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From Suffragette to Citizen: female experience of
parliamentary spaces in long-nineteenth century Britain

by

Amy Galvin

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines women's experiences of parliamentary spaces in long-nineteenth century Britain. It investigates how, throughout the century, women inhabited a variety of spaces with increasing confidence and ingenuity. It argues that, as a direct influence of women's interaction with these spaces, a distinct female political identity emerged within Parliament that shaped how some women interacted with the political sphere. Parliament was both a powerful political symbol and a significant political site; women's experiences, interventions, and resistance there form an essential part of the narrative of women and politics in Britain that has, until now, gone largely untold. There is a significant body of scholarship on the women's suffrage movement and female campaigning, but little has been done to explore women's interactions with the physical space of Parliament itself. Inherently patriarchal, it was not a building that was ready to countenance the idea of a politicised and enfranchised woman. Furthermore, beyond the building itself, its language, manners, and practices were also largely inaccessible to potential female inhabitants. This thesis provides an insight into how women were able to transition from female voters outside of Parliament to enfranchised citizens within it.

Examining the rich resources of the Parliamentary Archives and the Parliamentary Works of Art Collection uncovered a clear narrative of female political engagement and activity throughout the long-nineteenth century. This involvement developed and became more overtly politicised as the century progressed. In order to interpret the influence of parliamentary space in a new and more appropriate way, the thesis employs lenses from feminist geography in order to reveal female narratives of spaces that have traditionally been historicised as masculine. This approach posits a new understanding of women's relationship with Parliament and offers an insight into how it influenced their political position in long-nineteenth century Britain.

ABBREVIATIONS

HC Deb – House of Commons Parliamentary Debates

WSPU – Women’s Social and Political Union

NUWSS – National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies

WFL – Women’s Freedom League

From Suffragette to Citizen: female experience of parliamentary spaces in long-nineteenth century Britain.

Introduction

This thesis will map women's experience of parliamentary spaces from 1818-1918 to uncover how women went from being disenfranchised subjects excluded from Parliament to become enfranchised and elected citizens within it. The thesis will begin in 1818 although, as Chapter One will show, women had not always been formally excluded from Parliament before this point. However, this marked a new era in women's interaction with parliamentary space. Its four chapters will explore a range of spaces and the evolving ways in which women experienced these spaces in order to trace something of their journey within Parliament to Astor's election in 1919. To date, there has not been a comprehensive study of women and Parliament in this period. Mari Takayanagi's comprehensive study of women and Parliament in the first half of the twentieth-century offers an excellent model for this thesis but primarily covers women's experiences post-1918 and does not analyse spaces of Parliament.¹ Recent scholarship on women and politics has begun to uncover more of the story, challenging traditional narratives of Parliament as an exclusively male space.² However, this is often as context or tangential threads to wider political studies and thus the story of women and Parliament remains incomplete. *Suffragette to Citizen* will contribute to existing scholarship, working to tell a 'herstory' of women in Parliament that will reveal the numerous ways in which women were able to engage with the space throughout the long-nineteenth century. I have chosen to use the term 'herstory' as the specific aim of this thesis is to reinterpret patriarchal histories of parliamentary space and uncover women's experiences and contributions to Westminster at a time when broader historical narratives either

¹ Mari Takayanagi, *Women and Parliament, c.1900-1945*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, King's College London, 2012

https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/30807371/2012_Takayanagi_Mari_1069335_ethesis.pdf.

² Both this introduction and the remainder of the thesis will draw on this body of work throughout and in more detail. However, at this stage it is worth mentioning the two studies that have most significantly influenced this research and have contributed particularly on women and parliamentary space in the early-nineteenth century: Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013).

omit their presence or deny that they were there. Furthermore, the thesis will, as far as is possible, facilitate the telling of this female herstory through the language of the women who were there, allowing their words and their voices to articulate their own herstories of Parliament.

The wide-ranging and innovative forms of female political engagement that this thesis will illustrate offer a new reading of female political agency in the period 1818-1918, presenting women's interventions in parliamentary space and therefore the political sphere as increasingly, organised, strategic, and politically motivated. It will argue that, through women's developing engagement with Westminster, a distinctive female political identity emerged in Parliament that was directly influenced and shaped by women's interaction with parliamentary space. It will examine how parliamentary space was reconceptualised and reshaped by the women who inhabited it; there was a reciprocal influence between parliamentary space and the female political identity that emerged within it. The thesis will also contribute to a broader history of women and politics in this period. Consequently, it will function as a feminist history of women and Parliament but will also offer important context for the wider study of women and the political sphere.³

The thesis will explore four significant parliamentary spaces: the ventilator; the Ladies' Gallery; Select Committees; and locations across the wider parliamentary estate defined by women's use of them as sites of physical resistance in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It will do so in the context of a number of key themes and ideas. Firstly, the overarching aim of the thesis is to uncover a feminist narrative or herstory of women in Parliament that focuses on how women's relationship to parliamentary space changed over time. All of the women discussed in this thesis endured some form of hardship in order to claim their right to a space in Parliament and so the thesis intends to reclaim their place in the historical narrative of nineteenth-century politics and convey the female political activity that has so often been overlooked. Primarily exploring women's interactions with Parliament through their experience of parliamentary space, the thesis will borrow

³ For further details on the theoretical approach taken see pp.16-17.

from the discipline of feminist geography to elicit new readings of parliamentary space that shed light on female narratives in alternative spaces of political agency.⁴ As Rose has argued, employing spatial lenses that focus on how space can be reshaped or reconceptualised by actors within it has made it possible to perceive alternative readings of parliamentary spaces that illuminate women's experiences. The thesis will also consider how women challenged oppressive sexual politics in increasingly bold and diverse ways by using parliamentary space. These changing behaviours indicated the broader change over time in women's relationship with parliamentary space and illustrated their increasing assertion of female political agency and a right to engage with the space. This engagement evolved over the long-nineteenth century from unacknowledged and hidden observation to active participation in political systems and overt resistance of patriarchal control. Particularly significant amongst these behaviours and attitudes were how women used parliamentary spaces as sites of both female political education and female political networking.⁵ The thesis will illustrate how these behaviours and attitudes shaped women's experiences of parliamentary spaces and informed how both the women and the spaces changed over time. Finally, the thesis will show how the culmination of women's experiences of parliamentary spaces from 1818 to 1918 resulted in the emergence and development of a female political identity that arose specifically out of women's interactions with parliamentary space. This female political identity was located specifically within women's interactions with Parliament. As they observed, resisted, participated, and contested, women's understanding of their place within the political sphere evolved and they gradually asserted an increasing right to participation in parliamentary life. Consequently, particularly as women's rights campaigners united to fight for female suffrage from the mid-century, Parliament became both a symbolically and a physically significant space for women and politics. Alongside a wider increase in women's organised

⁴ Individual works shall be discussed at greater length and referred to throughout the thesis but the principal influence for this study was Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993).

⁵ Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013).

political activity from the mid-century there emerged, specifically within Parliament, a female political identity that was shaped by women's influences in that space.

In exploring the evolving relationship between women and parliamentary space in this way, the thesis proposes a model of social change comprised of small subversive acts building up to influence later more prominent acts of resistance. In the case of women and Parliament during this period, this meant moving from observing the Commons in a hidden attic space at the beginning of the nineteenth-century to orchestrating public and dangerous acts of physical resistance across the parliamentary estate by the beginning of the twentieth-century. As well as contributing to the evolving history of women and the political sphere in the long-nineteenth century, the thesis will also highlight the significance of seemingly small acts in the context of broader social change. At a moment when questions of gender, sexuality, equality, and civil rights are being brought to the fore of public consciousness through mass demonstrations and activism across the globe, this study hopes to illuminate the lives of women who have engaged in past episodes of political resistance so that we might both learn about and learn from their stories.

Women and the political sphere

The Great Reform Act of 1832 introduced an extended franchise but for the first time this was restricted specifically to men in the wording of the act. Women had not traditionally voted (in parliamentary elections) but neither had legislation explicitly discriminated on the basis of sex. Qualification for the franchise was based on property ownership, rather than sex. Although this inevitably excluded women from voting, the legislation itself did not. With the introduction of new reforms came the initiative to formalise women's exclusion from electoral politics. Undeniably, the political position of women in this period was characterised by oppression and gender prejudice. However, this is often misconstrued as justification for concluding that women lacked political agency. Even within a patriarchal context that considered the 'fairer' or 'weaker' sex incapable of contributing to political life, this thesis will suggest that some women were able to negotiate their political positions

and exert female influence. Furthermore, the number of these women and the diversity of their backgrounds increased over the course of the long-nineteenth century.

Eighteenth-century politics was governed by familial alliances and patronage and this system brought the politics of Westminster into elite homes in a manner that allowed rich, well-connected women to engage in political affairs.⁶ Elaine Chalus has termed this 'social politics'. Furthermore, within elite circles, there was an expectation that women would work to further the interests of their male relations and therefore their engagement in questions of the political and electoral process was often encouraged under these precepts. Alongside the official business of Westminster, a whole social calendar of balls, dinners, and parties occurred and they relied upon female hospitality and organisation. Women were expected to socialise and network with the female relatives of other political men, consolidating alliances or forming new connections. Additionally, there was an anticipation that women would contribute to electoral campaigns by canvassing and promoting candidates with whom they shared a familial link. Inevitably, the political roles that women played were defined by their positions as wives, mothers, and sisters and governed by their relation to influential men. They were also reserved exclusively for elite women. However, this was reflective of the broader political system that was reserved for the elite classes and these women enjoyed considerable influence in a context that was designed to preserve aristocratic control.⁷ As such, the legislation tying the right to vote to property ownership was both classed and gendered. Nevertheless, those lower down the social scale could influence elections by attending hustings and ballots; there was no secret ballot so voting was carried out in public.

Patronage afforded elite women considerable access to the political sphere in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. As an Age of Reform began to

⁶ Elaine Chalus, 'To Serve my Friends': Women and Political Patronage in Eighteenth-Century England' chapter one in *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present*, eds. Amanda Vickery (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp.57-88.

⁷ KD Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

characterise the political landscape of the nineteenth-century, women extended these networks of influence and their political role to engage in a broader range of activities. Nineteenth-century citizenship underwent significant shifts which helped to shape women's political engagement. Enlightenment ideology and the concurrent democratic revolutions of the eighteenth-century provoked shifts in attitudes to the relationship between the people and the state, facilitating more open and fluid interpretations of citizenship.⁸ The image of the citizen as an enlightened being able to contribute to the betterment of society placed relational bonds and civic responsibilities at the heart of new ideas of *active* citizenship. Innumerable women harnessed this idea to perform the role of citizen in public spaces. Hannah More's model of active benevolence became a distinct characteristic of female philanthropy but also spoke to emergent ideas around citizenship that opened a door for women into public life.

Struggles for the expansion of the franchise emerged from both the working and middle-classes and drove increasing unrest that led to a series of Reform Acts effecting legislative change.⁹ As Jane Rendall elucidates, this shifting political landscape offered a potential vocabulary, a language through which women could begin to understand and articulate their own struggle for political recognition.¹⁰ Alongside the emergence of a new and increasingly politicised language was an augmenting significance of the franchise. Consequently, the women using this new political language looked increasingly towards Parliament. Paradoxically, the nineteenth-century political terrain was both more oppressive and more malleable: its oppressive nature was extended through the continual reiteration and reinforcement of hegemonic gender codes; it was, however, more malleable due to the increasing influence of new ideas.¹¹ This presented a more complex and nuanced political sphere in which women had to negotiate both their political participation

⁸ Lauren Berlant, 'Citizenship' in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2007), pp.37-42 (p.37).

⁹ Bryan S Turner, 'Outline of the Theory of Citizenship' in *Sociology*, May 1990, 24:2, pp.189-217 (p.191).

¹⁰ Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain France, and the United States, 1780-1860* (UK: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985), pp.231-232.

¹¹ Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.1.

and how they conceived of themselves as citizens. Although legislatively they remained, as Gleadle has noted, 'borderline citizens', women developed new strategies to negotiate the political sphere and built on the work of their eighteenth-century predecessors to take ownership of certain political issues through their public works such as philanthropy, campaigning, and the development of women's organisations.¹²

Public works became one channel through which women extended their influence beyond the domestic sphere. Philanthropic endeavours often connected with political aims and women employed petitioning and campaigning as methods to intervene in the moral plight of the country, encompassing a variety of issues. One such issue prominent among female campaigners was the effort to abolish *sati*. British women petitioned Parliament and mobilised groups of women to engage with the political sphere on behalf of their philanthropic concerns. As Midgely has uncovered, petitions were sent to Parliament from fourteen different groups of women from across England between 13th February 1829 and 29th March 1830.¹³ Their very act of petitioning Parliament challenged the idea that the political arena was an exclusively male space. Indeed, Huzzey and Miller's recent article explores how petitioning recast the political culture of Britain, uncovering a wider shift in political practices that contextualises women's increasing engagement with petitioning.¹⁴ Furthermore, located within British women's campaigning on issues concerning colonised women was a logic that they later adopted to campaign for the rights of British women to have a greater say in the political sphere.¹⁵

¹² Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women*.

¹³ Claire Midgely, 'From Supporting Missions to Petitioning Parliament British Women and the Evangelical Campaign against *Sati* in India, 1813-30' chapter four in *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860 – The Power of the Petticoat*, eds. Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (UK: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), pp.74-92 (p.74).

¹⁴ Richard Huzzey and Henry Miller, 'Petitions, Parliament and Political Culture: Petitioning the House of Commons, 1780–1918', *Past and Present*, April 2020
<https://academic.oup.com/past/advance-article/doi/10.1093/pastj/gtz061/5819582>.

¹⁵ Furthermore, located within British women's campaigning on behalf of colonised women was a logic that continued to lead them assert their own right to political agency. Antoinette Burton has explored how depictions of 'Oriental' women as prisoners of harems and victims of cruel husbands within oppressive religious cultures were harnessed as 'proof' of the consequences for women in contexts where the question of female emancipation was ignored. Burton illustrates how Victorian feminism had an inextricable link to the Othering of colonial women. Nineteenth-century women's

Philanthropic interventions in the lives of British women were no less complex and often reinforced class privilege as women required social influence to access opportunities. Working-class women engaged in philanthropy at a local level, supporting neighbours and visiting the sick. However, the organised philanthropy that was the result of an engagement with active citizenship was largely reserved for middle and upper-class women who had both the time and the resources to establish and run such groups. However, despite the limitations on which women could participate, political reform introduced new legislation that created scope for women to exert political agency. The New Poor Law in 1834 and 1844 meant that women could develop their philanthropic works and, by the end of the century, they could both vote for and stand as Poor Law Guardians and play a role in shaping policy.¹⁶ In 1869 MP Jacob Bright introduced an amendment to the Municipal Corporations Parliamentary Bill that made women in England and Wales able to vote in municipal elections. The 1870 Education Act permitted women to vote for and stand for election to Education Boards. Their role in influencing and shaping policy in these acceptably 'feminine' areas created links between the female political sphere and the space of Parliament. Their participation revolved around traditionally nurturing and 'feminine' issues such as education and philanthropy, legitimising their interventions at a national and political level. Local government served as preparatory training for Parliament and women's influence on legislative reform at a local level helped to pave the way.¹⁷ Patricia Hollis has argued that women's interventions in local office were a means through which they could help other women and children, garnering them a stronger presence in political life in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century than in the late-twentieth century.¹⁸ These

interventions in other colonial issues such as anti-slavery campaigning were characterised by the same tensions; nineteenth-century women were re-enacting and reinforcing colonising behaviours, even as they sought their own emancipation. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (USA: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p.63.

¹⁶ Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women* and Krista Cowman, 'Women, Locality and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain' in *Gender in Urban Europe: Sites of Political Activity and Citizenship 1750-1900*, eds. Krista Cowman, Nina Javette Koefoed, and Asa Karlsson Sjorgen (Oxford, Routledge, 2014), pp.210-226.

¹⁷ Cowman, 'Women, Locality and Politics', pp.210-226.

¹⁸ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

legislative changes opened up new avenues for some women in local government and played an essential role in their political education. However, women found themselves negotiating inherently opposing roles, that of formally excluded woman and emerging political participant. Women continually had to negotiate the line between the two, meaning that their political participation remained contingent as sexual politics inhibited female political agency.

Women and Parliament

Women's roles in the political sphere were numerous and shifting. Although they did not perform as 'legitimate' political players in the sense that they had no legal right to political influence, they were evidently able to carve out their own political roles. This complex and changing relationship between women and political life was similarly reflected in Parliament. The Great Reform Act of 1832 was coincidentally closely followed by the Great Fire of 1834 that destroyed much of the old Houses of Parliament. The destruction of such a symbolic building was interpreted by many as a defining moment in both the history of Parliament and the history of Britain. The old building was 'a glorious mess: a ramshackle, higgledy-piggledy, degraded but monumental collection of individual buildings and artworks which over the centuries had formed a conglomeration of spaces' that had become synonymous with ideas of British power as they had witnessed iconic moments in British history and had housed the monarchy, the government, and the lawcourts.¹⁹ In contrast, the new Parliament building was defined by order and logic, reflecting the reshaping and regulation of political control that occurred through the Great Reform Act two years prior to the fire. In June 1835 a Select Committee issued specifications for the design of the new building, stipulating numbers of rooms, size, and allocation of spaces and the Lords shortly followed suit, issuing their own set of requirements.²⁰ The debating chamber of the Commons was to be modelled on the

¹⁹ Caroline Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.3-4.

²⁰ Caroline Shenton, *Mr Barry's War: Rebuilding the Houses of Parliament after the Great Fire of 1834* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.32.

previous chamber and emulate the structure of St Stephen's Chapel upon whose foundations it was built; it would retain two opposing sets of benches for MPs. This design note also served to preserve the traditional seat of patriarchal power. It invoked traditions of the legal system where defence and prosecution counsels stood before a judge and jury and echoed Parliament's origins as the highest court under the King. However, the remainder of the design specification indicated the need for a space that was fit for purpose and capable of representing the ideal of parliamentary control and order.

Historically, women were permitted to sit in the public galleries of the old Commons Chamber and watch debates. The public galleries were located above the main floor of the House and were open, offering a clear view of MPs below. The public galleries were known as the 'Strangers' Galleries' and all visitors, male or female, required permission to attend debates. This was obtained in the form of a grant from the Speaker that was issued through an MP. Consequently, visiting the Commons required a considerable connection to a parliamentarian. Attitudes to women in the Commons changed in 1778 after a particular incident where the Speaker had called for the public galleries to be cleared but female occupants had refused to be moved. This incident shall be considered in more detail in Chapter One. However, it is worth noting that, prior to this point, both men and women had to meet the same requirements to sit in the public galleries. The political sphere was heavily guarded and not exclusively along gendered lines. Maintaining control was reflected in both the processes of Parliament and the design of the new building in 1834. After 1778, men were permitted to return to observe the Commons but women were not; female spectators were explicitly banned from attending Commons debates. However, as this thesis shall show, paralleling the contrast between their formal exclusion from politics by the Great Reform Act and the reality of their claiming new and expanding political roles, women inhabited new and increasingly varied spaces across Parliament throughout the nineteenth-century. Furthermore, when the new Commons was built, provision was made for female spectators in the form of a Ladies' Gallery, indicating changing attitudes to women in Westminster.

‘Parliamentary spaces’ will be used in this thesis to encompass both Parliament the buildings and Parliament the institution, as both were experienced, explored, and contested by women both physically and metaphorically. Indeed, both the buildings and the institution of Parliament are inherently linked in such a way that it makes it difficult to explore one without the other. Furthermore, Parliament’s functions, such as passing legislation, scrutinising government (including through select committees), and debating issues were additional means through which women learnt to shape and influence the parliamentary process over the course of the long-nineteenth century. Although this thesis will focus primarily on the Commons and the role of the monarch is beyond its scope, it is worth noting some of the experiences of women in the third component that makes up the institution of Parliament. By comparison, the House of Lords was relatively accepting of the presence of women. The space functioned in a similar way, requiring visitors to obtain tickets at the discretion of the Lord Chancellor. However, accounts of women in the House of Lords suggest the sense of a mixed-sex space in which women were able to get much closer to the action. The *Saturday Review* described it as follows:

‘The fair sex do not enjoy at the hands of the rude and tumultuous Commons the ample homage they receive from the polished Peers. A field-day in the Lords would more be more aptly termed a field-day with the Ladies. When Lord Derby, to use his own irreverent expression, ‘gives the Lords a gallop,’ the appearance of the House is very much what used to be the appearance of a London ball in the days when the Guards were away in Crimea – a few old men rising out of the midst of a sea of petticoats. Ladies line the walls, ladies throng the bar, ladies have even been known to peer over the shoulders of bishops.’²¹

In the Lords, ladies were paid ‘homage’. They were welcomed into the space and made up a significant proportion of spectators. Sat alongside male spectators, often of considerable rank, they shared the same access to the proceedings in the Lords as their male counterparts. Undoubtedly, women had much freer access to the Lords

²¹ *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, Vol 7 (London: The Office, 1859), p.366. <https://books.google.co.uk/books> [accessed 31st October, 2019].

than they did to the Commons. However, the elite nature of the Lords was carefully protected and only the most well-connected women would have been able to go there. Furthermore, although the *Saturday Review* highlighted the ease of access and number of women who attended the Lords, it also reinforced their female function of decoration and adornment. Ladies were presented to have visited the Lords for amusement rather than political motivations. In the description they are 'thronging' and 'peering' and appear almost like a group of children rather than women engaging in political discussion. Although women could much more easily access the Lords, their position was that of silent observer rather than active participant.

