



# MARTYRS IN OUR MIDST

DUNDEE, PERTH  
FORCIBLE FEEDING OF SUFFRAGETTES

LEAH LENEMAN

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*Cover Design by Stevenson Graphics*

*Cover illustration shows Fanny Parker as Janet Arthur escorted from Ayr Sheriff Court July 1914. In 1912 she was the Women's Social and Political Union organiser in Dundee.*

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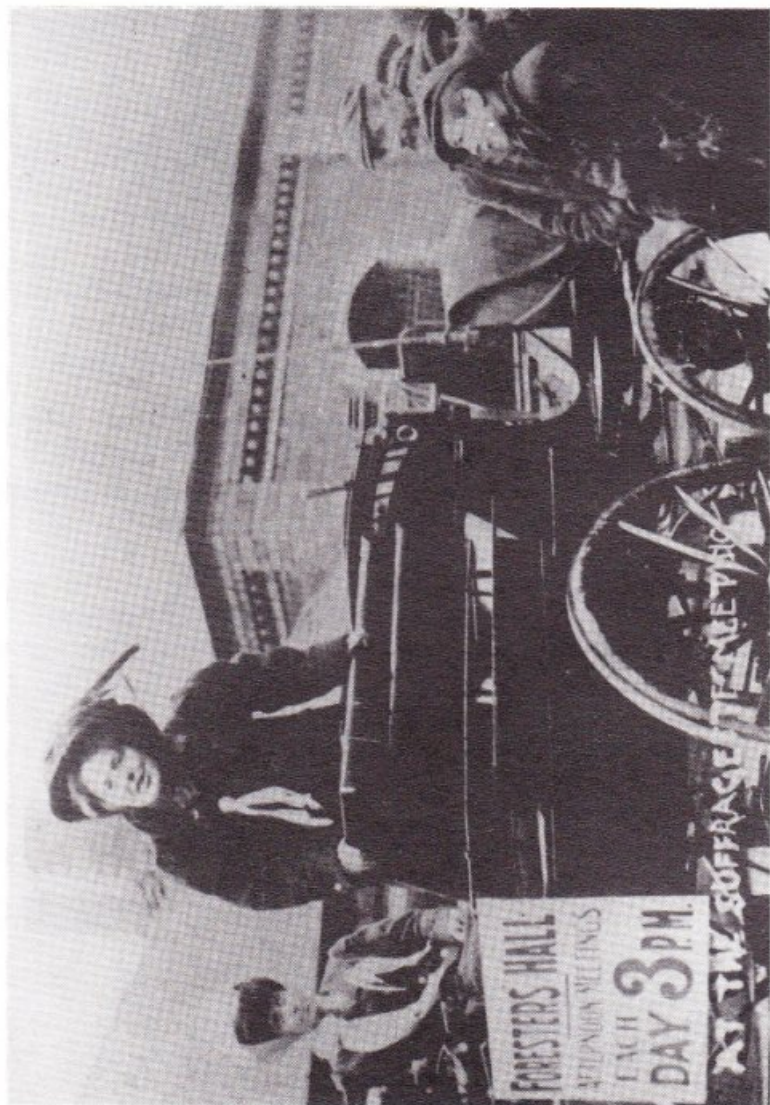
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AND THE FORCIBLE FEEDING OF SUFFRAGETTES

LEAH LENEMAN

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Suffragettes in Dundee touring in a horse-drawn carriage to advertise daily meetings in Forester's Hall, c.1910.

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## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	7
<b>1</b>	
The Dundee Prisoners and Suffragette Visits to Perth	10
<b>2</b>	
Ethel Moorhead	15
<b>3</b>	
Arabella Scott	21
<b>4</b>	
The Other Prisoners	27
<b>5</b>	
Reactions	35
Conclusion	39
Index	40





## INTRODUCTION

The women's suffrage movement in Edwardian Britain was not the purely London phenomenon it is generally believed to be; it was truly national. There was activity throughout England, in Wales, Ireland, and the length and breadth of Scotland, from Dumfries in the south to Shetland in the north. The three key centres were Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee. Dundee women were active from the start, but the city assumed a new — importance for the national leadership when Winston Churchill, a Cabinet Minister, was elected MP and when Asquith—whose constituency was East Fife—became Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup> Dundee was the first Scottish city in which suffragettes were imprisoned and went on hunger strike, and Perth prison was the scene of all but one of the forcible feedings carried out in Scotland. This happened in July 1914, the month before war broke out, when the campaign was at its most intense, and Perth became the main Scottish focus for the fierce tensions and emotions of that period. The story of the women who endured forcible feeding in Scotland, and the reactions of the citizens of Perth, deserves to be told.

The first three women's suffrage societies in Britain were formed in 1867, in Manchester, London and Edinburgh. The latter styled itself the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage, and while Edinburgh was always headquarters, speakers visited every part of Scotland, and branches were formed in many towns, including Dundee and Perth. The Victorian movement had its heyday in the 1870s, after the Second Reform Acts had so widened the male franchise it seemed difficult to imagine that women householders and ratepayers should not be able to persuade the existing electorate that they too should be granted the parliamentary vote. The women managed to collect great numbers of signatures on petitions and to enlist influential male support, but they underestimated the strength of the opposition. The idea of separate spheres—that women had a different role in life from men—was deeply rooted. In 1884 when the Third Reform Act widened the male franchise still further, no women were included.<sup>2</sup> The surge of optimism and enthusiasm that characterised the first phase of the movement was not sustained after 1884, yet new recruits still came along

— Lady Frances Balfour being a notable Scottish example—and the band of determined women who formed the nuclei of the first societies persevered in their work. The Edinburgh National Society kept going, though its activities were centred mainly on Edinburgh itself, with the branches disappearing. (But at the turn of the century there was a society in Aberdeen, and a new one was formed in Glasgow in 1902.) Despite the many setbacks they had received, the women still worked in the ways they had always worked: petitioning, writing letters, lobbying Members of Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter, Christabel, who formed a new organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Manchester in 1903, broke that traditional mould and transformed the political landscape.<sup>4</sup> By 1905 they were in London and had gathered together like-minded women who believed that as women had got nowhere by politely asking for the vote it was time to *demand* it. The Liberal Party would have to make votes for women a priority or be forced out of government. Heckling Liberal speakers, demonstrating outside the houses of Parliament, staging events that would capture the attention of the press—these were new tactics that brought the cause before a previously apathetic public. Not only did women flock to join the WSPU (and there was a breakaway militant society, the Women's Freedom League, as well), but the 'constitutional' movement gained a new lease of life, with societies springing up everywhere.

Women who joined constitutional societies did so because they had been made aware of the issues involved and believed that women should have the vote, but they wanted to work in law-abiding ways. They did not hesitate to copy many of the ideas from the militants—touring the country in caravans, chalking pavements to announce their meetings etc—but they did nothing which overstepped the bounds of acceptable 'womanly' behaviour. In the early years 'militant' activity consisted mainly of interrupting meetings and attempting to stage demonstrations in Parliament Square; suffragettes were brutally ejected from the meetings and imprisoned for the demonstrations. Male reaction to their activities was at this stage out of all proportion to anything they actually did.

The problem with relying on such shock tactics was that they either had to succeed quickly—and once Asquith, an implacable opponent of women's suffrage, became Prime Minister there was no chance of that—or become *more* shocking in order to command the same attention. New tactics did not always come from the Pankhursts; it was a Scottish woman, Marion Wallace-Dunlop, who was the first to refuse all food in Holloway prison until

her conditions were improved. In due course it became WSPU policy for all suffragette prisoners to go on hunger strike until their release.

It was at this stage, in the autumn of 1909, when the first phase of militant tactics had proved ineffective, with the suffragettes' actions and the authorities' response to them rapidly escalating, that Scotland had its first experience of all this—in Dundee.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See Leah Leneman, 'Dundee and the Women's Suffrage Movement', in *The Remaking of Juteopolis* (Abertay Historical Society, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women—The Story of a Struggle* (London, 1957) tells the story of the Victorian movement (as well as the Edwardian one). His style can be irritating, he provides no footnote references, and later scholars dispute some of his conclusions, but the book does provide a useful overview. Chapter 1 of my own book, *A Guid Cause—The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1991) covers the period from 1867 to 1884.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 2 of *A Guid Cause* covers the years 1885 to 1905.

<sup>4</sup> The story of the WSPU is well told in Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union 1903-14* (London, 1974). For a more personal view see E. Sylvia, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London, 1931).

