressed her belief in the centrality of local community to national strength:

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[50] *The Sunday Post,* 16 December 1928, p. 13
[51] *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 29 May 1929, p. 8
[52] *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 2 August 1923, p. 4
[53] Mervyn Miller, *English Garden Cities: An Introduction* (Swindon, 2010) p. 72
[54] David Mitchell's notes on interview with Jessie Kenney, 2 July 1965, London, Museum of London Suffragette Fellowship Collection, 73.83/48
[55] Price, *This World's Festival*, p.127 and 154
[56] Dixon, 'Theosophy in England', p. 78
[57] Chris McNab, *St Christopher's School: A Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2014), Dixon, 'Theosophy in England', p. 270. Though only run by the Theosophical Society until around 1930, St Christopher's remained a progressive school sought after by the children of radicals, intellectuals and artists: the children of Doris Lessing, Joe Slovo and Ruth First all attended, as did AA Gill and Jenny Diski.

> it is this kind of work that is keeping our dear country together, every village with its institution, every town with its dramatic soc, its musical group, its debating society, its Freemasonry, its Round Tables, its Rotarians and so on, which brings in every home that [illeg.] to one (sic) voluntary work, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Church Lads Brigade then the Churches, Women's Institutes, Red Cross Soc. It is no political party that keeps the country aware and awake but the voluntary effort of its citizens.[58]

In her own notes towards her autobiography, Jessie Kenney also expressed 'the higher hope we have in our village communities – county magazine – traditional songs – dances – customs. Literature'.[59] Their brother, Reginald Kenney, was a long-standing member of the Lancashire Authors Association and the Leigh Literary society, suggesting that this interest in local culture and local organising was shared among the siblings.[60]

This emphasis on the importance of voluntary associations, and the significance of social and cultural activities, reflects a continuation of their earliest understandings of politics, but also a turning away from national politics. The Kenneys had always been sceptical of traditional political parties, all perceived as prevaricating on suffrage and social reform which would benefit women, but there is a more fundamental disillusionment implied here. In the letter noted above, written to Jane in 1950, following the founding of the National Health Service, the National Insurance Act, and nationalisation of major industries, Annie Kenney nevertheless disregards the role of the state in social reform and writes only of a very limited ambition to 'keep our dear country together' and 'aware and awake'. This not only contrasts sharply with her own ambitious rhetoric on the prospects for genuine national transformation during the suffrage campaign, but also seems increasingly out of step with a broader political consensus on the importance of collective solutions to social problems.

This change not only reflected but reinforced their increasing detachment from collective movements and increasing focus on the self. The following sections of this chapter analyse this change in terms of Annie Kenney's religious faith and Jessie Kenney's complex experience of paid work. They should not wholly be understood as philosophical and political shifts, however. On the contrary, much of their new focus on their self was an attempt to explain their own detachment. If they were to be isolated from contemporary

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[58] Annie Kenney to Jane Kenney, 19 October 1950, KP/AK/2/KenneyJane/3
[59] 13 January 1952, KP/JK/2
[60] Yvonne Eckersley, 'Who Lived in My House?', *Past Forward*, August – November 2011, https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Docs/PDF/Resident/Leisure/Museums-and-archives/archives/Past-Forward/pf58.pdf (accessed 1 October 2017)

feminist politics, they would assert that isolation was valuable, and so invest their lives with new meaning.

The search for truth and the significance of the individual

Chapter two demonstrated that an idiosyncratic blend of Christian beliefs and theosophical interests were central to Annie Kenney's politics. This chapter now turns to consider how they were expressed in her unpublished text, *And All The Yesterdays*. Analysing this most complete statement of her religious faith, which purports to offer a logical and scientific case for reincarnation, also offers important insights into the evolution of her political thinking. It was not a purely philosophical work, nor entirely disengaged from contemporary events. On the contrary, it was begun as a response to the Nazi threat and concluded in the aftermath of war. As such, it can be read as a commentary on the limitations of contemporary political movements, and particularly the threat to the individual posed by totalitarian politics. However, rather than active engagement and action to counter these threats, *And All The Yesterdays* is preoccupied with the value of detachment and reflection. This was the opposite of the complete immersion in public activity which had characterised her suffrage activism. In her published autobiography, *Memories of a Militant,* the individual was enmeshed within, and subordinate to, a collective movement, but in *And All the Yesterdays*, the collective is perceived as potentially dangerous to the individual.

Numerous important studies have explored the resurgence of religious expression in the inter-war period, reflecting the sense of spiritual crisis engendered by the First World War, and a loss of faith in science.[61] Modern scholarship has often challenged the view that Britain became increasingly secular across the period, especially stressing the multiplicity of ways that people expressed belief outside formal religious institutions.[62] Religious beliefs continued to play a significant role in political movements.[63] As Keith Gildart's recent study of spiritual, supernatural and theosophic beliefs in the inter-war Labour Party shows, focusing purely on 'the economistic, the rational and the material' overlooks a hugely significant aspect of the way that reformers developed their political analyses and responses

[61] Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society*
[62] See, for example, Sarah C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark c.1880-1939* (Oxford, 1999), Alana Harris, *Faith in the Family: A Lived Religious History of English Catholicism* (Manchester, 2013), Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan (ed.), *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth Century Britain*. Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London, 2001) has been a crucial text which usefully places women at the centre of the narrative, though scholars have also argued that he overstates the degree to which Britain became secular after the 1960s.
[63] Summers, *Christian and Jewish Women in Britain*

to the political, economic and social challenges they observed.[64] However, there has been much less work on the interaction between feminist ideas and religious practices in the inter-war period.[65] Until recently, for example, Christabel Pankhurst's religious fervour in the post-war period has been largely perceived as bizarre, irrelevant, and essentially incompatible with feminism.[66] Davis *et al*, however, have rightly noted that 'we should be careful to avoid condemning theosophical and spiritual experiences as reactionary' and suggest that 'perhaps the retreat into other-worldliness was the product of a consciousness which, out of joint with a society in transition, sought an active solace elsewhere'.[67]

Though unconventional spirituality had been a shared family interest since childhood, it became increasingly significant in the inter-war period. Having been immersed in labour politics and journalism, and then engaged in diplomacy and propaganda, Rowland Kenney now turned to more spiritual pursuits.[68] He and his wife Asta joined the Theosophical Society at the same time as Annie and Jessie Kenney, and later, he studied with Ouspensky and Gurdieff at Fontainbleu, a centre which attracted many literary and cultural modernists: it was where Katherine Mansfield sought solace in the last weeks of her life and subsequently died.[69] He was also interested in, and convinced by, the popular faith healer Harry Edwards.[70] All the Kenney siblings took for granted the possibility of communication between the physical and spiritual worlds: Mollie, Nell and Annie all reported feeling their mother's presence or seeing her after death.[71] There was thus a shared family acceptance of, and interest in, alternative spiritual beliefs which could be debated in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect.

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[64] Keith Gildart, 'Seance Sitters, Ghost Hunters, Spiritualists, and Theosophists: Estoteric Belief and Practice in the British Parliamentary Labour Party, c.1929-51', *Twentieth Century British History,* 29/3 (2018) p. 358

[65] Important recent texts on women's spiritual practices, Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society* and Jane Shaw, *Octavia, Daughter of God: The Story of a Female Messiah and her Followers* (London, 2011), for example, do not specifically consider these developments in relation to the women's movement. The literature instead concentrates on specific feminist campaigns within particular religious traditions, such as Jessica Thurlow, "The Great Offender': Feminists and the Campaign for Women's Ordination', *Women's History Review,* 23/3 (2014)

[66] For example, Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, p. 285, Barbara Castle, *Sylvia and Christabel Pankhurst* (Harmondsworth, 1987) p. 158, Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p. 35. For more sympathetic recent readings, see Timothy Larsen, *Christabel Pankhurst: Fundamentalism and Feminism in Coalition* (Woodbridge, 2002) and Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 437-460.

[67] Davis, Durham, Hall, Langan, and Sutton, 'The Public Face of Feminism', p. 311

[68] Kenney, *Westering*, pp. 311-345

[69] 'Our New Master', *The London Rosicrucian*, April-May-June 1958. For a recent account of Fontainbleu see Alex Owen, 'The 'Religious Sense' in a Post-War Secular Age', *Past & Present,* 190 Issue Supplement/1 (2006)

[70] Jessie Kenney's diary, 1 January 1952, KP/JK/2. Harry Edwards was one of the most widely-known and popular faith healers in the mid-twentieth century. Philip Weaver, 'Edwards, Henry James (1893–1976)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oct 2012; online edn, Sept 2014 (http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/97273, accessed 4 Nov 2017)

[71] Jessie Kenney's diary, 5 May 1952, KP/JK/2

For some of the siblings, religion and politics were not only seen as compatible, but mutually reinforcing. Both Rowland and Reginald Kenney, for example, were persuaded by the economy theory of social credit, associated with and strongly informed by theosophical ideas.[72] Jill Roe argues that social credit resonated with many who had been attracted by the religion of socialism and were disenchanted by the rationalist politics which seemed increasingly to dominate labour politics.[73] Reginald Kenney unsuccessfully stood as a Parliamentary candidate in 1935.[74] One newspaper reported that his 'addresses are said to combine the simplicity and lucidity of a Blatchford with a passion and fervour reminiscent of Lloyd George'.[75] Theosophical ideas could thus open up new possibilities for political activism.

