‘Where the Church had refused to perform its duty the women themselves came forward’: the Prayer Campaign of the Women’s Social and Political Union, 1913-1914

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Abstract
This article represents the first detailed examination of the Women’s Social and Political Union’s prayer campaign against and within the Church of England. It seeks to highlight the extent of the campaign, consider its representation, explain its purpose and establish its significance. In defining these interventions as acts of militancy, this article highlights the ongoing significance of non-violent forms of direct action even into the final months before the outbreak of war. It underscores the fact that much militancy in this period was not actually aimed at achieving the vote but offered both a way for women to reaffirm their commitment to one another and a means to challenge what they saw as social degradation and corruption within the Church and in wider society. The article also argues that the prayer campaign demonstrates a particular shared mindset–of divinely inspired righteousness and certainty–which also helps to account for the extreme use of force at this time. Suffragettes used Christ’s example to justify and legitimate their efforts. As such, this article responds to a recent call for the need to take prayer and other religious acts seriously as political practices, considering their value as a form of militancy.

Keywords
suffragettes; militancy; prayer; WSPU; Church of England

On Sunday 3 August 1913, a group of women joined a service at St Paul’s Cathedral. During the litany, the women rose and, after the prayers for prisoners, interrupted the service with their own loud and unique prayer, their voices overlapping with the choral singing:

‘God bless Emmeline Pankhurst.
Save her, save her, give her life, and set her free.
Spare her, spare her, hear us while we pray to Thee’.

Vergers rushed to halt this unwelcome disruption. The women left voluntarily, the organ recommenced playing, and the service continued.¹

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.
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The following Friday, *The Suffragette*, the newspaper published by the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), was packed with dramatic news. Readers received detailed accounts of the perilous condition of leading activists, including Annie Kenney, Sylvia Pankhurst, George Lansbury, and Mary Richardson, who were undergoing hunger-strikes, and in some cases, thirst-strikes too. New incidents of arson, bombing and criminal damage were also reported, and a major fundraising campaign was underway. In this context, it would not have been surprising if a fleeting disruption to a church service merited little attention. But on the contrary, *The Suffragette* devoted an entire page to the intervention. Over the following year, the newspaper reported and celebrated the emergence of a prayer campaign among suffragettes, as women across the country turned church services into the latest stage for their political theatre.

This article represents the first detailed examination of this campaign against and within the Church of England. It seeks to highlight the extent of the campaign, consider its representation, explain its purpose and establish its significance. In defining these interventions as acts of militancy, this article highlights the ongoing significance of non-violent forms of direct action even into the final months before the outbreak of war. At the same time, it underscores the fact that much militant action in this period was not actually aimed at achieving the vote. Rather, militancy offered a way for women to reaffirm their commitment to one another and a means to challenge what they saw as social degradation and corruption within the Church and in wider society.

Participating in prayers for suffragettes in danger was a complementary form of militancy to that represented by the contemporary arson and bombing campaign. Militancy was a collective identity which was articulated by expressing solidarity with other women, and public prayers enabled women to both practice and defend militancy simultaneously. This article therefore offers an account of the final months of the militant suffrage campaign which emphasises non-violence, performance, and widespread participation, rather than violence, secrecy, and individual acts of daring. In this interpretation, militancy maintained significant continuities with earlier periods as well as introducing a new and distinctive form. The article also argues that the prayer campaign demonstrates a particular shared mindset—of divinely inspired righteousness and certainty—which also helps to account for the extreme use of force at this time. Suffragettes used Christ’s example to justify and legitimise their efforts. As such, this article responds to a recent call for the need to take prayer and other religious acts seriously as political practices, considering their value as a form of militancy.

**Religion, suffrage and militancy in historiographical context**

This series of protests have received very little attention in the extensive historiography of suffrage. Instead, historians have sought to explain the more dramatic episodes of militancy taking place concurrently, such as arson and bombing, seeing these as evidence of an escalation in militancy. This was in part because suffragettes themselves tended to privilege certain kinds of militancy in their own narratives, including imprisonment, hunger-striking, and force-feeding, which all presumed illegal activity. Some historians have seen militancy as a reactive, even defensive, phenomenon: a response to changes in
the political context. Many have debated whether such tactics were counterproductive and delayed women’s acquisition of the vote. Others have considered whether they constituted a form of terrorism.

However, feminist historians have argued against simply seeing the WSPU’s campaign in terms of escalating violence. They have stressed that a focus only on these forms of militancy risks mischaracterising the last years of the campaign and underestimating the continuity in non-violent militancy during this period. Innovation in militancy was also a feature of these last months, encompassing practices such as census evasion and lesser-known but more radical ideas such as marriage-strikes, birth-strikes and sex-strikes.

To better reflect contemporary self-understanding, recent historiography has sought to break the exclusive link between militancy and violence. Scholars have shown that much militancy drew on an established tradition of protest among radicals in Britain, including civil disobedience and passive resistance, and included the petitions and parades which also characterised the activities of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies. Violent and illegal acts were one possible form of militant practice, but by no means the only available option. Women who sold the WSPU newspaper on the streets, asked questions in political meetings or raised funds for the organisation could and did define themselves as militant. Other organisations, such as the Women’s Freedom League and the Tax Resistance League, called themselves militant, even thought they were never violent, emphasising the vitality and diversity of non-violent militancy. Historians have therefore offered more inclusive definitions of militancy which better encompass the full range of practices women adopted. In this article, I argue that interrupting church services with prayers should also be considered a form of militancy, and that these incidents played an important role in fostering and furthering shared militant identity at a time when collective expressions of that identity were increasingly difficult.

The religious turn in women’s history, in tandem with a critique of the secularisation thesis as an organising narrative in British history, has created rich and fulfilling new lines of enquiry and understanding, and rewritten established political, social and cultural narratives. While religious faith has frequently been linked with conservative thinking on gender and politics, scholars have also become increasingly attentive to its radical and liberationist potential for women. Like other contemporary reformers in the nineteenth century, suffrage campaigners were steeped in religious traditions. Evangelicals, especially Unitarians, were integral to the early women’s movement. Religious belief often underpinned women’s philanthropic efforts, engagement in the public sphere and demands for social reform. Laura Schwartz has shown that even Freethinking women framed their politics with reference to scripture. Churches were also challenged from within by what has been termed ‘church feminism’, which questioned patriarchal authority in an institution which relied on women’s involvement for its success. As such, Robert Saunders has written convincingly of the need to ‘write theology back into the history of the suffrage movement’, since ‘religion could act as a crucible of suffragist thought’.

Religious women—and men assumed visible and direct roles in the suffrage campaign in the Edwardian period. Religious suffrage societies were founded by Anglicans, Catholics, Jews, and Quakers. More unorthodox forms of faith, such as theosophy and spiritualism, were also deeply significant in shaping the ways feminists reimagined
the world. 25 Just as faith and suffrage were compatible, so were faith and militancy. The concept of the ‘church militant’, in which believers were called to arms on behalf of their faith, had gained increasing traction in the late Victorian period. 26 Suffragettes closely identified with Christ, spoke of ‘conversion’ to the cause, and, inspired by their faith, embraced self-sacrifice. 27 The teaching in James 2:26—that ‘faith without works is dead’—resonated with militants, and religious fervour found particular expression in militant forms of suffrage. 28 An ardent moral tone infused other areas of interest, such as the WSPU’s campaigns against ‘white slavery’ and venereal disease. These were based on a critique of male sexuality which revived earlier feminist traditions of social purity, and culminated in Christabel Pankhurst’s The Great Scourge. 29 This crusading zeal was often associated with ideas of racial purity and imperial superiority. 30

Collectively, this historiography offers a precise and detailed account of how faith influenced the intellectual underpinnings of the women’s movement as a whole and the suffrage movement in particular. This article, however, is primarily concerned with prayer as a militant act. The use of prayer was widespread across the suffrage movement. 31 But the suffragette prayer campaign, with its purposeful attempt to disrupt services, was qualitatively distinctive in both content and form from other prayers for women’s suffrage, and very definitely constructed and experienced as a form of militant protest. This article first offers an account of how the campaign unfolded before going on to analyse what these efforts indicate about suffragettes’ objectives and mindset at this time.

The features and course of the suffrage prayer campaign

Following the first incident, Christabel Pankhurst wrote a page-long editorial entitled ‘The Appeal to God’ in The Suffragette. 32 After briefly praising ‘the finest among the clergy’ who were visiting Downing Street to protest against force-feeding, she quickly moved on to chastise the Church of England for its failure to protect women from torture. Quoting numerous bible verses, she called the Church a ‘hanger-on and lackey of the Government’ and argued that it was ‘shamefully and obsequiously compliant’ in women’s sufferings. ‘At last women have taken the law into their own hands. They have gone into the churches to send up their own prayers’, she concluded with satisfaction. It appears, therefore, suffrage prayers were an example of the ‘spontaneous initiatives’ in militancy which were often carried out by individuals without prior approval, but subsequently endorsed by the leadership and taken up elsewhere. 33

Suffragette prayers assumed a template which largely followed the first intervention. The prayers typically featured at least one, and frequently all three of the following elements: the names of individual women suffering in prison, a desire to remember all those suffering in prison ‘for conscience sake’, and a call for God to ‘open the eyes of Thy church’ so that it would intervene. Later, this was occasionally broadened to a request to open the eyes of the nation. Sometimes the women prayed in ones and twos, but more often, it was a group of women who stood. No doubt the object was to create a greater impression, especially important in the cavernous spaces of a cathedral or abbey. Interruptions occurred at various different moments: often during the litany, but also after the collect, the anthem or the Magnificat, which had particular significance as ‘the
song of Mary’ and could be read as a feminist text. Sometimes a service would be subject to multiple interventions at different points, as church authorities dealt with one incident only to be met with further disturbances.