Whilst some women did enjoy comparative freedom in the Lords, their presence there did not always go uncontested. Prior to the expulsion of the ladies from the Commons in 1778, there was a similar incident in the House of Lords. In her letter to her sister Mrs Ann Granville in March 1739, Mrs Mary Pendarves (later Mrs Mary Delany) recounted how a group of women were refused admittance to the House of Lords when they wanted to hear a debate on the conduct of the Spanish government. Both sisters were raised in Wiltshire and Mary in particular was intended for a position at court. Later in her life she became a bluestocking and was known for her lively correspondence and botanical interest. She wrote:

'Again she [Lady Westmoreland] and the Duchess of Queensberry, Mrs Fortescue and myself, set forward for Westminster, and got up to the gallery door without any difficulty. There were thirteen ladies more that came with the same intention. To tell you all the particulars of our provocations, the insults of the doorkeepers and our unshaken intrepidity, would flourish out more paper than a single frank would contain; but we bore the buffets of a stinking crowd from half an hour after ten till five in the afternoon without moving an inch from our places, only see-sawing about as the motion of the multitude forced us. At last, our committee resolved to adjourn to the coffee-

house of the Court of Request, where debates began how we were to proceed?’²²

Beginning her account with ‘again’ conveys that Mrs Pendarves and her female companions were in the habit of visiting Parliament. Furthermore, their willingness to endure ‘provocations [and]....the buffets if a stinking crowd’ for most of the day implies that it was not mere amusement or fancy that brought them to Westminster but a determination to engage with political business. Mrs Pendarves employed official and politicised lexis such as ‘committee’ and ‘adjourn’ to describe herself and the group of women who accompanied her, positing them as politicised subjects. The resulting decision of their discussion was to ‘rush’ the House, displaying distinctly unfeminine behaviour and challenging the suggestion that they were silent and passive observers. Once she had gained entry to the House of Lords, Mrs Pendarves further demonstrated her political acumen through her analysis of the debating skills of the Lords and the merits of their arguments:

‘My Lord Chesterfield spoke most exquisitely well, - with good sense, wit and infinite spirit....everything after him was dull and heavy; much circumfloribus stuff was talked of on the Court side. The might have saved their breath; their convincing argument was in their pockets, not on their tongue: they had a majority of twenty-one, and though they seemingly conquered, they made a poor figure! Am I not a furious politician?’²³

Mrs Pendarves’ narrative conveyed an understanding of the proceedings of the House of Lords, the details of the debate, and, furthermore, the importance of financial power in political happenings there. Moreover, she firmly placed herself in the role of ‘politician’ on account of these skills, framing her position within the Lords as one of active participant rather than passive observer. Although this study will focus on the relationship between women and space in the House of Commons, the House of Lords makes a useful point of comparison. It is interesting that the two

²² Mrs Pendarves to Mrs Ann Granville, Thursday 1st March 1739 in Lady Llanover (ed.) *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1861), ii, p.44-45.

²³ Ibid.

houses should have such different attitudes to admitting women and yet their practices in terms of obtaining tickets was similar. Class dynamics were at play as the aristocracy strove to maintain the status quo and the role that elite women played in preserving the system meant that their presence in the Lords continued. However, in the Commons, the Age of Reform saw the House redefined more distinctly according to gender codes. As a result, women's experience of spaces within the Commons was very different to that of the Lords.

The 'herstoriography' of women and politics

Recent years have seen much important scholarship address the absence of women from the historiography of British politics. This body of work has countered the historical focus on high politics and diplomacy from the early-nineteenth century. First wave feminism in the early-twentieth century went some way to reintroducing the idea of a 'women's history' but it was the emergence of second wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by social histories of the 1960s, that began to produce a more consciously feminist approach to history.²⁴ The legacy of this movement includes the body of 'herstoriography' that this thesis engages with. Numerous studies have worked to uncover histories of women in the political sphere during the nineteenth-century. All of these studies have revealed how some women found ways of engaging in political life. Among the aristocratic classes, familial connections to electoral candidates and MPs saw women responsible for campaigning, hosting political parties, and nurturing political networks. With the advent of reform politics in the nineteenth-century, socialism and liberalism influenced emergent groups such as the Chartists, Owenites, and Unitarians which provided new political spaces which fostered female contributions.²⁵ However, the

²⁴ Second wave feminism saw feminist historians produce a plethora of works that energised the fields of women's and feminist history. The principal texts to influence this thesis were: Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Suppression and the Fight Against It* (London: Pluto Press, 1973); Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (USA: Columbia University Press, 1988); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2010).

²⁵ Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995); Helen Rogers, *Women and the People: Authority, Authorship and the Radical Tradition in Nineteenth Century England* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000); Julia Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*

question of the extent to which women were able to exert political agency in this period is one that continues to cause some debate. This 'herstorygraphy' reveals an alternative narrative that challenges traditional histories and conveys that women were active in political life. However, historians disagree about the extent to which their political activities were able to influence their political position.

The question of political agency was inherently tied to class privilege. Amanda Vickery illustrates how aristocratic women benefited from a hierarchical system in which they could perform as surrogates for male political power when canvassing, managing elections, or hosting political events.²⁶ Viewing elite women as conduits of male political power in this manner suggests that, although acting as proxies, they were able to influence the political sphere as clear actors. However, others have found that, in spite of women finding opportunities for political engagement, the obstacles to their participation in political life were more prominent than the relative agency they achieved. Kathryn Gleadle's research into women and early-nineteenth century political culture explores the impact of women's political activities including petitioning, publication, pressure groups, and patronage.²⁷ Anne Summers has uncovered how women could engage in auxiliary roles that challenged ideas of domestic femininity and afforded them a role in political life.²⁸ In spite of the breadth and quantity of female political activity, both conclude that hegemonic gender codes were repeated and reaffirmed as a result of women's ultimate political subjugation. The agency they were able to assert was always limited by patriarchal codes that confined women to peripheral or auxiliary roles.

This thesis will suggest a less polarised approach to the question of female political agency in this period. The political landscape of the nineteenth-century was a hostile environment for women but by examining how they navigated it, the thesis will illuminate new understandings of women's political roles. The space of Parliament makes for an interesting case study. As the centre of political power, it

(Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: 1991); Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983).

²⁶ Amanda Vickery (eds.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present*, eds. Amanda Vickery (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp.1-55.

²⁷ Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*.

²⁸ Anne Summers, *Female Lives, Moral States* (Berkshire: Threshold Press Ltd, 2000).

was the cornerstone of nineteenth-century political culture. Furthermore, as women explicitly navigated the physical spaces of the palace they were simultaneously navigating the metaphorical landscape of nineteenth-century political ideology. Sarah Richardson offers a more nuanced approach. She conveys the political potential of the domestic sphere, highlighting the interconnectedness of social and political relations and the ways in which women used these to forge their own networks and influence.²⁹ Shifting the focus to examine how women harnessed political power in spheres of their own design offers a new perspective that is essential in moving away from the traditional histories of patriarchal politics.

Space and methodology

Parliament, even in its rebuilt form, was designed to reinforce patriarchal supremacy in the political sphere. Consequently, there was little scope for women to seek out entirely new spaces for their own political activities. However, this thesis will illustrate how women were able to reconceptualise, reshape, and repurpose existing parliamentary spaces and harness them for their female political needs. To uncover the way in which women reinterpreted these spaces, a new methodology for reading and interpreting them is required. Examining feminist historical geographies, Briony McDonagh has recently highlighted that shifting research to perceive both public and institutionalised spaces alongside domestic spaces and the experience of individuals generates new understandings of history that can 'counter hierarchical readings of space.'³⁰ This thesis will engage with ideas from the discipline of feminist geography and the spatial theory it employs to re-examine parliamentary spaces with a feminist focus. Several works have influenced this methodological choice. Gillian Rose's work on visual methodologies posits that 'visual objects mobilise certain ways of seeing.'³¹ The visual design of Parliament reinforced the

²⁹ Sarah Richardson, 'Well-neighboured Houses': the Political Networks of Elite Women, 1780-1860' chapter three in *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), pp.56-73.

³⁰ Briony McDonagh, 'Feminist Historical Geographies: being and doing' in *Gender, Place & Culture*, May 2019, 25:11, pp.1563-1578 (p.1564).

³¹ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials, Fourth Edition* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2016), p.14.

hegemonic gender codes that formed an intrinsic part of the patriarchal political system it housed. However, Rose suggests that viewing from new perspectives opens up new readings of visual objects. In this thesis, introducing how the architecture and physical space of Parliament were seen by women, and how this changed over time, offers a new interpretation of women's relationship to parliamentary space that challenges the gendered political roles its design projected.

Moving beyond simply viewing space, Setha Low has devised a useful theory of socially produced and socially constructed spaces to examine how the behaviours, interactions, and attitudes of people within a particular space can reshape how it is understood.³² The social production of a space involves the process of its design and building, revealing the political, economic, and historical purpose of a space. On the other hand, the social construction of a space is reliant upon the behaviours and shared understandings of those inhabiting and acting within a space. Therefore, the male-produced space of Parliament can be re-read as a female-constructed space through the study of how women interacted with it. Christina Parolin posits 'the notion of *architecture parlante*, that architecture speaks, that it is expressive....[and this] enabled architecture to be 'read' as one might read a painting or other form of art.'³³ Reading the architecture of Parliament through a feminist lens, alongside the personal experiences of women preserved in diaries and letters, reveals a female political narrative that inhabits a new space in the political historiography of the nineteenth-century.

Sources

Despite their exclusion from formal proceedings of Parliament, women feature consistently at the peripheries of the archives. However, their marginalised position has resulted in an incomplete narrative of women in Parliament. Consequently, this study will draw on a variety of sources from different archives as it works to build a more complete impression of women's experiences of

³² Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place* (Oxford: Routledge, 2017).

³³ Christina Parolin, *Radical Spaces: Venues of Popular Politics in London* (ANU E-Press, 2010), p.6.

parliamentary spaces in the long-nineteenth century. The range of sources used by scholars working on nineteenth-century political culture, women and politics, and gender in the nineteenth-century includes legislation, political tracts, petitions, election records, newspapers and the wider press, as well as personal diaries and letters. This is the first comprehensive study of women and Parliament in this period. It will employ a similar source base to existing studies of women and politics more broadly, including records from the National Archives and the British Library. However, in order to explore a more focused history of Parliament, it will also draw on sources from the Parliamentary Archives and the Parliamentary Works of Art Collection, as well as using Hansard. Furthermore, as its aim is to convey a herstory of women in Parliament, this study will examine institutional records alongside sources from the Women's Library, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the Bristol Archives, and the Westminster City Archives that offer an insight into Parliament from women's perspectives. Finally, in order to develop an understanding of public attitudes and responses towards women in Parliament, the thesis will also examine press records, journals, and published writing, largely located in the British Library.

The institutional focus of this thesis has meant that the Parliamentary Archives and the Parliamentary Works of Art Collection were central to its study. These two collections document an institutional history of Parliament, as well as containing more subjective perspectives through sources such as the personal papers of parliamentarians and the artworks of people who lived and worked in the palace. Primarily, sources such as building plans, maps, Select Committee minutes, petitions records, and police reports have all contributed to the following chapters to help build an impression of what Parliament was like and how it changed over the course of the nineteenth-century. In addition, the Parliamentary Works of Art Collection, along with several postcards, prints, and photographs in the Parliamentary Archives, have added a visual appreciation for some of the spaces that will be explored, in addition to revealing something of how the artist or photographer viewed the space. However, there were several challenges to consider when working with this source base. As an institutional archive, the Parliamentary Archives only contain documents pertaining to the history of the institution and buildings of Parliament. Therefore,

although women are often mentioned in the records held there, it is difficult to get an impression of the women's own thoughts and feelings about being in the space. Where women are mentioned they are overwhelmingly framed by a male voice. An additional challenge was the variety of source material available. Whilst this offered a rich source base, it also required a range of approaches when reading and interpreting sources. Furthermore, when analysing the sources alongside one another, building plans would often differ in detail from Select Committee reports or paintings of a space and so it was sometimes difficult to perceive a definitive impression of parliamentary spaces. In some places, records from the National Archives were able to offer clarification or supporting evidence to corroborate parliamentary records. This was particularly useful in chapter four when metropolitan police records held at the National Archives contained similar details to those within the parliamentary police reports at the Parliamentary Archives.

Women's voices should be at the centre of a herstory of women in Parliament but these voices are largely absent from institutional sources. Therefore, this study will examine the personal writings, diaries, letters, and artworks of women alongside institutional sources to interpret a parallel narrative of parliamentary spaces. In some cases, it has also been possible to consider published writings, such as journal articles, political tracts, and treatises penned by female authors. The British Library contains many nineteenth-century journals and periodicals that feature female writers referencing experiences of Parliament. *La Belle Assemblée* and *The English Woman's Journal* are two such publications that have informed this study. It also holds the diaries of Elizabeth Fry that were particularly important for Chapters One and Three. The personal letters of Hannah More at the Bristol Archives were also a useful resource. The Women's Library at the London School of Economics houses a wealth of women's personal correspondence from this period which informed the whole thesis. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the Westminster City Archives, alongside the Parliamentary Works of Art Collection, all contain artworks by women depicting their impressions of parliamentary spaces. Again, the diversity of records has presented similar challenges of how to approach and interpret sources alongside one another. Furthermore, the personal and yet quasi-public nature of

correspondence created a further challenge. Although personal documents offered an insight into how women experienced parliamentary space, the impression of writers offered through letters and diaries is carefully crafted for public consumption. Letters were often shared and read aloud for entertainment and diaries and journals were often written with the intention of wider circulation or even publication. In this way, the female authors of these sources were navigating the public judgement of sexual politics as they recorded their personal experiences and this needed to be considered when handling such sources.

In addition to reclaiming women's experiences of parliamentary spaces, this thesis will consider how those experiences corresponded to broader public perceptions of women and Parliament. The nineteenth-century saw a huge increase in the production and circulation of newspapers and periodicals; these publications provide a detailed picture of public attitudes towards women and politics. Furthermore, as newspapers and periodicals were produced across the country, the press provides a rich source base from both national and regional perspectives. Regional sources from the British Newspaper Archive were instrumental in reclaiming the narratives of lesser-known women in Chapter Four. The Times Digital Archive helped to reveal a national reaction to women's changing relationship with parliamentary spaces. Additionally, the British Library houses a rich collection of newspapers, journals, and periodicals that have formed part of the source base across all chapters of this thesis. Inevitably, national agendas and institutional politics colour the tone of many of the articles that have been used to inform this study. However, considering them alongside institutional sources from the Parliamentary Archives and sources which offer women's perspectives of Parliament have allowed the thesis to triangulate its reading of the source base to develop a more complete picture of women's experiences of Parliament in this period.

Thesis Structure

Women's experiences of parliamentary spaces are reclaimed in this thesis to offer a feminist herstory of Parliament that positions women at the centre of its

narrative. The thesis will suggest that throughout the long-nineteenth century women were inhabiting, repurposing, and reshaping spaces in Parliament in increasingly politicised ways. Their relationship with and experience of parliamentary space changed over time and contributed to an emergent female political identity at the centre of political power in Britain. This is particularly significant as it occurred at a time when ideals of femininity confined women to the domestic sphere. In order to perceive this change and think about its implications on a resulting female political identity within Parliament, this study will take a chronological approach to women and Parliament from 1818-1918. This thesis takes the reader on a journey through four chapters from women's formal exclusion from the Commons in the early-nineteenth century to their adoption of Parliament as a site of physical resistance at the beginning of the twentieth-century.

The first chapter explores women's reactions to their formal expulsion from the Commons at the end of the eighteenth-century. Far from accepting their fate, women sought out an alternative space from which they could observe the proceedings of Parliament. Chapter One will introduce the ventilator, a ventilation shaft above a chandelier that rose from the Commons Chamber into an attic space above and featured small peep-holes that female spectators could peer down through. It will argue that the ventilator was a space of paradox; although it forced women to perform their formal exclusion from the Commons, it was a space on the periphery that offered them a unique vantage of the proceedings of the House and some relative privileges. The ventilator was a fluid space that both men and women occupied and so the chapter will consider the overlapping agendas at play there. It will argue that women appropriated and reconstructed the ventilator as a site of female education and political networking even as it reinforced their marginalisation from political life. It will examine the dissonance that occurred as a result of the exclusionary intentions of the space and women's paradoxical repurposing of it, uncovering a female narrative of women in Parliament at a time when they were formally prohibited from entering the Commons. In this way, the ventilator will be posited as a space with subversive potential and the site of an emergent female political identity in Westminster that grew out of women's interactions with both

one another and with the space itself. The chapter will frame the ventilator as an early example of a small number of women challenging oppressive sexual politics and endeavouring to engage in political life. It is important to note that this was not organised resistance and, often, it was unconsciously performed. However, the ventilator marks an important starting point for a herstory of women inhabiting and reshaping parliamentary space for their own political needs.

Chapter Two examines the new Ladies' Gallery that was provided for the accommodation of female spectators when the new Houses of Parliament were built following the Great Fire of 1834. The ventilator was destroyed in the fire and women's increasing presence in Parliament resulted in a call for a designated gallery for women in the rebuild. The chapter will argue that, like the ventilator, the Ladies' Gallery was a paradoxical space that both granted women approved access to the Commons as its design sought to define and control who had access and how they were able to observe. The metal grille that was installed in front of the gallery to hide female spectators from view was much contested until its eventual removal in 1917. However, as it caged and concealed the women behind it, it also afforded them privacy to engage with political debates on their own terms, to talk, to network, and as some women noted, even to sleep. Female behaviours and attitudes in the Ladies' Gallery reconceptualised the space such that it became a further site of female political education and networking. Furthermore, as women became increasingly confident in their residency there, it became a space from which female voices could extend onto the floor of the Chamber. Eventually, it would become a site of female physical resistance and protest. The chapter will suggest that this space was crucial to the development of a female political identity in Westminster. It will show how, by interacting with and reshaping the space of the Ladies' Gallery, women were able to develop the confidence and political knowledge to escalate their resistance of the status quo that kept them caged-off from the political stage.

Chapter Three will move from the nucleus of the Commons Chamber to consider peripheral spaces to the centre of power. Select Committees were, and still are, responsible for conducting enquiries into topics delegated to them by the House. The chapter will illustrate how some women were able to harness the space of the

Select Committee to influence policymaking. Prominent among these women were Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler. The chapter will consider these two women as case studies as their use of the Select Committees involved the invitation of women from prison or sex work backgrounds to give evidence in Parliament. It will examine how middle-class women's philanthropic works served as a legitimising cloak for their intervention in the space, highlighting the paradox between their respectable philanthropy and the radical act of bringing women's voices, particularly working-class women's voices, into Parliament. Furthermore, middle-class women used the Select Committees as a space in which they could further their own political agendas. The chapter will explore their radical use of the space whilst also considering the problematic manner in which they represented 'women's politics' and the tensions around middle-class women speaking for and about working-class women. In addition to the politics of their presence there, the chapter will convey how women experienced the space of the Select Committee, how they accessed it, and their feelings about being there. Finally, it will frame women's experiences of the Select Committee as an essential component of their political education and as precursor to suffrage deputations where women employed the skills they had developed in the Select Committees to control the political agenda.

Chapter Four examines women's experience of parliamentary spaces at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth-centuries. Frustrated by the slow movement of legislative progress and surrounded by a climate of social and political reform that was benefitting their male counterparts far more than them, women began to look to alternative means of expressing their political discontent. Militant forms of protest were adopted by various political groups in this period. Within the women's movement, the suffragette mantra of 'deeds not words' made them the most prolific militants. However, this final chapter will uncover a spectrum of physical resistance in Parliament that saw women from a range of different groups and from diverse backgrounds engage in challenging the status quo. Constitutional protests such as petitioning, direct protests in the form of damaging buildings, and physical confrontations with figures of authority were all distinct actions that formed part of the spectrum of resistance that the chapter presents. The chapter considers

the symbolic value of Parliament as a site of protest and how women used this to stage their acts of physical resistance in a way that captured both a public and a parliamentary audience. It will show how women used their bodies to physically challenge the 'male' space of Parliament and assert their viability as politicised subjects. The chapter will argue that this shift was indicative of a change in women's attitudes towards the space of Parliament as it became a site of challenge and protest rather than a space of male power. Their behaviours in the space of Parliament changed to reflect their developing female political agency. Militant protests were suspended in 1918 in support of the war effort and so the journey of this thesis will end there. However, it will have traced women's progress from the marginalised space of the ventilator to the prominent and public position of protesting across the parliamentary estate. The connections and networks women built within Parliament as well as their education in political process and practices all combined to form a distinct female political identity located specifically within the spaces in which it formed.

Chapter One: 'The Petticoat Parliament House' – the ladies of the ventilator, 1818-1834.

*'I mark this day as one of the most interesting days of my life. Mr Brougham had promised to try to get from Colonel Seymour admission to the ventilator of the House of Commons.'*¹

In her diary entry of 19th April 1818, Frances Lady Shelley narrated her experience of watching the proceedings of the House of Commons from the ventilator. Her diary entry offered a detailed depiction of how women were able to engage with Parliament in the early-nineteenth century. Her opening indicated that her female presence was contingent upon male admittance. Mr Brougham had to ask for permission and Colonel Seymour had to grant it. However, restrictive practices did not stop this from being 'one of the most interesting days of [her] life'; Lady Shelley was evidently interested in visiting Parliament. Her account continued to outline the details and conditions of her visit.

*'I was told that I should suffer dreadfully in going there. Brougham assured me that that place was so small that I should be forced to lie down, and the smell so dreadful that I should probably faint. All this, and more, I was determined to brave.'*²

The ventilator that she was warned of was an attic space above the old House of Commons, a storage space with a large ventilation shaft at its centre. It was through the gaps in this ventilation shaft that Lady Shelley, and numerous other women, watched debates in the House of Commons. It was not intended as a place from which to observe the Commons but in the early-nineteenth century, female spectators utilised it as a space of political engagement. As Lady Shelley herself recounted, women were prepared to endure physical discomfort in order to visit Parliament. Women accessed the ventilator by following a series of back passages. Lady Shelley described them as follows:

¹ *Diary of Frances Lady Shelley 1817-1875* ed. Richard Edgcumbe, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1913), ii, pp.7-8.

² *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

*'On my arrival I was conducted by Mr Bellamy through a number of winding passages, up and down stairs, and over the roof of St Stephen's Chapel. On reaching a dark niche in the wall Mr Bellamy warned me to preserve absolute silence, and opened a small door.'*³

Her narrative was characterised by a sense of darkness and restriction, indicating the marginalised position she was obliged to inhabit in order to visit Parliament. The instruction to remain silent oppressed her female voice and controlled her conduct in the space. The ventilator itself was similarly oppressive.