For Annie Kenney, however, an increasing interest in religion and faith was accompanied by a turning away from public engagement towards a life of thought and reflection. As chapter two demonstrated, an interest in theosophy had long underpinned her activism. Now, however, it was used to justify the exact opposite. *And All The Yesterdays* stressed above all the individual pursuit of knowledge and truth, through 'fervent search, diligent study, purity of purpose and a genuine desire to know God's law'.[76] Jessie Kenney put it more succinctly: 'Annie and I wanted to know what made God tick,' she told David Mitchell.[77] This was a direct response to what Annie Kenney perceived as lacking in contemporary society. Despite increasing democracy, liberty and prosperity, she believed that far too many people were unsatisfied with their lives. Improvement in the material conditions of life were a necessary but insufficient condition for human progress. In prioritising material wealth, too many were living in 'ignorance, superstition, greed, avarice [and prioritised] a worshipping of the outer at the expense of the soul'.[78] Again, this reflects her earliest interests in the 'religion of socialism', and the centrality of reading and study to her political awakening. Individuals needed to seek solace in quiet reflection and spiritual nourishment, rather than in activity. 'In fact once the <u>many</u> become interesting (sic) in <u>being</u>

[72] Kenney, *Westering*, pp. 286-303, Burkitt, Hutchinson, and Bunxitt, *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism*, pp. 13-21 and 152-160
[73] Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939* (Kensington, New South Wales, 1986) p. 335
[74] *The New Statesman*, 31 July-13 August 2015, p. 89, Burkitt, Hutchinson, and Bunxitt, *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism*, p. 170
[75] *Nottingham Journal*, 22 November 1934, p. 6
[76] Annie Kenney, *And All the Yesterdays,* p. 4, KP/AK/3/2
[77] David Mitchell's notes on his interview with Jessie Kenney, 24 March 1964, London, Museum of London Suffragette Fellowship Collection, 73.83/48
[78] Kenney, *Yesterdays,* p. 101

instead of doing, they will find life a far easier battleground than they do today,' she wrote.[79] Doing so would help individuals find far greater individual satisfaction and fulfilment.

This new emphasis on the individual cannot be understood without reference to the broader political context in which she wrote. Neglect of the soul and spirit, she believed, had created 'a world that is full of disorder, anarchy, [and] gross materialism'.[80] The catastrophic wars and suffering of the 1930s and 1940s had been caused by 'greed, ambition, and a shameless intolerance, all materialistic in their concepts, and more than any other sneaking slimy vice, the love of power … There lies the ruin, there lies the misery for peoples and nations'.[81] This does not just refer to the consequences of Nazi aggression, but also to the suspicion of communism, socialism, and trade union politics which had been evident throughout her career as an activist. These were, she believed, 'ideologies which have not and cannot fulfil their promises, for the leaders of these ideologies have made laws, rules and regulations that only half satisfy the material man – they have paid no heed whatsoever to the inner man's hopes, aspirations and profound yearnings'.[82] Theosophy represented a system which, unlike ideologies which were concerned only with external reality, power, and material conditions, responded to internal longings for true meaning.

Neither of the sisters' interests in religion was anti-scientific. On the contrary, Annie Kenney looked forward to the moment when 'science and religion will unite, then we shall have a true ontology'.[83] Historians have become increasingly alert to the ways in which individuals brought together these apparently incompatible beliefs, rejecting older historiographical traditions which narrate an unproblematic decline in the significance of religion through the twentieth century.[84] In *And All the Yesterdays,* Annie Kenney was at great pains to present a scientific case for reincarnation. It mattered very much that the case could be made through deduction and logic, rather than through faith and intuition. Jessie Kenney, meanwhile, claimed to have been 'introduced to metaphysics and mysticism' through Helena Blatavsky's *The Secret Doctrine.* As Joy Dixon notes, this book drew on the ideas of Haeckel, Darwin, and Spencer: texts which Jessie had read as a young woman and remained interested in. She was also interested in 'the esoteric teaching … [that] had lured

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79 Kenney, *Yesterdays*, p. 108
80 Kenney, *Yesterdays,* p. 115
81 Kenney, *Yesterdays*, Preface
82 Kenney, *Yesterdays,* p. 115
83 Kenney, *Yesterdays,* p. 11
84 Laura Schwartz, 'Enchanted Modernity, Anglicanism and the Occult in Early Twentieth-Century Oxford: Annie Moberly, Eleanor Jourdain and Their 'Adventure'', *Cultural and Social History,* 14/3 (2017) summarises this historiography and provides an important new case study

scientists like Sir Isaac Newton [and] Einstein'.[85] Their shared interest in theosophy was given legitimacy by the eminent figures it attracted, who had apparently shared their beliefs in the limitations, as well as possibilities, of scientific understanding. Science and faith were thus understood as complementary to one another, and faith needed a scientific basis.

Annie Kenney believed that oppressive systems not only neglected the inner lives of individuals but also repressed critique or dissent. In stressing the importance of freedom of thought, Annie Kenney therefore rejected all forms of dogmatism, in religion as well as in politics. Her ongoing belief in Jesus Christ as well as in reincarnation is one indication of her eclectic approach to faith: she joined the Rosicrucian Order as well as the Theosophical Society, and regularly attended Church of England services. She taught her son 'that all denominations were worshipping God in their own way, and that God listened to all with love and understanding,' taking him to all the different places of worship in Letchworth so he could determine for himself which path to follow.[86] This was a personal and practical response to the dangers of intolerance and sectarianism which again asserted the importance of the individual's freedom to think and choose for themselves.

However, this focus on the individual also reflected the reality of Annie Kenney's life outside suffrage and activism. In the 1920s, lacking the central focus which the suffrage campaign had given her, and detached from the former friends and colleagues which had so enriched her life, she devoted herself to 'a life of study, contemplation and meditation on the great enigma of life itself'. Yet she presented this as the opposite of a retreat from life: 'this was no escapism from myself, but a seeking to find my real self'.[87] To reconstruct her sense of self, she reconceived her own role and contribution to society. In *And All The Yesterdays*, she presented herself not as an activist and campaigner, but as a thinker and scholar who might act as a spiritual teacher and guide for others. Thus it did not matter if her voice went unheard: indeed, that would only confirm her righteousness. She wrote that 'I am quite prepared to find myself where modern prophets are often found – sadly out of the reckoning'.[88] The 'sages of the past and the pioneers of today – who will be the sages and saints of tomorrow – never have conformed to the blatant or the superficial,' she asserted in *And All The Yesterdays*. 'They live and die for the greater and more imperishable things, no ulterior motive, no selfish purpose is theirs, never ambitious for applause'. This is an indirect assertion of the ongoing value of her life outside politics.

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[85] David Mitchell's notes on his interview with Jessie Kenney, 24 March 1964
[86] Carbon copy of a letter from Annie Kenney to Christabel Pankhurst, 1942? 73.83/34* Museum of London
[87] Kenney, *Yesterdays*, Preface
[88] *The Sunday Post,* 16 December 1928, p. 13

Annie Kenney did not believe the individual could or should be entirely detached from society. On the contrary, her belief in reincarnation meant that individuals had a vested interest in actions which would ultimately bring them closer to God and to truth.[89] 'This life decides our next life,' she asserted.[90] Individual souls would be rewarded for their contribution to society in the next life. 'This feeling of closeness, of oneness with the great good, does not rob one of the sense of responsibilities, but rather adds to that sense of personal responsibility for our thoughts, and actions,' she wrote.[91] 'We know that just as one part of the body is dependent on other parts … so we as individuals are interdependent on each other'.[92] Joy Dixon has argued that for theosophists, 'a concern with spiritual personal transformation could be an integral part of the campaign for political and economic change'.[93] Yet the emphasis here marks a reversal of Annie Kenney's thinking in the suffrage campaign and in her earlier autobiography. Then, collective action for social reform for the benefit of others had been the primary motivation: now, her focus was on the prospects for the individual soul. In other words, the essential reason for treating others well was not because that was the right thing to do, but rather because one would be rewarded in the next life. A sense of obligation, rather than altruism, would thus drive social progress.

Annie Kenney's interest in spirituality, and her stress on the individual, reflected both her critique of political systems in which these elements were neglected, and an assertion of the importance of contemplation, study and faith, when her own life had, by necessity, come to revolve around these pursuits. In some respects, this newfound approach to life marked a continuity with her youthful immersion in the religion of socialism, and her lifelong belief in the importance of reading and thought. Nor did it necessarily mark a break with her feminist beliefs. For example, she wrote several pages in *And All the Yesterdays* about her ongoing admiration for Joan of Arc, who had been such an important figure for the suffragettes.[94] Clearly, though, her overall approach to political life had changed. She no longer stressed direct action and the urgency of political change, instead emphasising the need for thought and reflection.

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[89] *Memories of a Militant* claimed that her belief in reincarnation had been a longstanding guiding principle in her life, but this was a passing reference, not developed within that text. Kenney, *Memories*, p. 152
[90] Kenney, *Yesterdays*, p. 72
[91] Kenney, *Yesterdays*, p. 91
[92] Kenney, *Yesterdays*, p. 2
[93] Dixon, 'Theosophy in England', p. 252
[94] Kenney, *Yesterdays*, pp. 83-7

Of course, Annie Kenney was and is by no means alone in advocating a search for spiritual truth and higher meaning in life. However, it is notable that in *And All the Yesterdays* this search is not a complement to, but a substitute for, more traditional forms of political engagement. There are no specific political prescriptions advocated in *And All the Yesterdays,* no vision for social reform and no mention of the significance of the franchise, democratic political participation, or of women's specific roles and contribution to society. These striking omissions reflect her growing disillusionment with politics and isolation from the wider world. Jessie Kenney too shared her disillusionment, but her life experience was very different, and her response also merits closer scrutiny.

