



Ada Sharland Wackrill, Horatio's sister, was probably a member of a local branch of the National Union for Women's Suffrage (NUWSS). She acted as a steward for the NUWSS at a local fete and wrote to the suffrage press on their behalf emphasising the size and scope of the NUWSS across England as well as the societies commitment to peaceable means of campaigning.

In June 1911, she was among the women and men that travelled down to take part in the Women's Coronation Procession in London. The procession was organised by suffrage societies to rival the official Coronation procession of George V from which women were excluded. Approximately 40,000 women from around 30 women's suffrage societies participated, and the procession was seven miles long.

Politics played a large part in Ada's family life. Her father Samuel Wackrill was Leamington's first Mayor appointed in 1875/6. He was responsible for the town becoming a borough in 1875 and was hugely influential in the town for over forty years. He was given the Freedom of the Borough in 1899 and has a blue plaque on his former residence at 28 Portland Street.

Samuel had arrived in Leamington in 1861 and set up a very successful drapers business which he left to Ada and her siblings upon his death in 1907. In 1911, we find Ada living in Archery Road with her sister Alice Maria and brother Walter Thomas.

The suffragist alternative

The broad narrative of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies is well rehearsed. The NUWSS was established in 1897 as an organising and lobbying centralised suffrage group, run on democratic lines with a network of regional branches working through loosely knit and autonomous federations. The influential North West Federation included the Manchester Society and led by the formidable Margaret Ashton, it was an extremely powerful part of the Union.

A commitment to internal democracy through the branch network was a cornerstone of NUWSS policy. Until 1906 the NUWSS focused almost solely on lobbying Parliament and supporting Private Members' Bills for women's enfranchisement. After the establishment of the break-away Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903, the NUWSS continued to work alongside them but subsequently, as public opposition

hardened to the militant and civil disobedience of the WSPU, the NUWSS were determined to maintain their commitment to non-violent, constitutional methods.

However, from 1907, after the sensationalism of militant activity, it began to shift its strategies to include huge national and regional rallies and public demonstrations in addition to its parliamentary work. In Manchester there was a large rally in Alexandra Park in June 1908 attracting thousands of men and women to hear speakers talk on a range of topics from poverty to housing: Edward Carpenter, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Maud Royden and Sarah Reddish were among the speakers.

After the failure of the Conciliation Bills (1910-1912) and combined with a growing disillusionment with the prevaricating Liberal Government, the NUWSS moved to a closer collaboration with the Labour Party which formally supported women's suffrage as part of their own policy after 1912. This increased working class support, particularly in the North West. The NUWSS launched an Election Fighting Fund in the same year which promised support for candidates in any election to any party officially supporting suffrage. The outbreak of war in 1914 and the official NUWSS line of prioritising relief work over campaigning, and a refusal by the executive to give support to an International Congress of Women in The Hague in 1915, led to dissension in the regions and resignations from the Executive, many suffragists subsequently joining the anti-militarist Women's International League (WIL). However, muted political activity continued throughout the war while a group of suffragists, concerned about the erosion of women's personal liberties during the war, established regional Women's Interest Committees to watch over the wartime social and economic interests of women.

Suffrage agitation continued after 1916 as the NUWSS responded to the Government's proposed changes to the national electoral register and the establishment of the Speaker's Conference to consider franchise reform. The NUWSS was a key player in lobbying the government over the inclusion of women in the 1918 Representation of the People Act. After 1919 the NUWSS refocused on achieving an equal franchise and became the National Union for Equal Citizenship.

NUWSS leaflet, bought in 2017 as part of the Library's Voting for Change project Suffragists felt strongly about the rights of women and they saw the vote as a right. The lack of a vote was also tied up with issues of social justice, women's precarious work and pay, infant mortality and maternal welfare. Although the war threw some of these issues into starker relief and raised new concerns, such as the threats to personal liberty and the overt surveillance of women, many suffragists in the pre-war period were already involved with women-focused projects outside the suffrage campaign itself. In Manchester, suffragists backed campaigns for school clinics, municipal health visitors, Schools for Mothers, a Babies Hospital and trade union organisation for women workers while during the war they campaigned for better pay and conditions for munitions workers, agitated against REG 40D of the Defence of the Realm Act which threatened to re-introduce the Contagious Diseases Act, protested about the surveillance of women while their men were at the front, and spoke out for the destitute families of Conscientious Objectors - while still maintaining political pressure for the vote. After the war, many of them refocused on supporting Famine Relief Campaigns in war-torn Europe.