It is less clear exactly who participated in this campaign. The women who prayed were rarely named in reports of the incidents in The Suffragette, unless they were arrested. Acts of arson and bombing were also, of course, anonymous, making it impossible to identify whether the women who prayed were involved in these efforts concurrently. Arrests were few and far between. Two women, Rachel Somers and Ruth Kitch, were arrested outside St Paul’s in October 1913 for assaulting a police officer after having been ejected from the service.\textsuperscript{34} Seven women were arrested in Edinburgh in March 1914 for a breach of the peace and interrupting the service.\textsuperscript{35} In June 1914, Christine Adams was charged with ‘riotous and violent behaviour in a place of religious worship’, Mary Fausten with ‘obstruction’ and Miss Napsier with ‘insulting conduct and behaviour outside Westminster Cathedral’.\textsuperscript{36} Adams appears to have been considered especially dangerous since she was sentenced to a month for her offence, and, on release, was rearrested under the Cat and Mouse Act.\textsuperscript{37} But no WSPU organiser or name of note appears among the names of those arrested. Further, the arrest records suggest that each of these women were only arrested for this specific act (though they may, of course, have used pseudonyms).\textsuperscript{38} Participants in the prayer campaign seem therefore most likely to be grassroots members of the WSPU.

Around 350 incidents of suffragette prayers in churches were documented in The Suffragette.\textsuperscript{39} This is comparable to the 337 instances of violence in 1913 itemised by Christopher Bearman.\textsuperscript{40} A little under half of these took place in Greater London. The most frequently named targets were St Paul’s Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. Their respective Deans were active anti-suffragists, but these churches would likely have also been targeted on the basis of their size and status as a means of maximising publicity.\textsuperscript{41} It would also be easier to achieve anonymity in a large centre of worship, away from a local parish church where the congregation might include friends and family.\textsuperscript{42}

The practice was not limited to London, or to England, though it was an urban phenomenon. Outside London, it often took place in cathedrals, including Birmingham, Bristol, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool, Cardiff, and Norwich, as well as Bath Abbey and York Minster. But this was not a definitive rule. Parish churches in places from Ipswich to Newport and Norwich to Scarborough received visits, as did the university churches in Oxford and Cambridge. Frequent interventions took place in areas where the WSPU had a well-established presence, including Bristol, North London, and a stretch of the South Coast running from Hove to Hastings through Brighton, Eastbourne and St Leonard’s. Many suffragettes took holidays in these coastal towns, which would have aided anonymous interventions. St Margaret’s Church, Westminster, was subject to several interventions owing to its proximity to Parliament and the possibility of Members of Parliament being among the congregation.\textsuperscript{43} Once, the prisoners on remand in Holloway joined in the protest by praying within the chapel for Emmeline Pankhurst.\textsuperscript{44} Interestingly, given the WSPU’s origins, there was only one reported incident in Manchester, and it did not take place until the end of July 1914.\textsuperscript{45}

The vast majority of churches targeted were Anglian. The reasons for, and implications of, this will be discussed more fully shortly. However, a variety of non-conformist churches also saw outbursts of prayer. These included Congregationalist chapels, Baptist
churches, Quaker meetings, Unitarian churches, Wesleyan missions and the Scottish Episcopal Church, St Ninian’s, in Perth. There were very few interventions in Catholic churches and almost all of these took place in London. Though a number of prominent WSPU members were Catholic, in general, Catholic activists attempted to work within the strictures of the church rather than challenging it. The Catholic Women’s Suffrage Society, for example, sought to emphasise that women’s suffrage was compatible with Catholic teachings, and to attract more Catholics to the cause. Though they attempted to shift clerical opinion, they largely did so through correspondence rather than direct action.

There were also three interruptions at synagogues, and these were the only incidents that deviated significantly from the established pattern. In October 1913, three Jewish suffragettes, sisters Esther and Phoebe Rickards, and a Miss Russell, visited a synagogue attended by the Jewish cabinet member Herbert Samuel, an opponent of women’s suffrage and longstanding target of WSPU heckling. The service marked Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of atonement, and the women prayed for forgiveness for Samuel and Rufus Isaacs, ‘for denying freedom to women’ and ‘consenting to the torture of women’. No Christian cabinet members were ever singled out in this way. Phoebe Rickards explained their motives in a letter to the Jewish Chronicle, linking the practice of forcible feedings to the sufferings inflicted on Jewish people. ‘To those of us not devoid of pride of race, it is a terrible and maddening thing that the bulk of English Jewry should have forgotten already their own struggle for civic freedom, should be blind to the sufferings of their own people where that liberty is still denied, should be deaf to the cry of the Jew, tortured for his faith throughout the ages’. Later that year, at the synagogue in Brighton, women prayed that God would ‘forgive the King of England and the Tsar of Russia for their treatment of political prisoners’. At the Hampstead synagogue, women appealed ‘to your members of a persecuted race, to protest the persecution and torture of women’. This wording suggests that those intervening here were not themselves Jewish, and the lack of familiarity with Jewish prayers meant that they could not use their knowledge of the pattern and wording of the service in the same way.

Sometimes the women brought banners in order to make a visual impact as well as, or even instead of, an audible impact. Banners were often black, to underscore the sombre message and link the words with death and mourning. The text was frequently taken from Lamentations 1:2, ‘is it nothing to ye who pass by?’ At Westminster Wesleyan Mission, women carried the indignant message ‘Sweated women. Outraged children. White Slaves. God forgive your indifference’ and ‘Noble women, who strive to purify the race, are being tortured in prison’. These messages demonstrate the women’s belief in their ‘civilising’ potential, moral legitimacy, racial superiority and capacity to address social degradation. Women would often distribute literature within the pews or after the service, most frequently ‘The Appeal to God’. The prayers themselves, however, were the centrepiece of the protest.

Like other aspects of militancy, the suffragette prayer campaign was confrontational, unpredictable and designed to cause chaos. Church authorities, like government authorities, could not be sure where or when suffragettes might strike next. Some readied themselves with ‘arrangements . . . to prevent any unseemly disturbances’. In The Suffragette, interruptions to church services were linked with women’s disruption within
theatres and restaurants in an attempt to create a sense that suffragettes were omnipresent and inescapable. In March 1914, the paper claimed that ‘women continue to take every means of bringing the truth before the public, and where ever people have been gathered together’. Episodes were reported alongside more dramatic incidents, including window smashing, train bombings and arson attacks.

The prayer campaign was by no means the only way that suffragettes sought to make their presence felt within the Church of England. Religious buildings were one of the main subjects of the arson and bombing attacks during this time. Around a tenth of the incidents claimed by the WSPU in 1913 involved churches. Christopher Bearman, who carried out this analysis, suggests that attacks followed ‘the line of least resistance; that is, nearly all targets were the most flammable, the most easily accessible, and the least well defended, rather than the most economically important or the least likely to cause large-scale public disruption’. Nevertheless, there was undoubtedly a symbolic and emotional dimension to the destruction of church buildings which did not exist in relation to empty businesses and golf courses.

In many respects, the prayer campaign harked back to one of the earliest militant tactics: interrupting political meetings. Here, instead of interrupting political meetings with political questions, the women interrupted church services with prayers. During a period where women’s voices were rarely heard within formal worship, this was an outrageously transgressive act. It indicates the suffragettes’ belief that there was no space which should be off-limits to women’s participation. In both cases, suffragettes appropriated the gathering for their own purposes. In both cases, they claimed that their intervention was legitimate. In both cases, their intervention was perceived by other participants not only as illegitimate, but inappropriate and disruptive. However, in political meetings, women demanded an immediate answer: usually to some variant of the question ‘will the Liberal government give votes to women’. Their interruptions required a direct response. This was not a quiet and respectful question, but an insistence on receiving an answer. The women heckled the speaker in ways which conformed to established political practice while challenging established gender norms. In contrast, prayers were consistently framed by the WSPU as peaceful and respectful: an appeal to God, in the house of God.

Coverage of the prayer campaign in The Suffragette portrayed congregations as almost uniformly sympathetic. In Bayswater, they were described as ‘startled and impressed’ and in Cambridge as ‘awe-struck’. There was probably a significant degree of editorial licence in this representation. It is unlikely that every member of each congregation consistently responded with universal interest and warmth. They presumably also experienced indignation, irritation, and indifference. Indeed, reports from elsewhere suggested that some responded with outrage. This presentation was designed to bolster another common complaint made by suffragettes at the time: that a hostile press made it impossible for them to make a fair case to the public, and that when presented with the arguments directly, people were receptive.