# **Chapter 1**

## **The Dundee Prisoners and Suffragette Visits to Perth**

In October 1909 a group of five women caused enough of a disturbance at a meeting of Winston Churchill's in Dundee to be convicted of breach of the peace and sentenced to a fine of £2 or 10 days' imprisonment; in line with WSPU policy the women refused to pay the fine and went to prison<sup>1</sup>. Of these five women—Laura Evans, Adela Pankhurst, Maud Joachim, Catherine Agnew or Corbett and Helen Russell or Archdale (the Scottish courts always included maiden names of married women)—only the last-named was Scottish; at this stage militancy still tended to be imported from England.

The five were admitted to Dundee prison on 20 October and immediately went on hunger strike. The first forcible feedings had taken place in Birmingham in September of that year, so naturally there was much speculation about what the Scottish authorities would do. On 21 October the Under Secretary for Scotland sent the following telegram to the prison commissioners:

Dundee prisoners should unless medically certified unfit be fed under medical supervision if and when necessary. Any case medically certified unfit for such feeding should be specifically reported. Every precaution and care should be taken and you might perhaps send officer to consult with Governor at Newcastle who has recent experience.

The prison medical officer examined the women on the 22nd. Mrs Corbett and Mrs Archdale were older than the rest, and he did not consider them suitable subjects for forcible feeding, while Adela Pankhurst he considered too fragile and mentally 'peculiar'. He saw no reason why the remaining two should not be forcibly fed as they were young and healthy, but he recommended waiting until the following day, the fourth of their fast.

Various telegrams and reports were dispatched on that day. The medical officer had anticipated 'a good deal of difficulty in obtaining the services of nurses to assist' but was 'impressed with the desirability of getting one or

two, even at increased fees'. He obtained the services of a female warder from Perth and the matron of a nursing home in Dundee, but when, in company with another doctor, he examined the two women that evening, 'we came to the conclusion that it was not urgent and that another examination tomorrow might bring the matter into clearer light.' The Under Secretary for Scotland wired the prison from the Scottish Office, 'Secretary leaves full discretion in hands of Commissioners and Governor.' On the 24th the medical officer reported:

Visited the five suffragettes in company with Dr R.C. Buist and signed certificates recommending that the five should be liberated when convenient: in the case of four of them Mrs Archdale, Mrs Corbett, Miss Pankhurst and Miss Joachim, for specific reasons: in the case of Miss Evans, who has given no trouble or anxiety whatever and also looks very well, because it would expose her to a mental strain of an unjustifiable nature.

The women were all released that same afternoon, in a state of collapse according to the press; Mrs Archdale was said to have lost a stone and a half in weight during her four-day fast. The women all spoke of the kindness of the prison officials, Mrs Corbett stating she thought 'the Scottish prison system is at least a century ahead of the English'.<sup>2</sup> The WSPU spokeswoman, Flora Drummond, told the press she regarded the fact that the authorities had not resorted to forcible feeding as a 'great triumph' for Scotland, a phrase picked up by most of the Scottish newspaper that reported the release.<sup>3</sup> It was also said to have demonstrated Scottish 'independence'.

From the contents of the files it is very clear that forcible feeding *could* have taken place but that the medical officer was extremely reluctant to adopt such a course. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that this reluctance was the reason the women were spared. However, to give any credit to the Scottish Office for this forbearance could not have been more mistaken. The Secretary for Scotland himself wrote to the prison commissioners: 'I notice that contrast is drawn (in the newspapers) in respect of policy between the Scottish Office and Home Office. There was no such intention. The Home Office informs me that to begin forcible feeding so late at the fourth day of imprisonment or sometimes on the third may be dangerous.' He went on to ask the prison commissioners to obtain full information on the operation of forcible feeding; they reported back that they had received details from their medical officers at Perth and Barlinnie, and they sent the Scottish Secretary a report from their medical adviser who described the different methods (feeding cup,

oesophageal catheter and nasal tube) and gave his own recommendations. The Scottish prison system was prepared.

As it happened, in 1910 and 1911 the WSPU called a truce on militancy while an all-party compromise on women's suffrage, known as the Conciliation Bill, was thrashed out in Parliament. In 1912 the Conciliation Bill was 'torpedoed' (in Lloyd George's oft-repeated word) by Asquith's promise of a new Franchise Bill with the possibility of a women's suffrage amendment, and militancy was resumed by the WSPU, but the only Scottish manifestations were attacks on letter boxes, for which no one was ever caught.<sup>4</sup> However, in 1913, Asquith's Franchise Bill had to be withdrawn because the Speaker of the House ruled that any women's suffrage amendment would so alter its character that it could not continue its passage through Parliament. After that Scottish WSPU members also lost patience and followed the example of English militants by setting fire to buildings all over the country.

At the end of April 1913 the Perthshire Cricket Club was destroyed by fire, and the *Dundee Courier* advised its readers that the WSPU claimed responsibility.<sup>5</sup> The *Dundee Advertiser* published a local suffragette's letter defending such actions:

In this country in the past men have defied the law, and to-day their names are revered. We have John Hampden; we have the Covenanters, who carried their defiance of the law to the battlefield, as Drumclog and Bothwell Brig testify. Here in Dundee we have a statue erected in honour of a man who was outlawed. When women have the vote the need to defy the law will cease.<sup>6</sup>

The day after the cricket pavilion was burnt down two WSPU members bravely went from Dundee to Perth and attempted to address the public there. One of the two was Fanny Parker, WSPU organiser for Dundee at this time. In the early period of the militant movement Frances M. Parker was an active member of the Scottish Universities Women's Suffrage Union, touring the country in a horse-drawn caravan to preach the message. But after years of that kind of campaigning had brought women no nearer to getting the vote she switched her allegiance to the militants and—as will be seen in Chapter 4—her commitment to such methods was total.

When the citizens of Perth learned that two suffragettes planned to hold an open-air meeting in the city they mobilised themselves. Within a few minutes of the women's arrival they were mobbed by a crowd of thousands who howled

them down when they attempted to speak. The driver of the cab they were in tried to drive off, but so dense was the crowd that the frightened horse was brought to a standstill. The women alighted and would have been in real danger if the police had not appeared on the scene.

The policemen formed a bodyguard for the suffragettes and took them onto a tramcar, but the crowd followed until the tram came to a stop in the High Street. 'The excitement rose to fever pitch', according to the *Dundee Advertiser's* reporter, but he added—with an unconscious note of admiration—'the two ladies remained quite calm and collected, coolly glancing at the sea effaces, and then laughingly whispering to each other.' Later they made another attempt to speak, but 'handfuls of mud, several eggs and garbage' were thrown at them, and though they 'stuck gamely to their post', they finally had to beat a retreat, when 'a desperate rush was made by the infuriated crowd to get at the women, and the police were compelled to draw their batons in order to protect both themselves and their charges.' All in all, it was felt that the 'scenes of intense excitement' were 'probably unequalled within the memory of the oldest inhabitants of the burgh.'<sup>7</sup>

About a month later Fanny Parker was back in Perth, with another Dundee suffragette, addressing an open-air meeting. Their reception, while far less frenzied than on the previous occasion, was nevertheless hostile, with 'volleys of rotten eggs, orange peel, decayed vegetables &c' interrupting their attempts to speak; once again a police escort was needed to get them safely back to their hotel.<sup>8</sup>

These incidents reveal not only the guts of the women, but also the way in which the citizens of Perth responded to suffragettes at this time. April 1913 was also the month when the notorious Cat and Mouse Act was passed, which allowed the authorities to release hunger-striking suffragette prisoners and then re-arrest them when they had recovered their health. The difficulty was that released suffragettes did not voluntarily present themselves for re-arrest, and keeping a watch on them often proved impossible. And so, when arson attacks escalated further, the Home Office again resorted to the forcible feeding of suffragette prisoners. In March 1914 the Scottish Office followed suit. The first woman to undergo this in Scotland was a Dundee woman, Ethel Moorhead.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> For the story of the actions which led to the women's imprisonment see Leah Leneman, 'Dundee and the Women's Suffrage Movement', in *The Remaking of Juteopolis* (Abertay Historical Society, 1991) and Chapter 5 of '*A Guid Cause*'—*The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1991). Unless otherwise noted, the material on the women as prisoners comes from the following files: Scottish Record Office (SRO) HH16/37 and HH55/323.
- <sup>2</sup> *Votes for women*, 29 October 1909
- <sup>3</sup> E.g. *Scotsman*, *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, *Glasgow Herald* and *Dundee Advertiser*, 25 October 1909.
- <sup>4</sup> Corrosive acid or a thick tarry substance was poured into pillar boxes; the destruction of letters was meant to put pressure on the government to concede suffragettes' demands for the vote, but all it did was alienate sympathy.
- <sup>5</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 29 April 1913
- <sup>6</sup> *Dundee Advertiser*, 29 April 1913. The letter was from Lila Clunas, a member of the Women's Freedom League whose members did not commit acts of violence themselves though they strongly defended those who did.
- <sup>7</sup> *Dundee Courier* and *Dundee Advertiser*, 29 April 1913.
- <sup>8</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 4 June 1913.