*'I found myself in a room about eight feet square, resembling the cabin of a ship. There was a window to admit air, two chairs, a table, and a thing like a chimney in the centre. This was the ventilator, which opens into the body of the House of Commons.'*⁴

Dark, cramped, and unpleasant, the ventilator presented a stark contrast to the wooden-panelled, leather-upholstered, and heavily decorated Chamber beneath it. Its unwelcoming nature and liminal position appeared to parallel the formal exclusion of women from electoral politics in the nineteenth-century. Even though it illustrated the oppressive marginalisation of the ventilator, Lady Shelley's account also implied some of its apparent advantages. For example, she noted that 'through it the sound ascends so perfectly that, with attention, not a word is lost.'⁵ Within the Chamber of the Commons, competing speakers, background noise, and acoustics meant that details of speeches were difficult to hear, both for MPs and for those men and members of the press admitted to the public galleries. However, Lady Shelley remarked upon how the ventilator's position afforded perfect sound.

Furthermore, she referred to it as her '*secret* expedition – for it is not an acknowledged thing to go to the House.'⁶ The intrigue with which Lady Shelley presented her '*secret* expedition' suggests that this dark, uncomfortable, space of marginalisation also presented opportunity for an alternative experience. An

³ Ibid., pp.7-8.

⁴ Ibid., pp.7-8.

⁵ Ibid., pp.7-8.

⁶ Ibid., p.11.

alternative female narrative of the ventilator existed that reimagined it as a space of subversive potential and political engagement. Mr Brougham, who framed the space for Lady Shelley, emphasised its constricting size and lack of light and air and Mr Bellamy emphasised the need for 'absolute silence'. Their depictions of the ventilator focused on the exclusion of female observers and the silencing of female voices in the House of Commons. Arguably, male observers permitted to the Strangers' Galleries were also excluded as silence was enforced upon them and debates were often difficult to access. However, the very fact of a designated space for their accommodation indicated an official acknowledgement of their right to occupy space in the Commons, whereas women were officially banned. Nevertheless, Lady Shelley's own experience of the space was different. Whilst she noted its limitations and the requirement of male permission to be there, she also remarked upon the excellent quality of the sound enhancing her ability to listen to the debate below. She described the ventilator as a space of political observation rather than one of marginalisation.

The ventilator is a space that thus far has received little attention from scholarship on women and politics in the early nineteenth-century. Sarah Richardson has done important work in bringing it to the attention of scholars and posits the subversive potential of the ventilator as a space of political engagement for women.⁷ Kathryn Gleadle has considered the ventilator, acknowledging the subversive potential that Richardson highlights, but also noting its limitations in that it forced women to physically enact their exclusion in order to access Commons debates.⁸ Whilst it acknowledges these limitations, this chapter will offer a more optimistic view of the ventilator as a space that women were able to reconceptualise for their own political needs. It will expand existing scholarship, using accounts from women such as Lady Shelley, as well as recently discovered artworks depicting the ventilator, to present a more in-depth reading of the complexities of this space. Firstly, it will trace the history of the ventilator, considering the rules and practices of the space and women's experiences of being there. This history reveals it as a fluid space

⁷ Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women*.

⁸ Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*.

occupied by both men and women and therefore the chapter will consider the overlapping agendas of men visiting and regulating the ventilator and women inhabiting and appropriating it. Secondly, it will argue for the ventilator as a site of paradoxes. This is a new reading of a political space that has received little attention from current scholarship and provides a crucial perspective on women's political position in this period.

Borrowing from the discipline of spatial theory, this chapter will consider the dissonance between the social production of the space by patriarchal powers and its contrasting social construction by the women within it. This will reveal concurrent narratives of the ventilator that reveal the manner in which it was possible to reinterpret or reconceptualise both its meaning and its use. As a result of women's political oppression, their experiences of parliamentary spaces have hitherto been largely unexplored. However, this chapter will uncover how women sought alternative ways of participating in parliamentary politics, despite their formal exclusion from the space. Finally, by elucidating the complexities of the ventilator, this chapter will uncover its subversive potential, positing it as a space of both female political education and female political networking at a time when women were formally excluded from the political sphere. What Lady Shelley terms 'eaves-dropping in the House of Commons' will be reframed as women's early and tentative steps to asserting their claim to a space in Parliament. The women in this chapter were not suffragettes protesting against oppressive sexual politics but they were politically engaged and were challenging the narrative of separate spheres and women's formal exclusion from electoral politics.

Lady Shelley's diary entry does not only offer an alternative interpretation of the space of the ventilator, but also of the political capabilities of women in the nineteenth-century.

'The Alien Bill came on next. It had returned from the Lords with an added clause to the effect that its provisions should be retrospective to a given date.'

*This raised a difficulty, for it appears that since that date certain persons....had become naturalised.*⁹

The Alien Bill was to allow British government to control the entrance of foreign nationals into the country. Her understanding of the debate and the intricacies of the Alien Bill conveyed Shelley's engagement with politics. The legal and financial concepts that she was able to interpret demonstrated analytical thinking of which cultural stereotypes deemed women incapable. She was also able to appraise the political talent of the male speakers commenting on how Sir Samuel Romilly 'deliver[ed] one of the finest speeches he ever made', making her feel as though she 'could have burst forth in eloquence with those exhilarating cheers [inspired by the speech] to awaken every power of the mind and heart.'¹⁰ Her impassioned analysis showed her interest in political debate to be far more than novelty or curiosity. She demonstrated a keen understanding of political events preceding the speeches she was privy to, was able to contextualise and expand upon them, as well as deliver her own ideas and judgements. She delighted that 'during this eventful period I had the good fortune to hear something from all the best speakers. Canning appealed to the chair. This called for a speech from the Speaker', conveying her awareness of what made a good speaker, the regulations of the House, and political process.¹¹ Clearly already politically adept, the ventilator provided a space in which she could develop her skills and understanding through intimate proximity to parliamentary proceedings.

Despite the political insight shown in Lady Shelley's narrative of Parliament, her concluding comments conveyed something of the engrained nature of cultural thinking about the incapability of women to engage with the political world in this early-nineteenth century period. She wrote 'I felt so proud of the manly, energetic character of my countrymen, and reverently bowed my head in acknowledgement of their pre-eminence over my weak sex!'¹² Even though she could understand, interpret, analyse, and evaluate the words of the men below, Lady Shelley appeared

⁹ *Diary of Frances Lady Shelley*, p.8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.10.

unable to conceive of herself as worthy of taking an active role in political discourse. Perhaps this was an attempt to dissemble; diaries often served as semi-public documents used as forms of entertainment. Consequently, Shelley may have been exercising caution. However, her account concluded by returning to issues of gendered propriety:

*'Alas! At nine o'clock the debate closed, and Mr Bellamy took me into his room, where his wife paid me every attention, while her husband went to tell Mr Brougham of the dilemma I was in, in consequence of my carriage not having arrived. Brougham was equal to the occasion; he came and proposed that we should complete the fun by dining together in Mr Bellamy's room. We had the best beefsteaks, toasted cheese, pickles, and beetroot that I ever ate – in short, true House of Commons fare, and I could fairly claim to have done what no woman had ever done before me.'*¹³

Perhaps this is a disappointing return to conventionality after her 'secret expedition', but Lady Shelley's memoir presents an exciting account of a woman in Parliament that challenged the idea of women not being permitted entry to the Commons at this time. She revealed intimate details of parliamentary proceedings, both in the formal Chamber and in informal spaces; she displayed a female political understanding and analysis that contradicted societal notions of domestic femininity; and she offered the ventilator as a space of potential in which women could access, engage with, and analyse the world of politics.

Women and the political landscape

Using the ventilator as a space of political observation arose during a period when the political landscape in Britain was shifting. Oppressive sexual politics necessitated women's movement into alternative spaces and, particularly within Parliament, this marked a distinct change from attitudes to women in Parliament during the eighteenth-century which had been comparatively favourable. However,

¹³ Ibid., p.10.

the broader context of public engagement with Parliament shows that there was scope for resistance and negotiation. Traditional histories have argued that political life in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Britain was fundamentally patriarchal. It was governed exclusively by men, conducted within the 'male' public sphere, and structured along lines of gender and class privilege. James Vernon depicts a period of closure at the very moment when British politics claimed to be embracing democracy. As political agency was increasingly tied to property rights characterised by primogeniture in the age of the bourgeoisie citizen, he suggests that the period 'encouraged the private, individual and masculine use of politics.'¹⁴ It was inherently classed as the electoral reforms of 1832, 1867 and 1884 enfranchised particular numbers of men to maintain the patriarchal status quo. Furthermore, he notes how this was particularly disastrous for women, as these new political ideas '[provided] women with well-defined roles and identities which would not challenge the ascendancy of the patriarchal discourse of their politics.'¹⁵ However, Judith S Lewis explores the complexities of coverture to reveal potential for women to hold political agency in spite of the restrictions of primogeniture. She explores how families often orchestrated alternative ways of protecting or passing down property that involved women, therefore making property ownership negotiable and maternal family links important to garnering political influence.¹⁶ The contrast between the established system and the lived experience that Lewis reveals leaves the potential for political spaces that women could occupy, in spite of the official closure of nineteenth-century politics.

In the same way, the House of Commons was also a negotiable space. Traditionally the Speaker controlled who could occupy the Strangers' Gallery and it could be emptied at his command if an MP drew attention to the presence of members of the public. The Strangers' Gallery was the space afforded for members of the public to observe the Commons and was situated in a balcony above the Chamber. Control of the gallery was often used as a means of political tactics or a

¹⁴ James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture c.1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.9.

¹⁵ Ibid., p9.

¹⁶ Judith S Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in Late Georgian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.11-38.

way of managing controversial debates. For strangers to attend the Commons, the Speaker's permission was required. Officially, MPs were required to accompany strangers to gallery, but sometimes letters of introduction to the doorkeeper or bribes sufficed.¹⁷ In this way, those who could attend were ordinarily members of the elite with links to MPs. In the eighteenth-century, strangers originated from across the globe and women were often welcomed. It was at the end of the century that attitudes to women in Parliament began to change and women were formally excluded from the Commons as a result of one specific incident.

In February 1778, women were banned from the House of Commons after the Speaker had called for the galleries to be cleared, but some female occupiers refused to leave. In 1833, the incident was still remarkable and was described in *The Times* as 'a state of most extraordinary ferment and commotion' as 'officers found their duty of turning out the fair intruders no easy work; a violent and determined resistance was offered to them.'¹⁸ Attitudes to women in Parliament shifted and, as was reflected upon in *The Times* in 1950, 'the good sense of the country [at that time] was opposed to making the ladies of England into political partisans,'¹⁹ The incident occurred during a period when fears about national security occupied Parliament and MPs were frequently requesting for the public galleries to be cleared, so there was a wider precedent for banning the public from Parliament. However, the ban implemented in this case was gendered; women were formally excluded from the Commons and men were not. Nevertheless, undeterred, women continued to contrive ways to watch debates, with some gaining access masquerading as men. This activity was publicly acknowledged with *The Times* reporting that 'ladies used to steal into the gallery in disguise....the Duchess of Gordon had been seen "habited as a man sitting in the stranger's gallery"the beautiful Mrs Sheridan was attracted to its precincts in similar disguise.'²⁰ Women's determination to access Parliament then

¹⁷ PDG Thomas, *The House of Commons in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp.138-152.

¹⁸ 'Ladies' Attendance on Debates' in *The Times* (London, England), 5th March 1833:2, *The Times Digital Archive*.

¹⁹ 'Strangers in Skirts' in *The Times* (London, England), 27th October 1950:5, *The Times Digital Archive*.

²⁰ 'Political Notes' in *The Times* (London, England), 27th January, 1902:11, *The Times Digital Archive*.

reiterates how significant an institution it was to public and political life. It also demonstrates women's understanding of themselves as legitimate actors within its walls.

In her topography of the pre-1834 Commons, Clare Wilkinson argues it was a space resistant to change with no place for women. When the Act of Irish Union introduced an additional one hundred MPs, space was at even more of a premium and strangers even less welcome. However, Wilkinson also notes a similar negotiability of the Commons, particularly describing the 'spy-holes in the ventilator in the ceiling of the chamber....used principally by women.' She suggests that its use was commonly known of, further indicating the difference between established rules and actual practices.²¹ Women's intervention in the ventilator created dissonance that allowed them to renegotiate a parliamentary site. The minutes from a 1908 Select Committee examining the admittance of strangers to the house detail that after this incident 'the only place the ladies had to view proceedings in the old Chamber was through the ventilating shaft which as at the top of the old St Stephen's hall; there was a sort of balcony round where the ladies sat or stood; they could hear the debate there, and could just catch sight of the Members' heads below.'²² Widely acknowledged informally but not officially recognised as part of the Commons, the ventilator offered an example of the negotiability, that Lewis and Wilkinson identify in nineteenth-century British politics, within the central space of Parliament.

The ventilator required women to physically enact their marginalisation from politics as they challenged that very exclusion by watching debates from a makeshift attic space. It was complex in its function as both instrument of oppression and potential space of resistance. Davidoff and Hall's model of separate spheres offers a useful way of understanding the complexities of the ventilator. They examine a similar complexity in oppressive sexual politics and the differences between rules and practice that saw some women able to exercise a degree of political agency. Noting the revival of religious evangelism as central to crafting the identity of an emerging

²¹ Clare Wilkinson, 'Politics and Topography in the Old House of Commons 1783-1834', *Parliamentary History*, 21 (2002), pp.141-165.

²² *Select Committee, 1908, on House of Commons (Admission of Strangers)*, HC 371 (1908), p.23.

middle-class, they describe how the middle-class used these ideas to divide their world into two distinct spheres. Society was divided into the realm of morality and emotion, situated in the feminine domestic sphere, and that of rational activity, situated in the masculine public sphere.²³ According to this model, emergent middle-class culture praised womanly virtue as the foundation of a secure home whilst manly rationality safeguarded the public sphere. However, although these values pervaded sexual politics, they were not absolute. Davidoff and Hall recognise the negotiable spaces between the two spheres, exploring how women used the arenas of family enterprise and society beyond the home to intervene in the public sphere.²⁴ They nuance their argument, exploring how the public and private spheres might overlap and intersect, offering the potential for both men and women to move between their prescribed gendered spaces.

Their theory has proven contentious amongst other historians interested in the roles of nineteenth-century women, with some such as Amanda Vickery challenging *Family Fortunes* as too broad and sweeping, overlooking the importance of gender dynamics amongst other groups such as the elite classes.²⁵ Vickery also argues that women had more power than Davidoff and Hall's model of separate spheres suggests. Nevertheless, despite some criticism, Davidoff and Hall's assertion of an overarching ideology of separate spheres with complex and negotiable spaces at the boundaries has been highlighted by Kathryn Gleadle as a useful way of reading sexual politics in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁶ Gleadle argues that *Family Fortunes* 'stands as a touchstone of the rich possibilities and the irrefutable importance of synthesising these two central themes of modern women's history: that is, the

²³ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850 (Revised Edition)* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.13.

²⁴ There is a substantial body of literature on women and their organisation of political activities in the home that contributes to this argument of women's political engagement outside of Parliament. This chapter has been informed by: Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Sarah Richardson, 'Well-neighboured Houses': the Political Networks of Elite Women, 1780-1860' chapter three in *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), pp.56-73; Lynne Walker, 'Home and Away: The Feminist Remapping of Public and Private Space in Victorian London' chapter five in *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.65-75.

²⁵ Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, 36, 1993, pp.383-414.

²⁶ Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, p.2.

illumination of the workings of gender within the complex process of social constitution and the recovery of the marginalised voices of the past'.²⁷ The model of separate spheres navigates the complex landscape of sexual politics, offering a rationale behind female oppression as it also suggests potential for negotiable spaces that saw female agency in the public sphere.

Anne Summers perceives virtual public spaces in which women could engage in auxiliary roles that similarly challenged ideas of domestic femininity.²⁸ These spaces were unofficial, often improvised, and frequently semi-private, but allowed for women to take part in political conversation, behaviours, and acts. Openly acknowledged but not officially recognised, the ventilator can be interpreted as one of these virtual public spaces that created an opportunity for women to engage with the public sphere of politics. These studies all offer illuminating ways of reading the ventilator. However, despite the usefulness of existing scholarship in interpreting the ventilator, there is currently little material that considers how women may have navigated the space of Parliament in the early-nineteenth century. However, women were very much present. The first petition for female suffrage was presented to the Commons by Henry Hunt MP on 3rd August 1832. He presented the petition on behalf of Mary Smith, a landowner in Yorkshire, who believed, given that she met the property requirements, she ought to be entitled to a vote. Evidently, some women were engaging with Parliament in spite of their formal exclusion, and this chapter aims to address a gap in existing scholarship by exploring women's experience of parliamentary spaces in the early-nineteenth century. However, substantial work has been done to consider virtual or negotiable spaces in which women engaged with politics beyond Parliament in this period. Women's interaction with radical movements such as Unitarianism, Chartism, and Socialism introduced them to alternative political models beyond the status quo and created new spaces which facilitated new experiences of agency and autonomy.²⁹ Research has also been done

²⁷ Kathryn Gleadle, 'Revisiting Family Fortunes: reflections on the twentieth anniversary of the publication of L. Davidoff & C. Hall (1987) *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780–1850*' in *Women's History Review*, Vol 16, No 5 (November 2007), pp.773-782 (p.779).

²⁸ Summers, *Female Lives, Moral States*.

²⁹ Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995); Helen Rogers, *Women and the People:*

to explore the subversive potential of the domestic sphere, highlighting the interconnectedness of social and political relations and the ways in which women used these to forge their own networks and influence.³⁰ Yet little has been done to explore women's experiences of the space at the heart of British politics. This study will add to this body of work by considering how women employed the same ideas to gain agency within the central power of Parliament.

Approaching the ventilator

This chapter aims to read the space of the ventilator through the lenses offered by spatial theory and feminist geography and add to existing studies of women's interactions with the political sphere in this period by focusing on a specific location within Parliament. Appreciating different viewpoints and the power of positionality is integral to thinking about space.³¹ Adopting an interdisciplinary approach will enable a more holistic appreciation of complex and nuanced narrative of the ventilator that this chapter will uncover. As it oppressed and marginalised women, so it offered them a space in which they could nurture their political awareness. Christina Parolin's 'notion of *architecture parlante*' suggests that the ventilator can be read and reinterpreted in the same way as the diaries and letters of the women who went there, thus bringing the complexities of the ventilator to light.³²

Gillian Rose suggests that 'through the masculinization of the body politic, public space was also represented as a masculine arena.'³³ However, Rose continues to posit that alternative readings of space beyond dominant patriarchal discourses is also possible. What she terms 'a politics of paradoxical space' or 'the possibility of a space which does not replicate the exclusions of the Same and the Other' interprets

Authority, Authorship and the Radical Tradition in Nineteenth Century England (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000); Julia Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: 1991); Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983).

³⁰ Richardson, 'Well-neighbour'd Houses'.

³¹ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

³² Parolin, *Radical Spaces*, p.6.

³³ Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, p.36.

space in terms beyond those which are masculinist. In this way, multiple readings of a location are possible to articulate concurrent and different experiences.³⁴ Setha Low introduces the dual concept of space that is both socially produced and socially constructed which offers a similarly useful way of reading the ventilator.³⁵ The social production of space reveals the political, economic, and historical motives of those designing and building the space, whereas the social construction of a space relies on the behaviours and shared understandings of those inhabiting and acting within it.³⁶ Again, this facilitates a multi-faceted reading of the ventilator that acknowledges both the purpose and lived experiences of the space, both its liminality and its subversive potential.

The history of the ventilator

In 1818, the Marquis de Chabanne was commissioned to install a new ventilation system in the Chamber. In a study of the palace, it was described by Adam Lee in 1931 as follows:

*'In the year 1818, by an order of a committee of the House of Commons, very material alterations were made in the large room over the House, for a new plan of ventilation, and more easy escape of heated air; and which room was usually called the Lumber Room, and was divided into different apartments, and used or occupied as sleeping rooms, and for other domestic purposes, by the housekeeper, attendants, and servants, employed about the house: the room being over the present House of Commons, it is generally known by the name of The Roof....In the centre of this 'Roof', there is now an Octagonal Ventilator, with apertures in each division; and at those stations ladies occasionally attend to hear the debates.'*³⁷

³⁴ Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, p.137.

³⁵ Low, *Spatializing Culture*; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991/first French edn. 1974); and Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.68.

³⁷ Adam Lee, *Description of the Cosmorama Views and Delineations of the Ancient Palace of Westminster and St Stephen's Chapel* (London: W Davy, 1931), pp.v-vi.

The structural changes in the roof of the House of Commons created a new space that women, keen to engage with Parliament in spite of their expulsion from the House, quickly inhabited. This ventilator was reached by a staircase that led to the Members' coffee house, requiring 'scrambling and winding through stairs and passages, not of the most inviting description', so female spectators were required to move through spaces ordinarily barred from public access in order to reach it.³⁸ Its architectural function was to ease the escape of heated air from the Chamber. In addition to this, the resulting attic space was appropriated as quarters for parliamentary staff. The multiple and changing uses of the ventilator depict it as a changeable space, used for domestic purposes in a public building, already blurring the boundaries of separate spheres and suggesting its subversive potential. Furthermore, as this chapter will suggest, visitors to the ventilator were generally well-connected elite women, yet this description also highlights a distinct working-class presence in the same attic space, suggesting that the ventilator made parliamentary proceedings audible to a wider audience than sources may indicate.