In contrast, The Suffragette highlighted a range of responses from the church authorities. Sometimes those conducting the service sought to drown out the women with the organ. Sometimes they let the women offer their prayer before proceeding with the service. Sometimes the women were asked to leave. Often, they were forced to do so. Efforts to remove the women were usually conducted by vergers rather than clergy. These
men were presented as antagonistic: for example, in Birmingham, they reportedly used ‘unnecessary violence, most strong language and unchristian expression’. One especially menacing report from Brighton held that vergers had said ‘we’ve been waiting for you.’ But legal proceedings were always brought by the civil rather than ecclesiastical authorities. In Bolton, the vicar instructed the prosecuting lawyer not to offer any evidence for charges which had been brought against a Mrs Geldard. This suggests a degree of unease about pursuing punishment against these women.

The tussles which followed suffrage prayers often resembled the rough treatment which women received at political meetings. This point was made explicitly in *The Suffragette* when women tried to pray for Annie Kenney at St Paul’s Cathedral. ‘Women have got used to being knocked about by Liberal stewards, but the scene that took place on Sunday equals any Cabinet minister’s meeting in the roughness and violence that was meted out to the women’. As with other forms of militancy, suffragettes hoped to demonstrate how easily women’s transgressions were met with violence, exposing the fragile veneer of gentlemanly conduct. Other press reporting, however, suggested the suffragettes had responded in kind, one woman apparently claiming ‘it was prayer books to-day but it will be whips next Sunday’. Suffragettes were clearly not averse to confrontation in church. Though the risk of physical violence was probably lower than they might anticipate from the police, it was still present. In an unusual incident at the Brompton Oratory in June 1914, some male members of the congregation joined with vergers to eject praying women, and several women were hit in the face.

Occasionally, the response was more favourable. The vicar of University Church, Cambridge was reported as saying ‘the Church was assuredly the place for prayer, and if any had any prayer to offer, in what better and more natural place could they offer it?’ In Poplar, the Rector responded directly to suffragette prayers in language which echoed Matthew’s gospel: ‘take courage, I am with you always, even to the end’. The pioneering Congregationalist preacher Reverend Hatty Baker, a central figure in the Church League for Women’s Suffrage, raised the women’s cause in sermons as well as prayers. She adopted the language of militancy when praying ‘for the women waging so great a warfare for a higher moral standard and a purer race’. More progressive places of worship, unsurprisingly, were more likely to offer sympathy, not only enabling the women’s prayers, but also joining in. At the Whitefields Mission Church, the preacher echoed the women’s sentiments and language by praying ‘for those suffering for principles sake’. Likewise, *The Suffragette* commented approvingly that at the Brotherhood Church, the Reverend Swan ‘keeps the Suffragette movement well to the front’ and had committed to selling the paper at the church. At the Unitarian Church in Portsmouth, the Reverend Thompson even used *The Great Scourge* as his text, giving it his wholehearted endorsement. But this was not a universal rule. Quaker men in Birmingham ‘showed themselves incapable of practicing what they preached by throwing out the protesters in the well-known Liberal steward style’.

However, from the suffragettes’ perspective, it was not enough to target individual clergymen and churches. The Bishops had the opportunity to challenge force-feeding within the legislature, but did not do so. As a result, in February 1914, local branches began organising deputations to the Bishops in their region. Some, especially those who were already pro-suffrage, including those from London, Birmingham, Lincoln, Knaresborough and Durham, were receptive to these discussions. But by and large, the Bishops tended to respond that while they did not approve of force-feeding, the
women had brought it upon themselves through the use of extreme militancy. These deputations seemed to have little effect. Those who were predisposed to be sympathetic remained so: those who were hostile were unmoved. But it is unlikely that the women necessarily expected to achieve their stated objectives and gain the support of more Bishops. Rather, their intention was to gather examples of indifference and sanctimony, giving the suffragettes reason for fresh outrage.

The suffragettes also brought their demands directly to the Archbishop of Canterbury. In January 1914, he received an unexpected delegation from the WSPU, led by Norah Dacre Fox, reporting on the condition of women being force-fed and demanding to know what he would do about it. In a memorandum on the incident, the Archbishop, Randall Davidson, wrote that he had recently seen the Bishop of London, who had been investigating the women’s claims, and believed they were without substance. After the deputation, he was bombarded with letters asking to know what he proposed to do about force-feeding. Later there were demands for him to visit Mrs Pankhurst in prison. In April, Christabel Pankhurst sent Annie Kenney to claim sanctuary at his residence, Lambeth Palace. Unsurprisingly, Kenney’s appearance was most unwelcome. In her words, ‘When I told the Archbishop that I had come to stay and that I had brought my luggage, he became hot and irritated. We had a heated argument and did not agree about ancient Church History’. Rather than simply seeking to get rid of her, the Archbishop’s chaplain brought an anti-suffragist in to debate the whole question of votes for women. Eventually, Scotland Yard were called, and Kenney was taken to Holloway Prison. The Suffragette said that ‘the Archbishop’s conduct on this occasion could not have been in more direct opposition to the teaching of the Master he professes to serve’. After six days imprisonment, Kenney returned to Lambeth Palace, where she lay outside the gates. This time she was not permitted entry, and was picked up by Scotland Yard. On her next release, towards the end of May, she tried to claim sanctuary with the Bishop of London instead, but was ultimately dissuaded by the Bishop on the grounds that he was a bachelor. Instead, Kenney returned to more conventional suffrage work, speaking at large meetings in an effort to raise money. The outbreak of war a few weeks later halted her efforts, the prayer campaign, and suffragette militancy itself.

The WSPU’s justification of the prayer campaign and critique of the Church of England

Despite the clear link between protests in churches and other public spaces, the prayer campaign also distinguished between secular and religious forms of protest. It targeted the Church of England as a Christian institution for its failure to behave in a Christian manner. Militant women had long positioned themselves as the legitimate inheritors of Christian tradition in order to claim that they were observing divine justice in disregarding man-made laws. Jessie Kenney argued that ‘never was there a movement since the early days of Christianity where the members of it gave such loving and hard work which lasted for years, without any thought of reward except what they got for the work itself’. Like these early Christians, suffragettes claimed to be persecuted for their beliefs, and righteous in sticking to them. This was vital in enabling women to withstand the hostility and punishments they endured.
More specifically, suffragettes claimed to be inspired by Christ’s example in their devotion to humanity and willingness to suffer. For example, Annie Kenney suggested that hunger-striking suffragettes were ‘responding to the teaching of Christ by serving humanity and helping those who are too weak and too sorely oppressed to help themselves’. The Bible verses which suffragettes used in the prayer campaign were, with the exception of Lamentations, almost exclusively from the New Testament, relating to Christ’s life. But Jesus Christ was not, until the last days of his life, a passive figure, resigned to suffering. As one banner pronounced, quoting Matthew 10:34, Jesus said ‘I came not to send peace but a sword’. He was unruly, disobedient and willing to challenge church authorities, including within church buildings. He had been both a criminal and a prisoner. Suffragettes were not afraid—indeed, they were proud—to cast themselves in this mould. ‘In the steps of these our martyred sisters, Christ’s bleeding feet we track, toiling up new Calvaries ever, with the Cross which turns not back’ prayed one woman.

Through the prayer campaign, suffragettes did not only claim that they were Christians, but that in their suffering Christ himself suffered again at the hands of his own church. Christabel Pankhurst quoted Matthew 25:40—‘inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these ye have done it unto Me’—several times in her writing. When one preacher gave a sermon on Matthew 25:43, ‘I was in prison and ye visited me not’—another favourite verse of the suffragettes—a woman stood up to pronounce ‘Christ is at the present time in prison in the persons of the women who are suffering the torture of forcible feeding’. In Regent’s Park, prayers were offered to open the eyes of the nation so that ‘it may cease to crucify afresh the Son of God in these Thy servants’. He was working through them, and his spirit occupied their bodies in prison cells. He was being crucified as they were being tortured.

Emboldened by the authority represented by this embodiment of Christ, the suffragettes put forward a three-fold critique of the Church through the prayer campaign, designed to stir and shame it into action. First, they challenged its supposed apathy. Annie Kenney called the prayer campaign ‘the most searching of all tests’ for the Church, requiring it ‘to show whether they believe in the emancipation of half the human race, and whether they believe in following out the teaching of Christ’. Many members of the clergy were supporters of the suffrage campaign, both as members of the Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage and the Church League for Women’s Suffrage. Others, though, were indifferent or even opposed. By the last years of the campaign, suffragettes took the position that those who did not directly support women’s suffrage must, implicitly, be against it. Those who professed to support women’s suffrage but did not do enough to support it were also the subject of suffragette wrath. Norah Dacre Fox told the Bishop of Willesden that ‘there could be no doubt it was the apathy of the Church which had been largely conducive to women’s militancy’.