## CHAPTER 2

### **Ethel Moorhead**

Ethel Moorhead was brought up in India where her father was an army surgeon; the family returned to Dundee in about 1905. Her father died in 1911 and she then moved to Edinburgh, where she was known as an artist.<sup>1</sup> She made her maiden speech at a Dundee WSPU meeting in March 1910; in December of that year she threw an egg at Churchill when he held a meeting there. In 1911 she was congratulated by the Dundee branch of the Women's Freedom League (the organisation that had broken away from the Pankhurst-led Women's Social and Political Union and advocated nonviolent militancy) for being Dundee's first tax-resister. In March 1912 she was arrested in London and charged with damaging two windows but was discharged 'owing to failure of the evidence'.<sup>2</sup> From then on she confined her activities to Scotland, and the progression of her deeds of violence arguably mirrored that of the WSPU as a whole.

Her first Scottish offence was to smash the glass at the Wallace Monument in September 1912. When she was arrested she gave her name as Edith Johnstone. Brian Harrison claims that suffragettes gave false names when arrested in order to spare their families distress.<sup>3</sup> Ethel Moorhead apparently had no family surviving, and it seems a reasonable Assumption that her reason for giving a different name each time she was arrested was simply to cause the authorities as much trouble as she possibly could, an aim which she pursued on every possible occasion in every possible way. She was held in a police cell at Stirling for one night (and created a fuss about conditions there after her release) and then served seven days at Perth prison. She was said to have been 'insolent and defiant' but did not go on hunger strike and served her seven-day sentence.

In October, after being ejected from a meeting in Edinburgh's Synod Hall, she marched into the classroom of the male teacher who had been responsible for the ejection and attacked him with a dog whip. This time she was arrested in her own name and convicted at Edinburgh police court; her fine of £1 was paid in court so she did not go to prison on that occasion.

In December she was arrested in Aberdeen for causing a disturbance and gave her name as Mary Humphreys; she went on hunger strike but was

released on payment of part of her fine after serving four days of her 10-day sentence.<sup>4</sup> At the end of January 1913 she was involved in a disturbance at a meeting in Leven where she threw cayenne pepper into the eyes of a police constable and was arrested as 'Margaret Morrison'. She caused havoc in Cupar police cells by locking herself in, breaking all the window panes and throwing a pail-full of water over a police constable. At the end of her trial (during which she showed her contempt for the proceedings by refusing to stand and refusing to remove her veil for identification purposes), she was sentenced to 30 days' imprisonment in Perth.<sup>5</sup>

It was decided at that time that 'Margaret Morrison' should be forcibly fed. However, she had begun her hunger strike when she was arrested, so by the time was admitted to Perth prison she had been without food for four days. She refused to allow the medical officer to examine her, struggling with him when he attempted to do so. He insisted he could not examine her by force and could not undertake to feed her after a four-day fast without an examination, especially as he felt certain she was 'up to all the tricks about feeding resisting'. The result was that she was discharged after serving only two days of her sentence.

On 24 July 1913—as Margaret Morrison—Ethel Moorhead was admitted into Duke Street prison, Glasgow, charged with having broken into an unoccupied house placing fire lighters, wood and paraffin with intent to set the house on fire. She had a companion on this occasion, Elizabeth Dorothea Lynas or Chalmers Smith, a medical graduate of Glasgow University and wife of the Rev. William Chalmers Smith, minister at Gallon parish church, Glasgow. Something of the flavour of Ethel Moorhead's attitude to authority may be gleaned from the prison governor's report. 'Margaret Morrison' had smashed three panes of glass in her cell and had been removed to a strong cell.

I was asked why she had been removed there. I told her because she had broken her cell windows. That—she replied was because she had not got her "rights" and when asked what rights she replied by attempting to knock off my hat "because I dared to stand in the presence of a lady with it on."

'Margaret Morrison' herself wrote to the prison commissioners complaining of the governor's treatment of unconvicted prisoners: 'He is astonished that we are rebellious being accustomed to tame convicts—Kindly instruct him that it is not his duty to endeavour to tame the suffragettes and quite a hopeless task to undertake during their stay in HM

prisons.' Both women were released on bail, indicted and tried before the High Court in Glasgow on 15 October. They were found guilty and sentenced to eight months' imprisonment, re-entering Duke Street prison on 16 October.

By this time the Cat and Mouse Act was in force and after a five-day hunger strike the two women were released under licence, to return a week later. The Chairman of the Prison Commission wrote to the Under Secretary for Scotland suggesting that the police keep them under close observation so that they could be brought back when the licence expired. 'It makes the administration of justice a farce *if* after receiving a long sentence prisoners get off with a few days of actual imprisonment. . . . You will remember that we now have instructions not to resort to artificial feeding without the sanction of the Secretary for Scotland.' His suggestion was taken up, but in spite of a 24-hour watch being kept on the house of Mrs Chalmers Smith, she eventually gave them the slip (by the trick of changing place with one of the women who came to visit her), which was the cause of no little humiliation to the authorities, as the press picked up the story.

Ethel Moorhead alias Margaret Morrison also escaped, but in February 1914 two women were seen around Traquair House in the Borders, examining the doors and windows and making various enquiries, and when a police officer showed the owner of the hotel where the women were staying Ethel Moorhead's photo in the Police Gazette she was immediately identified. She was therefore arrested (resisting violently as was her wont) and removed to Calton jail in Edinburgh. After she had fasted for two days the prison commissioners' medical adviser was called in to examine her. He stated: 'Although apparently a healthy woman, she is not of robust habit. It is therefore desirable for the prevention of illness, that she now be artificially fed.' (The euphemism 'artificially fed' was generally used by the authorities at this time.) A telegram was sent asking the Secretary for Scotland for his approval, with a note stating that the prisoner was 'suspected of having taken active part in fire-raising in Perthshire and Renfrewshire since her liberation on licence on 20th October 1913.' (A warrant for her arrest was in fact held by Perthshire constabulary in connection with fires set at three mansions in the Comrie area on 3rd or 4th February.)

The Secretary for Scotland gave his approval and forcible feeding commenced. The reaction of Janie Allan, a key member of the WSPU in Scotland, shows clearly that Scottish militant suffragettes had convinced themselves that this could never happen.

The decision of the Prison Commissioners in Scotland to order

forcible feeding in the case of Miss Ethel Moorhead came as a shock to most of the public. It had been fondly believed that this barbarity was to be left to England, but last week it was proved that, however enlightened the Scottish public may be, the Commissioners have still ideas only suited to the Middle Ages, when torture and witch-burning were considered quite ordinary occurrences.<sup>6</sup>

The medical officer reported on 21 February that the feeding had been administered 'by a small sized catheter by the mouth without any serious hitch or difficulty, and during the administration the prisoner showed no signs of suffering much if any pain.' During the five days Ethel Moorhead was forcibly fed there was intense agitation outside the prison by militant suffragettes. On the evening of 23 February Janie Allan called on Dr James Devon, Medical Prison Commissioner. Dr Devon reported the conversation to the Chairman of the Prison Commission.

I said I was fully alive to all the risks contingent to any further forcible feeding to which Miss Moorhead was subjected and I would be very glad of any suggestion that would enable us to dispense with it, but it seemed to me that my duty was to prevent her from setting at defiance the law which was designed to restrain her. . . . She [Janie Allan] said that this meant that we were prepared to injure permanently a woman's health, to which I replied that for my part I was of opinion that if the women's health could only be preserved by allowing her to set fire to other people's houses, we must with regret risk her health. I told Miss Allan ... that I personally assumed the entire responsibility for the forcible feeding of Miss Moorhead and that I did it from as strong a sense of duty as they did (sic), and with equal sincerity in the belief that it was necessary.

