

THEY MADE THEIR MARK: SO CAN WE

I think everyone will be aware of this year's centenary that celebrates the Representation of the People Act, which gave at least some British women the right to vote and stand for public office the first time.

Early this year a national arts organisation, Artichoke, invited women and girls across the UK to mark this historic moment. On Sunday 10th of June, women and girls took part in a celebratory mass participation artwork in the four capital cities of the UK. Wearing either green, white or violet, the colours of the suffragette movement, and carrying colourful banners, the processions appeared as a flowing river of colour through the city streets.

In Milton Keynes several groups of women came together through meetings in person and via social media to plan and make several banners to take to the event. I worked with four friends to create a banner. We decided that we wanted to recognise the contribution of women over the last century, and chose five who had contributed in different ways and not just those who received accolades at the time. So we chose:

- Ethel Axby, who was a workplace activist and part of the McCorquodales strike of 1915 in Wolverton
- Nellie Abbey, who entertained the troops with Stantonbury Girls Club before and during WW1
- Jane Fawcett, one of the women who worked at Bletchley Park during WW2
- Margaret Durbridge, the only woman on the original Milton Keynes Development Corporation Board, and a local JP
- Jennie Lee, national politician, who instigated the Open University

We also wanted to acknowledge that we can all make our mark in different ways. So we made our banner and on the day it was the granddaughters of two of the team who carried the banner. It could easily be seen proudly carrying our message through London, acknowledging this new town with

roots going back many years, showing what we owe to the past, while moving forward into the future with confidence.

More information: <https://www.processions.co.uk/about/about-processions/>

Deborah Cooper

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EMILY WILDING DAVISON 1872-1913

We have all heard of the suffragette Emily Davison who was killed trying to put a banner on the King's horse during the Derby but probably like me knew little more. Her name reappeared during recent centenary commemorations of the gaining of universal adult suffrage in the UK. I was in Newcastle-upon-Tyne recently and having seen she was buried in Morpeth went there for the day.

I spoke to the Curator at the town museum who confirmed that she was buried in a family tomb at the main church. Descendants of the family had held a ceremony of remembrance in 2013 and local people including schoolchildren attended as well. I visited the grave on which besides Emily's name were those of her parents Charles E. and Margaret Davison, her father's first wife Sarah, her brother Alfred who died in Canada in 1918 and her younger sister Ethel who died of diphtheria aged 6. There was an elder sister Letitia who married a Frenchman and lived until 1943 and Sarah had several children who grew up with Emily and the others after their mother's death in 1866. I bought a book published by a genealogist, Maureen Howes which includes photographs of the large extended family who mainly lived in Northumberland.

Emily's father had employed Margaret to look after his wife and the children during her illness. After Sarah died they married and moved to the London area for Charles' work. Emily was born in Blackheath but they later lived in Kensington and later Twickenham. Emily attended Kensington High School for Girls where she was an outstanding pupil and gained a place at Oxford University in 1891. Her half-brother William recalled a lively happy childhood and were all encouraged in sports, music and drama. Margaret was a volunteer in the East End and Emily and her sisters helped take food parcels from a soup kitchen to dockers' families and others.

While Emily was studying Language and Literature at Oxford, her father died, unfortunately leaving very little money because of court cases he had been fighting. Margaret returned to Northumberland and opened a bakery. Emily had a break from her studies to work as a governess including a household where the woman was from New Zealand which had recently granted the vote to women. With her aunt's help was later able to finish her degree, getting a First.

Her interest in women's rights developed around this time and she joined the Women's Political and Social Union in 1906, soon taking active part in both the London area marches and the North East where she kept warm family connections. As groups' actions became more strident. Suffragettes had confrontations with the police and Emily and others were arrested several times in 1909 and went on hunger-strike. More unusual and militant actions led to further arrests for destruction of property and in 1911 six months in prison with force-feeding. On release it was difficult for her to find employment and she spent more time with her family. It was in Northumberland that the local WSPU group developed the plan to demonstrate at the Derby which Emily was chosen to carry out the following year.

On the 7th June Emily bought a return ticket to Epsom and watched the horses in the paddock where it had been planned to place the banner on Anmer, the King's horse. For some reason Emily did not do this but saved the action for the race itself, slipping out beneath the fence at the corner before a nearby policeman could stop her. She was severely injured in the collision and died four days later in Epsom hospital. Her sister Letitia visited from France in this time although she had recently had a baby and Emily was to have visited them in Paris to help her. There was considerable negative publicity over the disaster, both from the Government and from the mainstream suffrage movement who did not want Emily seen as a martyr. Letitia was one who responded to some of these reports in the press. Arrangements were made to bury her in Northumberland, which included a procession taking her coffin back to London during which many observers booed – they were shouted down, however by some of the dockers whom the family had helped in the past.