Though suffragettes understood that church leaders might have criticisms of militancy, or oppose women’s suffrage itself, they found it intolerable that any might accept the use of torture against women in the form of force-feeding. Yet some clergy seemed to think it justified. After one intervention at Westminster Cathedral, Father Bernard Vaughan, told the Evening Standard ‘There is nothing ethically wrong in letting them die’, as a result of hunger strikes: ‘Let them start at once, and make up for lost time’. How could it be that, as Christabel Pankhurst claimed, ‘the Church as a whole is silent before this horror’. One
objective of the prayer campaign, then, was simply to rouse the Church of England out of its apathy and stir it into action. One member of the Forward Cymric Union, Margarita Jones, listening to a sermon on Joseph, stood up and said she had heard enough about dreams: 'it is time we woke up'.

A similar critique is evident in a series of candid letters written by the composer and suffragette Dr Ethel Smyth to her distant cousin, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Both pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage groups had long sought Davidson’s endorsement. He professed support for suffrage as facilitating women’s moral influence in public life, and eventually served as a Vice President of the Church League for women’s suffrage. However, Davidson refused to intervene more proactively in the question to avoid the appearance of endorsing militancy. Smyth argued that his supposed leadership amounted to nothing more than ‘in a Christian spirit, to sit on the fence’. A fervent believer herself, she wrote that ‘it is horrible to me to have to believe that before all things, an anti-Church campaign is a necessary thing’, continuing

>a Church that, having never done one single thing to enlighten Governments & the world at large as to the nature of the woman’s movement, is now standing by, while force feeding is openly practiced as a means of torture, such a church should be openly attacked and scorned & vilified.

In her opinion, the church had brought suffrage militancy upon itself. This mirrored the claims of many clergy (and others) that the women had brought force-feeding upon themselves.

Secondly, the women sought to hold the Church to account for its failure to live up to what they saw as its responsibilities. In Hornsey, women carried a banner inscribed with the message ‘The Church’s Duty: to do justice and love mercy’. Suffragettes took this message directly to church leaders. On a deputation to the Bishop of Bristol, the local WSPU organiser Gladys Hazel informed him of her belief that ‘the Church had failed in its duty’. But it was not enough simply to highlight these failings. Suffragettes needed to step in and do what was necessary themselves. In Coventry, WSPU members chalked the instructions ‘Pray for Mrs Pankhurst’ outside churches. In Preston, suffragettes sent out a circular to local churches asking for—or rather, demanding—prayers, adding that ‘if the clergy refused to fulfil this request they would attend the various churches in person and offer prayers themselves. The situation in Preston was then made worse by the promise of a special service for the women’s movement which never took place. As threatened, the women carried out the prayers themselves, lecturing the clergyman responsible for the betrayal for good measure. These women saw themselves as true Christians doing God’s work.

In 1914, women took the even bolder step of interrupting sermons, not just services, lecturing the clergy on the true meaning of the texts they were preaching on. Caroline Brown took the pulpit herself in the Unitarian Church at Stenhousemuir to lecture the congregation on forcible feeding. In Norwich, a woman offered prayers from the altar itself. One woman interrupted the Prince of Wales during his first public duty, laying a foundation stone for a new Church at St Anselm. She called him and the assembled clergy ‘Traitors to the Cause of Church! Traitors to Christianity’, and singled out the Archbishop of Canterbury for his treatment of Annie Kenney. These efforts not only show the extraordinary self-confidence of the suffragettes but the shifting purpose of militancy. In Christabel Pankhurst’s words, militancy was ‘doing a work of purification’
in eradicating ‘tyranny, impurity, inequality, prejudice … the bad and the old have to be destroyed to make way for the good and the new’. Militancy would burn away all the vestiges of a corrupt society, making space to rebuild the world. The church was not immune from this social degradation: it was sustaining it. Inspired by the true spirit of religion, women had a duty to hold it to account.

While chiding those clergymen who did not live up to their responsibilities, The Suffragette also celebrated those who endorsed the women’s position and acquiesced in their demands. They were particularly keen to highlight instances where prayers seemed to generate a response from clergymen, since this suggested they were having an impact and offered an incentive to repeat the act. For example, at Whitefield’s Mission Church, the minister introduced prayers for ‘those suffering for principle’s sake’, an echo of the suffragette’s prayers on behalf of those suffering for conscience’s sake. ‘The women’s prayer had evidently gained for the Suffragist prisoners the support that was wished for’, the article concluded with some satisfaction. The most striking instance of action, however, took place at the Queen’s Hall in December 1913, when more than six hundred and fifty members of the clergy joined together to denounce force-feeding. But the Bishop of Kensington, who organised the associated petition, distanced himself from militancy, and all clergy who might be seen to approve of it.

Finally, suffragettes offered a critique of the hypocrisy in the Church’s stance. They asked why the Church refused to intervene on the ‘woman question’ while contributing to other political debates. They targeted church leaders who appeared at political meetings on other questions—for example, Welsh disestablishment—to ask why this cause meant more to them than women’s lives. They also questioned why the Church found it appropriate to honour militancy when it was carried out by men, but not by women. The report on events in Edinburgh Cathedral in October 1913 suggested that ‘an observer might have found the place a peculiarly appropriate one in which to ponder the ethics of militancy, for above the heads of the congregation there are displayed the banners of famous Scottish regiments’. Church intervention on the Irish question raised particular ire, since the suffragettes were acutely alert to what they saw as the double standards in treatment between their claims and the claims of Irish nationalists. A prayer at Brighton that there would be a peaceful settlement to the woman question was a direct reference to a prayer the previous week offered by the Archbishop of Canterbury for ‘the peaceful settlement of the Irish question’. In Ealing, after prayers for peace in Ireland, a woman rose to ask for prayers ‘that there might be no peace where there should be war’. In a precursor to Annie Kenney’s attempt to seek sanctuary with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Flora ‘The General’ Drummond and Nora Dacre Fox had attempted to seek refuge with Lord Lansdowne and Sir Edward Carson respectively. Their intention was to highlight the apparent discrepancy between the treatment of men campaigning for Home Rule and women campaigning for suffrage.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was believed to epitomise this hypocritical stance. As Michael Hughes’ work attests, the Archbishop was by no means averse to involvement in contemporary politics. In fact, he proactively sought to intervene in other constitutional crises around the People’s Budget and Home Rule. Hughes shows that Davidson received similar letters asking for public attacks on the government on these issues, but saw his role as ‘preventing division by helping politicians broker an agreement’. In the case of women’s suffrage, however, he did not even go this far, despite urging from figures such
as Lord Lytton who had hoped to gain his backing for the Conciliation Bill.\textsuperscript{122} But Ethel Smyth’s letter suggests female suffrage activists did not actually want the Archbishop to act behind the scenes. Rather, they wanted moral leadership and statements of support in public. As Smyth insisted, ‘it is for your Grace to give a lead.’\textsuperscript{123} Little else would suffice.

\textbf{Prayer, militancy and community in the WSPU}

Yet detailed attention to the way that the prayer campaign was framed in the pages of \textit{The Suffragette} suggests that the campaign was not, in fact, primarily directed at the Church of England, but other suffrage supporters, especially militant supporters. The most important evidence for this interpretation is the fact that women rarely prayed that they would win the vote. They prayed for other women. The immediate impetus for the prayer campaign was the Government’s increasingly brutal treatment of incarcerated suffragettes: longer sentences, renewed and sustained force-feeding, and the hated Cat and Mouse Act. The women outside prison could do little for the women inside prison, but they could pray. Suffragettes knew that repeated hunger strikes and periods in hiding took an almost unimaginable toll on the women involved. The suffering bodies of suffragettes released from prison were displayed at political meetings as a means of generating outrage and renewing commitment among the audience. Their condition was reported in \textit{The Suffragette} in solemn and sorrowful terms which made it clear to readers that death was a very real possibility.\textsuperscript{124} The death of Emily Wilding Davison in June 1913 was fresh in the suffragettes’ memory and perceived as a martyrdom. In this context, the suffragettes’ sincerely feared that ‘mice’ like Emmeline Pankhurst, Annie Kenney and Sylvia Pankhurst were at risk of death because of their treatment at the hands of the government.