The report of another conversation between Dr Devon and a WSPU deputation, in which he again took on himself full responsibility for the forcible feeding of Ethel Moorhead, appeared in an Edinburgh newspaper, the *Evening Dispatch*, on 25 February. He explained to the Chairman of the Prison Commission that he had done this because he believed 'it would be an advantage to fix their attention on somebody. It does not increase the risk to me and it may diminish that of the others.' (He added, 'My personal view is that the risk is very slight and I have been far too frequently threatened

by lunatics in and out of prison to worry about this lot.') In the weeks that followed he was indeed the target of attacks by suffragettes, including an assault with a dog whip.<sup>7</sup> By this time, however, Ethel Moorhead had been released from prison (on licence)—suffering from pneumonia.

As far as the prison doctor was concerned her illness was her own fault: she had deliberately broken panes of glass, torn her clothes, and tied herself to the bars, in order to expose herself to the cold. Her own version, however, supplied with precise and lurid details, was that in the course of the torture to which she was subjected food had gone into her lung; at one point, she stated, 'the priest was sent for to administer the sacraments'. The militants' own newspaper printed her story under the headline 'SCOTLAND DISHONoured AND DISGRACED!' Of far greater concern to the Scottish Office was the fact that the full gruesome statement also appeared in the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*.<sup>8</sup> A question was tabled in the House of Commons, asking the Secretary for Scotland for a statement on Ethel Moorhead's allegations. A list of some nineteen queries concerning specific points was sent to the prison governor by the prison commissioners. (In response to the final one it was stated that Ethel Moorhead had asked the medical officer if she could see the priest. 'He replied of course you can I'll send him to you. No mention was made of the administering of the Sacrament'.)

The Secretary for Scotland made his statement in the Commons on 9 March, laying the blame for Ethel Moorhead's illness on her own actions. Dr Grace Cadell, who had attended her on her release, indignantly refuted the claim that the illness was not the result of forcible feeding: 'there is no doubt', she wrote to the press, 'that Miss Moorhead's pneumonia was the result of some foreign substance entering her lungs.'<sup>9</sup>

Ethel Moorhead disappeared and was not rearrested. There was to be no more forcible feeding in Edinburgh's Gallon jail, but the man responsible for feeding Ethel Moorhead, Dr Ferguson Watson, became probationary medical officer at Perth prison. The wave of incendiarism continued, and it was decided that all of the more troublesome suffragette prisoners should henceforth be sent to Perth for forcible feeding. In the summer of 1914 four women were forcibly fed there. (A fifth, Helen Crawford, was also admitted, but because she was on a simple hunger strike and willing to drink water, and also because her offence was stone-throwing rather than fire-raising, she was not forcibly fed.) The first to be admitted—on 20 June—was Arabella Scott.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> This information was supplied by Dundee city police to the prison commissioners on 26 March 1913. Unless otherwise noted, everything on Ethel Moorhead (under all her assumed names) comes from SRO.HH16/40.
- <sup>2</sup> *Votes for Women*, 4 March and 16 December 1910. *The Vote*, 21 October 1911. *Votes for Women* 5 April 1912.
- <sup>3</sup> Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London, 1978 p. 162.
- <sup>4</sup> SRO.HH16/41. At this time it was not realised she was Ethel Moorhead, but the connection was made soon after.
- <sup>5</sup> Her behaviour in the police cells and in court are briefly mentioned in HH16/40 and amplified much further in the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, 30 January and 5 February 1912.
- <sup>6</sup> *Forward*, 1 March 1914.
- <sup>7</sup> *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, 17 March 1914.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Suffragette*, 6 March 1914. *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, 5 March 1914.
- <sup>9</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 13 March 1914.

## CHAPTER 3

### Arabella Scott

Arabella Charlotte Scott was born on 7 May 1886 at Dunoon, the daughter of a captain in the Indian army.<sup>1</sup> She was awarded an MA at Edinburgh University, became a schoolteacher and, together with her sister Muriel, lived in Edinburgh. Both sisters were very active speakers on behalf of women's suffrage in Scotland, and in 1909 they were both arrested in London on a charge of obstruction (for attempting to present a petition to the Prime Minister) and imprisoned for 21 days in Holloway.<sup>2</sup>

On 19 May 1913 Arabella Scott (along with two other women) was convicted of attempting to set fire to Kelso racecourse stand and imprisoned at Calton jail; along with the others she went on hunger strike.<sup>3</sup> She was liberated under the Cat and Mouse Act on 24 May when she was interviewed by a journalist from the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, who described her as 'a sweet-faced young lady'. She told him, 'The prison authorities, every one of them, were most kind and humane. In this respect the treatment is better in Scotland than in England.'<sup>4</sup> Although none of the women returned to prison on the expiry of their licences, Arabella Scott was found and rearrested on 12 June (the whereabouts of the other two were never discovered). She was taken back to Calton jail and immediately went on hunger strike. On the 16th the medical officer found her in a weak condition and she was released under licence.

Once again she did not report back when her licence expired, but on 24 August she was found in London and conveyed back to Calton jail. She went on hunger and thirst strike the day she was caught, and by the 28th the medical officer considered that her condition warranted immediate discharge. She had to be ejected by force as she insisted she would not leave until unconditionally released. That particular licence expired on 10 September, but it was not until May 1914 that she was discovered in Brighton, acting (under an assumed name) as WSPU organiser there. She had not, during any of her periods of freedom, been involved in any acts of militancy.

Arabella Scott resisted arrest on this occasion, so much so that the Scottish police who went south to arrest her required assistance not only from Brighton police but from New Scotland Yard as well. She refused to walk and had to be carried onto trains and into cabs, 'bawling and shouting' that she was a victim of the Cat and Mouse Act. On the train to Edinburgh, the detective inspector reported, she 'endeavoured to break the windows of the railway carriage, and to pull the communication cord, and when restrained from doing so, kicked, scratched, and struck out direct blows at my face.'

Her stay in Gallon prison was once again of short duration, for she had started a hunger and thirst strike when arrested on the 2nd and by the 8th she was in a poor enough condition for the prison doctor to recommend her discharge. She had now been on four hunger strikes in less than a year. Nevertheless, on 17 May she departed for London, seen off by a group of her friends. According to the press she had a 'somewhat haggard appearance', but her intention was to join the WSPU campaign against the Liberal candidate in the Ipswich by-election. The police were at the station but took no action as her licence had not yet expired.<sup>5</sup>

In the days that followed the Scottish Office and Prison Commission decided to take no special steps to rearrest her, and it seems very likely that they would have been more than happy if she had quietly disappeared. However, when a suffragette house in London was raided for another purpose she was recognised, and on 19 June the Scottish police did their duty by arresting her and conveying her—once again resisting all the way—back to Scotland. This time it was decided to take her to Perth prison and forcibly feed her.

She certainly did not come into the category of those for whom forcible feeding had been readopted, having been guilty of no acts of violence since her first release from prison. Why then was she treated in this way? One suffrage journal speculated that it might be an 'act of revenge for the effectiveness of her political opposition in the Ipswich by-election.'<sup>6</sup> However, there is no evidence to show that politicians took WSPU campaigns in by-election campaigns at all seriously, so this explanation appears highly improbable. She herself claimed afterwards that it was because at the time of her previous release she had refused to give the undertaking demanded of her to sever all connection with the WSPU.<sup>7</sup> The likeliest explanation is the simple one that Arabella Scott's cheeky defiance made the authorities look more than a little ridiculous.

She was admitted to Perth prison on 20 June and was not released until 26



July, an extraordinarily long time for someone to be forcibly fed. During That time she was allowed no visitors and no letters; her isolation from the outside world was as complete as the prison officials could make it. Her friends and relatives made every possible effort not only to see her but to get news of her. Her mother wrote direct to the Secretary for Scotland, beseeching him to order her immediate release: 'she is the daughter of an officer who gave valuable services to the Government of India for twenty-five years on the burning plains of Bengal and I am her widowed mother.' The Under Secretary saw no reason why the demand for release should be granted— 'and as for forcible feeding the prisoner has the remedy in her own hands.'

When Arabella Scott was discharged on 26 July it was reported that her physical condition was as good as it was when she was first incarcerated; in fact, it was said that she had gained a few pounds in weight.<sup>8</sup> Her own account of her ordeal appeared in the WSPU journal, *The Suffragette*, after her release, but the daily reports of the medical officer, H. Ferguson Watson, to the prison governor are just as harrowing to read.