The description continued to describe how the renovations uncovered 'the whole of the beautiful ancient Gothic Architecture....particularly a large embattled cornice that ranged all round the room....all these characteristics of the original building are preserved, and are now visible.'³⁹ It tells us something of what the women could see in the space around them and how it contrasted to the space of the Chamber below. The new 'octagonal ventilator' described is depicted in Figure 1 by Frances Rickman, daughter of John Rickman, clerk assistant in the House of Commons. Her sketch from June 1834 illustrates the structure of the attic space in which women visiting the ventilator sat, showing the chapel remnants of arched windows and vague, stick-figure women surrounding the central column of the ventilator itself. It shows the open window that Lady Shelley remarked upon and details discarded furniture and cut off windows, demonstrating that the attic space was an afterthought and not a site suited to supporting female participation in politics. The ventilator was designed as a functional space, without furnishing or

³⁸ Christian Isobel Johnstone, 'The Ventilators: a tale of the last session', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol 1, April 1832, pp.35-57 (p.44).

³⁹ Lee, *Description of the Cosmoramic Views*, p vi.

decoration, and intended to solely serve the practical needs of the patriarchal Chamber below. However, as Rickman's sketch illustrates the uncomfortable and marginalised situation of the ventilator, it also portrays the female spectators prepared to endure such conditions in order to engage with the political sphere. Rickman endeavoured to capture the space of the ventilator in her sketch and modelled it principally as a space of observation, reframing it as a site of subversion that encouraged female political participation against a backdrop of coverture and cultural oppression. The sparseness of the room makes it clear that women are being forced to enact their formal exclusion from the public galleries beneath them but their presence in the picture indicates that the official ruling of the House was not enough to deter female spectators from finding a way to observe political debates.

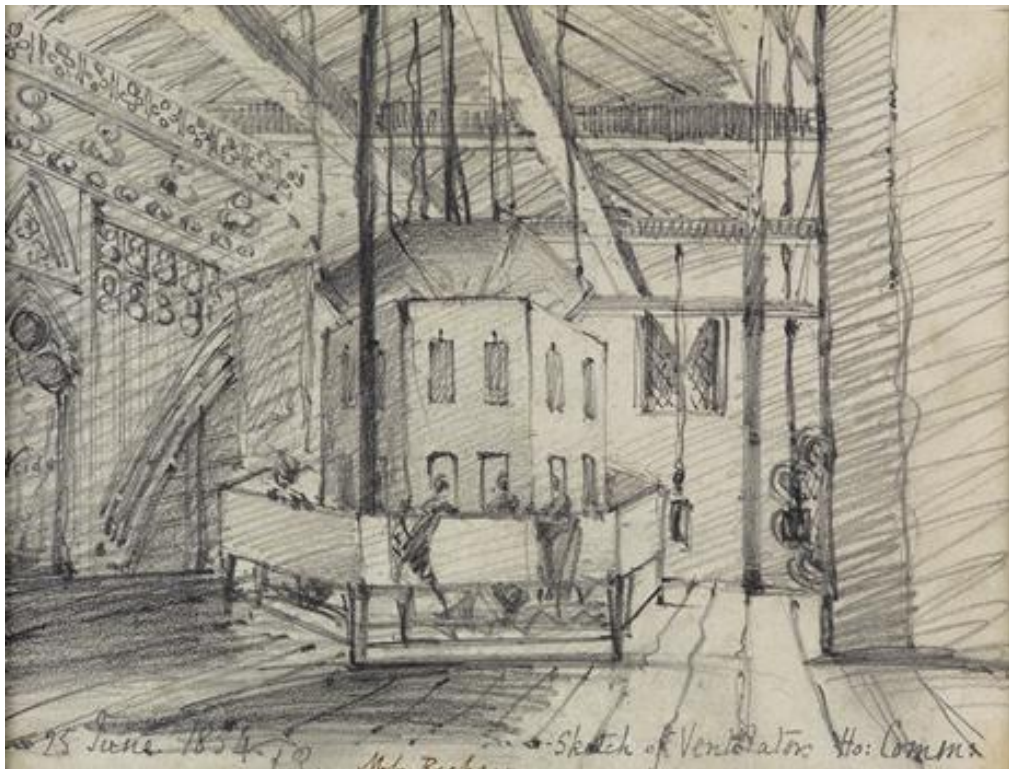


Figure 1: WOA26 Parliamentary Works of Art Collection – Frances Rickman, 'Sketch of a ventilator in the Ladies Gallery Attic in St Stephens, 1834'.

Women in the ventilator

The earliest known account of a woman using the ventilator as a space from which to observe parliamentary proceedings is of Elizabeth Fry in February 1818. An active philanthropist and campaigner, she was called to give evidence to a Select Committee on prison reform and insisted upon having access to the ensuing debate that her evidence informed. Being unable to observe from the public galleries, she was permitted to observe from the new attic space created by the installation of the Marquis de Chabanne's ventilation system. As the *Illustrated London News* later reported in 1893, 'Elizabeth Fry was the first woman to be allowed to go up there....[there was] procured from the Speaker a permit for her to be there during the debates on prison reform.'⁴⁰ The 'permit' described here became common practice as more women endeavoured to use the ventilator as a space through which they could engage with Parliament. Not unlike the process necessary for obtaining a seat in the public galleries, women were obliged to use their connections to MPs in order to receive a ticket to the ventilator, and these were granted by permission of the Speaker. Elizabeth Fry required a permit and Lady Shelley relied on Brougham requesting permission for her attendance. This process further complicated the space of the ventilator. Such rules and regulations emulated those of official spaces in the Commons below, thus inviting women to partake in parliamentary practices and seemingly legitimising the ventilator as a political space, but they also allowed for men to police and regulate women's use of that space, precluding it from becoming uniquely female and reinforcing the patriarchal status quo.

Indeed, as Lady Shelley's diary indicated, the ventilator was not reserved exclusively for the use of women:

*'While this petition was being read, Brougham took the opportunity of paying me a visit in my hiding-place.....I had received visits from Lord Sefton and Shelley in my soupirail.'*⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Illustrated London News*, 2nd December 1893.

⁴¹ *Diary of Frances Lady Shelley*, pp.9-10.

Male MPs were at liberty to move in and out of the ventilator whilst Lady Shelley described herself as hidden and restricted. Her use of the word *soupirail* holds connotations of being underground, despite her elevated position. Although she was challenging stereotypes of domestic femininity by seeking out a space in Parliament, her self-description communicates her intrinsic sense of alienation and lack of belonging. Elaine Chalus has highlighted how the ventilator 'did give them [women] a view of proceedings and remarkably good sound. While this placed new limits on women's parliamentary attendance and, what is perhaps more important, separated them physically and psychologically from the mass of (male) spectators, they were not hermetically sealed in the Ladies' Gallery. They could not go down to the floor of the Commons to mix with MPs, but the MPs could and did come to them.'⁴² Chalus' analysis offers a dual reading of the ventilator that this chapter aims to elucidate further. Whilst the ventilator was a liminal site of exclusion, it also offered comparative freedoms to women; it became a space of observation and listening, and also a space of political discussion with which both men and women wanted to engage. Furthermore, this thesis will situate the ventilator within a broader narrative of female experiences of parliamentary space in the nineteenth-century, offering a fresh perspective that situates it within a longer history of women and Parliament.

Regulations governing who could and could not access the ventilator also implied a class requirement for visitors, as 'admissions are by orders from the Serjeant at arms; and are limited to the wives of Peers and Members, or their daughters and immediate relatives.'⁴³ Although there is evidence to suggest that these rules were not strictly observed, there was a clear attempt to govern the space according to class, reserving it for the use of elite women. Available sources pertaining to the ventilator present it as an elite space; letters between ladies of society name scores of well-known women visiting there, and it became a socially fashionable place to be seen. Women gained access to the ventilator through their relations and friendships with Members of Parliament, necessitating connections and privilege to gain admittance. Women's motives for occupying the ventilator were not

⁴² Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c.1754-1790* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005), p.51.

⁴³ *Hampshire Chronicle*, 23rd March 1829.

always overtly political; some were there to support their male relatives or to hear the novelty of a debate alongside those with the more determined aim of following a political issue. The elite visitors to the ventilator would have had servants to wait on them, further complicating the make-up of the space and presenting it as more fluid and open. These other figures in the shadows are more difficult to draw out, yet their presence is alluded to. This further highlights the potential of the ventilator to create possibilities for those excluded from formal politics to access parliamentary proceedings.

The complexities of the ventilator meant that women's experiences were similarly mixed. Feelings of both liberation and oppression will be explored in more detail. However, women's accounts of their physical experience of the ventilator largely centre on the ill-equipped, dark, and uncomfortable nature of the space that Lady Shelley likens to 'the cabin of a ship.' Novelist Maria Edgeworth presented a similar view:

*'In the middle of the garret is what seemed like a sentry-box of deal boards and old chairs placed round it: on these we got and stood and peeped over the top of the boards. Saw a large chandelier with lights blazing, immediately below: a grating of iron across veiled the light so we could look down beyond it: we saw half the table with the mace lying on it and papers, and by peeping hard two figures of clerks at the further end, but no eye could see the Speaker or his chair, - only his feet; his voice and terrible "ORDER" was soon heard.'*⁴⁴

Edgeworth's use of the verb 'peeped' and her description of the limited view the ventilator afforded conforms to conventional notions of women marginalised and excluded from political life. The 'deal boards and old chairs' reflect the attitudes to their presence, and contrast starkly to the dark wood and leather upholstery that would have been provided for their male counterparts in the Commons Chamber below. However, despite their apparent exclusion from a space created by and for

⁴⁴ Maria Edgeworth to Mrs Ruxton, 9th March 1822 in Augustus JC Hare, *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: Edwards Arnold, 1894), ii, pp.66-67.

men, their willingness and curiosity to engage in political life saw women paradoxically creating a space of their own, for which they were prepared to endure discomfort, segregation and limitation. Although it was hot, uncomfortable and dirty, women continued to use the ventilator as a political platform. It was cramped and unpleasant and 'not more than fourteen could, at once, see or hear what was going on from this place, and even then but imperfectly. Besides, the smoke of the candles, and the heated atmosphere they inhaled, combined with the awkwardness of the position they were obliged to assume, made the situation so very unpleasant.'⁴⁵ Grant's description of women's physical experiences of the ventilator conveyed how women were forced to enact their ideological marginalisation from the political sphere in uncomfortable and degrading conditions. However, their perseverance in inhabiting and using the space as one of political observation challenged the restrictions of dominant sexual politics. Women were undeterred by the challenges of the space. For example, on 13th June 1824 Fanny Allen described how her and several of her female companions stayed awake all night to hear a debate on slavery and the trial of a missionary who was accused of inciting rebellion amongst slaves. She wrote of how 'it was after four before we got to bed' and how she 'slept soundly till eleven, when I got up, with only the penalty of a headache, which I will gladly pay again for such another night.'⁴⁶ The discomfort of the ventilator and the potential danger of keeping improper hours were not enough to deter women from engaging with Parliament.

Reconceptualising the ventilator

Although a liminal attic space, the ventilator was also an observation point that offered a unique vantage of the Commons with excellent sound. As a result, women began ascribing new meanings to the ventilator that highlighted its privileged situation rather than its liminality. For example, it was often the case that female

⁴⁵ James Grant, *Recollections of the House of Commons from the year 1830 to the close of 1835* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1836), p.12.

⁴⁶ Fanny Allen to her sister Mrs Josiah Wedgwood, 13th June 1824 in Henrietta Litchfield (ed.) *Emma Darwin: A Century of Family Letters*, 2 vols (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1915), i, p. 158.

observers in the ventilator were not acknowledged when the galleries in the House below were cleared, and consequently they would regularly have access to debates that were otherwise unheard by the public. Emma Wedgwood indicates one such occasion in August 1833 when O'Connell had 'the gallery cleared of all the strangers and the reporters amongst them', yet clearly she was still able to observe as she continued to write of what she saw.⁴⁷ Wedgwood framed her attic hideaway as an advantageous observation point from which to engage with political debates.

Vantage points offer an opportunity to read the space of the ventilator in a manner that further challenged women's formal exclusion from politics. The power of positionality is integral to thinking about space and makes it possible to reframe the ventilator more emphatically as a space of advantage as well as of marginalisation. Due to its attic location, the ventilator afforded women an elevated view of the House of Commons. De Certeau's theory of viewpoints facilitates a reading of this dynamic such that male MPs are merely 'possessed' by the space of the chamber, whilst the female viewers are able to appreciate its text and read new meanings that cannot be appreciated by those physically below them.⁴⁸ Women were able to forge understandings and interpretations of the Commons that it was not possible to perceive from within Chamber. An attic can be interpreted as a space for the unwanted, a means of keeping things out of sight and hearing, a separate space in which women were segregated and prevented from fully engaging with the political sphere. However, De Certeau's ideas on perspective position the female spectators of the ventilator as political agents with a unique appreciation of the proceedings they are watching.

In June 1824 Fanny Allen wrote a letter to her sister detailing a debate on slavery that she watched from the ventilator, describing MPs as 'principal performer[s]' who were 'appearing on the boards'⁴⁹, creating the sense of the House of Commons as a theatre presenting a show at which she was a spectator. Christian Isobel Johnstone

⁴⁷ Emma Wedgwood to her aunt Madame Sismondi, 5th August 1833 in Henrietta Litchfield (ed.) *Emma Darwin: A Century of Family Letters*, 2 vols (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1915), i, p. 256.

⁴⁸ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

⁴⁹ Fanny Allen to her sister Mrs Josiah Wedgwood, p. 156.

similarly describes it as a ‘theatre, opera-house, royal drawing-room, or [a] delightful royal cabinet’.⁵⁰ Fanny Allen’s metaphor of the theatre placed her as a spectator able to achieve a unique viewpoint and appreciate interpretations of the whole ‘production’ that were not possible from within it. Furthermore, the male MPs are trapped and subjected to her female gaze, further contending with the imbalance of gender politics in the early-nineteenth century.

Navigating their new role as powerful viewers influenced the way in which women shaped and conceived of the ventilator. Christian Isobel Johnstone styled it ‘The Petticoat Parliament House’, presenting the ventilator as a parallel to the Chamber and a political body in its own right.⁵¹ In her description in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, MPs visited the female spectators to receive advice and judgement on their performance, situating the women as political powerholders. In contrast, the MPs themselves are described as ‘that huge *Free-and-easy* motley assembly, of lounging, lolling, sitting, standing, leaning, stretching, yawning, slumbering, sleeping, winking, gaping, goggling, chewing, jotting, nodding, note-taking multitude of ‘Faithful Commons in Parliament assembled’’.⁵² Johnstone satirised the male MPs as inefficient subjects *in* Parliament whereas the women in the ventilator *are* the Parliament House. She reconstructed their attic hideaway as an independent political body.

Women’s behaviours in the ventilator reinforced an emergent awareness of their political capabilities that continued to challenge the sexual politics that formally excluded them from the political sphere. This was not only apparent in their writing but was also reflected in paintings and sketches of the ventilator done by female artists; the way in which they depicted the space reflected their understanding of women as central to its political construction. Figure 2, a watercolour painting of the ventilator, believed to have been completed by Lady Georgina Chatterton, later of Baddesley Clinton in July 1821, provides a detailed representation of this emerging consciousness and can be ‘read’ to reveal a little more of what it was like for women

⁵⁰ Johnstone, ‘The Ventilators’, p.44.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.44.

⁵² Ibid., p.45.

to experience engagement with political life through the spatial medium of the ventilator. Chatterton was a writer and an amateur painter, but produced this painting as a young girl of fourteen. The watercolour is held in a collated album of family amateur artworks alongside a ticket admitting the bearer to Westminster Hall on 11th July 1821. This was the date of the state opening of Parliament. The King presented a speech to the House of Lords whilst the House of Commons debated the Queen's exclusion from the coronation and so it would have been an occasion on which many members of elite society were present at Westminster. The MP shown speaking is radical Scottish MP Joseph Hume. Chatterton's depiction of both the House and the ventilator is indicative of how her young mind experienced Parliament.

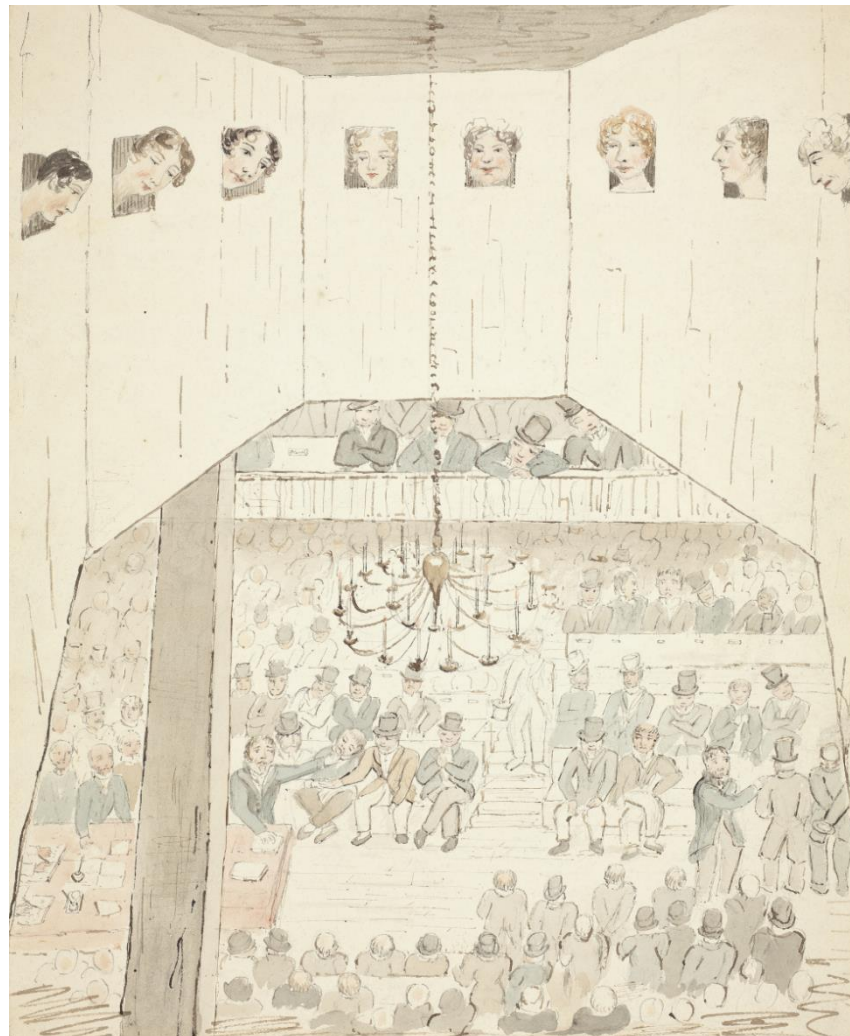


Figure 2: DR759/4 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Archives – Georgina Chatterton, 'Pencil and watercolour drawing, showing a view of women viewing debate from the ventilator shaft in the House of Commons, Parliament c.1821'.⁵³

Doreen Massey asserts that 'space and place are important in the construction of gender relations....spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood.'⁵⁴ Massey's theory of space supports the image of excluded women occupying a limited and liminal space in their role as submissive and inferior sex. However, if Massey's understanding of how space can reflect and affect understandings of gender is applied to Lady Georgiana Chatterton's watercolour painting, a very different representation of gender relations is shown through her depiction of both the space and the women within it. To begin with, female observers of the Commons are depicted above the men; this may seem to be an obvious statement given the physical location of the ventilator, but rather than appearing to have been placed out of sight in a liminal space, their depiction disproportionately takes up the top third of the image. Rather than appearing as obscure or faint figures, they have distinctive faces and features and are illustrated in full colour, suggesting significance and relevance. The women are painted as elevated and keen observers above the Chamber and the subjects of their observations are the male MPs below, echoing the theatrical metaphors of Fanny Allen and Christian Isobel Johnstone. If, as Massey said, space can both reflect and affect ideas about gender, Lady Chatterton's apparent perspective of the space conveys women as the principal focus, engaging fully and eagerly in political life, and suggesting ideas of female political significance that representations of other political spaces failed to advocate. Certainly, the proportion of space on the page that the women are given for just the heads of eight individuals, as opposed to the much smaller space allotted to the numerous male MPs painted in full body, implies an

⁵³ The painting belongs to Baddesley Clinton (National Trust) but is held in the archives at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon.

⁵⁴ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p.179

altogether different gender dynamic from that championed by dominant sexual politics.

Chatterton's reframing of women's political position is further suggested in the individual manner in which she depicts the women; they are confined to the liminal space of the ventilator, but their identities are far from limited. In painting female spectators as individuals with craning necks and alert and attentive facial expressions, Lady Chatterton represents the political engagement of the women. She also suggests their subversion of the space that was meant to contain them through their use of it as a space of political access and engagement. The proportions of the painting and the space allocated to the women suggests a political identity; they are not merely a marginalised group, but a significant and actively participating presence with an evident political interest. Lady Chatterton's painting suggests that this site of exclusion was indeed changed through behaviour, or socially constructed, to become a site of potential and political agency. Judith Butler's ideas on space provide another interesting means through which this change in the perception of space, and by extension gender, can be appreciated: 'instead of thinking about space and place as pre-existing sites which occur....bodily performances themselves constitute or (re)produce space.'⁵⁵ Through the manner in which she has depicted the space, Lady Chatterton reproduced it in a way that it holds central focus and political significance, rather than considering it as a liminal site. Furthermore, her portrayal of women's bodies within the ventilator as politically engaged suggests that female behaviour was reproducing it as a political space. In contrast to what would be expected of a political portrait of the early-nineteenth century, women are the focal point of the image. Lady Chatterton's painting recreated the ventilator as a site where female observers could challenge what society expected women to be.

As well as challenging ideas of women's political status, Chatterton's painting offers a representation of male politicians that contrasted with nineteenth-century discourses of masculine power. In the painting the men appear to occupy an arena in which they are ironically contained, whilst the women look down on them and

⁵⁵ Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin (eds.), *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), p.86.

observe from a position of power, echoing the stage metaphors of Fanny Allen and Christian Isobel Johnstone. In the painting, they are not only subject to the female gaze, but also appear restricted by the physical space of the Chamber which is proportionately smaller than the ventilator. Although the political practices occurring within the Chamber in the painting would indeed have been reinforcing patriarchy and male-centred political ideas, Lady Chatterton's representation of the space suggests the possibility of an alternative balance of power between the sexes. The men in the painting are indistinct and lack individuality, with many not having facial features and others blending into furniture or the background before their bodily form is complete. Again, there are echoes of Johnstone's satirical description of 'Faithful Commons in Parliament assembled', signifying an alternative reading of political power in female terms. Although the central focus of the political system the painting depicts, the men are not the central focus of the painting itself. Lady Chatterton's asserts a political identity for women through the contrasting detail and individuality with which they are portrayed in her painting. Rather than being limited by the space of the ventilator, women are able to reconstruct the space to create a female political perspective. Chatterton's painting suggests something of the way in which women appreciated the space of the ventilator and the role it afforded them in political life, presenting the paradoxical nature of a space that was at once both limiting and liberating.