When the suffragettes prayed, they almost always named several women, so that the congregation, the clergy–and God himself–might picture her. Rachel Peace was among those most frequently prayed for.\textsuperscript{125} She had been sentenced to eighteen months hard labour for arson in October 1913. She was out on licence under the terms of the Cat and Mouse Act when arrested, and would therefore not be allowed out again, raising the prospect of a sustained period of torture. A harrowing first person account of her experiences was published in December, which asked readers to ‘please pray with me that this time I may be spared further the horror of past nights’.\textsuperscript{126} The repeated incidents of prayers in Preston can be explained by the fact it was home to Edith Rigby, who had been sentenced to nine months hard labour and was undergoing repeated hunger strikes and periods of recovery under the terms of the Cat and Mouse Act.\textsuperscript{127}

The prayer campaign highlights the central role played by \textit{The Suffragette} in sustaining the ‘imagined community’ of suffragettes.\textsuperscript{128} It helped create and reinforce their individual and collective sense of themselves as militant suffragettes, their relationship to one another and their sense of belonging. Suffragettes had long sought to create a sense of connection and solidarity across prison walls with demonstrations and protests outside.\textsuperscript{129} During a period when suffragettes had fewer opportunities to meet through deputations and processions, encounters with one another’s experiences in the press took on renewed importance. Even a cursory examination of the newspaper demonstrates that it devoted an astonishing amount of space to the prayer campaign. On 31 October 1913,
for example, *The Suffragette* devoted a page to coverage of the interruptions in church, a further page to a letter from Annie Kenney to the Bishop of Winchester, and another page to an open letter from the Reverend Edwin Mould to ‘all anti-suffragists’.¹³⁰

The leaders of the WSPU always made it very clear that individuals must make their own decisions about militancy. While they encouraged women to participate in the movement as far as their conscience, resources and abilities permitted, there were no formal expectations or demands on women. There was also a pragmatic recognition that relatively few women would be either willing or able to carry out the most drastic actions. On the other hand, there was an expectation that women should do *something*. In this context, the prayer campaign offered militant women several different benefits. It enabled them to demonstrate public support for one another. It could be carried out in any part of the country. It allowed them to subvert hostile press coverage by presenting a different image of suffrage directly to congregations. Reports of the incidents detailing who was prayed for, at what point in the service, and the response of the congregation and church authorities, provided a template which women could adopt and adapt. This meant that, although the prayers required few resources, a little planning and co-ordination could increase their impact. Arrest was possible but unlikely. Women could not be kept out of churches as they could be kept out of political meetings. Nevertheless, protest through public prayer should not be perceived as an easy option. Olive Bartels’s ‘sensitive’ sister Margaret made several trips to pray in Westminster Abbey, ‘She never did anything militant’, Bartels recalled, here specifically meaning violent. ‘For a woman of her temperament it was a tremendous effort’.¹³¹ The prayer campaign thus allowed women to live out Emmeline Pankhurst’s pronouncement from 1912 to ‘be each militant in your own way’.¹³²

However, the suffragette prayer campaign was certainly not an instance of the ‘freelance militancy’ which some historians have found useful in explaining developments in later years.¹³³ This was a campaign in which Christabel Pankhurst played a key role, both in developing the arguments that underpinned the action, and, as editor of *The Suffragette*, in publicising the results. As Timothy Larsen and June Purvis have shown, while Pankhurst’s later career as an evangelical preacher has sometimes been interpreted with derisive incredulity, her political and religious beliefs had long been closely linked.¹³⁴ During Lent in 1913, Pankhurst had been outraged to discover that women in Holloway had been denied the sacrament, and sent a deputation to the Bishop of London to rectify this.¹³⁵ Her Easter message drew on Matthew 23:13–a criticism of ‘hypocrites’–and said that the women ‘had a clean conscience’.¹³⁶ The key elements of the suffragettes’ critique—the Church’s apathy, hypocrisy, and failure to live up to its duties—were all laid out in “The Appeal to God”, and it was at her prompting that Annie Kenney sought sanctuary with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Her enthusiastic endorsement of the prayer campaign provides further evidence of her escalating religious enthusiasm in the pre-war period. Yet there is no suggestion that she told each and every one of the participants what to do and when to do it. Rather, as Annie Kenney argued, ‘providing they kept strictly to the main policy laid down . . . once they were proved to be “true blue” they had militant methods given to them to utilise as they thought best’.¹³⁷ The suffrage prayer campaign thus provides further evidence for a more nuanced interpretation of militancy, which, as Krista Cowman has suggested, recognises that the centre had an important role to play in co-ordinating, rather than controlling, militancy.¹³⁸
The prayer campaign found sympathy from across the suffrage movement, including from religious suffrage organisations. Constitutionalist advocates for suffrage might vehemently disapprove of particular militant tactics: they might even find them counterproductive. Yet they had no wish to see women suffering as they suffered under the Cat and Mouse Act. This had been made clear in August 1913, when the religious suffrage organisations, led by the Jewish League for Women’s Suffrage, combined to denounce force-feeding. The Church League for Women’s Suffrage published critiques of both the forcible feeding and the Cat and Mouse Act. A similar spirit of sympathy and understanding characterised the response to the prayer campaign. For example, the Catholic Women’s Suffrage Society refused to condemn the interruptions at the Brompton Oratory and Westminster Cathedral. Indeed, in general, religious suffrage societies took a tolerant attitude to militant activity: including welcoming members of the WSPU to their own ranks, a stance which occasionally resulted in censure from their co-religionists.

In private, some suffrage supporters went even further. Constitutionalists and militants alike, including men as well as women, wrote impassioned letters to the Archbishop of Canterbury demanding that he exercise the moral leadership which they considered his responsibility. These letters consistently expressed horror that he had allowed Annie Kenney to be rearrested literally on his doorstep. ‘She is fighting against the things Christ fought, and against which our Church is supposed to be fighting, and yet you join with them on the other side against her’, wrote a Mrs Willocks. Like her, several correspondents distanced themselves from militancy itself but nevertheless appealed to the Archbishop to move the church away from ‘apathy and indifference’ to those ‘who are being cruelly assaulted . . . in their fight for their exploited sisters and children’. These correspondents felt that the Church could not remain neutral on the suffrage question, and that in allowing the arrest of Annie Kenney, it had in fact moved from neutrality into government support. They quoted different biblical authorities in support of their argument, all from the New Testament, and specifically referring to the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. One referred to Luke 16:25, underlining the words ‘Son, remember’, to highlight the fact that those who enjoyed torments in this life would be rewarded in the next, and vice versa. Alice Kidd, secretary of the Churchwomen’s Protest Committee, went so far as to compare the Archbishop to Pontius Pilate, suggesting that Davidson ‘may also be an accessory to His death once more, in the person of his beloved disciple’.

**Conclusion**

In May 1914, the Bishop of London announced to the House of Lords that he had become a convert to women’s suffrage, despite the fact that he had been a target not only of disrupted services, but of a bomb placed under his chair. However, on the face of it, the prayer campaign had little effect. The press occasionally made mention of it, describing the ‘disgraceful conduct’ of the ‘obnoxious’ women, but paid relatively little attention, certainly in comparison with other forms of militancy. They were far more focused on the dangers to church buildings posed by the arson and bombing campaign. As this suggests, the suffragettes themselves rather drowned out the possible impact of the prayer campaign with their more dramatic acts.
Though, as we have seen, some individual churchmen were sympathetic to the women’s claim, there was little hope of a more substantial shift in opinion while more extreme forms of militancy continued. The suffragettes were certainly correct to maintain that Church leaders—and the government—had had plenty of time to act before they had embarked on more extreme forms of militancy. Yet, as we have also seen, these efforts also provided Church leaders with a ready excuse not to act. As some historians have argued, militancy—especially in its more extreme forms—made it more difficult for the government to grant women the vote, since they could not be seen to ‘give in’ to violence. At the same time, the faith that sustained the women’s efforts also made it more difficult for them to reconsider their own approach. Christabel Pankhurst wrote in ‘The Appeal to God’ that ‘women have been true to the spirit and example of Christ. Knowing that, they are lifted above all human criticism’. This degree of zealotry is rarely helpful in politics. All this seems to indicate that the suffrage prayer campaign was ineffectual at best.

But historians are not only interested in political campaigns on the basis of their apparent successes and failures. In this article, I have argued that an accurate understanding of the suffragette prayer campaign is vital to appreciate the full range and character of suffragette activity at this time. It has long been recognised that the women’s movement sought to redefine the nature of the political: politicising spaces and concerns previously believed to be beyond the realms of conventional politics. This article has also made the case that prayer could be harnessed for political purposes, and so needs, in some instances, to be understood by historians as a political act. The suffragette prayer campaign was not simply a further tactic: another weapon from a tool box of practices from which suffragettes could pick and choose their own preferred combination. Though undoubtedly it was intended to—and did—create a spectacle, the prayer campaign was not only a provocative performance. It reflected genuine belief, sorrow, and love for one another. Close attention to its meaning offers new insights into the ways that suffragettes viewed themselves and their cause. While the prayer campaign is evidence of the suffragettes’ self-confidence, grounded in their insistence that they were both the followers and embodiment of Christ, it also indicates their very real fears. Suffragettes were not praying that the suffrage campaign would be successful and that the vote would be granted. They were praying that women would be saved from death. This was a sincere wish which, in its way, reflected a sense of desperation and perceived lack of alternatives as much as any bomb.

In July 1977, a group of feminist activists once again sought to occupy religious spaces on political grounds, taking to the pulpit of Westminster Cathedral in order to protest at attempts to restrict abortion rights. One of the protestors, Eileen Fairweather, argued that ‘we have been forced to occupy because the Church, Government, and the medical profession are run by men and we have no voice within them. Yet they run our lives for us’. Her critique would have resonated with the suffragettes. It illustrates the ongoing significance of religious spaces for feminist protest throughout the twentieth century: spaces which the WSPU prayer campaign helped prise open.