According to his first report she was fed by tube three times during the first 24 hours. The first time, 'within five minutes of being fed she was sick & of the 1½ pints of sweet milk, containing 2 eggs, half was retained.' This happened again on the third feeding. 'No active resistance when fed' was noted at the end of the report. In her own account, when she was held down while the tube was inserted, 'I would close my eyes and pray that I should have no feelings of resentment or anger towards those who caused me pain.' She went on

On the removal of the gag, my head was seized . . . , my chin dragged upwards and backwards, my jaws and lips held tightly together. Sometimes voluntarily, sometimes involuntarily the food would be returned into my mouth, and unable to escape would burst through my nose. Then my nose would be pinched, and I was ordered to swallow it again. I wouldn't, and struggled for breath. Then they would say, "We will let you breathe when we see you going purple."<sup>9</sup>

On the second day, 22 June, the medical officer reported that she complained of a severe pain across the stomach and heart region, but as she had suffered this pain while hunger striking previously it was not considered to be connected with the feeding. She retained all the food that was fed her. 'She has made no active resistance, has been allowed to write to the Secretary for Scotland & is fit for further feeding.' The following day she asked to write to the prison commissioners but as she was in bed and 'doing better' the medical officer

could not see 'any benefit in allowing her to excite herself meantime. Should any one ask the commissioners about her or want to visit I think it will aid me in caring (sic) out the treatment if no relative of hers is allowed to visit'.

On 25 June the medical officer wrote, 'Her health continues satisfactory & she is fit for further treatment.' But, he added, 'She has been more troublesome today than at any other time due to the fact that she recognised Dr Dunlop [the doctor who had authorised her discharges from Gallon jail] & associated his presence with the hope of getting away. She made a greater demonstration of struggling in his presence than on any previous occasion.' The Prison Commission's Medical Adviser commented, 'Satisfactory. Shows importance of avoiding, as far as possible, all causes of excitement.'

On the 27th the medical officer reported, 'She has been allowed a bath today. Food continues to agree with her and her condition is satisfactory. She is fit to be detained for further treatment.' On 30 June he wrote

Last evening she was informed by the Governor the result of the petition sent to the Secretary] for Scotland] about forcible feeding on the 22nd inst. This information has somewhat upset her: she slept less in consequence—from 9 to 12 and from 2 to 3.30 AM. She has asked for a petition to the Commissioners. I have refused for the following reasons: It is not in the interests of prolonging the treatment to (1) allow any writing (2) to allow her to sit up, which would aid sickness (3) the mental effort is bound to have a negative action on stomach & digestion (4) during treatment she requires all the mental & physical rest obtainable.

On 2 July she was awakened by thunder and lightning at 4.30 a.m. 'She became very depressed and expressed the hope that she would be struck by lightning.' He added that her condition was satisfactory and she was fit for further feeding. On 4 July he was of opinion 'that her condition has improved since admission'. However, he continued

This forenoon she impulsively jumped out of bed and since then it has required 3 wardresses in constant attendance to prevent injury to herself or to prison property. Every precaution will be taken. She has become excited & charges everyone with breaking the prison rules, which she demands to see. In her present state she is too excited and I cannot recommend that she see these. Her chief complaint is that she is not allowed exercise, to which by the rules she is entitled. She is being treated as a sick person & I do not think it would be well to allow her up.

By the 5th she had calmed down somewhat and consented to take two cups

of tea with milk if two of the wardresses were sent away. She was to be encouraged to take some food voluntarily, increasing the amount each day but on subsequent days she refused to do so). On 7 July he wrote, 'As she has threatened "to do something that will cause her release" very special precautions are being taken not only when being fed but also at all other times lest she make some impulsive attempt on her own life. Her condition remains quite satisfactory and she is fit for further treatment.' The following day she was said to be 'still unreasonable and dour—requiring the most careful attention.'

In view of his earlier statements of the prisoner not resisting forcible feeding Ferguson Watson's comments on 14 July are revealing. 'I beg to report that the prisoner ... has, on two separate occasions which I forgot to record, stated in front of several wardresses & myself that she would shoot me when she got out. Within a few days of her coming here she bit my left forefinger and it became septic & remained so for over a week.'

On the 17th she was 'highly excited & emotional. As she was difficult to manage I requested the governor to place three Wardresses along with her, and she is now very much quieter.' On the 19th

Shortly after 9 P.M. she sat up in bed & said "That is my sister's voice." Her sister was in the South Quad opposite the prison, being nearer it than to muse and I myself heard someone perfectly distinct call "Arabella, Arabella, fight on, you are bound to win." I felt certain a megaphone was being used. Prisoner was somewhat excited up till 11 P.M. & did not fall asleep till 11.30 P.M. She woke up at 5 am & is rather depressed this morning. . . . Her health is satisfactory and she is fit for further treatment.

In her own account she wrote: 'At night, my sleep was often very much broken and disturbed by dreams. The fact of knowing I had so many friends near . . . gave me courage to go through with the ordeal.'

On the 22nd she was allowed to sit up for two hours; on the 24th she was visited by the Chairman of the Prison Commission and was allowed to sit up for four hours; on the 25th she was persuaded to give up her hunger strike, and on the 26th she was discharged. The press were told that the reason for her release (still under the Cat and Mouse Act) was 'because the authorities consider that the punishment she has undergone at the prison fits the crime.'<sup>10</sup> The real reason for her release, as is made clear in a confidential memo from the Chairman of the Prison Commission to the Scottish Office was 'the tremendous strain and cost' involved in keeping her: 'as we cannot keep her for anything

like her whole sentence and have shewn her and her friends that we can keep her for a good while at a time, I think we may just as well liberate her now.'

The Medical Adviser commented after her release, 'Most satisfactory regarding the health of this prisoner after a long duration of artificial feeding'. The medical officer, no longer constrained to write about the prisoner solely in medical terms, expressed his opinion of her in a letter of 28 July to the Secretary of the Prison Commission. He claimed that if any particularly horrible act was committed in the near future Arabella Scott would be to blame; his letter conveys deep hatred for his erstwhile 'patient'. It is true that when she came out of prison she claimed the experience had made her 'more militant than ever', but that is hardly surprising. Her health was clearly measured solely by her physical state with no one even considering the mental effects (as evidenced by the extracts from the above reports) on her of such a long period of isolation from her friends and relatives, being watched day and night performing her most intimate functions, with nothing to do but lie on her bed and wait for her next 'feeding'.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> A.J.R. (ed), *The Suffrage Annual and Woman's Who's Who* (London, 1913).

<sup>2</sup> *Votes for Women*, 30 July 1909.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, everything further on Arabella Scott is in SRO.HH16/44.

<sup>4</sup> *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, 24 May 1913.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* , 17 May 1914

<sup>6</sup> *Votes for Women*, 24 July 1914.

<sup>7</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 28 July 1914.

<sup>8</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 27 July 1914. Her sister Muriel, replied angrily to many of the statements made in that article in a letter published in the *Courier* on 28 July.

<sup>9</sup> *Suffragette*, 7 August 1914

<sup>10</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 27 July 1914. In the letter published the following day, her sister, Muriel, pointed out that this confirmed the suffragettes' claim that forcible feeding *was* a form of punishment, not a process carried out on compassionate grounds.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Other Prisoners

Unlike those of the previous two women, Frances Gordon's name did not feature in suffrage journals or the popular press as a militant activist until her arrest for attempted arson in June 1914. However, because of the nature of her offence she was sent to Perth prison for forcible feeding, and the particular interest in her case lies in the manner in which this was carried out.<sup>1</sup>

She was admitted the evening of 23 June and, in spite of having taken no food or water, was vomiting, so the medical officer (Ferguson Watson) did nothing until the 25th. On that day he reported

She had a visit (before feeding) from Dr Dunlop and as she suspected the visit had to do with forcible feeding she was very much upset and hysterical prior to the feeding, and consequently gave more trouble during the operation than I had anticipated.

On the 26th he wrote, 'Prisoner is of a highly neurotic and hysterical temperament. There has been more or less nervous prostration since I told her that I had orders to feed her. . . . Today she is still hysterical and unstable.' On that day he also noted that she had a very narrow pharynx and nasal passage and had difficulty breathing after the tube was inserted. On the 28th he reported: 'She still exhibits much nervousness both while awake and while asleep . . . while asleep talked much about tubes and feeding.' She was also vomiting up much of what was being fed her, and about this time he began considering supplementing feeding by tube by rectal feeding; he was delighted to receive a memo from the prison commissioners' medical adviser suggesting just this course of action. On 30 June he informed the prisoner 'that I could not allow her bilious attacks to go on & that she would have treatment per bowel.' He reported to the prison governor that the wardress had given her a 'nutrient enema' of egg and milk, and as she had retained this he proposed giving her more food in this manner, though also by tube.