In spite of limitations, the ventilator facilitated the emergence of a distinctly female political consciousness in this early-nineteenth century period that was inherently tied to women's experiences of the ventilator and of witnessing parliamentary proceedings from its attic location. The ventilator became a space of female political education and of female political networking, nurturing an emergent female political identity that challenged the ideology of separate spheres in both its nature and its location. The political education of the women in the ventilator was evident in their letters and diaries, inherently linked to what they saw, heard, and shared with other women there. When Emma Wedgwood described O'Connell's clearing of the public galleries, including reporters, she demonstrated her political education in her analysis of his actions. Condemning it as a mistake, she wrote that

'it was a most foolish passionate thing to do as the Reporters are sure to gain the day in the end.'⁵⁶ The very fact of her questioning his decision challenged ideas of patriarchal political power. However, it also demonstrated the political understanding that she was developing in the ventilator, interpreting the relationship between politicians and the press and the power the latter had to influence public opinion. Her analysis was sound and logical, contextualised within her privileged view from the ventilator that remained occupied even as the galleries were cleared.

The ventilator also offered women the opportunity to engage with political issues of their own choosing rather than being limited by those in the press or those brought home by their male relatives. Questions of oppression and social reform are among those most frequently referred to in accounts of the ventilator. Slavery, *sati*, and the plight of the poor were some of the political debates about which women in the ventilator wrote, showing particular interest in their handling within the House of Commons. Such political issues concerning oppressed groups shared parallels with the political situation of women and offered a language and concepts capable of articulating their own political needs as well as those of the oppressed groups in question. The women in the ventilator were not protesting for female emancipation, but this early space of female political education offered an introduction to a politicised language of oppression. Women's choices of debates actively entwined their political education with issues concerning the plights of other oppressed social groups. In a letter to her aunt Madame Sismondi in March 1831, Elizabeth Wedgwood wrote that what she was:

'most anxious to hear is the debate on Tuesday on Slavery. Macaulay's speech on the reform bill almost made me cry with admiration, and I expect his speech on so much more interesting a subject to be the finest thing that ever was heard. It is most unfortunate for this question that it should come on now. Who has leisure to listen to the still small voice of justice in the midst of such a turmoil? And what ought this nation to expect at the hand of God but

⁵⁶ Emma Wedgwood to her aunt Madame Sismondi, 5th August 1833, p. 256.

*calamities and disgraces as long as we will not hear it, and suffer those daily murders to go on?*⁵⁷

Her anxiety to hear the speech and her use of emotive language such as ‘justice’, ‘turmoil’, ‘calamities’ and ‘murders’ illustrated the extent of her interest in this question. Invoking God and religious values further appealed to the moral culture of her time. However, Wedgwood’s account reveals more than just her interest. She commented on the unfortunate timing of the speech, revealing an understanding of the broader political landscape that has developed through her interaction with Parliament from the space of the ventilator. Furthermore, she used the collective pronoun ‘we’, implying that she, as a woman, was a member of the political nation that needed to address the issue. It was her membership of the ‘nation’ and not her gender that led to her joint responsibility in the matter. However, her choice of ‘we’ also implied a shared identity with the other women in the ventilator with whom she would have discussed the proceedings of the House, revealing more of their shared political experience and education.

Fanny Allen demonstrated a similar political understanding from the ventilator, conveying acute observations of and judgements on the debate she witnessed on 13th June 1824:

*‘Lushington’s speech was sensible, but his manner was too theatrical and his voice pompous. Tindal answered him. It was his debut and his taste was strange in chusing so odious a subject to begin his House of Commons career....Williams’ speech was very good indeed. Copley’s, the best on his side of the house, I think....Denman spoke very well, but Brougham’s speech was delightful. He spoke for an hour and 10 or 20 minutes, and it was the most incomparable thing I ever heard.’*⁵⁸

Allen presented a balanced and critical evaluation of a range of political speakers, demonstrating an understanding of what constituted ‘good’ and ‘bad’ qualities in a politician. She critically evaluated MPs’ oratory styles and choices of topic in a

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Wedgwood to her aunt Madame Sismondi, 27th March 1831, p. 236.

⁵⁸ Fanny Allen to her sister Mrs Josiah Wedgwood, 13th June 1824, pp.156-157.

manner that demonstrated her political awareness. Her appreciation of the dynamics of debates and of the etiquette of the House of Commons further testified to the knowledge she developed in the ventilator. Her analytical overview would not have been possible from amongst the noise and bustle of the Chamber below and therefore attests to the significance of the ventilator in shaping her political knowledge as well as conveying further challenge to the ideology of separate spheres. At a moment when women were excluded from official engagement with the Commons, the ventilator offered women a space from which they could learn about political proceedings first-hand. These experiences facilitated the formation of their own distinctly female analysis of political questions and contributed to an emergent female political consciousness evolving within the ventilator.

As women experienced political engagement through the spatial medium of the ventilator, so they shared, connected, and networked with the other women in the space. The ventilator became the hub of a female political network as women shared evenings in the ventilator, wrote to one another about them, and disseminated what they heard and thought. In a letter to her aunt Madame Sismondi about the second reading of the Reform Bill in 1831, Elizabeth Wedgwood wrote of how women collected and waited 'to receive bulletins from the Thorntons in the ventilator', alluding to a gathering and disseminating of political information with the ventilator as its source.⁵⁹ Women were appropriating space for their needs, and not only the needs of those fortunate enough to gain access to the ventilator, but also for those still stranded outside of Parliament. Consequently, women were not only reascribing meaning to the ventilator as a place of political agency, but they were also establishing satellites to it that further broadened female access to political life, thus politically educating not only those within and from elite society, but also 'even....the housemaid'⁶⁰, as more women could access political information. Furthermore, by transmitting information from the space of the ventilator to other spaces beyond Parliament, female observers of the House of Commons were indirectly, and perhaps unknowingly, challenging the exclusively male political system that Parliament

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Wedgwood to her aunt Madame Sismondi, 27th March 1831, p. 234.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

projected, enabling numerous women from across society access to the proceedings of a political space that had previously been inaccessible to them. The patriarchal socially produced space of the Houses of Parliament was destabilised by the subversive action of granting access to those beyond the walls of Westminster itself. Women's behaviour demonstrated them acting in new ways within the ventilator that showed political understanding and organisation in a manner that was denied to them by the ideology of separate spheres.

Through their shared experiences, learning, and networking, women created what Fanny Allen termed their own 'pretty history of the ventilator.'⁶¹ Rose conveys how, historically, 'women's movements in public space are constrained by the ideological claim that women's space is the private domestic arena', yet the women depicted in this chapter moved outside of that domestic arena and asserted their claim to a space within Parliament.⁶² The ventilator was not an exclusively female space, but it developed a distinctly feminine character and was constructed on the foundations of women's shared commitment to engaging in political life. In this way, it challenged conventional interpretations of the 'constraints' placed on women's movement in public spaces. Evidently it still had limitations; as a marginalised attic space not fit for the purpose of housing spectators, its physical make-up forced women to act out their formal exclusion from politics. However, the ventilator symbolised female assertion of their right to access Parliament and was constructed by the women within it to become a space of education and female collaboration.

In her study of the dichotomous and gender focused relationship between public and private space in Victorian London, Lynne Walker suggests that women's 'socially lived identities were partly defined by the spaces they occupied and that in turn their presence produced the social spaces and buildings which they occupied: a process which was cumulative and reflexive, taking place over time, producing and being produced by and within dynamic, gendered space.'⁶³ Walker's analysis describes the

⁶¹ Fanny Allen to her sister Mrs Josiah Wedgwood, 13th June 1824, p. 157.

⁶² Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, p.18.

⁶³ Lynne Walker, 'Home and Away: The Feminist Remapping of Public and Private Space in Victorian London' chapter five in *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.65-75 (p.66).

realm of the domestic and the private spaces that women occupied, yet it provides a final reading of the ventilator for this chapter to close on. It is clear that the ventilator allowed women to construct a parliamentary space in which they interacted both with politics and with one another. They observed and analysed; they wrote about what they saw; they sketched and painted what they saw; they disseminated their experiences amongst their friends and acquaintances such that the female political presence in the ventilator was extended beyond the patriarchally defined boundaries of Westminster. Furthermore, through 'living' this political experience, women created a lived *political* identity that was distinctly female, with its own constructed space, viewpoint and understanding. The 'dynamic, gendered space' that Walker refers to becomes that of the ventilator. This early-nineteenth century period appears to have refused women entry onto the political stage, confining them to the wings to watch from a concealed and ignored site out of the main Chamber. However, women overcame this designation and constructed within the ventilator a platform for political education and a site of female political networking, establishing a foundation upon which future women could assert their right to entry to the Houses of Parliament. The great fire of 1834 destroyed the House of Commons and, with it, the ventilator. Unfortunately, it destroyed that site of female political agency that had been so cleverly and subversively established. However, it also destroyed the exclusively patriarchal main chamber of the Commons and could not destroy the political awakening that had occurred in the minds of the women who had accessed Parliament through their place in the ventilator, leaving a female political legacy seeking to claim a site for its establishment in the reconstruction of the house.

Chapter Two: Prisoners in Gilded Cage – the Ladies' Gallery, 1852-1917.

'I must not forget the attempt made by me to procure a better gallery, whence the ladies might listen to the debates, nor the fun we had in the House when some of the oldest members in it rose to oppose the leave I asked for, and assured the Speaker that 'if ladies were permitted to sit undisguised in the gallery, the feelings of these gallant old soldiers and gentlemen would be so excited and turned from political affairs that they would not be able to do their duty to their country.'

*To prevent my elder being thus led astray, I proposed a trellis-work, or partial screen, betwixt the collective gaze of the House and the assembled beauty....In spite of all opposition, leave was obtained to appoint a Committee to consider the best way of carrying out the resolution of the House for an alteration in the gallery....We had very good fun on the Committee, and one dear, gallant old soldier, now no more, who served on it, asked me 'what I could be thinking of to propose a gallery for women; you're married....If you get a comfortable gallery, and make an attendance at the debates a fashion among women, we shall always have our wives looking us up.'*¹

George Fitzhardinge Berkeley MP's recollection narrates his experiences in July 1835 of proposing and overseeing the installation of a Ladies' Gallery in the new Houses of Parliament that opened in 1852. He was MP to Gloucestershire West and a novelist, as well as having passions for sports and duelling. It is unclear why exactly he rose to the task of suggesting the building of a ladies' gallery. The old ventilator discussed in Chapter One was destroyed in the great fire of 1834, leaving behind it the legacy of wider calls for a parliamentary space to accommodate female visitors to the House of Commons and Berkeley became the spokesperson in the House. As his account suggests, the motion was successful, offering a seemingly positive shift in attitudes to women in Parliament as an officially recognised gallery was built for the sole

¹ Grantley F Berkeley, *My Life and Recollections Vol 1* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1865), pp.359-360.

purpose of housing them. However, what his memoirs reveal is the complex nature of the Ladies' Gallery as a space designed by men to define and control how women could engage with the space of Parliament. Berkeley continually refers to the 'fun' had when discussing the new gallery, both in the House and on the Select Committee established to oversee the its design, undermining it as a space of progress and female political advancement and instead presenting it as a pet-project that humoured him and entertained his peers.

The female occupants of the gallery are depersonalised and categorised together as 'the assembled beauty', reduced collectively to a single noun and precluding any political purpose to their presence in the House of Commons. Furthermore, his account highlights the broad objections to the gallery and the concerns that male speakers, glorified by Berkeley as 'gallant old soldiers and gentlemen', would be far too distracted by the female appearance to properly perform their public duty. He proposed a 'trellis-work or partial screen', the construction of which prompted widespread debate until its eventual removal in 1917 and earned the gallery its nickname of the 'cage'. Such concerns about women's distracting influence were widely discussed and dwelt particularly on the distracting nature of their dress. For example, in a debate about the grille on 24th March 1876, Mr Osborne Morgan highlighted that women in the gallery were referred to by other MPs as 'beautiful animals' and 'things to be winked at', distracting MPs from their political business.² Mr Beresford Hope pondered how during the sitting of the House of Commons between four o'clock and midnight the grill prevented ladies from having to worry about 'this question of morning or evening dress'.³ Finally, Berkeley's account reduced the women to 'wives' of MPs, suggesting an inherent notion of class and status attached to the gallery that weakened its potential as an emancipatory space and patronisingly characterised a female presence in the Commons as 'a fashion among women' rather than a desire to engage with the political sphere.

However, in spite of his joviality and apparent undermining of the Ladies' Gallery as a political space, Berkeley's words and actions as he debated for its

² HC Deb 24th March 1876 vol 228 c587, Mr Osborne Morgan.

³ HC Deb 24th March 1876 vol 228 cc 586-587, Mr Beresford-Hope.

establishment suggested another view. He was described in the *Parliamentary Portraits* of 'The Metropolitan' as 'the member for West Gloucestershire who makes just one speech every session, and that speech is always on the same subject. The subject is the admission of ladies to the gallery of the House, to hear debates and witness the proceedings. As a member of the legislature, this is the only question with which Mr Berkeley identifies himself.'⁴ Whilst it seems at odds with the tone of his memoirs, creating a space from which women could observe the House of Commons was clearly a significant issue for Berkeley. Using the argument of women's moral character as a positive influence and their existing influence over politics at a local level, as well as the examples of women's existing interaction with political debate in the House of Lords, the Irish Parliament and the Chamber of Deputies in France, he argued for their presence in the new House. In his address to the House on 16th July 1835, he argued against the 'narrow reasoning' that claimed women should not be interacting with politics:

'I am well aware that there is an erroneous opinion entertained by a few, a very few, as to what is deemed the too great interference of ladies already in the political world; and I have even heard of some men who are sufficiently selfish in their confined notions of lawful rule and right of supremacy, to say that they ought to take no part therein; but this narrow reasoning I deny. So long as a female head can singly wear the crown of England, let them not hold so false a doctrine. Are there any to be found hardy enough to assert that the female portion of the population does not contain a vast share of the better intellect of the country, or that in very many instances it does not fall to their lot to think of, and to rule, the line of conduct which man in his more apparent wisdom may pursue?'⁵

His undermining of popular thinking about the place of women as well as his appreciation of their intellect and existing occasions where women interacted with the ruling of the country present a very different interpretation of the Ladies' Gallery.

⁴ *Parliamentary Portraits*, 'The Metropolitan Magazine', January to April 1838, Vol XXI (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838) p.263.

⁵ HC Deb 16th July 1835 vol 29 cc637-40, Mr Grantley Berkeley.

By invoking the political potential of women, his speech characterised the Ladies' Gallery in the very least as a space of political observation and ambitiously as one of female political influence. His motion won by a narrow majority and a Select Committee was established to oversee the design and installation of the new gallery. The Ladies' Gallery was a multifaceted and contradictory space and Berkeley's speeches and remembrances highlight its paradoxes.

Approaching the Ladies' Gallery

This chapter will interrogate the complexities of the space, exploring both its limitations and its subversive potential. Interrogating these complexities will reveal a dual narrative of the Ladies' Gallery that allows for the expression of female political agency in what was a marginalised and oppressive space. It will consider the problematic nature of the space, particularly its design and construction, which reinforced the patriarchal status quo and imprisoned women's political potential in a cage-like gallery. However, it will also unearth an alternative and female narrative of the space that reveals how, despite its oppressive design, women were able to reconceptualise the Ladies' Gallery as a space of female political education and networking through their interactions and behaviours within it. It will argue that women's experiences of parliamentary space in the Ladies' Gallery shaped new political identities for them and brought them into being, such that by the dawn of the twentieth-century, the Ladies' Gallery was both a symbol and a site of female political protest, challenging the patriarchal status quo that had constructed it.

This parliamentary narrative remains little touched by scholarly work, with women's interactions with Parliament often featuring as fleeting moments in histories focused on political activities beyond Westminster. Existing studies of the Ladies' Gallery by Sarah Richardson and Claire Eustance analyse the oppressive nature of the gallery's design, though Richardson's work also reveals the subversive potential of the space.⁶ This chapter offers a new insight into this topic by tracking

⁶ Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women*, p.137; Claire Eustance, 'Protests From Behind the Grille: Gender and the Transformation of Parliament, 1867-1918', *Parliamentary History*, 16(1), 1997, pp.107-126.

the political journey of women in Parliament that was facilitated by their experiences of the Ladies' Gallery. Furthermore, it will do so by adopting methodologies borrowed from feminist geography to explore alternative readings of space. Briony McDonagh has recently highlighted the importance of adopting these new methodologies to support the uncovering of marginalised voices.⁷ Nirmal Puwar exemplified this approach when she analysed a particularly famous protest in the Ladies' Gallery that shall be considered later in this chapter, considering how challenging boundaries of vision and sound allowed twentieth-century women to contest the oppressive nature of the space.⁸ Adopting a similar approach, this chapter examines the Ladies' Gallery to uncover female experiences that have, until now, gone unexplored.

This chapter will employ two principal ideas from feminist geography in order to analyse a female reconceptualisation of the Ladies' Gallery. Firstly, it will look to Gillian Rose's work on visibility. She argues that visibility refers to how vision, what is seen and how it is seen, is culturally constructed to reinforce dominant narratives.⁹ Berkeley's account of the Ladies' Gallery has already indicated that its design strictly defined what could be seen, or more importantly could not be seen, in order to maintain a narrative of patriarchal dominance in the House of Commons. However, Rose suggests that visibility also makes it possible to read subservient narratives in the same space. By looking through the eyes of the women in the gallery and exploring what they could see, hear, and experience from within it, the Ladies' Gallery suggested a subversive potential that undermined its prison-like and oppressive view from without. Secondly, this chapter will adopt the understanding of gendered space as a social process of symbolic encoding and decoding.¹⁰ Adopting this approach facilitates multiple possible readings of the Ladies' Gallery; although encoded by symbols of patriarchal power and female subservience, the decoding and

⁷ Briony McDonagh, Feminist historical geographies: doing and being, *Gender, Place & Culture* (published online, 2019) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0966369X.2018.1552122>.

⁸ Nirmal Puwar, 'The Archi-texture of Parliament: Flaneur as Method in Westminster', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2010, 16(3), pp.298-312.

⁹ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*.

¹⁰ Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (USA: Guilford Press, 1994).

reconstitution of these symbols allows for a reconceptualisation of the space. By employing these methodologies, this chapter offers a new and innovative reading of the Ladies' Gallery that will allow for a greater understanding of women's experiences of parliamentary space from the mid-nineteenth century and how they helped to shape women's political identities in this period.

The history of the Ladies' Gallery

The complex nature of the Ladies' Gallery was evident from its conception. The consternation that Berkeley's proposal prompted characterised discussions around the space throughout its existence. Cultural values of women's domestic responsibilities ideologically isolated them from the political sphere; this exclusion was reaffirmed in the design and construction of the Ladies' Gallery. Interestingly, the period between the old House of Commons burning down and MPs moving into their new Chamber in 1852 offered more flexibility. The House of Commons moved into the Lesser Hall whilst the building works were taking place, but much of the everyday business of Parliament was occurring in semi-public places without the closed doors of Westminster Palace to bar the outside world. The extent to which the public had access to Parliament during this period is not clear, but perhaps this less formal context would have provided greater scope for public engagement with proceedings. Ladies were afforded a gallery in the temporary chamber, but there is also evidence, as Caroline Shenton has found, of them 'finally in May 1836....[being] permitted to sit in the public gallery in a special area, just as they were in France, America, and some German states.'¹¹ This further set the precedent for establishing a space for women in the new Chamber. The blurred lines around women's engagement with political spaces during this transitory period resulted in a complex political environment as the Ladies' Gallery was being built, opening up further potential for alternative narratives to those of the status quo.

After Berkeley's proposal won a narrow majority, a Select Committee was established to monitor the design and construction of the Ladies' Gallery. In Charles

¹¹ Shenton, *Mr Barry's War*, p.63.

Barry's designs for the new Houses of Parliament, women were to have a separate gallery for the purpose of watching debates in the Commons. In 1876 a debate on the Ladies Gallery attested that 'the presence of ladies was an acknowledged institution of that House. They had made regulations for the admission of ladies, and the plans of the architect contemplated their presence.'¹² Indeed, even the temporary buildings used by Parliament whilst Barry's designs were being constructed were to reflect this new space, as it was decided by the Select Committee on 16th July 1835 that 'a portion of the Stranger's Gallery at the North end of the House, not exceeding a quarter of the whole, and capable of containing 24 ladies, be set apart for their accommodation, divided by a partition from the rest of the Gallery, and screened in front by an open trellis work', with Barry's final designs including a gallery that could accommodate up to forty women.¹³ Furthermore, unlike its predecessor the ventilator, the new Ladies' Gallery was to be formalised with official procedures for access. The Select Committee minutes determined that it 'be called the Ladies' Gallery', as well as outlining the rules to allow 'admittance to be granted and regulated according to such form and manner as The Speaker shall appoint'.¹⁴

The specifications of the 'form and manner' that were deemed appropriate expanded over two pages: it was outlined that a book was to be kept to record the names of all of the ladies who visited the gallery, and that their names ought to be recorded on the day prior to their visit alongside that of the MP they were associated with; no member was to be allowed to invite more than two ladies in a week unless the gallery was not full; printed tickets were to be issued to members that they would pass on to female guests and it was not possible to be admitted to the gallery without a ticket nor to transfer it to another name. These are just a few of the formalities that were decided by the committee. These rules and practices mirrored those of the public galleries and the adoption of such official practices presented the Ladies' Gallery as a recognised and legitimate space for women in Parliament, unlike the

¹² HC Deb 24th March 1876 vol 228 cc579-91.