Service, duty and paid work

Jessie Kenney shared Annie Kenney's spiritual outlook and political disillusionment: she, however, remained far more engaged in the wider world. When Jessie considered focusing her energies entirely on religion, one of her associates persuaded her not to join a religious order and 'run away "from the dust of the arena"'.[95] Again, her life choices were driven by necessity and circumstance as much as ideology and politics. Like Annie, Jessie left the movement with no financial resources to fall back on. Unlike Annie, she did not marry, and thus acquire a measure of financial and personal stability through conventional family life.[96] Her life was therefore much more defined by paid work. Jessie Kenney was only 31 in 1918 and potentially had many years of work ahead of her. Selina Todd's study of women's work in the inter-war period has indicated that work was not perceived as a temporary or marginal experience but central to women's independence and identity.[97] In particular, women sought secure and respectable employment in the public sector – especially in the civil service, local government and the BBC – with good rates of pay, terms and conditions, and other benefits.[98] While these were important considerations for Jessie, she also expressed wider motivations which went beyond the purely material.

Most importantly, Jessie Kenney needed to earn a living, and was candid in acknowledging that 'it was an economic problem of course. Had I possessed capital or £2 a

[95] 'Our New Master', *The London Rosicrucian*, April-May-June 1958, KP/JK/6
[96] Jessie does not express any sense of regret at this, instead asserting the value of a single life. 'The British Bachelor woman is for the most part a happy woman busy etc,' she wrote in response to newspapers going 'mad on Sex – Spinsters and Divorce.' JK diary, 21 October 1929, KP/JK/2
[97] Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England, 1918-1950* (Oxford, 2005)
[98] Helen Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric, and Regulation: Women's Work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900 - 55* (Manchester, 2016), Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC* (London, 2016)

week for the rest of my life I should never have gone to sea.' Yet at the same time, she believed that 'there were many problems to solve: the economic problem, the problem of one's immortal soul [and] the future destiny of women'.[99] She had a strong self-conception as a 'pioneer' in the women's movement and wanted to continue with 'pioneering' work in the post-suffrage era. As women took advantage of the dismantling of some legal barriers to enter new fields – standing for Parliament, becoming magistrates, and serving on juries – there were reasons to believe that other fields might open up.[100] The ideas of duty and service, and of contributing to the public good, which had been so central to her work in the suffrage campaign remained strong motivating factors. Yet she also hoped to find work which would be intellectually rewarding and fulfilling, enabling her to pursue interests in the links between science and religion. As she explained:

> after the intense concentration of the Suffragette Movement and my experiences in the 1914 war, I wanted to go more deeply into the cause of things than politics and humanism could explain alone. Although the Suffragette movement was a spiritual one, I felt I need[ed] to probe certain matters more deeply … In studying science I found great satisfaction in knowing there were certain natural laws which were to me at the time Cosmic truths … Perhaps there were laws also which governed the ethical and moral laws, which if man knew exactly what they were and could see the manifestation of them, perhaps he could be more obedient to these laws than he has been … it was no use running away from the world to study in peace either religion or science. The test of these scientific and religious laws had to be worked out in the world and in oneself.[101]

For Jessie Kenney, then, paid work was not only a financial necessity but also held real significance. It offered the possibility of constructing a new identity, linked to, but distinct from, her suffrage activism. Through paid work, she could continue the public service which had characterised her work for the WSPU but also pursue her own intellectual and spiritual interests. She decided upon wireless technology, 'for I loved the sea and saw in this career an opening for service and study that appealed strongly to me at the time'.[102]

Like her sisters, Caroline and Jane Kenney, Jessie drew on the connections forged within the suffrage community to help realise her career ambitions. After some time working for the Red Cross in Paris and at the Bureau for Blind French Soldiers, she returned to the UK to study wireless telegraphy.[103] Her old friends were supportive of this new direction. 'How good that you are getting in touch with the scientific world,' wrote

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[99] Service, KP/JK/4/2/2/10
[100] To follow on "What made you go to sea?" KP/4/2/2/10
[101] Religion, Science and the Scientists, KP/JK/4/2/2/9
[102] Chapter 1, KP/JK/4/4/10
[103] I meet Madame Curie and Professor Flammarion, KP/JK/4/2/2/9

Constance Lytton, later writing to express her 'joy and pride' since 'it is simply splendid what you have achieved'.[104] Lytton offered to put her in touch with her old friend Maurice Baring, who had worked in wireless telegraphy during the war and wrote her a letter of introduction when Jessie sought a meeting with Marie Curie.[105] Lytton and Lord Willoughby de Broke wrote Jessie's references and Lloyd George sent his good wishes.[106] There is no sense here that former activists felt disappointed that the sisters had moved on to new forms of work, though Emmeline Pankhurst warned her 'my dear child, you need unlimited means to pursue science'.[107] Jessie makes clear the degree of unconditional family support which enabled her to pursue this new interest. 'Doubtless they thought it was an impracticable idea, but one of the family wanted to do something and they never failed in anything they undertook. They felt they could do this for me, I deserved it, and I must have it.'[108]



Figure 16: Jessie Kenney as a wireless telegraph operator, early 1920s
KP/JK/9

[104] Constance Lytton to Jessie Kenney, 17 October 1919 and 24 April 1923, KP/JK/3
[105] Constance Lytton to Jessie Kenney, 24 April 1923, 17 October 1919 and 21 September 1921, KP/JK/3
[106] The Wireless College and Mr Whale, KP/JK/4/2/2/9
[107] Service, KP/JK/4/2/2/10. Another note suggests that Marie Curie gave her the same advice.
[108] To follow on "What made you go to sea?", KP/4/2/2/10

When Jessie Kenney gained her qualifications, her achievement was widely publicised in local and national newspapers. She was reported to be 'the first woman to pass the Government's new wireless examination tests' and she had 'succeeded in gaining the Postmaster-General's first-class certificate of proficiency, and is thus competent to operate wireless telegraphy apparatus as a first-class operator on board a British ship'.[109] Jessie would always claim to be the first woman to qualify in this way, though in her history of women's relationship with the seafaring professions, Jo Stanley has demonstrated that in fact, 38 women had studied the same course during World War I.[110] Again, this serves to underline the importance of Jessie Kenney's own understandings of this role: it mattered very much that she should be recognised as the first, even if this was not strictly true.

Ultimately, however, Jessie Kenney's hopes remained unrealised. She was unable to find work in her chosen profession. The reasons for this are obscure. Her profile in *Calling All Women* says that she 'was not allowed to practice because of her sex' and James Taylor told Brian Harrison it was because 'the trade unions wouldn't accept her', but these remarks remain unexplained.[111] Instead of the high status, well-paid, and rewarding work she anticipated in wireless telegraphy, she instead took up work as a stewardess on board ship: work which was low-paid, low-status, and with little distinction from other forms of domestic labour. She had anticipated entry into a male profession and instead found herself engaged in more traditional forms of women's work. The greatest indignity was that stewardesses were required to look after people who were simply sea sick, not ill: they were perceived as carers, not professionals.[112] Working on board ship sometimes meant extremely long hours with only brief breaks for meals and toiling 'in circumstances that would try a saint'.[113] The gulf between her expectations and her experiences had a serious impact on her sense of self-worth, expressed in unusually personal terms in 1929. 'I feel as though every scrap of vitality had left me,' she wrote.[114]

Jessie Kenney clearly identified many of the problems that she experienced as specifically gendered, created by a ship hierarchy which insisted that women were placed at the bottom regardless of skills and experiences. 'It seems strange that women should always be kept in subordinate places at sea. It does not matter how long a woman has been at sea

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[109] *Hull Daily Mail,* 23 April 1923, p. 6
[110] Jo Stanley, *From Cabin 'Boys' to Captains: 250 Years of Women at Sea* (Stroud, 2016) p. 78-9
[111] *Calling All Women*, February 1964, p. 3, Interview with James Taylor. Jessie told Alicia Percival in 1954 she had 'Spent years trying to get job for wh. she was trained. No women wireless op. in RN or Mer Navy' 7/ACP
[112] 25 March 1929, JK/2
[113] Sea-sickness, KP/JK/4/2/2/10
[114] 3 March 1929, JK/2

she is always subordinate to the last comer in training amongst the men's staff,' she wrote. This was just one instance of the gendered discrimination that was entrenched in life at sea. At work, stewardesses were subject to 'petty persecution,' 'spite' and 'outright bullying,' simply because they were women, while in their leisure time they were subject to gendered scrutiny and judgement. Old-fashioned male stewards:

> think after a woman has done a hard day's work that her spare time should be spent in darning ship's linen, or someone's socks, or that she should be knitting or sewing, or gossiping over the eternal cup of tea. That she should want to read a book after she has been using her arms and legs at a terrific pace, is beyond their comprehension … If she is knitting and having a chat with one or two of her confreres then she is gossiping. If she has her head in a book, the most harmless thing she could be doing, and certainly the best thing for the cultivation of her mind, then she is an intellectual highbrow and one wonders what she has come to sea for.[115]

Jessie Kenney recognised there were practical steps which might greatly improve working conditions on board ship. She set out a series of recommendations: promote more women to the senior staff positions, ensure that sea-sick patients were the responsibility of the medical staff rather than stewardesses, reform the tipping system and increase time off.[116] However, she does not appear to have taken any practical steps to tackle these issues through collective action: neither joining – or indeed establishing – a group specifically campaigning to improve women's terms and conditions of employment, nor a more general trade union.