Rectal feeding was carried out for four days, but on 3 July Ferguson Watson advised the prison governor

Prisoner's condition now begins to cause anxiety... she is very feeble & the pulse is sometimes unable to be counted. I do not think she ought to be detained longer than tomorrow if she has to make the journey to Glasgow.

He concluded that day's report: 'I am strongly of opinion that this case was not suitable for forcible feeding; but I was unable to give that information before a careful trial had been given.'

It is clear from the medical officer's reports that as he viewed Frances Gordon in the way he (and other prison doctors) viewed all the female prisoners he dealt with—as a collection of organs rather than as a woman—it never occurred to him (or to anyone in the prison service) that there could be any objections to his treatment of her. He was thus quite unprepared for the storm that broke when she was released and her doctor (Mabel Jones) issued a report on her having been fed rectally. A typical response was that of the man who wrote to the Scottish Office, expressing 'horror and disgust ... —feelings which must be shared by all Scotchmen who are aware of the facts—at the treatment to which a Suffragist prisoner has recently been subjected in Perth gaol.' He pointed out that 'there is a steadily rising tide of indignation throughout the country against this horrible practice of forcible feeding. When forcible feeding is coupled with abominable obscenities, such as those mentioned in the report, I, and many others, feel a sense of personal degradation, that such things can be done by the instructions of those who represent us in Parliament.'

The report—which led to questions in the House of Commons—certainly made lurid reading: 'Seen at midnight on July 3rd her appearance was appalling. Like a famine victim—the skin brown, her face bones standing out—her voice a whisper, her hands quite cold, her pulse a thread'. The medical officer indignantly refuted many of the statements in the report, claiming, for example, that 'During the journey to Glasgow she sat up and admired the scenery and talked to my assistant all the way, there being no evidence then of her voice being a whisper.' He insisted she had never complained of ill-treatment.

The statements are entirely misleading and suggest to me that the report, which is made by a suffragette is one entirely for the gratification of suffragettes and impressionable people who cannot see that the report is exaggerated but are likely to offer sympathy on the suggestion that medical treatment consists not of humane treatment but of brutality.

Comparing the medical officer's daily reports with Frances Gordon's story

as related by Mabel Jones, it is clear that the latter did indeed contain a good deal of distortion, but a far greater distortion was the version of events provided by the medical officer and Chairman of the Prison Commission to the Scottish Office, which insisted that the prisoner had undergone a systematic course of drugging between being released on bail and appearing in court. The Chairman stated 'there can be little doubt that the difficulty in retaining food which ultimately baffled us was due to previous drugging', while the medical officer claimed he had suspected this from the start 'and subsequent events convinced me that she had been the case.' The fact that he made no note of any such suspicion in his detailed reports while she was in prison shows up this arrant nonsense for what it was: a desperate attempt by the prison service to counter the unexpected storm of criticism provoked by the case.<sup>2</sup>

On 3 July, when Frances Gordon was released, another suffragette—Maude Edwards—was convicted of slashing a portrait of King George V at the Royal Scottish Academy and was sent to Perth prison.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the arsonists, who were only caught by chance, she acted in full view of the public and was therefore courting arrest and imprisonment. Her name does not appear in any previous press reports, nor in any of the suffrage journals, so this was presumably an isolated gesture. The press noted that she 'did not belong to Edinburgh', and as her GP was in London there is no way of knowing if she was even Scottish.

It may be conjectured that one reason why she was willing to be arrested and convicted (for three months)—knowing, as she would have done, that women who had damaged paintings in London were being forcibly fed—was because she had acquired a medical certificate stating that she had been confined to bed for four months in 1913-14 with a 'dilated heart, weak action, irregular rhythm and mitral murmur' and that forcible feeding would therefore be very dangerous and could even cause death. When she was admitted to prison on 3 July Maude Edwards appears to have been on a kind of 'high', believing that she would have to be left alone. Ferguson Watson called her mental condition 'abnormal' and reported

She did not behave like a sane person. She spoke in exaggerated tones. . . . She seemed incoherent at times, did not seem to realise the gravity of the situation. Laughing she said "you are bound to know many people who can alive for three months without food."

In her account of her experiences after her release, she wrote that she thought that talk of forcibly feeding her was an 'idle threat'.<sup>4</sup> However, her belief that the certificate and a medical examination would exempt her proved ill-

founded; Dr Ferguson Watson was made of stronger stuff. He did find evidence of a heart condition but did not attach much importance to the certificate 'because it was written by a *lady doctor* [his emphasis] who is not now able to judge whether forcible feeding will do any harm.' He considered the report 'much exaggerated'.

On the 5th he began feeding her by tube. He admitted that 'owing to her physical condition I do not consider her a very good case for feeding, but as, I indicated yesterday, I wished to try the effect.' She did not resist and lay flat on her bed without attempting to induce vomiting, so the medical officer was very satisfied with his experiment. He reported that he intended to go on with it, 'but at any time should she make active resistance so as to damage her already dilated heart I shall discontinue feeding & report.'

According to Maude Edwards' own statement she 'resisted as much as possible', but the doctor's statement that she never offered any resistance is more believable. It seems reasonable to suppose that knowing what the consequences of a struggle could be, the woman was afraid for her life. He continued feeding her by tube, although much of the time she was sick and vomiting. On 8 July he wrote, 'She is not a very good case for feeding as there is much congestion of the stomach owing to cardiac dilation . . . but I am satisfied I can detain her quite as long as Frances Gordon without doing any further damage to her diseased condition.' (She insisted afterwards that she was also fed rectally, but this could not have been done without appearing in the medical officer's reports.)

On the 10th she applied to the prison commissioners to be liberated on licence 'on the understanding that I give an undertaking to refrain from militancy in the future. My special reason for making such an offer is the fact that the medical officer of the prison tells me that excitement is injurious to my heart.' She gave up her hunger strike on the following day and was liberated under licence on the 14th. Dr Ferguson Watson was 'of opinion that the quiet, and rest in bed, coupled with the treatment improved her condition on the whole.'

If the last two women attempted to serve the cause of women's suffrage only by one grand gesture, the same certainly could not be said of Frances M. (Fanny) Parker. She was arrested in London (for 'obstruction') in 1908 and served six months in Holloway. In 1909 she was an active speaker with the Scottish Universities Women's Suffrage Association and in 1911 she was their fraternal delegate to the International Suffrage Congress in Stockholm. In March 1912 she was imprisoned in Holloway for window-breaking. In October of that year



she was arrested and imprisoned for the same offence in Dundee; in November she spent five days in Aberdeen prison for concealing herself in the hall where Lloyd George was to speak.<sup>5</sup>

She has already been encountered (in Chapter 1) as WSPU organiser for Dundee where, from autumn 1912, she was an indefatigable worker; scarcely a week went by without her writing letters to the press and addressing meetings of all kinds. After the outbreak of war, when the WSPU was disbanded, she was recruited by the Women's Freedom League to head their new organisation finding suitable jobs for women and making sure those women were not exploited.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that such a woman felt driven to an attempt at arson is a clear indication of the absolute desperation she, and others like her, felt at the government's continuing denial of the franchise to women. Her attempt to burn down the cottage at Alloway where Robert Burns was born was certainly not meant to lead to her arrest as it was carried out at 2.30 a.m., and it was only because there was a watchman on duty (as there was at all such houses of historic importance for fear of just such an attempt by suffragettes) that she was caught; her female companion escaped and was not identified.

She gave her name as Janet Arthur and created a fuss when she was charged at Ayr sheriff court, denying the court had any jurisdiction over her. Yet even on this occasion she revealed something of her calibre.