¹³ Parliamentary Archives HC/CP/16670/4 *Report from the Select Committee on the Admission of Ladies to the Strangers' Gallery together with the Minutes of Evidence taken before them*. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 28th July 1835, p.319.

¹⁴ Parliamentary Archives HC/CP/16670/4 *Report from the Select Committee on the Admission of Ladies to the Strangers' Gallery* 28th July 1835, p.319-320.

ventilator that was an improvised space situated outside of the Chamber. However, they were also a means through which patriarchal powers could define and control which women could enter the gallery, when they could enter, and how they could behave there.

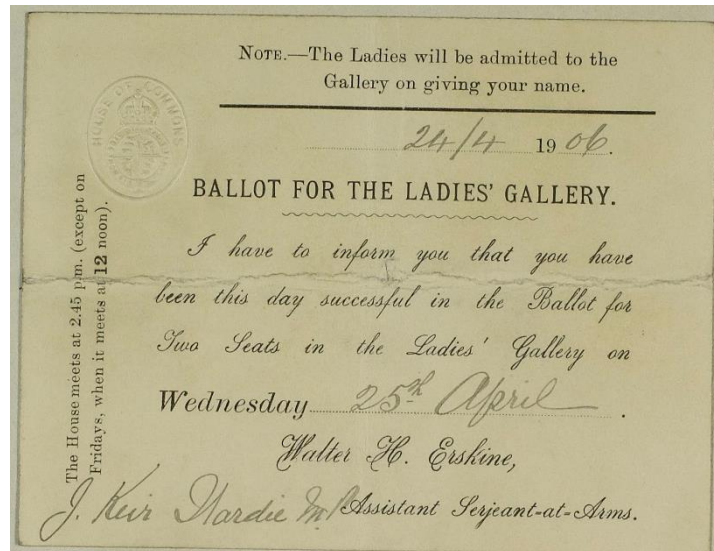


Figure 3: Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/3 – Ticket to the Ladies' Gallery.

Figure 3 shows one of the tickets to the Ladies' Gallery, issued on 25th April 1906 to Keir Hardie. The note at the top indicating that 'ladies will be admitted to the Gallery on giving your name' conveyed how women's access to Parliament was controlled by male authority. That the ticket was issued to the MP by the Assistant Serjeant-at-Arms and not to the women themselves was a further indication that women were there as guests and on the authority of MPs with whom they shared a connection. This in turn implied that the Ladies' Gallery was intended for women of a certain class and with certain societal associations. The ballot for, issuing, and taking up of tickets revolved around male permission. From its conception, the Ladies' Gallery was an official and acknowledged space 'exclusively for their [women's] accommodation', conveying that the new Houses of Parliament was considering the need for women to have access to its proceedings.¹⁵ However, the restrictive nature of a ticketing process and the terms of access defined by men appeared to reinforce the idea that women had no place in public life. The Ladies'

¹⁵ Parliamentary Archives HC/CP/16670/4 *Report from the Select Committee on the Admission of Ladies to the Strangers' Gallery* 28th July 1835, p.320.

Gallery was a problematic space that simultaneously invited women into Parliament as it defined and restricted their political access.

It was not only the Ladies' Gallery but the entirety of the new Chamber that defined the dynamic of both political hierarchies and sexual politics. As the Ladies' Gallery confined women to a liminal and closed off space out of sight and mind, the new Chamber reaffirmed mid-century attitudes to ideals of masculinity revolving around self-control, hard work, and independence.¹⁶ These culturally prescribed characteristics defined the manner in which men interacted with and responded to their perceived duties in the public sphere. These cultural ideals of masculinity were evident in the new design for the House of Commons Chamber which, with dark wooden furniture and gleaming leather, was described as 'the best club in London' and exuded the impression of complete and unerring male control.¹⁷



Figure 4: Parliamentary Archives ARC/VAR/57/2 – Postcard of the House of Commons.

¹⁶ Eustance, 'Protests From Behind the Grille', p.110.

¹⁷ *The Sphere*, January 13th 1906.

In Figure 4 the concept of idealised masculinity is easy to trace. The design projected ideas of rank and authority; the Speaker held the seat of power at the centre of the Chamber with the members likewise positioned around and in the immediate proximity of this centre of power, suggesting their importance and control. The architecture of the Chamber was characterised by its 'monastic' gothic revivalism. The manner in which the Chamber was designed structurally obliged everything to direct its attention towards that central space, such that everyone from the members to the most peripheral spectators were guided to privilege it in their sightline. The gradual moving outwards from that central power implied ranking, with power diminishing the further from the Speaker's chair one found oneself. The design of the Chamber revolved around straight lines which echoed control; their hard and definite shape coincided with the absolute nature of masculinity idealised by cultural values. Dark coloured wood panelling and leather upholstery similarly conveyed the idea of a male space and yet, as it appeared simple in its design, it also exuded both a sense of business and the suggestion of luxury that further posited the ideal qualities of manliness in the period. The whole Chamber conveyed male power and control through its shape and design, confirming the patriarchal nature of political power and reinforcing women's exclusion.

To this end, it appears that the new Ladies' Gallery offered limited scope for a change in ideology about women's engagement with the political sphere. The Ladies' Gallery, or 'Ladies' Cage' as it came to be known, was a space that was constructed by men for women in a way that the ventilator never was. Although the official reintroduction of women into Parliament offered some scope for progress, the space was decided upon, designed, and built by men, and consequently reflected ideals about how men perceived women's role in and interaction with Parliament. It is important to consider how far both these male influences and the ultimate design of the space suggested that women were integrated into Parliament in popular cultural narratives. Not all men were critical of women having a place in politics, and indeed there were those who favoured their introduction. In his famous speech to Parliament on the Household Suffrage Bill on 20th May 1867, John Stuart Mill asked:

‘Can it be pretended that women who manage a property or conduct a business, who pay rates and taxes, often to a large amount, and often from their own earnings, many of whom are responsible heads of families, and some of whom, in the capacity of schoolmistress, teach more than a great many of the male electors have ever learnt, are not capable of a function of which every male householder is capable?’¹⁸

His argument represented many of those put forward by others who were sympathetic to women’s rights. A strong advocate of equality and women’s rights, Mill frequently showed support for female suffrage in the House. He asked at the end of this speech that ‘the word “man” be omitted [from the Household Suffrage Bill], and the word “person” inserted in its place.’¹⁹ Although he was unsuccessful in his attempt to include women at this juncture, he was one of several who began to represent women’s rights on the floor of the House, albeit through male conduits. Nevertheless, in spite of positive support from men such as Mill, the new site for women, realised in the Ladies’ Gallery, was disappointingly representative of the cultural ideals of the exclusion of women from public life that had dominated the century thus far; they were marginalised, unseen, and excluded from the official business of the House.

¹⁸ Published version of speech by John Stuart Mill in the British Parliament on the Household Suffrage Bill, 20th May 1867, British Library YD.2009.a.9066, p.2.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.16.

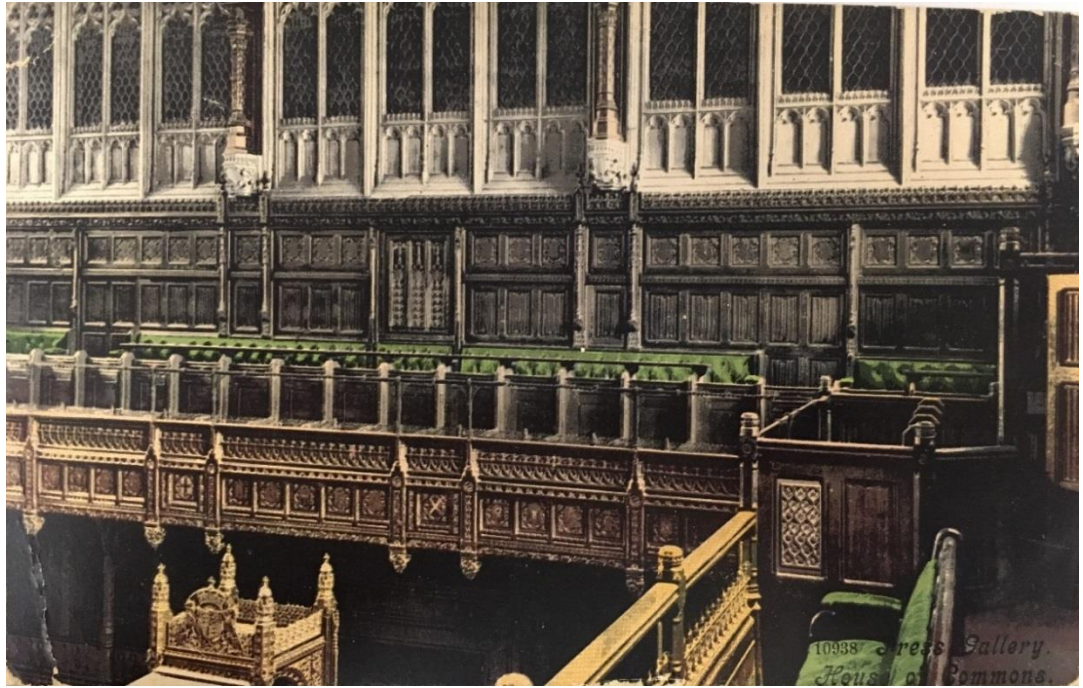


Figure 5: Parliamentary Archives ARC/VAR/57/2 – Postcard of the Press Gallery showing the Ladies' Gallery.

The physical space of the Ladies' Gallery reinforced this exclusion. Women were forced to perform their marginalisation in order to attend Parliament. Firstly, that the space was separate and set apart from the rest of the House conveyed that women were still confined to a liminal site beyond the central Chamber. The Ladies' Gallery was situated directly above the Reporter's Gallery and the Speaker's Chair, furthest away from the proceedings of the House beneath it. It was designed as the space at the greatest distance from political debates. In Figure 5, the metal grille in front of the Ladies' Gallery can be clearly seen. The 'trellis work' that came to earn the space the name of 'Ladies' Cage' has significant symbolic value; women were still physically and ideologically cut off from the proceedings of the Chamber below them, as they still could not be seen by MPs. To this end, the metal grille designed for the front of the Ladies' Gallery appeared to reaffirm the idea of separate spheres, representing a physical barrier between the two as it both physically and metaphorically separated domestic femininity from political masculinity.

The very name of the 'Ladies' Gallery' suggested an implicit idea of the class of woman that would be expected to inhabit the gallery, defining who could attend

Parliament as well as when and how. The wives and daughters of MPs would be permitted to attend and support their male relatives, but this too suggested a further control of political ideology, as these women were expected to support the politics of the men they were connected to. The Ladies' Gallery then became a way of managing the political potential of a female space within Parliament on male terms. Furthermore, the grille also physically limited what women were able to see and hear and was a source of physical discomfort. As Millicent Garrett Fawcett described, 'one great discomfort of the grille was that the interstices of the heavy brass work were not large enough to allow the victims who sat behind it to focus, so that both eyes looked through the same hole. It was like using a gigantic pair of spectacles which did not fit and made the Ladies' gallery a grand place for getting headaches.'²⁰ Fawcett's description was emotive, associating the grille with 'heavy' qualities of conventional manliness, whilst the frail 'victims' were trapped behind it, depicting women as the prisoners of men. Whilst her description suggested the inequality of the situation, it also conveyed the limitations of broader sexual politics. Her perception of the space recounts a narrative that sees the maintenance of women's ideological exclusion from politics and the public sphere.

Contemporary discussions of the Ladies' Gallery recognised the exclusionary nature of the space and it was often likened to 'purdah'. Purdah refers to the practice in some cultures of screening or concealing women from men, usually by means of a curtain. Harriet Beecher Stowe's brother described the Ladies' Gallery as an 'oriental rookery....the architectural version of the veils that covered women in Islamic cultures.'²¹ Charles Beecham's use of the noun 'rookery' dehumanised the women in the gallery, making them birds in an aviary as they were caged to be controlled. The adjective 'oriental' conjures both the notion of purdah and the entrapment of a harem, another metaphor widely used to describe the effect of the grille. Richardson has argued that men were not only 'controlling' but also 'sexualising political space' to 'assert their power over women.'²² These comparisons continued as the Ladies'

²⁰ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *The Women's Victory – And After* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1920), p.166.

²¹ Quoted in Joan D Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.238.

²² Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women*, p.137.

Gallery and the grille partitioning it off became frequent features of debates in the House. In a debate in the Commons on 9th April 1866, Sir George Bowyer referred to the Ladies' Gallery as 'the black hole of Calcutta' and said that 'it reminded him of a Jewish synagogue, where the women were supposed to be concealed from the men; but in that House there was no reason for such concealment.'²³ That the links to other cultures reached the very floor of the house demonstrated the extensive reaches of this metaphor.

Both men and women drew on these comparisons. In her autobiography, Ida B Wells narrated the only known account of the Ladies' Gallery by a woman of colour. She was given a tour of Parliament by Keir Hardie. Of her impressions, she wrote:

'There is [in the British Parliament] a special gallery for women, and the night I stood outside the door and peered into the House of Commons I noticed about the speaker's chair a wire netting which extended to the ceiling. Behind this there were what I took to be gayly dressed wax figures, presumably of historic personages. Imagine my surprise when I was told that was the ladies' gallery, and it was only behind this cage that they were allowed to appear at all in the sacred precincts hitherto devoted to men.'²⁴

The Women's Freedom League described the grille in terms that 'resonated with the orientalist imagery of the oppression of purdah and the harem so characteristic of Victorian feminism.'²⁵ This parallel to the perceived inferiority of eastern cultures and their oppressive treatment of women was intended to shame the House of Commons into reforming the Ladies' Gallery. Antoinette Burton has argued that the image of the oppressed Eastern woman became a recurring motif for Victorian feminists as 'the spectre of degraded Eastern woman and the degenerate children she produced provided feminists with sinister evidence of what the Anglo-Saxon race – and perhaps the imperial nation – might become if female emancipation

²³ HC Deb 9th April 1866 vol 182 cc915-917, Sir George Bowyer.

²⁴ Ida B Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B Wells (Second Edition)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), p.147.

²⁵ Laura E Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.99.

in Britain were prohibited indefinitely.’²⁶ Burton’s analysis contextualises debates around the gallery within a wider narrative of the treatment of women in this period. The ‘spectre’ haunting these nineteenth-century women allied female emancipation with imperialist concerns, broadening the scope of the activism emerging around women’s rights in this mid-century context. However, the use of the ‘degraded’ Eastern woman simultaneously echoed the extent to which Western women were also oppressed and marginalised by society, manifest in the physical barrier of the grille. This motif is problematic when considered alongside the systemic exploitation of colonial peoples by the British Empire, such exploitation as facilitated the privileged lives of the women who would have attended the Ladies’ Gallery. However, they employed it as a means through which they could articulate both the injustice of their situation and their broader political concerns.

The socially produced space of the new House of Commons maintained a central focus of the Chamber and male parliamentary debate to support the patriarchal system. Barry’s design continued the tradition of a central space of political debate that could only be inhabited by men, putting men physically and ideologically at the centre of the political system. The peripheral sites around this space were elevated above it, avoiding engagement in political debate on the same level as the MPs in the Chamber and ensuring that the privileged view and hearing of the MPs was not replicated in any other space. Strangers to the House and reporters inhabited the preferential public galleries. In contrast, women were consigned to the uppermost space and had the additional obstacle of the grille to overcome in order to engage with political debates. In this light, the Ladies’ Gallery appeared to be another symbol of female exclusion from the public sphere. However, the political reforms of this period offer an alternative narrative of progress running parallel to that of the affirmation of the exclusion of women from public life in the new Parliament building. Throughout the nineteenth-century, a series of acts were passed that addressed multiple issues concerning women and bettered their situation.

²⁶ Burton, *Burdens of History*, p.87.

In 1839, the Custody of Infants Act meant that women could petition for the custody of children up to the age of seven. In 1857, the Matrimonial Causes Act moved the authority of granting divorce from Parliament to a court of law, meaning that divorces were more readily accessible as it increased the scope for them to be granted. In 1864, 1866, and 1869, three Contagious Diseases Acts were passed that saw women subjected to awful treatment if suspected of prostitution or spreading venereal disease, but as a result of a campaign led by Josephine Butler that shall be explored further later in this chapter, these were repealed in 1886. In 1870 the Married Women's Property Act meant that women could claim ownership of money and property that she earned during her marriage. In 1873, the Infant Custody Act further embellished upon the Custody of Infants Act to dictate that decisions of custody should be defined by the needs of the children in question. In 1878, the Matrimonial Causes Act decreed that women who were subjected to violence within a marriage could attain a separation order for their protection. Finally, in 1882, the Women's Property Act meant that women had total ownership of their money and property. These Acts of Parliament depict a slow but clear progression of women's interests throughout the nineteenth-century, even as the building excluded them from political life.

Reconceptualising the Ladies' Gallery

In this vein the Ladies' Gallery can also be looked to as the site from which women watched this progression of their rights in Parliament and continued their political education. Georgiana Chatterton's watercolour painting of the ventilator examined in Chapter One (Figure 2) illustrated an alternative reading of the ventilator by centring that space as its focus and displacing the Chamber to its periphery. Adopting the same focus on peripheral spaces in the new House of Commons allows for a similar reconceptualisation of those spaces and a female narrative emerges to challenge a reading of the Ladies' Gallery as solely oppressive. There are further comparisons to be drawn to the ventilator. Like the attic space above the old House of Commons, the Ladies' Gallery maintained the elevated view of women. In the photograph below, taken from the Ladies' Gallery in 1897, the view afforded by its

elevated position is clear. Reporter and cartoonist Henry Furniss described how 'much that is officially important reaches this Gallery which strangers of the sterner sex at the other end of the hall may hear less easily, or not at all', conveying the privileged hearing that was also afforded by the position of the gallery.²⁷ It was also a space with the potential to be reshaped or reimagined. Women's behaviours and development within the Ladies' Gallery created an alternative narrative that saw the space develop over time from a site of female political education and networking to one of overt political protest. Furthermore, women's experiences of and interactions with parliamentary space in the Ladies' Gallery shaped new political identities.



Figure 6: Parliamentary Archives HC/LB/1/111/1/12 – House of Commons from the Ladies' Gallery. This photograph was taken by MP Benjamin Stone as part of a series documenting Parliament as a historic building.

²⁷ Henry Furniss, 'Stranger's in the House No 2' in *The Graphic*, 16th March 1889, p.278, Parliamentary Archives ARC/VAR/180.

The tensions between these two readings of the Ladies' Gallery continued to shape contemporary discourse on the space. On 16th March 1889, *The Graphic* released a supplement with the second part of a parliamentary study by Henry Furniss entitled 'Strangers in the House No.2' with a focus entirely on the Ladies' Gallery. Furniss was a sketch writer commissioned to observe and report on life in the Palace of Westminster and this supplement was the second of a series of studies entitled 'Life in Parliament'. Although primarily an illustrator, he had gained experience drawing caricatures of political figures in the 1870s and, upon coming to London, would frequently spend time in the Press Gallery of the House of Commons sketching the prominent MPs in debates which he then sold to city publications. His depictions of the Ladies' Gallery revealed more of the dual narratives at play there. His article opened claiming to 'have done little more than edit the experiences of certain ladies who have generously placed their time and knowledge at my disposal, but do not permit me the honour of tendering my thanks publicly to them by name'.²⁸ He framed his account with female experiences at the fore; the women remained anonymous and their voices were mediated through his but his allusion to their influence over the content of his study shares parallels with the political influence they were able to garner from the Ladies' Gallery.

²⁸ Ibid., p.277.



Figure 7: Parliamentary Archives HC/LB/1/112/248 – A Corner in Ladies' Gallery

In Figure 7, entitled 'Corner in the Ladies' Gallery', Furniss depicted how women were obliged to crane forwards, highlighting the physical barrier the grille placed between them and the political proceedings they were trying to observe. The image featured no elements of the political business, reinforcing the ideological barrier excluding them from the political sphere. Instead, he focused on their clothing and adornments, connoting the female function of ornamentation, the same ornamentation that some MPs felt would be a distraction and used to justify the installation of the grille. That this ornamentation is a construct imposed by patriarchal power upon perceived notions of femininity to both please men and place women in a subservient position further upheld the status quo of male authority. Furniss' subtitle of 'Caged' evoked how the grille inhibited female spectators. 'The Dungeon' with the accompanying description of the waiting room as 'hardly as attractive as it might be....dark and small, and more suggestive of a prison than a palace', further enforced the idea of women as prisoners of male control.²⁹ The

²⁹ Ibid., p.278.

theme of control coloured his description as he noted that regulations were 'made for her benefit, and it is in her interest to conform to them.'³⁰ He commended the 'vigilance of the police', proclaiming 'let a lady endeavour to find a place within the outer gates – under an archway, in a corridor, on the Terrace, anywhere where she is not under the direct observation of a policeman, and she will find that she is attempting an impossibility.'³¹ His narrative conveyed the oppressive way in which women were continually observed.

However, Furniss' sketch also offered an alternative narrative of how women used the space in ways that challenged its oppressive design. They were depicted as individual characters, conveying their significance as separate identities rather than them being seen simply as a group of women. He drew them craning forwards in an attempt to see through the grille, clearly engaging with and invested in the political discussion below. Despite the constructed visuality suggesting a removal of women from politics by the inability to see the Chamber in the image, their behaviour redirects the viewer's attention to the House below and necessitates a link between the women in the gallery and political proceedings. The inability to see the Chamber suggested power relations that excluded women from the hegemonic male space of politics, yet their behaviour within the space circumvented their exclusion and refocused the view on their relationship to the centre of power. As Furniss represented their seclusion, he also represented their behaviour. Their focus on the debate below posited an alternative interpretation in which they were fully engaged with the political process from which they were ideologically excluded. Social differences between male and female were constructed around separation of their abilities, duties, and power but the behaviour of these women craning forward challenged that concept. As they physically stretched their bodies to see, they breached the gap between male and female spheres to demonstrate themselves as both willing and capable of engaging with 'male' political business.