Instead, like Annie, Jessie's primary response was to seek consolation in religion. Jessie – like Annie – joined the Rosicrucian Order in the 1920s and ran a chapter on board ship. She contributed to the founding of the Rose-Croix University, and became Master of the Francis Bacon chapter in 1958.[117] Later still, while living in a retirement home run by nuns, she converted to Catholicism. She expressed her determination to rely on herself and on God in a series of prayers set out in her 1929 diary:

> Let me not pray to be Relieved from dangers, but to be fearless in facing them. Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain but for the heart to conquer it. Let me not look for allies in Life's battlefield but to my own strength. Grant me that I may not be a coward feeling your mercy in my success alone, but let me find the grasp of your hand in my failure.[118]

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[115] Women and the big noises, KP/JK/4/2/2/10
[116] Women and the big noise, KP/JK/4/2/2/10
[117] 'Our New Master', *The London Rosicrucian*, April-May-June 1958
[118] JK Diary, 11 January 1929

In a series of notes to herself – both stern and poignant – she stressed the value of independence, self-reliance and detachment. 'Learn not to care for praise or blame and only for the approval of the Conscience,' she told herself, 'keep your troubles to yourself … do not discuss yourself in anyway unless it may be to help remove a misunderstanding'.[119] Religion not only offered a means of justifying withdrawal and isolation, but invested this strategy with meaning and dignity.

Jessie Kenney's other strategy was to stress the concept of service as the defining principle of her life. This enabled her to draw a direct connection between her former career and her current work. She recognised, however, that many of her associates did not see the connection between service as a stewardess and her work for suffrage:

> I know that some of my friends have always had a little mental reserve that I could go to sea and work in the humble capacity of that kind of service when I might have been doing so many other things that with the training I had had would have seemed more suitable. After having been a political organiser, a speaker on public platforms, taken part in one of the purest and finest movements of modern times; after having been in the position of having had two and three secretaries under me, and literally scores of voluntary workers, it seemed strange that I could go on in this kind of "service" for years.[120]

To explain this apparent discrepancy, she argued that service undertaken with 'patience and dignity and … understanding of why they served' was inherently noble and dignified.[121] Those who looked down on service were likely to be those who despised manual labour and thus perpetuated conflict between the classes. Duty, on the other hand, might be a concept which could hold the nation together. She cited the example of the King and Queen, aligning herself with figures who could not be more removed from her own situation, yet arguing that they were united by this understanding of service. The point was to recognise one's duty, whatever it might be, and to carry it out to the best of one's ability. At its best then, service on board ship might be profoundly enriching. 'What a great experience it had been to me, this new kind of service,' she wrote. 'In this service I have found answers to all the problems that perplexed me before I went to sea'.[122] The concepts of service and duty which, as chapter two indicated, had been so central to the Kenney's political activism, were here reimagined for her new circumstances.

There are clear hints, however, that this was the most optimistic interpretation of her career, designed to assert her worth in public. In private, she admitted to far greater

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[119] 5 January 1929, JK/2
[120] Service, JK/4/2/2/10
[121] Service, JK/4/2/2/10
[122] Service, JK/4/2/2/10

doubts and expressed her desire to embark on a form of service to others which might be more dignified, fulfilling and meaningful than the service which characterised the stewardess's life:

> What to do – give myself up to the pursuit of knowledge in the service of the public or throw myself again into the struggle of life on behalf of the downtrodden husks of humanity? I think the latter service is needed most. To emancipate myself and help emancipate others to Divine order(?)[123]

As this suggests, however much she asserted the value of her work as a stewardess, ultimately, she found it unconvincing. She rejected the idea to 'give myself up to the pursuit of knowledge in the service of the public' which was the path that Annie had chosen. Jessie's desire to 'throw myself again into the struggle of life on behalf of the downtrodden husks of humanity,' indicates her longing to return to the forms of heroic action which had characterised her life within the suffrage movement.

Again, however, there is no evidence that she took practical steps to re-engage with political campaigning or with feminist activists. Though a member of the Suffragette Fellowship, the final section will demonstrate that her engagement with the group reflected her increasing preoccupation with suffrage history, rather than any desire to engage in public campaigning on contemporary feminist issues.

Eventually, Jessie Kenney was able to find employment which, to some degree, both fulfilled her desire for work which was personally rewarding and served the broader public good: first, in managing the welfare and first aid provision in a factory during the Second World War, and, in the 1950s, managing welfare for one of the first comprehensive schools.[124] This new work enabled her to draw a more direct connection between the ideals of duty and service she believed exemplified the suffrage movement and her own post-suffrage work. Her profile in *Calling all Women* stated that 'Soror Kenney – as she is known – has never run away "from the dust of the arena", but like a good suffragette continues her practical and spiritual work for the well-being of her fellows'.[125]

In the 1950s, Jessie Kenney expressed great admiration for well-known figures such as Mary Stocks – whose life of service encompassed teaching, university leadership, and work as a magistrate – as well as lesser-known individuals including Alice Gilliatt, who served on the London County Council, had been a school governor and chaired the local

[123] 10 February 1929, JK/2
[124] 'Our New Master', *The London Rosicrucian*, April-May-June 1958
[125] *Calling All Women*, February 1964, p. 3

magistrates group.[126] These women's lives exemplified the contribution that women could make to public life. They were following in the tradition of public service which Jessie believed characterised the militant suffrage movement, and represented the pioneers which, at one time, she hoped to have become. It is notable, however, that Jessie Kenney did not tie these increasing opportunities for women to the construction and development of the welfare state. Instead, 'personal responsibility' is noted and underlined several times in her earliest notes, including on a page 'in praise' of various institutions and characteristics. Like Annie Kenney, she had become more interested in the role of the individual – whether as pioneer or as public servant – than the potential of the collective.

Representation, life-writing and the historical record

The final section of this chapter focuses on the purposes and significance of Jessie Kenney's autobiography, *The Flame and the Flood*.[127] Though Annie Kenney's autobiography, *Memories of a Militant*, has been analysed by a number of scholars, Jessie Kenney's autobiography, being unpublished, incomplete, and increasingly fragmentary, has not previously been studied as a resource in itself.[128] Rather, it has been primarily used as a source for Emmeline Pankhurst's war-time trip to Russia, though Krista Cowman also drew on its testimony for her study of WSPU organisers.[129] This historiographical omission is all the more surprising given the general lack of personal testimony from working-class women involved with suffrage, and the significant attention paid to many of the better-known accounts by women such as Hannah Mitchell and Ada Nield Chew. Annie Kenney's autobiography was the first to be published after the 1918 Representation of the People Act, while Jessie, writing her work over many years in the 1950s and 1960s, appears to have been among the last suffragettes to have committed her reflections to paper.[130] Framing the

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[126] Jessie Kenney to Rowland Kenney, 3 December 1955, KP/JK/3

[127] A quotation among her papers appears to indicate that this title comes from the WB Yeats poem, *To My Heart, Bidding It Have No Fear*, KP/JK/4/2/2/10

[128] For analysis of Annie Kenney's autobiography see, for example, Regina Gagnier, *Subjectivities: a History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford, 1991), 146 and 165, Howlett, 'Gender, Identity and Collectivity', pp. 18-30, Wright, 'Heroic Transgressions', pp. 108-129

[129] Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, pp. 331-338, Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, pp. 137-140, Cowman, *The Right Spirit*

[130] Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners*, Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story* (London, 1914) were earlier, but written at the height of the campaign and so from a very different perspective. Cicely Hale, *A Good Long Time: The Autobiography of an Nonagenarian* (London, 1973) otherwise appears to be one of the last published autobiographies. There are an astonishing number of published autobiographies from former suffragettes including Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part*, Evelyn Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure: Selected Reminiscences From an Englishwoman's Life* (London, 1933), Hamilton, *Life Errant*, Margaret Haig, *This Was My World* (London, 1933), Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance*. There are also numerous unpublished accounts, such as those by Millicent Price, Kitty Marion, Jessie Stephen and Helen Archdale, as well as those accounts edited and published

suffragette life-writing oeuvre, then, the differences between these autobiographies can be explained not only by the sisters' differing experiences, but by the very different contexts within which they wrote.

This thesis has drawn extensively on Jessie Kenney's autobiography to illuminate her understanding of her life. This final section is primarily concerned not with what she says, but why she says it. As the huge body of scholarly work on autobiographical writing attests, autobiography is a deeply political process which involves complex processes of memory, justification, and interpretation: creating meanings which are as much informed by present concerns as past experiences.[131] The significant numbers of suffrage autobiography has prompted a number of important critical studies of this genre.[132] Kathryn Dodd and Krista Cowman have argued that the writing of suffrage history by former participants was a highly politicised act which perpetuated old divisions and disagreements.[133] Those texts which were most successful – Ray Strachey's *The Cause* and Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Suffragette Movement* – were also hostile to the WSPU, and, as June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton have demonstrated, their views were hugely influential in shaping views of militancy that informed much twentieth century historiography.[134] Some, such as Brian Harrison, have interpreted this as a substitute for political activism, comparing efforts to establish the Suffragette Record Room unfavourably with contemporaneous campaigns for equal pay.[135] Hilda Kean, conversely, argues that preserving the past did not mean neglecting the present, and many feminist autobiographers in the 1930s continued to campaign as they wrote their memoirs.[136] Kean and Laura Nym Mayhall have drawn attention to the ways that testimonies by former suffragettes framed a very particular narrative of militancy, focused

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posthumously, such as Murphy, *Molly Murphy*, Mitchell, *Hard Way Up*, Nield Chew, *Life and Writings*, McPhee and Fitzgerald (eds.), *The Non-Violent Militant*

131 Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London, 2000), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis, 2001), Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I*, Gagnier, *Subjectivities* and Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, and Penny Summerfield's reflections on subjectivity and personal testimony in Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, 1998) pp. 1-42, have been some of the most important texts which have informed my theoretical understanding of autobiography