Some minutes before she was removed from the dock a woman, who had been sentenced to pay a fine of £1, or ten days [for receiving stolen goods], was brought into the dock to wait removal to prison, and Arthur showed her sympathy by talking to her in soothing tones, and endeavoured to allay her fears about the prospect of going to prison. Her sympathy took practical form in the end, for she asked that the woman's fine be paid from the considerable sum found in her possession when arrested.<sup>7</sup>

As a prisoner on remand in Ayr, 'Janet Arthur' immediately put the prison commissioners and Scottish Office in a quandary by going on hunger and thirst strike.<sup>8</sup> In view of her offence, to liberate her on bail did not seem a viable option, but then neither did waiting until her condition forced them to release her under the Cat and Mouse Act. Janie Allan (earlier encountered in the case of Ethel Moorhead) called on the prison governor at Ayr and told him that 'Miss Arthur' was the niece of a very distinguished person (it was later established that Lord Kitchener was her uncle) and that there would be trouble if she died in prison as she was determined to do. The authorities wanted to send her to a nursing home, but she refused to go.

They were even willing to allow her to go to Janie Allan's home in Prestwick under licence, but, as the Chairman of the Prison Commission wrote in a confidential memo to the Under Secretary for Scotland, the police were 'unwilling to undertake to watch it even at our expense'. As Dr Ferguson Watson at Perth prison was willing to feed her, it was decided to transfer her there, although they appreciated there might be difficulties as she had been on hunger and thirst strike since her arrest on 8 July and it was now the 13th.

By the 14th, when she was in Perth prison, rumours began to circulate about her condition, and members of her family called at the Scottish Office in London. The Under Secretary was clearly impressed by her brother, Captain Parker, when he called on the 15th, particularly as the Captain had 'no sympathy with his sister's views'. The Under Secretary advised the Chairman of the Prison Commission that Captain Parker would be travelling up to Scotland that night and that his main request was for his sister to be examined by a second doctor to allay the family's anxieties about her condition.

Earlier that day a telegram from Captain Parker to the governor of Perth prison, asking if his sister was dangerously ill, caused the governor to ask for prison commissioners' instructions, 'as M.O. will not say that Arthur is not dangerously ill. He can only say that she is not any worse since he received her.' The wire sent to Captain Parker, stating that her condition 'is as good as can be expected in view of her conduct', was hardly calculated to soothe the family's fears, and it is not surprising that he should have taken further action.

It is, however, the only case in which a relative was influential enough to cause a second medical opinion to be given on a suffragette prisoner. Before going on to that opinion it is worth looking at Fanny Parker's own account of her experiences given in great detail after her release. It is far too long to reproduce, but one section is worth concentrating on because it seems the most likely to be an exaggeration. After describing being fed by tube ('The food was doing me no good; I was getting weaker and weaker'), she went on to an 'attempt to feed me by the rectum. I objected and protested against this indignity and struggled as best I could. The manner in which this was done was so unnecessarily painful that I screamed with agony.' She described another attempt to feed her in that way which was also done 'in a cruel way, causing me great pain', and also mentioned 'a grosser and more indecent outrage' which she did not specify. In the last paragraph she wrote: 'While lying in my cell I could not help wondering how the doctors and wardresses could have become so cruel. . . . It proves the danger of giving a medical man, who is part of

the prison system, full control over the bodies of prisoners.<sup>9</sup>

None of the above appears in the medical officer's reports, only the statement that in addition to the food taken by tube 'she had 3 enules, all being retained.' To be fair, her description of rectal feeding mentioned only wardresses, so Ferguson Watson clearly was not present at the time. On 16 July he reported, 'Her condition has undergone a change for the better and I am now able to say her condition is satisfactory.'

On that same day—the day on which she was in fact discharged—the outside doctor, Dr Chalmers Watson, also examined her, and his opinion was very different: 'The patient's general appearance is that of a very thin woman in a state of pronounced collapse', he wrote; her 'recovery from her present condition will be slow, several weeks at least elapsing before she will be restored to anything like her usual health.' As she had complained to him of pain in the genital region, associated in her mind 'with rough and faulty introduction of instruments' he had had two nurses examine her; they reported swelling and soreness. Her own doctor subsequently expressed the opinion that a more detailed examination of the patient should be made from a gynaecological standpoint, and she herself expressed a desire that the examination be made, so on the 18th Chalmers Watson and a gynaecologist examined her while she was under general anaesthetic and reported

Local inspection of the front passage revealed distinct swelling of the vulva in its posterior part and also the presence of a raw surface on the mucous membrane of the inner and outer folds on both sides. These appearances explain the marked pain complained of in the genital region.

Sending a copy of his report to the assistant medical officer, Dr Chalmers Watson expressed his profound distaste for the whole business with the comment, 'I sincerely hope that I will have no more medical experience of forcibly fed women.'

There was a good deal of further correspondence between the Scottish Office, prison commissioners, and governors of both Ayr and Perth prisons resulting from the report.<sup>10</sup> The Under Secretary for Scotland was also very worried that Fanny Parker would escape from the nursing home where she had been sent before the date of her trial, thus making them look even more incompetent. As it happened, she did precisely that, but on 4 August war broke out, and the WSPU announced an end to militancy, and on 12 August the Secretary for Scotland (following the Home Office lead) announced a complete amnesty for all suffragettes, whether convicted or unconvicted, in or out of jail.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> All material on Frances Gordon is in SRO.HH16/46.
- <sup>2</sup> Frances Gordon herself emphatically denied the allegation in a letter to the press, stating that her sickness and retching 'were the natural outcome of the hunger and thirst strike upon my constitution and were in no way due to drug-taking.' *Glasgow Herald*, 28 July 1914.
- <sup>3</sup> SRO.HH16/47.
- <sup>4</sup> *Suffragette*, 31 July 1914. All further statements made by Maude Edwards herself come from this source.
- <sup>5</sup> *Suffrage Annual*; *Common Cause*, 23 September 1909; *Votes for Women*, 8 March, 6 & 13 December 1912; *The Suffragette*, 8 November 1912; *Dundee Advertiser*, 31 October & 30 November 1912; SRO.HH16/41 & 42.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Vote*, 18 June 1915.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Scotsman*, 9 July 1914. The *Glasgow Herald* of the same date also reported this action of hers.
- <sup>8</sup> Material on Fanny Parker as Janet Arthur is in SRO.HH16/43
- <sup>9</sup> *Votes for Women*, 7 August 1914.
- <sup>10</sup> And it is 'Janet Arthur' rather than Frances Gordon who is remembered as the suffragette who was fed by the rectum. See George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1966 edition), p. 340.

## CHAPTER 5

### Reactions

The last three chapters dealt with the experiences of the suffragettes who suffered forcible feeding, but how did others react to what was happening in Perth prison? The WSPU mobilised its members effectively, and from 3 July onwards there was a 24-hour picket around the prison; other means were also found to bring the plight of the prisoners to the attention of the citizens of Perth.

The feeling of being under siege affected all the prison staff, as revealed in the journal kept by the prison governor.<sup>1</sup> On 7 July he wrote

The Chief Constable Perth informed me by letter that he had confidential information that the suffragettes intended to damage property in Perth tonight. I therefore took the precaution of posting 6 officers outside the boundary wall up till 2.30 a.m. this morning, nothing unusual occurred.

On the 11th a warder reported seeing a man and two women measuring the ground north of the boundary wall 'in rather a suspicious manner', so the governor sent a number of his staff to patrol the wall until daybreak; again, nothing unusual occurred. However, on that same day he wrote: 'The officers whose houses are facing the Edinburgh Road inform me that they cannot get sleep at night with the noise caused by the suffragette picket and their followers.' On the 12th he noted that the suffragettes and their followers 'created a disturbance by singing hymns &c' until they were removed by the police. On the evening of the 20th he recorded that the suffragettes held a meeting outside the gates: 'There would be from 2000 to 3000 people. There was no disorder.'

If the whole of the staff felt besieged, what about Dr Ferguson Watson, the medical officer? Whatever one might think of his callousness toward the women in his hands, the strain proved too much for him in the end. The prison governor noted on 20 July: 'Received intimation from the Medical Officer that owing to circumstances that have arisen since coming to Perth he asks that his appointment be not confirmed at the end of his year's probation.'

In a letter of 23 July recommending the release of Arabella Scott, the Chairman of the Prison Commission wrote to the Under Secretary for Scotland

I have had to bring six extra wardresses here from other prisons stopping holidays and working extra time. . . . We have also to keep extra men on day and night duty at the outer gates. The Governor was on the point of resignation, the Medical Officer did resign. The Matron and female staff much strained and all nervous and irritable.<sup>2</sup>

It would be interesting to know if English prisons such as Birmingham and Newcastle, where forcible feeding took place, experienced anything similar. If so, then the prison system was being placed in an impossible position, and it is difficult to imagine how it could have continued to cope.