In addition to his sketches, Furniss' article included interviews with the women he encountered in the Ladies' Gallery that similarly conveyed the dual

³⁰ Ibid., pp.277-278.

³¹ Ibid., p.278.

narratives at play in the space and its potential to be both a site of oppression and a site of female political engagement. The interviews revealed that women themselves were aware of these tensions and understood the gallery's value as a space of potential. Furniss wrote:

'One lady has told me that her first feeling was that she was like a bird in a cage – only 'more so', since her fine feathers were useless as there was no opportunity to display them to an admiring 'house'; and, further, she must have recollected that the caged songster can at least exercise his sweet voice unrestrained, and this dear privilege of the weaker sex is not permitted by the Rules of the House of Commons, and is, I need scarcely say, by far the most frequent cause of an official protest from other parts of the House.'³²

The dehumanising of the woman to a mere bird, adorned with feathers and a singing voice, was reminiscent of the decorative purposes of women alluded to by MPs objections to the gallery's installation. However, the sympathetic tone with which the 'caged songster' was treated suggested some failings in this new arrangement. Furthermore, although she described being silenced in the gallery, in Furniss' interview the 'songster' testified publicly to her dissatisfaction with the Ladies' Gallery. Presumably the woman knew that Furniss was a journalist and that her words would be published. *The Graphic* served as a public mouthpiece to challenge the oppressive design of the gallery. These criticisms of the space brought ideas of women as politically engaged into the public domain and challenged the limitations of the Ladies' Gallery.

The question of the grille

Women's discontent with the Ladies' Gallery continued to shape discussions of its design in the public sphere. As the debate moved beyond conversations between women behind the grille or in private letters, the question of the grille became one of national political significance. The matter of the poor ventilation of

³² Ibid., p.278.

the Ladies' Gallery was introduced almost immediately after its opening and was first brought to the attention of Members of the House on 12th May 1864, when Sir George Bowyer asked for the grating to be removed. Following up again on 30th June 1864 as he 'wished to ask the First Commissioner of Works, whether, for the purpose of providing for the due ventilation and comfort of the Ladies' Gallery, he will give directions for the removal of the grating in front of that Gallery?', he reminded the House that 'in the House of Lords ladies sit in an open gallery without any grating at all....And is this House likely to be influenced by the ladies when they do no harm in the House of Lords?'³³ Bowyer had studied the law and was interested in religious debates, converting to Roman Catholicism in 1850 and strongly supporting both Catholic and philanthropic causes. His support of the Ladies' Gallery grille being removed was continuous, as he raised the issue in the house again in 1866 and 1867. Although once more articulated through a male mouthpiece, the discussion of female political needs in the Chamber represented a shift in thinking about women in Parliament. The Ladies' Gallery became a symbol of female political engagement and debates around its design allegorically represented discussions of women and politics.

Bowyer was not the only MP who proposed the removal of the grille. However, those raising the issue of the grille were met with strong resistance in the House. On 9th April 1866, Mr Cowper responded to Bowyer's arguments as follows:

'there was no rule of the House which allowed ladies to be present, and it would be a great change in their practice if they were to make one. In the House of Lords it was quite different. Peeresses had rights there as well as the Peers, but it was otherwise in the House of Commons, and his own impression was that most of the ladies who came to attend their debates would not be desirous of being more exposed to public view than at present. He believed that they were thankful for the veil of obscurity, which protected them from publicity, and from the observation of the House.'³⁴

³³ HC Deb 30th June 1864 vol 176 c496, Sir George Bowyer.

³⁴ HC Deb 9th April 1866 vol 182 cc919-920, Hon. Henry Cowper.

Cowper spoke on behalf of women, assuming their personal feelings and responses to the grille and relying on the traditions of Parliament to argue for their continued exclusion. However, that the resistance was so strong suggested that the question of women in Parliament was becoming more prominent. Women continued to watch the unfurling of these debates from the Ladies' Gallery. 'The Ladies' Gallery Resolution' on 9th July 1869, saw Mr Henry Arthur Herbert, MP for Kerry, rise to move that the grille be removed from the front of the Ladies' Gallery, seconded by Mr Andrew Johnston, MP for Essex Southern. They were opposed by Mr Alexander Beresford Hope who continued the argument that the grille was there for the protection of women. The House did not divide and the grille remained in place. Nevertheless, it continued to be a topic of debate throughout the rest of the nineteenth-century. The Ladies' Gallery remained oppressive but women's voices were emerging from within it to shape discussions on the floor of the House. Furthermore, those discussions revolved around female political needs and desires.

A particularly interesting debate was on 24th March 1876 where once again Mr Beresford Hope opposed the removal of the grille, referring to the earlier movement in 1869 and its lack of success. Sir George Bowyer continued to support the removal of the grating, backed by several of his fellow MPs. Sir William Fraser highlighted how 'having visited the Gallery just now, he found it was very difficult to hear and absolutely impossible to see from the back seats.'³⁵ Mr Osborne Morgan argued that 'if those who were in favour of the grating desired it for the protection of the ladies they paid but a poor compliment to the House; while if, on the contrary, they thought it necessary for the protection of the House, that was but a poor compliment to the ladies', expressing his contempt for the fact that 'the House of Commons was the only Assembly in the world in which it was found necessary to shut up the ladies in the way they did.'³⁶ The contestation of this physical and ideological barrier brought the issue of women in Parliament onto the floor of the House and saw numerous MPs engaging with the idea that women might have a place in the political process. Although this was promising, the grille remained in

³⁵ HC Deb 24th March 1876 vol 228 c589, Sir William Fraser.

³⁶ HC Deb 24th March 1876 vol 228 c587-588, Mr Osborne Morgan.

place throughout the nineteenth-century and was not removed until 23rd August 1917. Nevertheless, its very debate saw men engaging in the discussion around the role women should play in political life and introduced the topic of women's rights to political debate. Paradoxically, the grille went from being a barrier excluding women from the House to the topic of debate that moved them firmly onto its floor.

The 'herstory' of the Ladies' Gallery

The limitations of the Ladies' Gallery were not only challenged by British women and MPs. Kate Field, travel writer, actress, and American visitor on an educational tour of Europe, described how 'the Ladies' Gallery is nothing more nor less than a box, a coop fronted by a heavy iron grille so that I can soon feel as if I were shut up in prison for some unknown crime. I can flatten my nose against the bars and see without being seen, - by which arrangement the intellect of mighty man is not distracted by the presence of lovely women.'³⁷ Her account revealed something of how British politics were conveyed abroad in a country where women enjoyed comparatively more freedoms. The unfairness of an 'unknown crime' alongside the mocking juxtaposition of the stereotypes of the 'intellect of mighty man' and mere 'lovely women' indicated that a broad spectrum of women were criticising the cage-like feel of the gallery and contesting it in their writings. Furthermore, Field's mockery suggested another challenge to female subservience, creating new meanings of femininity within the space of the gallery as she denounced its failings with an authoritative female voice. As a foreign visitor to the gallery, the concept of its cage-like design was clearly shocking and unpleasant to her, and her open criticism of this in her American voice adds another dimension to the female political narrative that was emerging from this new space.

Observations of women such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Fanny Allen, and Kate Field documented a female political narrative of the Ladies' Gallery. Women's interactions with the Ladies' Gallery shaped a female political identity that developed

³⁷ Kate Field cited in Mary Suzanne Schriber, *Writing Home: American Women Abroad, 1830-1920* (USA: University of Virginia Press, 1997), p.152.

over time as women adapted to the space. Similarly, their behaviour in the Ladies' Gallery became increasingly politicised as their identity developed, marking a narrative of women's political awareness that was intrinsically tied to the space of the gallery. Women continued to write about these experiences and developed a stronger political voice as a result of their experiences in the Ladies' Gallery. The shifts in their use of the space and changes in their behaviour became more clearly and consciously articulated in their writing. Anna Parnell was an Irish nationalist, political activist, writer, and sister of Irish Nationalist Leader Charles Stewart Parnell. Her account of the Ladies' Gallery described that although the 'dimly lit parlour reserved for the unenfranchised portion of the population' was on appearance restrictive and liminal, 'it did in fact ensure considerable advantages which were denied the men – freedom to stand up, to talk, to keep on their hats and above all, freedom to go to sleep, a benefit no one who has not frequented the House of Commons....can rightly appreciate the greatness of.'³⁸ Parnell noted demonstrations of dress, movement, interaction, and action that all deviated from the draconian rules of the Commons and introduced women to small, subversive acts within the space of Parliament. Women were able to talk and to discuss what they were watching such that their political identities developed in the context of discussion and collaboration with other women. The design of the Ladies' Gallery was encoded by male intentions of removing women from male spaces of power but was decoded and reconstructed in Parnell's discourse as liberating in contrast with other parliamentary sites and as an arena that encouraged the development of female political networks.

Fanny Allen's political commentary continued to develop, reflecting how women's political consciousness and identities developed over time in the Ladies' Gallery. She moved from likening the House of Commons to the theatre to explicitly critiquing and exploring the Chamber itself.³⁹

³⁸ Anna Parnell cited in Jane McL. Côté, *Fanny and Anna Parnell: Ireland's Patriot Sisters* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p.95.

³⁹ See chapter one *The Petticoat Parliament House*, pp.42-52.

‘The only person, or the two persons I wished to hear, I did not. H.Drummond did not speak that night, and Julia Smith would not stay long enough for D’Israeli. Then I should say the debate was a cold one. Mr Gladstone spoke fluently, but there was no soul in his words, and indeed there were no giants in the House.’⁴⁰

Allen developed preferences both about politics and orators. She was able to comment on whole debates as well as individual speeches, and she understood the concept of key political players through her allusion to the ‘giants in the House’. As well as critiquing the physical space of Parliament in her judgement of the provisions offered for women in the new Ladies’ Gallery, Fanny Allen also continued to develop as a commentator on political debates in her personal letters, showing a more enriched understanding through her continued political education in this new space. Fanny Allen was not alone in her development, as references to experiences in the Ladies’ Gallery and the accompanying political critiques that these experiences fostered continued to feature more prominently in ladies’ writings through the mid-century. Mrs Tanner, in her letter to Josephine Butler on 7th March 1886, described Mr Stansfeld’s speech as ‘of great force and beauty’, reflecting an understanding of oratory skills and a strong connection to the political content of the speech.⁴¹

Like her aunt Fanny Allen, Emma Darwin conveyed her political experiences of the Ladies’ Gallery in her correspondence. In writing to her daughter Henrietta Litchfield in 1886 she showed awareness and contemplation of a whole political debate:

‘I was absorbed in the debate yesterday, Gladstone’s was a very fine speech with all the obstacles to the scheme slurred over, and with a very unworthy comparison about intimidation in England. I am glad he spoke so highly of Albert Dicey’s book. Trevelyan’s speech was grand, and Parnell’s a mere personal attack and squabble, and very bad even for him. I wonder how it will end.’⁴²

⁴⁰ Fanny Allen to her niece Elizabeth Wedgwood, 26th December 1847, p.113.

⁴¹ Mrs Tanner to Josephine Butler, 7th March 1886, Women’s Library 3JBL/03/13.

⁴² Emma Darwin to her daughter Henrietta Litchfield Spring 1886, p.274.

As wife of Charles Darwin and member of an elite family, Emma Darwin moved among privileged circles and attended to the issues of the day. However, her observations were more than the fashionable account of a woman in high society. Her description of herself as 'absorbed' in the debate demonstrated an interest in and focus on the political matter in hand. Her critique conveyed an understanding of interactions between different political players, as well as clear political views of her own. She deftly praised some, whilst criticising others, giving a detailed picture of her interpretation of events. The gallery that was defined by social differences of public male and domestic female ironically facilitated her 'masculine' understanding of politics and allowed her to ascribe a new meaning to the gallery as a site of her political education.

Furthermore, Emma Darwin's letters demonstrated that she networked with other women in relation to her discussion of political debates, furthering her political education whilst simultaneously extending a female political network arising from these exchanges. When discussing the forty-one hours sitting of the House of Commons in February 1881, she described how:

'I think I never enjoyed anything so much in politics as when the Speaker at last put his foot down on Wednesday morning, and all the more because it disappointed horrid Mr Biggar and his papers and Blue books. I was out of all patience with the Speaker and the Executive, but Mrs Mulholland, who called here yesterday, said that the reticence was preconcerted in order to give them plenty of rope to hang themselves.'⁴³

It was one of many challenges by Parnell to Parliament on the question of Ireland and Home Rule but this particular occasion was remarkable because of the length of time for which Parnell and his supporters were able to disrupt the debate. Firstly, although it was not explicit in her letter whether or not she remained for the duration of this event, her loss of patience indicated that she spent a significant amount of time in the gallery to witness the scene. She conveyed a particular interest in national issues by the nature of the debate she endeavoured to follow. However, most interestingly

⁴³ Emma Darwin to her daughter Henrietta Litchfield December 1881, pp.243-244.

here, Emma Darwin indicated how her understanding of the event was illuminated by conversation with Mrs Mulholland. Mrs Mulholland showed a keen understanding of the political tactics taking place and, through her explanations, was able to enlighten another woman in her political network. Furthermore, this occurred beyond the boundaries of Parliament as Mrs Mulholland 'called here'. Paradoxically, by marginalising women to maintain power relations favourable to male control, the gallery enabled and encouraged the collaborative power of female discussion. That the conversation did not take place in the gallery itself was further testament to women's political engagement extending beyond Parliament as they took their observations from the House of Commons into their discussions outside. These exchanges were collaborative, educational, and focused on politics, demonstrating how female political networking nurtured developing identities in the Ladies' Gallery.

These collaborations extended to women of relatively young ages who visited the Ladies' Gallery. In her autobiography, writer Beatrice Potter Webb recalls how, at the age of fourteen, she:

'concentrate[d] on extracting tickets for the Ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons from my sisters' admirers....I recollect spending hours listening to debates – loathing Gladstone and losing my heart to Disraeli; on one occasion (I think it was after one of the big debates on the Ballot Bill) returning in a hansom cab in the small hours of the morning, alone with my latchkey to our house in Princes Gardens, an occasion stamped on my memory by ravenous hunger.'⁴⁴

Even at the young age of fourteen, Potter conveyed a clear passion for engaging with politics through both the time dedicated to procuring tickets and listening to debates and her views on the political figures she discussed. Conveying a skilful approach to gaining access to the House, she was able to manipulate the social admiration of women as things of beauty to win tickets from her sister's admirers. Potter endured the discomfort of 'ravenous hunger' in order to see a debate in its entirety, reminiscent of Fanny Allen's discomfort in the ventilator. The juxtaposition of

⁴⁴ Beatrice Potter Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.63.

'loathing' and 'losing my heart' illustrated the strong convictions behind the political views she was developing. Although not as mature or detailed in their nature as some political views expressed in the letters of older women, Potter's recollections conveyed that the female political identity flourishing in the Ladies' Gallery was accessible to women of all ages.

Although at its outset there were strict rules and principles that guided who was able to receive tickets and how and when this was possible, these regulations were quickly abandoned, and it was soon possible for women without a ticket to queue up and take a seat once the House was sitting and it was clear which tickets were not going to be taken up on that day. Despite the strict rules about tickets being allocated by MPs and visitors' names being recorded the day before their arrival, soon it was also common place to exchange and pass tickets on, with some MPs even signing blank tickets to be filled in with someone's name at a later time. Once more women found themselves in a unique situation; although the Ladies' Gallery was an officially recognised space within Parliament, it was not bound by the rules of the House of Commons itself, so separated was it by the infamous grille. Consequently, the 'rules' put in place to govern their interaction with Parliament at the gallery's conception were quickly altered, adapted, or done away with altogether as women adapted their behaviours and appropriated the space for their needs. In her *Notes from the Ladies' Cage*, Anna Parnell noted some of the further benefits to this flexible handling of regulations:

'Everyone knows that occasionally an MP informs the Speaker that strangers are present, with a view to having them turned out....The ladies, however, do not share in the general banishment, unless, indeed, it happens to be decreed in their special interest. Not being visible they can very easily be supposed not to exist.'⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Anna Parnell, 'How they do in the House of Commons. Notes from the Ladies' Cage', *Celtic Monthly*, 3:5 (May 1880), p.469.

Like its predecessor, the ventilator, the Ladies' Gallery permitted women to remain when the other galleries were cleared, allowing women a privileged view of closed debates. Anna Parnell went further to name some of these:

'When Mr Biggar ejected the Prince of Wales, and so made a thrill of horror run through the backbone of the Empire, when Mr O'Donnell's speech on Lord Leitrim was found too shocking for publication, and on other occasions nearly as exciting, the ladies were present all through, and thus enjoyed ample compensation for any disadvantages imposed on them by their position in ordinary times, so that it is not after all hard to understand why they so contentedly submit to imprisonment and seclusion.'⁴⁶

Although Parnell noted the benefits of the Ladies' Gallery, she was not blinded to the patriarchal influence that dictated its construction. Her comment on invisibility making it easy to assume women no longer existed was a sharp criticism of the physical and ideological exclusion of women from the Chamber by the grille. She understood that, through their inability to be seen, women were removed from the business of the House. However, she simultaneously reconceptualised the gallery to convey the paradoxical privileges it offered its female inhabitants. It is also important to note that Parnell's account is an example of women's writing about the Ladies' Gallery moving from private letters to public political reporting. She conveyed an intricate understanding of parliamentary procedure and acute analytical skills as well as an art for wit and satire.⁴⁷ Anna Parnell had a uniquely political background and was not representative of the average middle-class female in her access to influence. Nevertheless, the thoughts expressed in her writing were conceived of in the Ladies' Gallery and shared by its other inhabitants, contributing to the overall female political identity developing there.

Anna Parnell was not the only woman to develop a public political voice. In February 1908, Lady McLaren released her *Answer from the Ladies' Gallery to the Speeches in Opposition to the Women's Suffrage Bill*, taking to account all of the

⁴⁶ Parnell, 'How they do in the House of Commons', p.469.

⁴⁷ McL. Côté, *Fanny and Anna Parnell*, p.95.

arguments suggested by men in the Chamber against the Suffrage Bill and answering them in turn with an intelligent wit and subtle mockery. She asserted that 'my object is to answer the arguments advanced against the measure' and she did so systematically, addressing MPs by name and countering their arguments.⁴⁸ Her account was based on her reaction to debates that she had heard in the Ladies' Gallery. Once again, the political understanding developed within the gallery was transmitted to the outside world. Furthermore, Lady McLaren noted a shift in the political engagement of the women in the gallery as she narrated that 'the day has fortunately gone by when little jokes and ungallant stories have power to move the Ladies' Gallery.'⁴⁹ She illustrated the changes in women's behaviours over time as they engaged with the space of the gallery and adopted new attitudes and responses to the debates in the House. Furthermore, her words were publicly available and disseminated the idea of women as politically engaged beyond the confines of the gallery.

Beyond the Ladies' Gallery

Women not only adopted new behaviours within the Ladies' Gallery but also began using other parliamentary spaces to articulate their political ambitions. The 1832 petition calling for female enfranchisement was discussed in Chapter One. It was unique in its early proposal but was neither widely supported nor followed by subsequent petitions supporting its cause. However, this changed dramatically in the mid-century period. Over 16,000 petitions in favour of the female franchise were received by Parliament between 1866 and 1918. The sudden adoption of petitioning as a political method to campaign for women's suffrage was inspired by a mass petition organised by the Kensington Society and presented to Parliament by John Stuart Mill in 1866. Women's political concerns were moving from behind the grille onto the floor of the House. The Ladies' Gallery became a space from which women could witness the reading of their petitions and track their progress. It became an

⁴⁸ Lady McLaren, 'Better and Happier': An Answer from the Ladies' Gallery to the Speeches in Opposition to the Women's Suffrage Bill, 28th February 1908, p.3, British Library 08416.i.42(3.).

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.4.

increasingly politicised site. The first Women's Suffrage Bill was presented to Parliament in 1870 by Jacob Bright and Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke. Although it was the first Bill, it was not the first debate on the subject. This happened during Mill's attempt to amend the Second Reform Bill in 1867. In a letter to her husband, Josephine Butler recalled a discussion with women who witnessed the presentation of the bill from the Ladies' Gallery:

'I did not go to the House of Commons last evening, because I was too late. The ladies all came back early, in high spirits, the Female Suffrage Bill having passed the second reading by a majority of 33.....Mrs Bright described amazingly the scene in the House & in the Gallery. When the votes had been counted....Mrs Maclaren (Mrs Bright's sister) sank upon Mrs Peter Taylor's breast, & Mrs Peter Taylor sobbed! Miss Becker stood bolt upright like a statue with hands clasped in a dumb ecstasy of joy. A lady behind clapped her hands, & at once a _____ in office rushed in & told her that there must be no noise!'⁵⁰

The reactions of these women moved beyond simple interest as they developed a political identity that sought representation. That they were observing the debate on the proposed bill for their suffrage emphasises their engagement with their own place in political life. For those women in Parliament, this meant that their political endeavours fought increasingly to move beyond the grille to the floor of the Chamber. Sites defined by male hegemony were shifting as female subjects introduced new behaviours within and consequently meanings to parliamentary spaces, reconceptualising them in a manner that served their uniquely female political aspirations.

Women were not only interacting with political issues concerning their own emancipation but began to more openly and confidently support other causes that they considered important. They engaged with a wide range of debates such as slavery, Home Rule, educational reform, public health acts, and marriage reform. A

⁵⁰Letter from Josephine Butler to her husband Rev George Butler, 6th May 1870, Women's Library 3JBL/03/13.

political debate of the time that saw women notably claiming greater space in the House of Commons was that of the campaign for the repeal of the 'Contagious Diseases Acts' of 1864, 1866 and 1869. These acts declared that police could arrest women suspected of carrying venereal disease in naval and military towns and force them to submit to 'medical' examinations. They also had the power to confine women indefinitely until their suspected disease was cured and they were no longer considered a risk. Objecting to the inequality of legislation that exploited women's bodies and highlighting the invasive humiliation of forced examinations and confinement, Josephine Butler led a campaign to challenge these acts and have them repealed. Daughter of John Grey, who himself was a strong advocate of social reform and was very active in the anti-slavery campaigns, Josephine Butler grew up with strong political views that continued to be supported by her husband, George Butler. With Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy she established the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts that saw over 800 women support the campaign, publishing pamphlets and petitioning government for repeal.