132 Maroula Joannou, "She Who Would Be Politically Free Herself Must Strike the Blow': Suffragette Autobiography and Suffragette Militancy', in Julia Swindells (ed.), *The Uses of Autobiography* (London, 1995), Davis, Durham, Hall, Langan, and Sutton, 'The Public Face of Feminism', Green, *Spectacular Confessions*, Hilda Kean, 'Suffrage Autobiography: A Study of Mary Richardson - Suffragette, Socialist and Fascist', in Claire Eustance, Joan Ryan, and Laura Ugolini (eds.), *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History* (London, 2000), Cowman, 'A Footnote in History?', Cowman, '"There is So Much"', Wright, 'Heroic Transgressions', Howlett, 'Gender, Identity and Collectivity'

133 Dodd, 'Ray Strachey's The Cause', Cowman, 'A Footnote in History?'

134 Purvis, 'Gendering the Historiography', Holton, 'The Making of Suffrage History', Stanley Holton, 'Reflecting on Suffrage History'

135 Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p. 321

136 Kean, 'Searching for the Past', p. 74

on spectacle, violence and prison. They argue that the Suffragette Fellowship, which specifically asked women for details of their arrests and sentences, only served to consolidate this understanding of suffrage militancy.[137]

This implicitly suggests there were two separate processes at work: suffrage history as created by participants, usually in the form of autobiography and mostly published in the inter-war period, and suffrage history as created by non-participants, in a variety of academic and popular forms, often critical of the WSPU and its militancy, which continued well into the remainder of the century. Yet these processes did not occur in isolation. Suffragettes were deeply interested in suffrage history in a variety of forms. They sought to commemorate their own histories through solemn ceremonies and informal gatherings, especially through the Suffragette Fellowship.[138] Sought after as interview subjects and consultants, they attempted to influence and shape the production of histories and dramatisations in ways consistent with their own understandings of the suffragette legacy.[139] Annie Kenney, for example, was vehemently against Jill Craigie's proposal to make a film about the women's movement during World War II, considering it an irrelevant distraction at a time of national catastrophe and using the opportunity to lecture Craigie on the WSPU's contribution to the war effort.[140] (Political differences may also have played a part in this: Jessie Kenney described Craigie as 'a nasty piece of work, like her husband').[141] Suffragettes read texts, listened to radio plays and watched television dramas, and discussed these through their friendship networks to compare and contrast these representations with their own memories, and challenge those accounts they considered inaccurate.[142] The suffragettes were therefore both producers and consumers of suffrage history.

Yet the critiques of suffrage history have rarely paid much attention to how former suffragettes themselves received this history. One exception is Krista Cowman's revealing case study of Mary Gawthorpe's response to Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Suffragette Movement*. Cowman posits Gawthorpe's own autobiography, *Uphill to Holloway*, as a riposte to

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137 Nym Mayhall, 'Creating the 'Suffragette Spirit'', Kean, 'Public History and Popular Memory'
138 See, for example, the delicate issues around moving Emmeline Pankhurst's statue in 1956, discussed in Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 501-2, and Pankhurst's ongoing reactions to new publications, pp. 507-519
139 See, for example, *Calling all Women*, February 1958, p. 3, acknowledging the several women (including Jessie Kenney) who contributed to the 1958 documentary *Fighting For the Vote*. Jessie Kenney's suggested amendments to the text are at KP/AK/5/3
140 Annie Kenney to Jill Craigie, 14 July 1944, KP/AK/5. This film created divisions among former allies: Helen Archdale and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence were among those who supported Craigie and bring the film to fruition. See the Craigie Papers in the Women's Library, and Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 488 - 9
141 Jessie Kenney to Warwick and Joan Kenney-Taylor, 12 April 1951, KP/AK/5/2
142 Interview with Grace Roe, conducted by Brian Harrison, 23 September 1974, Millicent Price to Verity Lambert, undated copy, MPR/02. There are scathing reviews of David Mitchell's books in *Calling All Women*, February 1966, p. 20 and February 1968, p. 22

Pankhurst.[143] Jessie Kenney shared Gawthorpe's concerns about the supposed misrepresentations within Pankhurst's texts, and the extent to which these came to be understood as accurate and reproduced elsewhere. The remainder of this chapter thus offers new insights into suffrage life-writing in the later twentieth century, conceptualising Jessie Kenney's text not as a monologue focused on her own experiences but as a dialogue with existing cultural narratives around suffragettes.

Jessie Kenney's autobiography was a direct reaction to the existing historical record on the suffragettes which she saw as limited and misleading.[144] Several scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which individuals have challenged official records and representations of their lives, highlighting the uses which people made of memory, testimony, collective identity, and personal experience.[145] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson describe a strategy of 'writing back' in autobiography: when writers refuse to adopt the roles they have been assigned, reclaiming agency and control of their own stories.[146] Jessie studied many of the existing autobiographies in the process of writing her own, not only to confirm what was said of herself and Annie, but to clarify her own memories.[147] Much of the correspondence which remains in her files attests to her desire to research details which were unclear in her mind. At the same time, she attempted to enter a dialogue with future readers and scholars, leaving notes 'for anyone who would write a proper life of Annie.'[148] As chapter four indicated, Jessie Kenney used her autobiography as a means of challenging some of the inaccuracies she perceived around public understandings of militancy. This chapter now demonstrates that she attempted to do the same for misrepresentations and mischaracterisations on a range of subjects.

Krista Cowman argues that former WSPU members 'were not solely concerned with memoirs … but retained the earlier feminist belief that history had to be written for a purpose which transcended that of an objective account of past events'.[149] Jessie Kenney's autobiography is no exception. She set out to achieve several distinct but related ambitions:

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143 Cowman, 'A Footnote in History?'. *The Suffragette Movement* was itself an attempt by Sylvia Pankhurst to challenge what she perceived as myth-making around Emmeline Pankhurst: see Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, p 358-9

144 See, for example, 'notes for future articles' in KP/JK/4/3 in which she refutes a recent article by the scholar Geoffrey Gorer.

145 Selina Todd, 'Class, Experience and Britain's Twentieth Century', *Social History,* 39/4 (2014), Geoff Eley, 'The Past Under Erasure? History, Memory, and the Contemporary', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 46/3 (2011), Hughes, 'The Left in Post-War Britain', Celia Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left: Sixties Activism and the Liberation of the Self* (Manchester, 2015)

146 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p 176

147 There are extensive notes on, for example, Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part*, and Montefiore, *Victorian to a Modern*, in KP/JK/4/2

148 KP/JK/AK/5, and *Calling All Women*, February 1951, p. 3

149 Cowman, '"There is So Much"', p. 148

first, to demolish the reductive caricature of Annie Kenney in clogs and shawl, second, to challenge perceptions of the WSPU in general and the Pankhursts in particular, especially in reasserting the important role that the WSPU had played in winning the war; and finally, by implicit association with these historic events, to secure her own place in history and thus cement her own sense of self-worth. Personal motives – the concern for the reputations of her sister, friend and self – were inextricably linked to her political desire for the rehabilitation of the WSPU. As such, Jessie Kenney's autobiography is not only a record of her own experience, but an ambitious attempt to rewrite suffrage history.

Annie and Jessie Kenney were deeply interested in recording and commemorating suffrage history. Both donated items to the Suffragette Record Room: Jessie's contribution included the original manuscript of *March of the Women*, presented to her by Ethel Smyth, while Annie donated treasured mementoes of Constance Lytton, including a tablecloth embroidered with names of leading activists, as well as some of her own important documents, such as an appreciation of the WSPU written by the Labour Women's Branches, and signed by Isabella Ford and Margaret McMillan.[150] They saw this not as an exercise in nostalgia but as an important means by which young women might be educated about recent history and encouraged to build on their work. Annie Kenney made this explicit in the message she wrote to celebrate the opening of the Record Room: 'May the Record Room be a help and inspiration to the younger generation to serve and give abundantly in the pursuit of a noble ideal'.[151] She saw this as a sacred duty and responsibility, since, as she told Christabel Pankhurst, 'when we pass the border it is the records that we have left behind that will mar or help in the task that others will have to perform'.[152] Jessie too said she knew 'many young people who are fascinated with the unusual things the 'Suffragettes' did … they find themselves wading through volumes of their paper … studying their policies, handbills, cartoons, articles, exhibitions of their propaganda and even poems'.[153] This emphasis on education indicates a continuity with their work in the suffrage campaign. As chapter three indicated, both Jessie and Annie Kenney had seen the WSPU as a key means of teaching women about their political rights and responsibilities. Their own history could now be used to continue this education. After her retirement, Jessie Kenney

[150] Presented by Annie Kenney to the Record Room and Museum, KP/JK/4/2/2/5. These items appear to be lost.
[151] Annie Kenney to Sophia Goulden Bach, undated, KP/JK/2/1. On the founding of the Record Room, see Kean, 'Public History and Popular Memory', Hughes-Johnson, 'Rose Lamartine Yates', pp. 355-361
[152] Carbon copy of a letter from Annie Kenney to Christabel Pankhurst, 1942?, London, Museum of London, David Mitchell Collection, 73.83/34*
[153] KP/JK/4/2/2/4

appears to have taken an increasing interest in the Suffragette Fellowship, speaking at commemorative events and contributing reminiscences and obituaries to the newsletter.[154]



Figure 17: Jessie Kenney as a Suffragette Fellowship Member
KP/JK/9

While the Record Room recorded the collective experience of women in the WSPU, autobiography offered the opportunity to account for individual experience. Jessie Kenney's first priority was to challenge the representation of her sister Annie. Given the WSPU's sophisticated understandings of the importance of representation and imagery, it is not surprising that Jessie paid such close attention to the way that Annie was presented in emerging histories of the movement. She believed the diverse roles that Annie had played in the movement and her broader significance to the campaign – as discussed in chapter four – were being erased and replaced with a parody: a stereotyped working-class factory girl, ignorant, naïve, and entirely dependent on Christabel Pankhurst. Jessie contrasted this with the way that Rowland Kenney was being treated in the memories of his male contemporaries. His contribution to the socialist movement, his work at the *Daily Herald* and at the Foreign Office, she argued, all received appropriate credit, whereas Annie was 'a caricature, somewhat vulgarised' which was 'a belittling of the part she played in the

[154] See *Calling All Women*, February 1955, p. 8, February 1958, p. 3, July 1961, p. 2, February 1966, p. 22, February 1968, p. 15, February 1969, p. 30

Suffragette Movement'.[155] It did not appear to matter where Rowland had come from, only what he had done. This was not the case for Annie, who was unable to escape the 'factory girl' label.