Apart from the picket, suffragettes found other means of raising the consciousness of Perth residents. At the King's Cinema in Perth on 18 July a film had just been shown with a convict in a cell when a woman stood up and said to the audience: 'Friends, do you know that a woman is being forcibly fed in Perth prison in a cell such as you have been witnessing, this very evening she is being tortured.' And at St Ninians Cathedral, on two Sundays in July, a group of suffragettes arose and prayed 'God save Emmeline Pankhurst, Arabella Scott, and all prisoners who are being tortured for conscience' sake. Open the eyes of Thy Church that it may understand the spirit of this movement.<sup>3</sup>

The King and Queen visited Scotland in July, and before their arrival there was 'considerable uneasiness in official circles' about what the militants might get up to. In fact, Janie Allan wrote to prison commissioners with veiled threats of serious disruption to the royal visit if women were still being forcibly fed in Perth prison.<sup>4</sup> Extra police were drafted in from Glasgow, and security was tight. Helen Crawford from Glasgow, a prisoner on release under the Cat and Mouse Act (for nothing more serious than breaking two windows), had been left alone in Perth until the Royal visit, but when she decided to watch the procession she was pounced on by the police, and she too ended up in Perth prison,<sup>5</sup>

The suffragettes did make their presence felt in every city visited by the King and Queen, but their actions were perfectly harmless, the most usual one being to throw balls into the Royal carriage with messages attached, beseeching Their Majesties to stop forcible feeding. The most dramatic incident in Perth was when 'a young woman attired in black rushed out from a point where the crowd was particularly dense, placed her foot on the stop of the Royal car and

vigorously struck at the window pane.' She was immediately dragged off and arrested, and the policemen's hardest task was protecting her from the angry onlookers.<sup>6</sup>

It was the constant picket, and the speeches and demonstrations accompanying the picket that had the greatest effect. During the first week the *Dundee Advertiser* described an open-air meeting at the High Street Port addressed by Muriel Scott on behalf of her sister, Arabella. The reporter noted that in the course of her appeal she 'became so affected that she was compelled to resume her seat for a time, while many of her audience were also visibly affected.' Subsequently she asked the audience to follow her and her friends to the prison where she would attempt to see her sister.

Followed by about 300 people, the waggonette in which the Suffragettes were seated proceeded slowly towards the Penitentiary, and by the time Edinburgh Road was reached the crowd had been augmented to close on 2000 people. At the prison gate Miss Scott again addressed the gathering, and on her call three cheers were raised, while a couple of verses of "Scots Wha Hae" were sung.<sup>7</sup>

Muriel Scott's request to see her sister was refused (the crowd dispersed quietly when she asked them to do so), but the amount of sympathy she gained by her attempt is evident.

The suffragettes who picketed at Perth put across their point of view in the Glasgow socialist journal, the *Forward*. 'Again the Government have helped us more than any move on our part could have done', they wrote; 'they have given and delivered Perth into our hands.'

At first a few little untaught boys came to harass and jeer... but a large majority of people—in particular working men, have come to show an intelligent sympathy and interest.<sup>8</sup>

Militants often claimed sympathy when none is discernible, but press reports confirm the truth of this. On 22 July the *Dundee Advertiser* reported that Perth Trades Council resolved to protest against the forcible feeding of suffragettes in Perth prison and to petition parliament on the subject. The secretary, Mr J.M. Rae, said:

The militant section had carried the war into their midst, and in doing so they had taught them much that they had been ignorant of. Twelve months ago a militant could not receive a hearing, and was hooted and bawled at as if she were a fanatic. Now, large crowds nightly assembled

to hear and express sympathy with them. No one could stand and listen to the recital of the sufferings of those confined in their prison unmoved.<sup>9</sup>

Having seen the reaction to suffragettes in Perth a year earlier in Chapter 1, this is a remarkable change indeed. After the last prisoner was released the militants did not leave the city where so much goodwill had been created. Muriel Scott told the press that 'meetings would still be held nightly in the streets of Perth for some considerable time', and that premises were being sought for a branch to the WSPU to be set up in the city.<sup>10</sup>

A few days later all this became irrelevant, for war was declared, the WSPU suspended militancy and, as indicated at the end of the last chapter, suffragette prisoners were free. In 1918 certain women over 30 were given the vote, and progress toward the enfranchisement of all women, in 1928 was uneventful.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> SRO.HH12/63/12. At time of writing this file was closed to the public, and I am very grateful to the Scottish Home & Health Department for allowing me access to it.

<sup>2</sup> SRO.HH16/44.

<sup>3</sup> *Suffragette*, 24 & 31 July 1914. On the first occasion the women were apparently ejected from the church with great brutality, but the second time they were quietly asked to leave, which they did.

<sup>4</sup> *Dundee Advertiser*, 1 & 8 July 1914. SRO.HH55/336.

<sup>5</sup> Helen Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography. Marx Memorial Library, London. This was written long after the event and is unreliable on facts but nevertheless useful as a first hand account. A copy of the manuscript is held in the William Gallagher Library, Glasgow.

<sup>6</sup> *Scotsman*, 11 July 1914. The suffragette gave her name as Rhoda Fleming and her address as the WSPU office in Glasgow. There was no militant by that name in Scotland so it was obviously a fictitious one.

<sup>7</sup> *Dundee Advertiser*, 8 July 1914.

<sup>8</sup> *Forward*, 11 July 1914.

<sup>9</sup> A public meeting to protest against forcible feeding was held under the auspices of the Perth Trades Council on 26 July, the day on which Arabella Scott was released. *Dundee Advertiser*, 27 July 1914.

<sup>10</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 28 July 1914.



## CONCLUSION

The most extraordinary aspect of this story is the extent to which it has been forgotten. It is true that until recently the prison files were closed to the general public, so that one would have had to rely solely on the statements made by the prisoners after their release (as all accounts of forcibly fed suffragettes in England have done). Nevertheless, the equation of the women's suffrage movement with London in nearly every book on the subject is a far more potent reason for the lack of awareness amongst Scots of the drama that was played out in their midst. And—also pointed up by this tale—everything of note that happened in Scotland did not necessarily happen in Edinburgh or Glasgow. Dundee was an active centre of suffragism throughout the militant period of the movement, and Perth was the focus of Scottish activity in the final and most intense stage of conflict between suffragettes and the government over the issue of votes for women, a conflict that was only ended by the outbreak of the Great War. What happened in Dundee and Perth is part of Scotland's heritage and deserves recognition as such. Without the courage and determination of the suffragettes who fought and suffered at that time British women would have had to wait much longer for the right to vote for their Members of Parliament.

## INDEX

- Agnew or Corbett, Catherine, 10-11  
Allan, Janie, 17-18, 31-2, 36  
'Arthur, Janet' (Fanny Parker), 31
- Cadell, Dr Grace, 19  
Calton jail, Edinburgh, 17, 19, 21  
Cat and Mouse Act, 13, 21, 22, 25, 31, 36  
Chalmers Watson, Dr, 33  
Commons, House of, 19, 28  
Conciliation Bill, 12  
Crawfurd, Helen, 19, 36
- Devon, Dr James, 18  
Duke Street prison, Glasgow, 16-17  
*Dundee Advertiser*, 12, 13, 37  
*Dundee Courier*, 12  
Dundee prison, 10-11
- Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, 18, 19, 21  
Edwards, Maude, 29-30  
Evans, Laura, 10-11
- Franchise Bill (1913), 12
- Gordon, Frances, 27-9
- Home Office, 11, 13, 33  
'Humphreys, Mary' (Ethel Moorhead), 16
- Joachim, Maud, 10-11  
Jones, Dr Mabel, 28-9
- Lynas or Chalmers Smith,  
Elizabeth Dorothea, 16-17
- Moorhead, Ethel, 13, 15-19  
'Morrison, Margaret' (Ethel Moorhead),  
16
- Pankhurst, Adela, 10-11  
Pankhurst, Christabel, 8  
Pankhurst, Emmeline, 8, 36  
Parker, Fanny (Frances M.), 12, 13,  
30-3  
Perth prison, 15-16, 22-37  
Perth Trades Council, 37  
Perthshire Cricket Club, 12
- Russell or Archdale, Helen, 10-11
- Scott, Arabella Charlotte, 21-6, 36, 37  
Scott, Muriel, 21, 37, 38  
Scottish Office, 11, 13, 22, 29, 31-3  
*The Suffragette*, 23
- Wallace-Dunlop, Marion, 8  
Watson, Dr Ferguson, 19, 23-36

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