The movement for women's and universal men's suffrage was gradually successful in the changed social climate following the 1914-18 War. Emily's story is still not complete, however and I hope to fill some of the gaps.

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A SHORT VISIT TO ALDERMASTON

I had heard about Aldermaston in 1961, when my husband and I shared a room in a cottage owned by Jim Bath and his wife Valerie. They told us they were among the first people to go on a march to Aldermaston, so I knew about it, and that it was an anti-war protest. And I vaguely thought it was something I ought to do, but time went by and I didn't make the effort.

So when, earlier this year, Chris Coppock informed us he would be going there, and offered lifts, I at last committed myself to going there to see for myself, and add my voice.

When we went he collected me, and then also went to the Buddhist Temple in Willen to collect Sr Marita, and another monk who was visiting from Japan, and another young man. (I don't know his name, but Chris might).

We drove there in Chris's small car which coped very well. We went via Buckingham, and then further south to near Reading. Aldermaston is very near Reading, and also near another well-known plant that manufactures nuclear war-heads. So I was already learning new information.

When we got to Aldermaston I was amazed to discover how large it is. It covers hundreds of acres I think, and is surrounded by a large fence, behind which we could see many large old buildings.

Eventually as we kept driving round this huge fence, we got to an entrance into the plant, and that's where CND was stationed, and also a number of police. CND had a gazebo to one side of the entrance, where they were selling books and cards, and giving out information; and in front of the entrance to the parking lot, there were the very large CND letters that other people have told they have seen elsewhere.

There were also banners tied to the fence, many of them expressing the severe dislike for the proposed Trident renewal and its weapons, as well as other anti-nuclear and anti-war messages.

Our Buddhist passengers immediately stationed themselves in front of the fence and started chanting and banging their drums. They also had a very high banner flying above them.

When we arrived there were a few people, but more and more arrived, some in large buses from Oxford and London. Eventually there was a large crowd of people milling around, and a group of musicians arrived with bongo drums. People moved into the area behind the gates, and we were treated to a few lively musical pieces. Many people had their own banners, and some had brought seats and sat down, including me. People were very friendly and the atmosphere was like a friendly festival. I noticed that most of the people there were round about my age or a bit younger. The young people seemed to be organising.

The event was partly a celebration of sixty years of CND (this needs to be checked). There followed a number of impassioned speeches about the situation now and the history, there was a poet who read a number of poems, and there was lovely music and singing. The event for me was expressed by the large banner held by two people which read 'I can't believe we're still protesting about this shit!' Exactly! Lots of good humoured people, polite and friendly, but very serious about why they were there.

I'm very pleased I went, and that there are people out there who are protesting against the manufacture and distribution of all that dangerous stuff.

Carol Barac

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MORE ABOUT TEA – UK TEA BRANDS: TIME TO STEP UP



There is nothing like a nice cup of tea... But have you ever thought about WHERE the tea comes from?

Many British blends include tea from Assam, where the people who picked it – most of them women - are paid poverty wages and live in appalling conditions, are scared to speak up and have no way out. People work long hours in the tea gardens carrying heavy loads, often without proper equipment or even shoes. Workers are paid just £1.50 a day, and the services the estates are supposed to provide – like housing, clinics and schools – are often poor quality or even non-existent.

*"They don't repair the houses. We register complaints to the management, they note it down, but that remains in the register, they give no importance."
"When auditors come for inspection... we're nervous and can't tell them the truth... Out of fear, we say that we get all the facilities and that everything is OK."*

These appalling conditions are well known in the UK tea industry, which has been buying tea from Assam for years. The 'Big 6' British tea brands - **PG Tips, Twining's, Typhoo, Yorkshire Tea, Tetley and Clipper** - have more than 67% of the retail market, but they aren't doing enough to challenge Assam tea estate owners or to improve their own buying practices. But you can get them to do more. It starts by asking a simple question: **who picked my tea?**

The tea workers in Assam face many complex issues – but one common thread is that no one takes responsibility for their situation. UK tea brands need to start being part of the solution, not part of the problem. An important first step the brands could take right now is to tell us which estates in Assam they buy from. Transparency like this would help open up the secretive world of tea-buying. It would shine a light on exploitation and mean that consumers – and more importantly people in Assam – could hold companies to account.