Jessie Kenney blamed Sylvia Pankhurst for the construction and perpetuation of this image. 'It seems a strange thing that when Annie is ever mentioned by Sylvia and other people in connection with the Suffrage campaign one would think that the only meritorious thing Annie had ever done in her life was to work in a cotton factory!' she wrote to Christabel Pankhurst.[156] Jessie believed that Sylvia was jealous of Annie's closeness to Emmeline Pankhurst, reasonably pointing out the 'noticeable change' between the way that her sister was portrayed in *The Suffragette* and her later characterisation in *The Suffragette Movement.*[157] Annie Kenney's representation in the post-suffrage era thus became a key battleground in the ongoing struggles between different factions in the women's movement. However, while Christabel Pankhurst had arguably been the more significant figure during the campaign, in the post-war period it was Sylvia Pankhurst's characterisation of Annie Kenney and of the WSPU more broadly which became dominant, both in scholarly work and in public portrayals.[158]

Annie Kenney became increasingly concerned by this image. As her health further deteriorated in the 1940s and 1950s, members of her family assumed the burden of challenging what they understood as misrepresentations, in part so that her health would not be further affected by emotional distress. 'You can understand why I resent that in the last years of her life when she is no longer able to take part in the battle of life that she should be treated in this way,' Jessie complained to Charlotte Marsh, asking the Suffragette Fellowship if they would discuss the matter formally.[159] Jessie's concerns were shared by other members of the family. Warwick Kenney-Taylor also wrote angry letters to the BBC and to Jill Craigie complaining about how his mother was represented in *The Women's Rebellion*, a 1951 radio play Craigie had produced.[160] Reginald Kenney even made a personal trip to the BBC to meet with the producers. Their concern outlasted Annie Kenney's death in 1953, and indeed took on renewed significance, as the Kenneys worked to ensure that her

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155 Annie Kenney to Charlotte Marsh, 22 March 1951, KP/AK/5
156 Jessie Kenney to Christabel Pankhurst, 12 October 1935, KP/JK/3/Pankhurst C/6
157 In Retrospect, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
158 Stanley Holton, 'Reflecting on Suffrage History', Holton, 'The Making of Suffrage History', Purvis, 'Gendering the Historiography', Kean, 'Public History and Popular Memory', Hilda Kean, 'Public Histories of Australian and British Women's Suffrage: Some Comparative Issues', *Public History Review* 14 (2007)
159 Annie Kenney to Charlotte Marsh, 22 March 1951, KP/AK/5
160 Warwick Kenney-Taylor to Jill Craigie, 7 April 1951, KP/AK/5. This unease about Annie's representation was shared by other suffragettes, as noted on p. 132.

legacy was celebrated in what they believed was an appropriate manner. The unveiling of a blue plaque for Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester in 1960 was of huge significance for the family.[161]

Yet Jessie's interest in suffrage history was not motivated purely out of concern for Annie and the immediate family. Equally important to her were what she perceived as attacks on the character and motivations of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and the work of the WSPU both in winning the vote and supporting the war effort. Suffragettes were increasingly portrayed as a marginal group, often in terms which emphasised their supposed hysteria, in ways which replicated the worst of their contemporary abuse and which argued that their militancy had been counterproductive. After interviewing her in the 1960s, David Mitchell noted that 'Jessie [is] tired of press, radio, TV presentation of Suffragettes as extremists, cranks, fanatics etc. Thinks it high time that more attention was paid to educational and social vision at [the] heart of [the] movement'.[162] Again, she believed this was the result of *The Suffragette Movement*, and again, other suffragettes shared her concerns. Christabel Pankhurst, for example, sent Jessie a copy of Roger Fulford's recently published work, which she had gone through, page by page, correcting the errors. As a Liberal – three times a Parliamentary candidate – Fulford was detested by ex-WSPU members for perpetrating what Jessie called 'The Great Lie about the Suffragettes'.[163] In her autobiography, then, Jessie Kenney set out to reassert the importance of the WSPUs role in securing the vote and winning the war, as well as to challenging the representation of her sister and her family.

Both sisters believed that the best way to tackle the misconceptions which had arisen was for Christabel Pankhurst to write what Annie Kenney called 'the real true history of our movement'.[164] They felt this would provide a necessary corrective to Sylvia Pankhurst's distortions. Annie, for example, appealed to Christabel's sense of family pride – 'I feel in every fibre of my being that this is what your Mother would have wished' – as well as to her religious faith, since 'if what you are lecturing on is true, [and] there are only a few millions who will be saved, the rest of us will still be here labouring in the vineyard to fulfil our mission' and that they would need guidance on how to do so.[165] This desire to see Christabel Pankhurst's definitive account was widely shared among the suffragettes.[166]

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[161] See the commemorative file at KP/AK/7
[162] David Mitchell's notes on his interview with Jessie Kenney, 24 March 1964
[163] KP/JK/4/2/3/31
[164] Annie Kenney to Christabel Pankhurst, 1942?
[165] Annie Kenney to Christabel Pankhurst, 1942?
[166] Interview with Grace Roe, conducted by Brian Harrison, 4 October 1974. See also Purvis, *Christabel*

However, Pankhurst herself did not want to complete this task. She was not only fully committed to her religious activities but, unusually among suffragettes, saw an interest in the past as a distraction from present concerns.[167] 'Do our men voters spend their time, thought and tongue on how, and through whom, they got the vote?' she asked Teresa Billington-Greig in 1956. 'They have more sense. They concentrate on how to use their vote.'[168] Teresa Billington-Greig, however, expressed the frustration of many suffragettes when she wrote to chide Pankhurst about her refusal to provide an account of the movement from her point of view. 'The responsibility is on you … I cannot show the whole, typical Dedicated Women unless I have data … and your particular later share of the Woman's service to Humanity will fail to be registered.'[169] Pankhurst's posthumous account, *Unshackled,* was not published until after Annie Kenney had died, and did not have the widespread impact that Jessie and other former suffragettes had hoped for.

Jessie Kenney thus assumed the responsibility of writing the necessary corrective herself. She took this work extremely seriously, withdrawing from the Rosicrucian Society after 30 years of involvement, because 'I have now got to do a special work of authorship on a great Movement, a pioneering Movement of which I am the only one left who was, with my sister Annie Kenney, in this Movement for the political emancipation'.[170] Throughout her autobiography, Jessie Kenney positioned herself, by virtue of her relationship with Christabel Pankhurst, and as her self-perception as the last representation of the authentic militant movement, as an expert who had the authority to challenge existing accounts of the organisation being produced by scholars, writers, dramatists, and even other suffragettes themselves. Jessie saw her account as accurate and definitive. One section, for example, was to be entitled 'facts and truth'.[171] 'I know of what I speak,' she told the BBC, listing the highlights of her suffrage career and noting the moments when she had been closest to the Pankhursts, witnessing the making of history.[172] Clearly, she had a very strong sense that she was uniquely positioned to give an 'accurate' account of the WSPU's inner workings.

Pankhurst, p. 510-14

[167] Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, p. 490

[168] Christabel Pankhurst to Teresa Billington-Greig, 13 November 1956, London, Museum of London, David Mitchell Collection 78.83/32

[169] Teresa Billington-Greig to Christabel Pankhurst, 8 Jan 1957, London, Museum of London, David Mitchell Collection 78.83/32

[170] Jessie Kenney to Fratre Williams, 2 December 1966, KP/JK/6. This was not accurate, even if it is read specifically in reference to being '*with* … Annie Kenney': a number of other suffragettes were still alive when Jessie Kenney wrote this letter.