Notes

1. The Suffragette, 27 March 1914, 546.
2. See The Suffragette, 8 August 1914, including an account of the incident on 743.
3. Robert Saunders, “A Great and Holy War”: Religious Routes to Women’s Suffrage, 1909–1914, English Historical Review, 134, issue 571 (2019), 1476.
4. Brief narrative accounts can be found in relevant unpublished PhD theses: Jonathan Francis, ‘Combating the “Sin of Self-Sacrifice”: Christian Feminism in the Women’s Suffrage Movement’, Durham, 1996, 314–324 and Eun Soo Choi, ‘The Religious Dimensions of the Women’s Suffrage Movement: The Role of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, 1867–1918’, Glasgow, 1996, 153–159.
5. The literature on militancy is vast. For thoughtful scholarly assessments critical of militancy, see especially Brian Harrison, ‘The Act of Militancy: Violence and the Suffragettes, 1903–1914’, in Brian Harrison (ed.), Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain (Oxford, 1982) and Martin Pugh, The March of the Women: a Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women’s Suffrage, 1866–1914 (Oxford, 2002) especially 171–223. For viewpoints more sympathetic to militancy, see especially Laura E. Nym Mayhall, The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860–1930 (Oxford, 2003); Barbara Green, Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905–1938 (Basingstoke, 1997); June Purvis, Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography (London, 2003); June Purvis, Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography (London, 2018).
6. Laura E. Nym Mayhall, ‘Creating the “Suffragette Spirit”: British Feminism and the Historical Imagination’, Women’s History Review, 4, no. 3 (1995); Sandra Stanley Holton, ‘Reflecting on Suffrage History’, in Claire Eustance, Joan Ryan, and Laura Ugolini (eds.), A Suffrage Reader (London, 2000).
7. Liz Stanley and Anne Morley, The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison: a Biographical Detective Story (London, 1988) 153; Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, ‘The Transfiguring Sword’: The Just War of the Women’s Social and Political Union (London, 1997), 10, 57.
8. The case for and against suffragette militancy, especially in these later forms, is examined in depth in June Purvis, Elizabeth Crawford, and Sandra Stanley Holton, ‘Did Militancy Help or Hinder the Granting of the Vote’, Women’s History Review, 28, no. 7 (2019). This interaction also provides an excellent overview of recent historiography on the topic.
9. Rachel Monaghan, ‘Single-Issue Terrorism: A Neglected Phenomenon’, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 23/4 (2000); Rebecca Walker, ‘Deeds, Not Words: The Suffragettes and Early Terrorism in the City of London’, The London Journal, 45, no. 1 (2020). Popular histories taking this view include Fern Riddell, Death In Ten Minutes: Kitty Marion, Activist, Arsonist, Suffragette (London, 2018); Simon Webb, The Suffragette Bombers (Barnsley, 2017).
10. Krista Cowman, Women of the Right Spirit: Paid Organisers of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) 1904–18 (Manchester, 2007), 121.
11. Jill Liddington and Elizabeth Crawford, Vanishing for the Vote: Suffrage, Citizenship and the Battle for the Census (Manchester, 2014). See also the incredibly useful resource available at https://www.mappingwomenssuffrage.org.uk/ [accessed 1 April 2021]. Tania Shew, ‘Militancy in the Marital Sphere: sex-strikes, marriage-strikes and birth-strikes as militant suffrage tactics, 1911–1914’, in Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Lyndsey Jenkins (eds.), The Politics of Women’s Suffrage: Local, National and International Dimensions (London, 2021).
12. Purvis, Crawford, and Stanley Holton, ‘Did Militancy Help or Hinder the Granting of the Vote’, and see also Sandra Stanley Holton, Feminism and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage and Reform Politics, 1900–1918 (Cambridge, 1986); Laura E. Nym Mayhall, ‘Defining Militancy: Radical Protest, the Constitutional Idiom, and Women’s Suffrage in Britain, 1908–1909’, Journal of British Studies, 39, no. 3 (2000) and Jon Lawrence, ‘Contesting the Male Polity: The Suffragettes and the Politics of Disruption in Edwardian Britain’, in Amanda Vickery (ed.), Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present (Stanford, 2001).
13. Lyndsey Jenkins, Sisters and Sisterhood: The Kenney Family, Class and Suffrage, 1890–1965 (Oxford, 2021), 136–169.
14. Claire Eustance, ‘Meanings of Militancy: The Ideas and Practice of Political Resistance in the Women’s Freedom League, 1907–1914’, in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (eds.), The Women’s Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives (Manchester, 1998); Hilary Frances, “Pay the piper, call the tune!”: the Women’s Tax Resistance League’, in June Purvis and Maroula Joannou (eds.), The Women’s Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives (Manchester, 1998); Hilary Frances, “‘Dare to be Free!’: The Women’s Freedom League and its Legacy”, in June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (eds.), Votes for Women (London, 2000); Nym Mayhall, The Militant Suffrage Movement, 49–51.

15. Krista Cowman, “The Stone-Throwing has Been Forced Upon Us”: The Function of Militancy Within the Liverpool WSPU, 1906–14’, Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 145 (1996) 175; Cowman, The Right Spirit, 121–2; June Purvis, ‘Emmeline Pankhurst’, in June Purvis and June Hannam (eds.), The British Women’s Suffrage Campaign: National and International Perspectives (London, 2020), 42. See also Krista Cowman, ‘What Was Suffragette Militancy? An Exploration of the British Example’, in Irma Sulkunen, Sija-Leena Nevala-Nurmi, and Pirjo Markkola (eds.), Suffrage, Gender and Citizenship: International Perspectives on Parliamentary Reforms (Newcastle, 2009).

16. June Purvis, “A Glass Half Full” Women’s History in the UK’, Women’s History Review, 27, no. 1 (2018), 7. For examples, see Sarah C. Williams, Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark c.1880–1939 (Oxford, 1999); Sue Morgan and Jacqueline de Vries (eds.), Women, Gender and Religious Culture in Britain, 1800–1940 (London, 2010); Carmen Mangion, Catholic Nuns and Sisters in a Secular Age: Britain 1945–90 (Manchester, 2019).

17. Sue Morgan (ed.), Women, Religion, and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900 (Basingstoke, 2002); Jacqueline de Vries, ‘More than Paradoxes to Offer: Feminist, History and Religious Culture’, in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline De Vries (eds.), Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940 (London, 2010); Anne Summers, Female Lives, Moral States: Women, Religion and Public Life in Britain, 1800–1930 (Newbury, 2000); Sandra Stanley Holton, Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory and Radicalism in the Lives of Women Friends (London, 2007).

18. Jacqueline de Vries, ‘Transforming the Pulpit: Preaching and Prophecy in the British Women’s Suffrage Movement’, in Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (eds.), Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millenia of Christianity (London, 1998).

19. Kathryn Gleadle, The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women’s Rights Movements, 1831–51 (Basingstoke, 1995).

20. For example, Sue Morgan, “‘Wild Oats or Acorns?’” Social Purity, Sexual Politics and the Response of the Late-Victorian Church’, Journal of Religious History, 31, no. 2 (2007).

21. Laura Schwartz, Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women’s Emancipation, England 1830–1914 (Manchester, 2013).

22. Brian Heeney, ‘The Beginnings of Church Feminism: Women and the Councils of the Church of England, 1897–1919’, Journal of English History, 33 (1982); Brian Heeney, The Women’s Movement in the Church of England (Oxford, 1988); Timothy Willem Jones, Sexual Politics in the Church of England, 1857–1957 (Oxford, 2013); Wayne M. Riggs, ‘Permission to speak: British women in the established Churches during the First World War’, Women’s History Review, 28, no. 4 (2019), 669. Perhaps the most famous of these challenges was posed by Maude Royden in her campaigns for ordination, for which see Sheila Fletcher, Maude Royden: A Life (Oxford, 1989) and Sue Morgan, “‘A Feminist Conspiracy”: Maude Royden, women’s ministry and the British Press’, Women’s History Review, 22, no. 5 (2013).

23. Saunders, “A Great and Holy War”, 1476.

24. Carmen Mangion, ‘Religious Suffrage Societies’ in Krista Cowman, Women’s Suffrage (forthcoming).

25. Diana Burfield, ‘Theosophy and Feminism: Some Exploration in Nineteenth-Century Biography’, in Pat Holden (ed.), Women’s Religious Experience: Cross-Cultural Perspectives (London, 1983); Joy Dixon, The Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England
(London, 2001); Joy Dixon, ‘Modernity, Heterodoxy and the Transformation of Religious Cultures’, in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline De Vries (eds.), Women, Gender and Religious Cultures (Abingdon, 2010); Jenkins, Sisters and Sisterhood, 86–93.

26. Saunders, “‘A Great and Holy War’”, 1493.

27. Kabi Hartman, “‘What Made Me a Suffragette’: The New Woman and the New (?) Conversion Narrative’, Women’s History Review, 12/1 (2003); Gay. L Gullickson, ‘When Death Became Thinkable: Self-Sacrifice in the Women’s Social and Political Union’, Journal of Social History, 51/2 (2017) 378–80.