That's why Traidcraft Exchange is launching a campaign to ask British tea brands to do the right thing and step up on behalf of the people who pick their tea..**Please add your voice by asking the big brands: 'Who picked my tea?'**

You can do this by visiting the website: www.traidcraft.org.uk/tea-campaign. Or pick up a card in the shop/reception area of Christ the Cornerstone church, where of course you can also stock up with Traidcraft's **Fairtrade tea**, grown and picked by smallholders who enjoy the benefits of a guaranteed minimum price and a premium to invest in their communities.

Win Kennedy

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CHURCH OF ENGLAND CELEBRATES FIRST BIRTHDAY OF NUCLEAR BAN TREATY WITH FAVOURABLE VOTE AT SYNOD

The Church of England General Synod has voted in favour of a motion on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) by a majority of 260-26. The debate took place in York on 8 July and was opened by Stephen Cottrell, the Bishop of Chelmsford.

The motion calls on the UK government to “respond positively” to the TPNW, which was agreed at the United Nations on 7 July 2017 with the support of 122 states. The government position up to now has been NOT to support the Treaty.

The Church of England adopted a position against the replacement of Trident in 2007. It now joins other churches including the Church of Scotland, Methodist Church, Baptist Union and the Quakers in calling on the government to respond positively to the Treaty. The Holy See of the Roman Catholic church has already signed and ratified the Treaty at the UN.

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TRUMPING TRUMP



The (unofficial) state visit of Donald Trump saw mass protests up and down the country.

London saw the biggest week day protest in its history with more than 250,000 people taking part in what organisers called a “Carnival of Resistance”. The scale of the protests was so large, in fact that the president kept clear of official meetings in London entirely.

But the protests weren’t about Trump the man. They were an outcry of anti-racists, peace and justice campaigners and environmentalists against the dangerous brand of politics he represents.

The U.S. president courted controversy during his election campaign; one that was characterised by nationalism, misogyny, racism and Islamophobia. He promised to “Make America Great Again” by building walls; both literally and figuratively. His approach to international diplomacy has been no less alarming with Trump taking to Twitter and bragging about having the “bigger (nuclear) button” and not being afraid to use it.

No surprise, then, that the majority of the British public were unsettled when Theresa May rushed to meet Trump shortly after he was elected. The visit made it clear for all to see that the special relationship remained unchanged; the UK is still beholden to the US and that business deals trump “British values”. Perhaps the two leaders had seen eye to eye. It was, after all, Theresa May who when, in parliament, was asked if she would press the nuclear button responded with an emphatic “Yes”.

Trump has tried to implement a racist travel ban - largely from majority Muslim countries. He has also pursued a policy of zero tolerance towards undocumented migrants; one that has resulted in the separation of young children from their parents, putting people into cages and building camps for detainees. These policies, backed by racists in his administration, have given renewed confidence to the far right globally as they watch the leader of the World’s biggest military power from afar.

However, the brand of politics Trump vocalises has a precedent that can be found much closer to home. The “hostile environment” championed by Theresa May, first as Home Secretary and subsequently as Prime Minister, led to the outrage of the Windrush scandal that saw thousands of black British people threatened with deportation. This is not an isolated incident. May also piloted the now infamous “Go Home” billboard vans - sent to areas of high migration across the UK.

David Cameron referred to the desperate migrants and refugees living in “The Jungle” in Calais as “a swarm” - a phrase that both dehumanised the victims of the wars in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan in which Britain played a leading role whilst creating a climate of fear around refugees and migrants.

And let’s not forget the “Tough on Immigration” mugs from Ed Miliband’s doomed Labour Party general election campaign. Such interventions, bolstered by a rabid right wing media, have sown division in our society and fuelled the demonisation of migrants and Muslims at home and abroad over many years.

These approaches have one thing in common: The scapegoating of “others” for the socio-economic issues in our society; rather than an honest appraisal of the system that created them: casino banking, billions spent on war and weapons to bomb innocent people abroad, tax cuts for the rich and austerity for the poor.

The protests against Trump’s visit show that the majority reject this kind of politics. Videos of the day reached millions across the globe. The significance of this cannot be underestimated. The protests will give confidence to campaigners at a time when unity and demonstrations for peace, justice and prosperity for all have never been more important.

A recent Trump tweet threatened war with Iran. As such it’s vital that we continue to build the movement for peace. We must demand that our elected representatives don’t repeat the mistakes of the past. 15 years ago the “special relationship” led a British prime minister to follow a US president to war in Iraq.

Kevin Vickers

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WHAT'S ON

26 September: International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

17th October: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

24th October: United Nations Day

25th November: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

MK Peace and Justice Network have posted the above dates with a view to developing activities on these issues.