[171] KP/JK/4/2/2/4

[172] Jessie Kenney to Mr Burroughs, 29 March 1951, KP/AK/5

Yet of course, Jessie Kenney's account was as subjective and shaped by her own concerns as any other history of the suffrage movement. Those concerns revolved around her desire to set the record straight on behalf of her sister Annie and friend Christabel. She envisioned her autobiography as a final act of duty and service to her sister, friend and the movement more generally. This was a continuation of the comradeship and loyalty which she had exhibited throughout the campaign. She told Christabel Pankhurst in 1935 that 'Annie and I have ever striven to uphold and defend the prestige of the Women's militant movement at its highest and best, and will ever do so'.[173] The autobiography was a way to continue this, even after the deaths of Christabel and Annie. She began writing notes for her autobiography early in the 1950s, as Annie's health failed, but gave it sustained attention after a period of illness in 1958 and it was a major preoccupation for at least a decade.[174]

To challenge the 'factory girl' fallacy, Jessie Kenney constructed a new narrative in its place: one in which the Kenney family was comprised of exceptional individuals who had heroically overcome the disadvantages of their birth through their personal qualities and hard work. This led to an idiosyncratic selection of material: for example, her family history is not prefaced by their own genealogy but by an account of the Lees family, local landowners, enabling her to mention that her brother Reg married into a well-off family.[175] Her mother's family in particular were presented as of superior social standing. Jessie emphasised philanthropic activity, professional achievement and global travel, all much more associated with the middle-classes. A great-aunt 'was known as the Duchess' she states, implying cultural and social status, while her mother received regular social calls from the doctor and vicar as well as other members of the community who came seeking advice and guidance. Even her father was described as a member of the 'labour aristocracy'.[176] As a result, she positioned the Kenneys as atypical members of the working-classes, outsiders and observers in their community, and blessed with peculiar talents and advantages. This self-understanding was not simply constructed by Jessie but was shared among the family more widely. 'Annie's family were as I said an outstanding family … when I look at that family,

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[173] Jessie Kenney to Christabel Pankhurst, 12 October 1935, KP/JK/3/Pankhurst C/6

[174] These earliest notes, while undated, are written in diaries from 1952. 1958 was the date given to David Mitchell in 1964. David Mitchell's notes on his interview with Jessie Kenney, 24 March 1964. The same interview indicates that at this stage she was still planning three books, and in the same year, her brother Bert wrote up memories of World War I to inform the project. In November, a letter from her niece suggested that Jessie was continuing to work on the book and that there was much still to do. Mary Kenney to Jessie Kenney, 11 November 1964, KP/JK/3. There is no indication as to when she finally gave up the project, but there is, however, very little correspondence available for the years after 1964. She entered the retirement home in 1969, which perhaps indicates that her health was already failing.

[175] Filed under Wham's House, KP/JK/4/2/2/3

[176] KP/JK/4/2/2/3, p. 7-8

the mark they made in life … the traditions of the Kenney family shone out like a beacon,' James Taylor told Brian Harrison.[177] Christabel Pankhurst similarly told Jessie that 'I always say you Kenneys were not typical factory people. It would be very well for the country if they were all like you … but that unfortunately is not the case'.[178]

In deconstructing the image of Annie Kenney in clogs and shawl, then, Jessie Kenney replaced one myth with another: that of the Kenney family as exceptional and extraordinary. Jessie insisted that Annie 'was no ordinary "mill girl"'.[179] However, as chapter one argued, this ignored the wider cultures of auto-didacticism, literacy and self-improvement which were such an important part of working-class culture and labour activism. As such, it challenged only the idea that Annie Kenney herself was a factory girl: it did not challenge stereotypical ideas about factory girls more widely. 'My sister Annie was innately refined, sensitive, a lover of good literature and had great appreciation of beauty in nature and art. She was popular in all grades of society, from the crowds in the streets, to the women of every profession, with policemen and detectives, and men and women of rank and title,' Jessie told the BBC.[180] She compared Annie Kenney and Sylvia Pankhurst several times and found Sylvia greatly wanting. Jessie claimed that Annie 'had great taste in dress … when (sic) Sylvia often looked slovenly,' and that shaking hands with Sylvia 'was like shaking hands with a wet codfish'.[181] Ironically, then, while Jessie criticised Sylvia Pankhurst for her 'amazing snobbery' she also responded in kind.

Jessie Kenney had a similar desire to correct the public perception of Christabel Pankhurst, whom, she believed, did not have sufficient credit for her achievements. She claimed unique authority in her understanding of Pankhurst, thanks to the close working relationship the women had developed, first through their offices next door to one another at WSPU headquarters, and then while living together in Paris. She saw Christabel Pankhurst as a woman of deep feeling, capable of generosity, intimacy and warmth. Like other suffragettes who had been part of Christabel Pankhurst's inner circle, she did not believe that Pankhurst's public image was accurate.[182] Her accounts of the militant movement, especially its earliest months when she herself was not actually present, are very

[177] Interview with James Taylor, conducted by Brian Harrison
[178] Christabel Pankhurst to Jessie Kenney, 25 May 1957, KP/JK/3/Pankhurst C/26
[179] Jessie Kenney to Mr Burroughs, 29 March 1951, KP/AK/5
[180] Jessie Kenney to Mr Burroughs, 29 March 1951, KP/AK/5
[181] In Retrospect, KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[182] See, for example, interview with Grace Roe, 23 September 1974

much focused on the actions of Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst, positioning them as the driving forces of the movement.[183]

In her broader account of the WSPU, however, she did not seek to create a new narrative. Rather, she returned to, and entirely replicated, the organisation's justification for its existence. She dismissed contemporary critiques of the suffragettes as simply repeating the old attacks which had previously been levelled at them by their opponents, and so simply drew on well-rehearsed lines of defence. For example, she told the historian, teacher and feminist Alicia Percival that 'we are proud of militancy & we thank Mrs Pankhurst for it. There had to be a militant movement'.[184] As chapter three discussed, Jessie challenged the public fixation on violence with a consistent emphasis on education, and an assertion that militancy was the only possible course of action, owing to constant Government inaction. The only way that her accounts differs significantly from other suffrage narratives is her focus on the contribution that men had made to the campaign.

Jessie Kenney also paid particular attention to the role that the WSPU had played in the war: a role which she believed had been entirely overlooked but which she considered central not only to women's success in winning the vote, but Britain's success in defeating Germany. She believed that Lloyd George and Churchill, bitter and resentful that the Pankhursts had consistently got the better of them, had conspired to diminish their achievements. She cited as evidence Lloyd George's war memoirs, in which, they were conspicuous by their absence, despite their war-time closeness.[185] She rejected the increasingly common view that the suffragettes had been inactive after 1914, seeing their wartime work as a continuation of, rather than a disruption to, their service.[186] Jessie Kenney also reiterated the WSPU's justifications for war. 'How could women stand aside – especially British women – while small nations were being crushed,' she asked.[187] She remained convinced not only that the vote would only matter if Britain remained free, but that women had a duty to fight for liberation and freedom of oppressed peoples: a narrative which was informed by her work during World War II as well as her earlier experience.

Laura Mayhall has argued that the post-war construction of 'authentic suffrage militancy' was as much grounded in the WSPU's war effort as in their pre-war campaigns, since war service had legitimised their claims to historical significance.[188] Since, as chapter

[183] KP/JK/4/2/2/4
[184] Alicia Percival's notes on interview with Jessie Kenney (undated, probably 1954). 7/ACP
[185] David Mitchell's notes on interview with Jessie Kenney, 2 July 1965
[186] 9 January 1952, KP/JK/2
[187] 11 January 1952, KP/JK/2
[188] Nym Mayhall, 'Creating the 'Suffragette Spirit'', p. 334

four demonstrated, Jessie Kenney's experience as a militant suffragette did not follow the martyr's trajectory from prison to hunger strike and force-feeding, it was even more important to claim her place in history through this war-time contribution. Indeed, for a long period, Jessie tried to get her diaries of her trip to Russia published as a standalone text. This may suggest that she saw this work as of even greater significance than her suffrage activism.

Jessie Kenney understood her experiences as a suffragette and her wartime work not only as central to her own sense of self-worth, but also as confirmation of her historical significance. 'What other Movement for reform has ever completely triumphed! … all that experience has worked into our being something of value which can never be lost.'[189] The personal and the political were thus intimately linked: what she had done mattered. Criticisms of the WSPU's militancy and its wartime strategy were therefore not only interpreted as historical inaccuracies but as experienced as a personal attack which threatened to undermine her own sense of self. Since her later experiences at work had been much less rewarding, this period of her life held even greater significance. Indeed, notably she and her sister were the only suffragettes to write an autobiography who did not continue into some form of public life or political campaigning. As a result, while most autobiographers saw the suffrage struggle as just one episode in a much longer arc of political activism, for Jessie Kenney, this period represented the high point of her life. This may explain the general lack of reflexivity or self-scrutiny within her autobiography. It is very much a wholehearted defence of the WSPU without more nuanced consideration of whether any criticisms of the organisation had merit. To critique the organisation would therefore be to challenge the movement around which she built her identity and sense of self.

As a consequence of this preoccupation with the past, Jessie Kenney offers almost no commentary on the contemporary position of women. For example, at no point in her autobiographical drafts does she discuss the cultural ideals of domesticity and housewifery which had shaped women's lives in the 1950s, nor indeed the emergence of radical politics in the 1960s. Of course, it would be unfair and anachronistic to expect her to anticipate the concerns of the women's liberation movement which would not emerge until after her autobiography had been set aside. Nevertheless, this almost total lack of concern with contemporary issues is striking, given how broadly her interests had ranged during the campaign. The autobiography is framed as a way of teaching young people about their

[189] Christabel Pankhurst to Jessie Kenney, 7 February 1936, KP/JK/3/PankhurstC/13

history and she does not consider whether contemporary activism might have resonated with WSPU strategies.

Jessie Kenney never successfully completed nor published her autobiography and her desire to see suffrage history portrayed in ways she found satisfactory remained unfulfilled.[190] Accounts of Annie Kenney in both popular and scholarly history continued to be dominated by a reliance on the 'mill girl' and 'factory girl' image, which has not been fully challenged until this thesis. She continued to resent this: watching *Shoulder to Shoulder* in the 1970s she simply told her carers 'it wasn't like that at all'.[191] Nevertheless, while Jessie Kenney may not have achieved her own aims, she left behind a document which has great value in revealing how suffragettes understood themselves in relation to the organisation, and the central place that it occupied in their lives well after the campaign had ended. As Jane Humphries reminds us, working-class autobiography is as useful in revealing perceptions of the self and their environment and how working people interpreted their experiences.[192] Jessie Kenney's account may be deeply partial, but that very partiality makes it an important source for suffrage historians.