28. Jorgensen-Earp, 'The Transfiguring Sword', 104; Carolyn Christensen Nelson, ‘The Uses of Religion in the Women’s Militant Suffrage Campaign in England’, The Midwest Quarterly, 51, no. 3 (2010). This verse was quoted in The Suffragette, on January 2 1914, 278.

29. Sue Thomas, ‘Crying “the horror” of Prostitution: Elizabeth Robins’s “Where Are You Going To . . . ?” and the Moral Crusade of the Women’s Social and Political Union’, Women: a Cultural Review, 16, no. 2 (2005); June Purvis, ‘Fighting the Double Moral Standard in Edwardian Britain: Suffragette Militancy, Sexuality and the Nation in the Writings of the Early Twentieth Century British Feminist Christabel Pankhurst’, in Francisca De Haan et al. (eds.), Women’s Activism: Global Perspectives From the 1890s to the Present (Abingdon, 2013); Purvis, Christabel Pankhurst, 330–6; and on the wider context, see Susan Kingsley Kent, Sex and Suffrage in Britain (Princeton, 1987); Margaret Jackson, The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality (London, 1994) and Lucy Bland, Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality (London, 1995).

30. Antoinette Burton, The Feminist Quest for Identity: British Imperial Feminism and ‘Global Sisterhood’, The Journal of Women’s History, 3, no. 2, (1991); Antoinette Burton, Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture (London, 1994).

31. Saunders, “‘A Great and Holy War’”, 1479–80; Mangion, ‘Religious Suffrage Societies’.

32. The Suffragette, 8 August 1913, 10.

33. More famous examples of this approach include window-breaking, hunger-striking, and pillar box firing. Pugh, March of the Women, 180.

34. The Suffragette, 23 October 1913, 23.

35. The Suffragette, 27 March 1914, 546. These women were Marian Downie, Alexis Turner, Marjorie MacFarlane, Janet Wallace, Caroline Brown, and Oonah ai Caellaig. Five of these women appear on the Suffragette Roll of Honour (7LAC/2, LSE Women’s Library).

36. The Suffragette, 19 June 1914, 166. ‘Miss Nupsier’ appears as ‘Lupsia’ in the Suffragettes: Amnesty of August 1914: Index of Women Arrested 1906–1914, HO 45/24,665, The National Archives, consulted via England, Suffragettes Arrested, 1906–1914 at ancestry.com [accessed 1 February 2021]. A ‘Miss Nupsia’ also appear on the Suffragette Roll of Honour. Mrs Fausten was reported as Fusten in some of the coverage. For more on her career, see https://www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk/faustenmrs-mary[accessed 1 March 2021]. I am grateful to Elizabeth Crawford for information on Mary Fausten.

37. The Suffragette, 7 August 1914, 310. A photograph of Adams (held in the Museum of London at 58.87/35) was taken while she was in prison as part of the authorities efforts to conduct surveillance on suffragettes: again, this suggests she was considered dangerous. The Cat and Mouse Act was officially The Prisoners’ (Temporary Discharge for Ill-health) Act. Introduced at speed in April 1913, this law meant women who embarked on hunger strikes after arrest were no longer force-fed. Instead, once thought close to the point of death, the prisoners were released in order to recover before being rearrested. Subsequently women sought to evade the authorities through cunning and disguise.

38. Index of Women Arrested 1906–1914.

39. There is a lack of precision in some of the reports which makes exact calculation impossible. For example, according to The Suffragette, ‘at least nine’ churches in Brighton and ‘several’ churches in Bath were reported to have been visited on 20 February 1914, 422.

40. Christopher Bearman, ‘An Examination of Suffragette Violence’, English Historical Review, 120, no. 486 (2005), 31–32. As he notes, there is also an incomplete list of incidents in ‘A Year’s Record’, The Suffragette, 26 December 1913, 258.
41. Julia Bush, *Women Against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain* (Oxford, 2007). Dean Inge, at St Paul’s, later refused a service of commemoration for women’s suffrage. Dean Inge to the Church League for Women’s Suffrage, 7 December 1918, LSE Library Collections, GB 106 9/06/138.

42. Further reports of suffragette prayers at St Paul’s were reported in *The Suffragette* on 17 October 1913, 6; 24 October 1913, 23; 31 October 1913, 50; 12 December 1913, 206; 30 January 1914, 354; 6 March 1914; 8 May 1914, 84; 5 June 1914; 17 July 1914, 246; and 24 July 1914, 266. At Westminster Abbey services were interrupted on 17 October 1913, 7; 31 October 1913, 50; 7 November 1913, 85; 19 December 1913, 231; 23 January 1914, 332; 20 March 1914, 522; 27 March 1913, 546; 29 May 1914; 26 June 1914, 186; 17 July 1914, 246; 31 July 1914, 264; and 7 August 1914, 309.

43. *The Suffragette*, 13 February 1914, 401; 27 February 1914, 448; 24 April 1914, 43; 15 May 1914, 108; 22nd May 1914, 114; 26 June 1914 184; 24 July 1914, 266 and 7 August 1914, 309.

44. *The Suffragette*, 20 February 1914, 422.

45. *The Suffragette*, 24 July 1914, 266.

46. At Westminster Cathedral, incidents reported in *The Suffragette*, 14 November 1913, 109 (after which suffragettes moved to the Carmelite Church nearby to sell the newspaper) and also on 12 June 1914, 144; St Mary of the Angels in Bayswater (a silent protest involving a flag in WSPU colours), 28 November 1913, 148; St Mary Magdalen’s Wandsworth, 19 December 1913, 231; St Michael and All Angels, Kensington, 13 March 1914, 494; The Chapel of St Monica, Palmer’s Green, 8 May 1914, 84; Brompton Oratory, 12 June 1914, 144; St Patrick’s Cathedral Dublin, 12 December 1913, 206.

47. Elaine Clark, ‘Catholics and the Campaign for Women’s Suffrage in England’, *Church History*, 73/3 (2004), 651–658.

48. *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 October 1913, 10. Esther Rickards, then a medical student, was a pioneering gynaecologist and surgeon, one of the first women to become a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons and a founding member of the Socialist Medical Association. She only went into medicine because women could not become veterinarians at this time. Esther Rickards (1893–1977) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/70412.

49. *The Suffragette*, 17 October 1913, 7.

50. Phoebe Rickards to the Editor, *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 November 1913, 33.

51. *The Suffragette*, 12 June 1914, 144.

52. *The Suffragette*, 10 July 1914, 224. The *Jewish Chronicle* reported that ‘on leaving the building, they were loudly hissed’. 10 July 1914, 35.

53. *The Suffragette*, 31 October 1913, 50.

54. *The Tablet*, 6 June 1914, 897. I am grateful to Sophie Cooper for her assistance here.

55. *The Suffragette*, 6 March 1914, 472; 13 February 1914, 401.

56. Bearman, ‘Suffragette Violence’, 31–32.

57. This was based on St Paul’s command in 1 Corinthians 14:34 to ‘let your women keep silence in the church: for it is not permitted unto them to speak.’

58. Lawrence, ‘Contesting the Male Polity’.

59. *The Suffragette*, 21 November 1913, 130; 7 November 1913, 85.

60. For example, Mr Schneider to The Editor, *Jewish Chronicle*, November 21 1913, 19.

61. This point was made specifically in *The Suffragette*, 3 April 1914, 572.

62. *The Suffragette* 5 December 1913, 173; February 1913, 401; 13 March 1914, 494; 20 March 1914; 3 July 1914, 207.

63. For example, at Liverpool, Cambridge and Newport, (*The Suffragette*, 21 November 1913, 130) and at Aberdeen (*The Suffragette*, 20 March 1914, 522).

64. *The Suffragette*, 24 October 1913, 27.

65. *The Suffragette*, 21 November 1913, 170.

66. *The Suffragette*, 9 January 1914, 294.