Conclusion

Celia Hughes has argued that 'the powerful emotional investment' that activists made in their work 'left a lasting imprint on their sense of self in the world'.[193] Annie and Jessie Kenney's sense of self was so bound up with their membership of the WSPU that reconstructing a new identity outside it was hugely challenging. Abruptly disconnected from their support networks, owing to the collapse of the organisational structure and rapid changes in circumstances, left them adrift from the financial, social, cultural, emotional and psychological support which had been so central to their activism and to their lives. In this significantly altered context, the Kenneys sought new ways of asserting the meaning and importance of their lives. They constructed new identities based not around the collective but as individuals – as religious thinker and feminist pioneer – which sought to make a virtue of their dislocation and isolation. The concepts of duty and service which had shaped

[190] Yet she told David Mitchell that she suspected that 'the Asquiths and the Bonham Carters, the old, reviled, Liberal family names' would attempt to 'squash' her account: Mitchell suspected this was a way of delaying publication – 'is this an excuse for not finishing the books?' David Mitchell's notes on his interview with Jessie Kenney, 24 March 1964.
[191] Miss J Kenney: Memories by Sr M. Cuthbert, KP/JK/1
[192] Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, p. 24
[193] Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p. 11

their lives within the WSPU, were reimagined as individual acts, made without broader social approval. Beneath their confident self-assertion, however, lay dissatisfaction, and a wish to be remembered and understood on their own terms.

Conclusion

This is the first historiographical study not only of the Kenney sisters, but also of working-class women within the WSPU who remained committed to the organisation and to Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. It has significantly deepened and extended our understanding of the militant suffrage movement, women's kinship and friendship networks, and feminist politics and activism in this period more widely. In analysing why working-class women were attracted to militant suffrage, it has suggested several related explanations: a weak affinity with labour politics and a belief that gender was a more significant force in their lives than class; an organisation which closely mirrored not only their ideological beliefs but their sense of immediacy and urgency in securing their objectives; and the significant benefits they derived from their commitment to the organisation, in the form of lasting and meaningful friendships, social and cultural capital, and professional connections and opportunities.

This thesis has clearly shown that for the Kenney sisters, the vote was neither a symbolic goal, nor a utilitarian tool by which women might achieve other ends. Rather, it was understood by these women as a transformative measure which would enrich women's lives in intangible, spiritual and emotional ways, as well as in political and practical terms, as much through building a shared collective movement across class lines, as through achieving their immediate objective. This understanding was grounded in their own experiences within the organisation, which had opened up tremendous new opportunities for them. As historians such as Krista Cowman have demonstrated, the supposed 'split' with the labour movement has been significantly overstated. Labour activists and feminist activists continued to collaborate across organisational boundaries to achieve shared goals, especially at local levels, and working-class women continued to join the WSPU and to participate in militancy throughout the campaign. This thesis has sought to explore the implications of her findings through close examination of one family at the heart of the organisation. Clearly, as the Kenneys' lives demonstrate, a working-class background would not necessarily inhibit women's progress or prominence in the organisation: indeed, it might prove a positive asset.

This study has, however, also drawn attention to the limitations of the Kenney sisters' politics, and to the complex and uneasy way that class was understood within the WSPU. It has revealed some of the ongoing difficulties that women faced as they sought to negotiate and navigate competing aspects of their identities. The Kenneys believed that the WSPU was carving out a new space for cross-class co-operation and meritocratic progress, and given their own experiences, this is unsurprising. At the same time, however, they

reached this conclusion by denying the salience and significance of class and background: a strategy which other working-class women outside the organisation may have found problematic or even ludicrous. This thesis has therefore also demonstrated that the Kenneys' faith in the transformative possibilities of the vote was grounded in a lack of real engagement with the material and cultural structures which also shaped women's lives, as well as illuminating the struggles and disappointments they experienced outside the women's movement.

This thesis has challenged the caricature of Annie Kenney as a naïve and unquestioning puppet of Christabel Pankhurst and instead, developing the insights offered by June Hannam, demonstrated that she was an important and influential figure within the women's movement in her own right.[1] However, rather than resorting to facile and unhelpful narratives of feminist heroines and seeking to establish Annie Kenney as a 'woman worthy', it has sought to place her in the context of both her familial, friendship and political networks. Instead of considering her in relation to Christabel Pankhurst, it has not only demonstrated how important the Kenney sisters were to one another, but placed the sisters within a wider web of political and affective relationships which shaped not only their politics but their lives. As a result, it has made a valuable contribution to the literature on female networks by demonstrating how they significant they were both for women embedded in, and on the margins of, formal campaigning.

At the same time, it has highlighted the contributions that the other sisters made to feminist politics as individuals: providing the first analysis of Jessie Kenney's role in the 'Young Hot Bloods' and the first critical commentary on her autobiography, *The Flame and the Flood*, as well as offering the first extended consideration of Nell Kenney's work as an organiser and uncovering the myriad ways in which Jane and Caroline Kenney's professional careers were shaped by their friends and colleagues within the women's movement. This highlights the ongoing importance of excavating the forgotten campaigners whose experiences extend the conventional existing narratives. As such, this thesis makes a useful contribution to some important ongoing debates on the suffrage campaign, providing new perspectives on the role of childhood and home experience, the nature of militancy, the extent to which individual members possessed agency and autonomy, the place of faith and spirituality in the campaign, the political implications of women's friendships, and the significance of suffragette autobiographies. It also highlights potential new areas of enquiry, such as the relationship between the 'religion of socialism' and feminist politics, the

[1] Hannam, 'Suffragettes Are Splendid'

significance of sisterly support, the ongoing meanings of militant identity, and the operation of transatlantic feminist networks in professional as well as political contexts.

This study suggests several fruitful areas for further research. Some of these are directly related to the WSPU and its members. A critical analysis of Jessie Kenney's role is a reminder of the startling lack of work on a number of crucial figures within the WSPU: Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Flora Drummond foremost among them. Moreover, this thesis has offered just one possible case study of the many groups of sisters who participated in the militant suffrage campaign: there are many possibilities for comparative studies which are also likely to offer contrasting perspectives on the issues. Even within the Kenney family, unanswered questions remain about the tensions between loyal obedience and uncritical submission. Sources within Nell Kenney's archive noted in chapter four hint that, unlike the other sisters, she may have harboured doubts about WSPU policy. Although illness, marriage and emigration might explain her resignation from the organisation, these factors do not adequately account for her life-long reticence on the subject: she rarely spoke about her experiences to her daughters.[2] However, her careful preservation of an extensive archive testifying to her involvement in the WSPU suggests this episode in her life continued to retain significant meaning for her.

This study also raises a number of wider possibilities. The limitations of doctoral research mean that this thesis has only briefly considered the significance of their brothers, particularly Reginald and Rowland: one, apparently, wholly supportive; the other deeply critical of their political practice but nevertheless an important figure in their personal lives. Examination of their papers and archives would undoubtedly deepen its insights into the intersection of labour and feminist politics not only within the Kenney family but within British politics more widely. Moreover, the findings on Jane and Caroline Kenney's professional careers suggest that a great deal could be gained through extending studies of feminist teachers' work in the inter-war period beyond the well-known campaigns on equal pay and working conditions, and into questions about how teachers saw their role in preparing girls and young women for citizenship. Their lives also suggest intriguing new possibilities for studying the interaction of political and professional goals in ways which challenge not only national boundaries but also existing chronologies of feminist activism. Some crucial questions about the sisters' lives also remain unanswered. A lack of material on Molly and Alice's lives in America has meant that it has not been possible to consider how the family network supported women outside political and professional contexts, though,

[2] Beatrice Clarke to Warwick Kenney-Taylor, 6 August 2000, KP/CLA/3

like Jessie and Annie, and Jane and Caroline, these sisters formed a life-long partnership. Understanding this would enhance our conception of sisterly support outside the women's movement.

This study has provided one set of answers to the question of why working-class women might have been attracted to militant suffrage. However, there is clearly much more work to be done to further our understanding of this crucial issue. Historians can no longer plead that a lack of sources make working-class women within the WSPU all but invisible. Recent work by June Purvis has, for example, drawn extensively on the papers of Jennie Baines which, like those of Jessie Kenney, have been under-utilised by scholars.[3] Diane Atkinson's recent study has identified and braided together the lives of large numbers of little-known figures in a study which has provided one of the richest and most complex portraits of militant action to date.[4] Laura Schwartz's forthcoming study will also extend the existing literature on servants into the women's movement, providing an exciting and challenging perspective on how far middle-class feminist principles extended towards the working-class women they encountered on a daily basis. Moreover, the possibilities of digitisation – particularly of the census, and of newspaper collections – make it increasingly possible to identify and trace forgotten figures in ways which were impossible for previous generations of scholars.

In her autobiography, the feminist activist Helena Blackburn claimed that 'there are times when the story of one life is so interwoven with the story of its time, when the thought and conduct of one individual soul is so typical of the life of its generation, that to tell the story of the one, is to tell that of the other.'[5] As Pauline Polkey has argued, Blackburn's individual identity was clearly bound up with the collective identity of her generation of political activists. In this thesis, a close examination of the Kenney sisters' lives has not only sought to tell their story, but in doing so, to re-tell a familiar story – the history of the Women's Social and Political Union – from unexpected and unfamiliar perspectives.

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[3] Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*

[4] Atkinson, *Rise Up Women!*

[5] Pauline Polkey, 'Reading History Through Autobiography: Politically Active Women of Late Nineteenth-Century Britain and their Personal Narratives', *Women's History Review,* 9/3 (2000)

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