67. *The Suffragette*, 3 July 1914, 207.
68. The Suffragette, 24 October 1913, 27.
69. Variously reported in Lincolnshire Echo, 20 October 1913, 2; Leeds Mercury, 20 October 1913, 5; Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail, 20 October 1913, 3 and elsewhere.
70. The Suffragette, 12 June 1914, 144, and The Times, 8 June 1914, 48.
71. The Suffragette, 14 November 1913, 109.
72. The Suffragette, 9 January 1914, 294.
73. The Suffragette, 2 January 1914, 278; see also 28 November 1913, 148; 5 December 1914, 173; 27 March 1914, 546.
74. The Suffragette, 28 November 1913, 148. On Hatty Baker see Elaine Kaye, 'A Turning-point in the Ministry of Women: the Ordination of the First Woman to the Christian Ministry in England in September 1917', Studies in Church History, 27 (1990) 507–8 and 'Reverend Hatty Baker' by Anne Corry and Julia Neville https://www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk/baker-rev-harriet-hatty/ [accessed 1 February 2021].
75. The Suffragette, 20 March 1914, 522.
76. The Suffragette, 3 April 1914, 572.
77. The Suffragette, 20 March 1914, 522.
78. The Suffragette, 13 February 1914, 389, and see Purvis, Christabel Pankhurst, 354.
79. The Suffragette, 17 July 1914, 246.
80. The Suffragette, 13 March 1914, 484; 3 April 1914, 571; 10 April 1914, 599.
81. 'Memorandum' Davidson, 516, 17, Lambeth Palace Archives.
82. Davidson 516, 37–93 and 94–121, Lambeth Palace Archives.
83. The Suffragette, 5 June 1914, 132.
84. Annie Kenney, Memories of a Militant (London, 1924) 248–251.
85. 'One chapter on CO-ORDINATION and CORRELATION', Jessie Kenney’s unpublished autobiography, The Flame and the Flood, KP/JK/4/2/2/4, Kenney Papers, University of East Anglia.
86. The Suffragette, 31 October 1913, 51.
87. The Suffragette, 23 January 1914, 332.
88. This point was made explicitly by Christabel Pankhurst, The Suffragette, 8 August 1913, 10.
89. The Suffragette, 2 January 1914, 278.
90. 'The Suffragette, 8 August 1913, 10; 13 February 1914, 589.
91. The Suffragette, 23 January 1914, 332.
92. The Suffragette 20 February 1914, 422; see also 13 February 1914, 401.
93. As Sharon Crozier-de Rosa has argued, shame was a means of regulating the behaviour of others: her work explores its use by women against other women but it undoubtedly had other applications. Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash (London, 2018).
94. The Suffragette, 24 April 1914, 37.
95. Angela John and Claire Eustance (eds.), The Men’s Share? Masculinities, Male Support, and Women’s Suffrage in Britain, 1890–1920 (London, 1997), 7–11; Saunders, ““A Great and Holy War””, 1478; Cliona Murphy, ‘The Religious Context of the Women’s Suffrage Campaign in Ireland’, Women’s History Review, 6, no. 4 (1997), 560–1.
96. The Suffragette, 13 March 1914, 494.
97. The Tablet, 13 June 1914, 930.
98. The Suffragette, 8 August 1913, 10.
99. The Suffragette, 20 February 1914, 422.
100. Riggs, 'Permission to speak', 670–1.
101. Ethel Smyth to Archbishop Randall Davidson, 11 February 1914, Davidson 516, 30, 32-33, Lambeth Palace Archives.
102. The Suffragette, 17 July 1914, 246.
103. Western Daily Press, 10 March 1914, 9.
104. The Suffragette, 1 May 1914, 72.
105. The Suffragette, 19 December 1913, 231.
106. The Suffragette, 20 February 1914, 423.
107. The Suffragette, 13 March 1914, 494.
108. The Suffragette, 20 March 1914, 522. Two days later, she was among the women arrested in Edinburgh.
109. The Suffragette, 17 April 1914, 8.
110. The Suffragette, 26 June 1914, 184.
111. The Suffragette, 2 May 1913, 492.
112. The Suffragette, 28 November 1913, 148.
113. Common Cause, 12 December 1913, 4.
114. The Suffragette, 31 October 1913, 50.
115. The Suffragette, 17 July 1914, 246.
116. The Suffragette, 24 October 1913, 27.
117. The Suffragette, 17 July 1914, 241.
118. The Suffragette, 9 January 1914, 294.
119. The Suffragette, 2 January 1914, 279.
120. Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote (London, 1957), 273.
121. Michael Hughes, ‘Archbishop Davidson, the “Edwardian Crisis,” and the Defense of the National Church’, Journal of Church and State, 57, no. 2 (2015), 227.
122. Lord Lytton to ‘Chapman’, 15 October 1910, Davidson 515, 58, Lambeth Palace Archives.
123. Ethel Smyth to Archbishop Randall Davidson, 11 February 1914, Davidson 516, 31, Lambeth Palace Archives.
124. Lyndsey Jenkins, ‘Annie Kenney and the Politics of Class in the Women’s Social and Political Union’, Twentieth Century British History, 30, no. 4 (2019), 495–7.
125. For example, she was mentioned by women in prayers across the country as reported in The Suffragette, 21 November 1913, 130; 28 November 1913, 148.
126. The Suffragette, 19 December 1913, 232.
127. The Suffragette, 7 November 1913, 85; 21 November 1913, 130; 19 December 1913, 231; 20 February 1914, 423; 13 March 1914, 494; 20 March 1914, 522. Rigby had set fire to the home of Sir William Lever during a visit of the King to Lancashire with the intention, in her words ‘of lighting a beacon which should warn the King and the Government that women should no longer submit to disenfranchisement’. The Suffragette, 2 January 1914, 276.
128. Digitalisation has revolutionised our ability to engage with newspapers and other source material and proved invaluable during the coronavirus pandemic when archives were closed and historians were unable to access physical archives. However, historians must be cautious in their digital techniques. Keyword searches can only show us what we are looking for. This is helpful as a starting point for tracking subjects. But it is essential that we do not lose the context in doing so. The initial idea for this article came when I was reading the entirety of The Suffragette in search of material on another topic entirely, and was struck by the prominence given to public prayers at this time. For an extended discussion of this point see Adrian Bingham, ‘The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians’, Twentieth Century British History, 21, no. 2 (2010).
129. June Purvis, ‘The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes in Edwardian Britain’, Women’s History Review, 4, no. 1 (1994), 12.
130. The Suffragette, 31 October 1913, 7. 11. Mould was an ongoing supporter of the WSPU even after suffragettes destroyed a local industrialist mansion in May 1913: his article from 21 March, ‘What to do with the Militant Suffragette’, was reprinted by the organisation as a leaflet that August.
131. Olive Bartels, interview with Brian Harrison, 27 March 1976, 8SUF/B/078b, LSE Women’s Library.
132. The Suffragette, 25 October 1912, 17.
133. Developed in Stanley and Morley, Emily Wilding Davison, and applied by, for example, Sandra Stanley Holton, Suffrage Days: Stories From the Women’s Suffrage Movement (London, 1996), 241; Michelle Myall, “No Surrender!”: The Militancy of Mary Leigh, a Working-Class Suffragette’, in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (ed.), The Women’s Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives (Manchester, 1998).
134. Timothy Larsen, *Christabel Pankhurst: Fundamentalism and Feminism in Coalition* (Woodbridge, 2002); Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, esp. 101–111.

135. Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 320, based on Mary Richardson, *Laugh A Defiance* (London, 1953) 85. Victoria Lidiard, reportedly the last surviving suffragette and active in the late twentieth century campaign for women’s ordination, provided a similar account, but apparently taking place in 1912, and with an intervention by Emmeline Pankhurst. *Chrysalis*, February 1987, 16, London, LSE Women’s Library Collection. I am grateful to Grace Heaton for this information.

136. *The Suffragette*, 21 March 1913, 366, and see also the discussion in Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 320.

137. Kenney, *Memories*, 110.

138. Cowman, *The Right Spirit*, 207.

139. Anne Summers, ‘Gender, Religion and an Immigrant Minority: Jewish women and the suffrage movement in Britain, c. 1900–1920’, *Women’s History Review*, 21, no. 3 (2012), 409.

140. *Church League for Women’s Suffrage Monthly Paper*, November 1913, 319–20; January 1914, 20.

141. Clark, ‘Catholics and the Campaign for Women’s Suffrage’, 657.

142. Mangion, ‘Religious Suffrage Societies’.

143. E. Willocks to Archbishop Randall Davidson, 4 June 1914, Davidson 516, 165, Lambeth Palace Archives.

144. Lady Helen Lely to Archbishop Randall Davidson, 10 July 1914, Davidson 516, 262, Lambeth Palace Archives.

145. Mary Beatrice Oldfield to Archbishop Randall Davidson, 20 May 1914, Davidson 516, 162, Lambeth Palace Archives.

146. Alice M. Kidd to Archbishop Randall Davidson, 29 May 1914, Davidson 516, 159, Lambeth Palace Archives.

147. Women’s Enfranchisement Bill Second Reading, Hansard HL Deb. Fifth Series, vol. 16, col. 50.

148. *Lincolnshire Echo*, 20 October 1913, 2.

149. See, for example, a series of letters printed in *The Times* on ‘the protection of churches’, 12 June 1914, 9; 15 June 1914, 4; 17 June 1914, 9; 19 June 1914, 9. The last, anonymous, letter informed readers that parishioners had formed guard to protect the church, and intended to strip and flog any man found to be assisting a suffragette.

150. Purvis, Crawford, and Stanley Holton, ‘Did Militancy Help or Hinder the Granting of the Vote’, esp. 1220–4.

151. *The Suffragette*, 8 August 1913, 740.

152. *The Times*, 16 July 1977, 2. For more on Fairweather’s politics, see Eileen Fairweather, ‘The Feelings Behind the Slogans’, in Marsha Rowe (ed.), *The Spare Rib Reader* (London, 1982).

Acknowledgement

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support from the AHRC which enabled me to carry out the research for this piece. It was written up while I was undertaking a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at Queen Mary, University of London.

I am grateful to Robert Saunders, Carmen Mangion, Sophie Wilson and the reviewers at *Cultural and Social History* for their careful and detailed readings of this article: their suggestions have been much appreciated.

Thank you also to Sophie Cooper, Elizabeth Crawford and Grace Heaton for assistance on specific points.
Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

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