In 1883 when the matter was to be discussed in Parliament, Butler encouraged all women to attend the debate in the Ladies' Gallery.⁵¹ There was some consternation about whether or not women should be permitted to witness the discussion of such a delicate subject. However, Butler was so determined to ensure the presence of women that she wrote a circular to MPs on 20th February before the debate on the 27th contesting that 'in a question so vital and solemn as this, self ought to be forgotten, and there ought never to be heard such sentimental talk either among men or women about our feelings of delicacy or any personal pain' and demanded that if men were to discuss and permit 'such an outrage against women, they ought, in justice, to give an account of their action in the presence of those

⁵¹ Butler also took her campaign beyond the Ladies' Gallery into other political spaces. She appeared before a Royal Commission in 1871, promoting the views of working men and their objection to 'sex legislation' and 'a woman's character being referred to as arbitrary and inadequate a tribunal as one magistrate without a jury.' Involving men in her campaign for reform created another dimension to her politics that looked at women's rights in the broader context of sexual politics. Appearing before the Royal Commission, Butler was also challenging a conventionally male-controlled space with her vocal female presence.

women.’⁵² In her campaign, Butler not only contested how women’s bodies were perceived within society but she also challenged how those bodies were perceived within Westminster. She placed her protest in the Chamber through petitions, generated a physical female presence in the Ladies’ Gallery, and dismissed arguments about the language suitable and appropriate to be heard by women. The ‘Contagious Diseases Acts’ were repealed in 1886 and, in addition to the championing of women’s rights over their bodies, it also marked another change in the dynamic of women’s influence in Parliament from the Ladies’ Gallery. Furthermore, not only did Butler’s campaign further develop the female political narrative in the Ladies’ Gallery, it publicly and nationally challenged the popular patriarchal narrative that categorised women’s bodies as sinful and corrupt.

⁵² Josephine Butler to an MP, *Ought Women to be in the Gallery of the House of Commons on the 27th?*, 20th February 1883, 3JBL/22/13 Women’s Library at LSE.

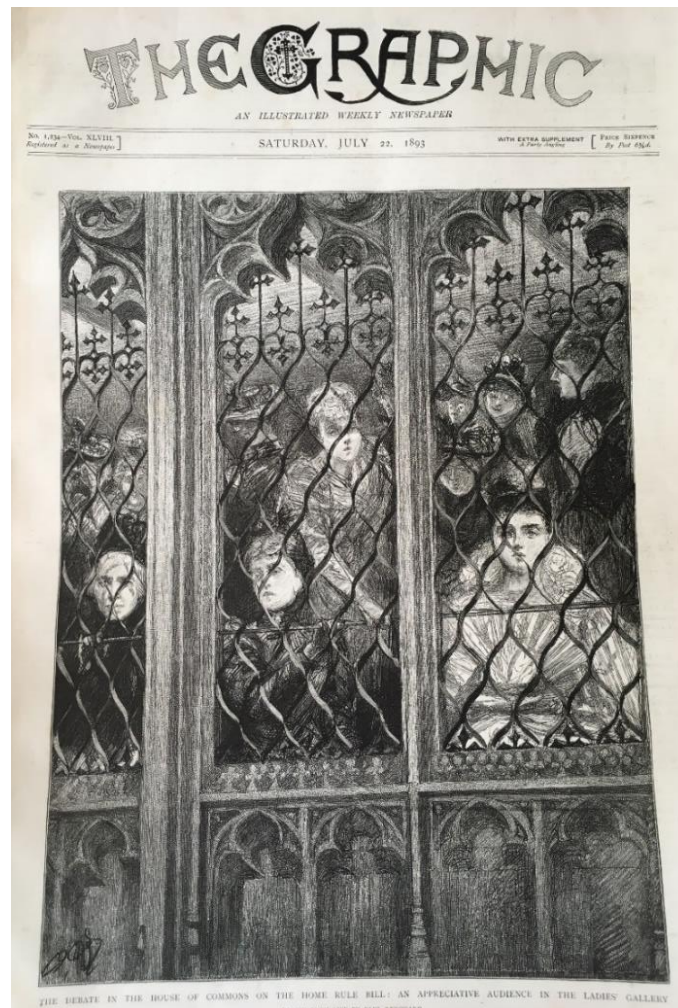


Figure 8: Private Collection – *The Graphic*, Saturday 22nd July, 1893.

Another political debate of the day that garnered female political interest was Home Rule. Figure 8 is the front page of *The Graphic* on Saturday 22nd July 1893. It depicted what was described in the caption as ‘an appreciative audience in the Ladies’ Gallery’ for the debate on the Home Rule Bill’. The gallery was portrayed as full and all of the women’s faces were directed towards the debate in the Chamber. As their presence in Parliament continued and their confidence grew, so did the manner in which women engaged with the debates they were watching. Increasing numbers caused the presence of women to be recorded on a front page, shifting a purely male public political focus to consider female participants. The space of political business was becoming more fluid as women continued to pursue their place in Parliament. Furthermore, the political discussions in the Ladies’ Gallery were moving beyond its confines in the form of letters, publications, petitions, and

campaigning. Women developed these new behaviours over the course of their time in the gallery, redefining it as a space of female political education and networking. The Ladies' Gallery became a symbol of women's position in politics as it was both oppressive and liberating. The space took on its most remarkable transformation at the beginning of the twentieth-century as the campaign for the female franchise finally saw it become a site of female political protest.

Towards a space of female protest and resistance

Figure 9 from *The Graphic* in 1906 conveyed women beginning to contest the physical barrier between them and the House and begin to claim space within the Chamber itself.



Figure 9: Private Collection – *The Graphic*, 5th May 1906, p.558.

The caption read:

‘A remarkable scene occurred in the House of Commons last week during the debate on the extension of Parliamentary franchise to women. A number of feminine champions of the movement, who had gained access to the Ladies’ Gallery, raised a disturbance, clamouring for a division and shaking their fists at members through the grille. The general opinion is that this tactless and undignified demonstration has thrown back the cause of women’s suffrage for a number of years.’

The caption reinforced social expectations of female comportment and denounced this assertive behaviour as unseemly, claiming that it damaged the women’s suffrage movement. Perhaps this was the case but the multi-faceted story of female suffrage, particularly at this moment in history, is far too complex to be summarised in such a way. Nevertheless, what is significant when reading the space of the Ladies’ Gallery in this image is that these women breached the border that divided them from the ‘male’ space of the Chamber. Disregarding the rules of the House, they were clearly depicted demonstrating their political demands in a physical way that challenged male ownership of the space. By using their bodies to literally penetrate the Chamber, these women crossed ideological boundaries as well as the physical boundary of the grille. Their physicality challenged prescriptive notions of femininity and the entrance of parts of their bodies into the space of the Chamber challenged their marginalisation within the House of Commons.

Women in the gallery created a female political narrative that grew increasingly prominent as the century progressed. This narrative challenged patriarchal authority of the space of Parliament. This physical challenge to parliamentary space became most apparent on 28th October 1908 when Helen Fox and Muriel Matters of the Women’s Freedom League ‘chained themselves to ironwork of the grill’ of the gallery in what was both a brave demonstration in the campaign for the female franchise and an overt claim to space within the

Commons.⁵³ As they were doing so, Violet Tillard put a banner calling for 'Votes for Women' through the latticework and men in the public galleries threw leaflets down to the MPs below.



Figure 10 : Parliamentary Archives – HC/SA/SJ/3/1 – Suffragette Banner

Matters and Fox broke the physical boundary of the grille and challenged the ideological barrier it represented that excluded them from the debate below. Furthermore, they disrupted the 'male' business of the house and forcibly placed female concerns in its way. Hansard records that, during the debate below on a Licensing Bill, 'the remainder of the speech [by Mr Remnant] was inaudible in the Press Gallery on account of a disturbance in the Ladies' Gallery, where two ladies had chained themselves to the grille and endeavoured to address the House in favour of woman suffrage.'⁵⁴ In this instance female voices overpowered those of the male MPs below. The women caused quite a disruption and were 'brought out with the

⁵³ Police Report by Chief Inspector Scantlebury, 28th October, 1908, HC/SA/SJ/10/12/6/1 Parliamentary Archives.

⁵⁴ HC Deb 28th October 1908 vol 195 cc364, Mr James Remnant.

ironwork and the locks were filed off in a Committee Room' as the women had refused to hand over the keys to their cufflinks and it was not possible to remove them in the gallery.⁵⁵ They were subsequently ejected from Parliament and Muriel Matters was then 'charged with offences committed outside after [she] had been ejected from the House.'⁵⁶ By the beginning of the twentieth-century women had progressed from oppressed observers behind the grille to politicised women necessitating its removal. Although the grille was not permanently removed until 1917, this temporary removal is symbolic of the augmenting presence of a female narrative in Parliament that was challenging the status quo.

When they succeeded in ensuring the temporary removal of the grille, Helen Fox and Muriel Matters achieved the deconstruction of the physical barrier that had represented women's exclusion from political debates from the mid-nineteenth century. Although the women who first sat behind its trellis work did not chain themselves to the grille or throw leaflets, voices, and hands through it into the Chamber, they were able to think and act in different ways that undermined the limitations of the space and instead harnessed it for female needs. Their reconceptualisation of the Ladies' Gallery encouraged the emergence and development of a female political identity within it. It was the reactions, thoughts, and behaviours of the early visitors to the gallery that nurtured the conditions for women such as Fox and Matters to protest so boldly. Initially through impromptu acts of resistance based on circumstance, the women in the Ladies' Gallery developed systems of collaborative education and networking, undermining the intended limitations of the gallery and instead reconstructing it to serve their own female political needs. Consequently, these women were able to resist marginalisation and instead were able to undermine patriarchal control of the system in order to voice their political concerns. Furthermore, these protests and demonstrations had tangible impacts on policymaking and put pressure on the government to consider further reform. Despite its oppressive design, the Ladies' Gallery was reconceptualised over time to become a space of female political

⁵⁵ Police Report by Chief Inspector Scantlebury, 28th October, 1908, HC/SA/SJ/10/12/6/1 Parliamentary Archives.

⁵⁶ Ibid..

empowerment. Through their female political networks, women reframed the Ladies' Gallery as a site of female political protest, developing a female political narrative to challenge patriarchal control in the building at the heart of its power.

Chapter Three: 'Into the lion's den': female navigation of parliamentary spaces of policymaking.

*'These are trying situations for human nature, and a dangerous position for young women to find themselves in....The innocent and the helpless stand there exposed to the wiles of the snarer. Who has not been shocked by the frightful details we have read in the public papers; how orphan after orphan has been victimised on board emigrant ships by men calling themselves Christians; how modest maidens have been brutalised over and insulted by those whose peculiar duty it was to protect them during the long and tedious voyage?'*¹

Caroline Chisholm's account of the plight of women and child emigrants reflected her dedication to her public campaign for the improvement of their situations. She was born in Northampton in 1808 at the dawn of a century that witnessed a significant shift in attitudes to philanthropy and social works. Consequently, her speech, that might once have been considered improper, was heard within the context of a growing philanthropic sphere that saw women reaching beyond the confines of the home. Alison Twells has described the emergence of what she terms 'missionary domesticity' as theories of separate spheres entwined with revived scriptural focus on the domestic duty of womankind. This resulted in the middle-class British woman becoming a signifier of a moralising and superior civilised Christian society.² In this context, Chisholm grew up aware of the moral and cultural expectations of domestic femininity. As the wife of Captain Archibald Chisholm of the East India Company's military service, she accompanied her husband to India and then in 1838 to Australia. It was in these two countries that she was to meet the vulnerable and abandoned women and children that inspired her public campaigning; Chisholm's encounters in the colonies directed the course of her life's philanthropic works. As Twells suggests, these works were inherently defined by Chisholm's feminine duties as a wife and

¹ 'Portrait of Mrs Caroline Chisholm', *The Illustrated Magazine of Art*, Vol. III No.13, 1854, pp.33-35 (p.34).

² Alison Twells, 'Missionary Domesticity, Global Reform and 'Women's Sphere' in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Gender and History*, Vol.18 No.2, August 2006, pp.266-284 (p.267).

mother; the extension of these domestic duties created a new quasi-public sphere in which women could exert influence through the enactment of their missionary domesticity. The emphasis on Christian principles and moral values created new cultural spaces that spanned both the domestic and the public in their aim to create a Christian and moral society.³ Women were able to harness this role to move beyond the domestic setting of the home and exercise their feminine duties in public spaces. The subversive potential of philanthropy has been well-explored, with a particular focus on the local and regional interventions that occurred as a consequence of middle-class activism.⁴ However, what these studies have overlooked are the ways in which middle-class women were able to access the space of Parliament, and particularly how they were able to navigate existing channels of power in order to integrate their presence into conventionally patriarchal spaces of parliamentary business.

This chapter will explore the power of Select Committees, for some nineteenth-century women, as navigable parliamentary spaces that permitted formal and legitimate engagement with policymaking. Select Committees were, and remain, one of the most important ways in which Parliament scrutinises government. They are parliamentary bodies, meaning that members are all MPs or members of the House of Lords.⁵ Select Committees take evidence from the public and expert advisors, engaging with this to publish their reports and evidence and make recommendations. Mari Takayanagi's research on women and committees, acknowledged the way in which women were able to negotiate these parliamentary bodies in the early-twentieth century.⁶ However, her research concentrates almost exclusively on the period post-1918 and so this chapter offers some precursory history of how women engaged with Select Committees in the nineteenth-century. More recently, Sarah Richardson examined the how, as the formal arena of

³ Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792-1850: The 'Heathens' at Home and Overseas* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.6.

⁴ Seth Koven, 'Borderlands: Women, Voluntary Action, and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840-1914' in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* eds. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.94-135 (pp.94-99).

⁵ This differs from Royal Commissions, public inquiries, government committees, and so on, bodies of which anyone can be a member.

⁶ Takayanagi, *Women and Parliament, c.1900-1945*.

parliamentary politics grew more exclusive, some nineteenth-century women harnessed older forms of interaction with the state such as petitioning, Royal Commissions, and Select Committees.⁷ Considering particularly the philanthropic campaigns of Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler, this chapter will consider not just how middle-class women experienced the space of the Select Committee, but also how working-class women, female prisoners, and sex workers inhabited, acted within, and influenced it. Such women are often absent from scholarship on women and Parliament and this chapter will introduce their much-needed voices and experiences to the narrative. How were women able to access the space of the Select Committee and what were the several and conflicting cloaks or guises of respectability they required in order to do so? The chapter will examine the paradox of middle-class women's politically expedient moralising and philanthropic endeavours alongside the potentially radical invocation of the stories of deviant women into the patriarchal centre of power. It will consider how women experienced the space of the Select Committee, how they accessed it and their reactions to and feelings about being there. It will explore how women were able to use the space of the Select Committee to further their own political agendas. The chapter will discuss the representation of 'women's politics' and the tensions around middle-class women speaking for and about working-class women. Finally, it will view the act of giving evidence to a Select Committee at the beginning of the nineteenth-century as a precursor to the demand for deputations to be received by politicians such that women could represent their own political agendas at the turn of the century.

In July 1847, Caroline Chisholm gave evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonisation, representing those she called 'unprotected single females'.⁸ As a consequence of her philanthropic endeavours setting up boarding houses and finding situations for vulnerable women in India and Australia, Chisholm was called to give evidence before the Select Committee considering future legislation around colonisation and emigration. Upon reviewing her evidence, Earl

⁷ Sarah Richardson, 'Conversations with Parliament: Women and the Politics of Pressure in 19th-Century England', *Parliamentary History*, 37:1, July 2018, pp.35-51.

⁸ *Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonization from Ireland*, HC 737 (1847), vol ii, p.407.

Grey sent a dispatch to the governor, Sir CA Fitzroy, informing him of Chisholm's thoughts concerning the vulnerability of emigrating young women and directing him to make changes accordingly. He wrote that Mrs Chisholm had highlighted 'the want of proper accommodation for the reception and protection of young women immediately on their landing from emigrant ships' and emphatically directed that 'this is a point to which I would request your early attention, and I am sure I need not impress upon you the importance.'⁹ When retelling this story Chisholm's biographer, Eneas MacKenzie, remarked 'it is pleasing thus to record the attention paid by a powerful aristocratic government to the voice of a sincere uninfluential woman when pleading in the cause of humanity.'¹⁰ MacKenzie underlined the direct impact that Chisholm's presence in Parliament and her testimony had on ensuing policymakers' decisions. However, his paradoxical disregard of her as an 'uninfluential woman' undermined the clear and direct influence that Chisholm's experiences, thoughts, and opinions had upon those men who penned the legislation resulting from the committee. It underlined tensions around the paradox of women's moral and caring role taking them beyond the private sphere of the home. Emphasising her womanly qualities could have been a means of justifying Chisholm's intervention in a masculine sphere. As a respectable middle-class woman engaged in Christian philanthropic works for the greater public good, Chisholm entered the space of the Select Committee as a legitimate and viable political agent, there to consult as a result of her uniquely female expertise. Furthermore, not only was Chisholm herself invited into Parliament, but her testimony invoked the presence of the 'unprotected single females' abandoned in the colonies that she strove to represent. Consequently, women's emerging expertise as a result of their philanthropic works enabled female narratives to enter a space of policymaking.

⁹ Eneas MacKenzie, *Memoirs of Mrs Caroline Chisholm with and account of her Philanthropic Labours in India, Australia, and England* (London: Webb Millington and Co, 1852), pp.134-135.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.135.

Women and the political landscape of nineteenth-century Britain

The political landscape of mid-nineteenth century Britain has been revisited and redefined by historians over recent years. Moving away from the traditional study of 'high politics' revolving around parliamentary procedure and legislative processes, historians have increasingly broadened their analysis of this period to interrogate the social and cultural contexts of political life, political pressures that could arise outside of those processes of 'high politics', and the significance of lived political experiences. These interrogations of the history of political culture have also been essential for contemporary historical studies of women's political experiences in the nineteenth-century. Recent studies have increasingly challenged histories that omit women from political history on account of their exclusion from formal politics in the period.¹¹ The narrative of separate spheres that characterised nineteenth-century attitudes to gender politics and facilitated traditional histories of patriarchal political culture are re-interrogated in these histories. They are challenged as not wholly representative of the lived experiences of British women in the nineteenth-century. These studies look instead to 'informal and ad hoc arenas' of political agency that have previously been overlooked.¹² The political position of women that saw them navigating their formal exclusion from political life as well as these informal but politicised spaces created the potential for subversive behaviour that requires a reinterpretation of women's political roles in this period. Many of these studies have re-examined the language and practices of mid-nineteenth century political culture, as well as these 'informal and ad hoc arenas'. However, there has not yet been a comprehensive re-examination of the central political space of Parliament in light of these new approaches to political history.

¹¹ Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013); Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (UK: Macmillan Press, 1985); Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Krista Cowman, *Women in British Politics, c.1689-1979* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹² Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women*, p.56.

The ideology of separate spheres framed popular discourses of gender roles in Victorian Britain. Davidoff and Hall delineated separate spheres in *Family Fortunes* as they explored the intersection of class and gender in nineteenth-century. Influenced by traditional notions of masculinity and femininity embedded in evangelism, the middle-class conceived of both their class and gender identities through the ideology of separate spheres.¹³ Chapter One of this thesis has already considered debates around *Family Fortunes* in more detail.¹⁴ However, Davidoff and Hall's ideology of separate spheres that, when more carefully considered, are nuanced by complex and negotiable spaces between them also offers a useful model for examining the space of Select Committees and women's experiences there. This perception of changeable spaces shares parallels with Twells' suggested 'stretching' of the domestic sphere and provides a useful framework for understanding how women such as Caroline Chisholm were able to adopt mantles of moralising respectability and Christian duty to engage with Parliament.

The complexity of the categories of public and private spheres and the difficulty in defining them was not lost on a nineteenth-century middle-class trying to influence the moral growth of the country. The contemporary notion of 'woman's mission' emerged to situate the philanthropic efforts of women such as Chisholm, Fry, and Butler within the broader context of separate spheres. In 1839, Sarah Lewis published *Woman's Mission* which offered a framework within which women could explore their evolving moral and social duties. For Lewis, 'woman's mission' was located within a specifically religious agenda that required women to exert their superior moral influence and elevate society. She wrote passionately of women's greater morality and the nobility of her cause to cultivate the whole of society through her maternal care and influence. However, this task was to be carried out through familial channels and the special and sacred responsibilities as wife and mother as woman 'will best accomplish this mission in the sphere which God and nature have appointed, and not by quitting that sphere for another.'¹⁵ Women's superior morality ought to and necessarily would impact questions of politics and

¹³ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

¹⁴ See Chapter One pp.33-34 for more detailed reference to this argument.

¹⁵ Sarah Lewis, *Woman's Mission*, 4th Edition (London: John W Parker, 1839), p.12.

society but through the conduit of their influence over their husbands and sons. This view did not go uncontested. Anna Jameson described the volume as 'so far defective that it considers women *only* in the light of mothers, whereas they have other relations with society.'¹⁶ Nevertheless, Lewis' work was hugely influential and her theory of 'woman's mission' was 'invoked throughout the period to awaken women's aspirations *and* to curtail their activities.'¹⁷ Lewis was both very conservative but also subversive as her writing echoed women's place as the domestic sphere but offered the potential for the influence of their domestic role to extend beyond the home.

Nevertheless, this characterisation of 'woman's mission' continues to be debated. Alex Tyrrell has explored contemporary cultural understandings of 'woman's mission', concluding that even though the ideology of feminine morality was located in the domestic sphere, women were increasingly harnessing their social responsibilities to obtain 'responsibility outside of the home' as they participated in religious and benevolent organisations to perform their maternal role as female social reformers.¹⁸ Tyrrell argues that a 'feminisation' of philanthropy and religious duty meant that women were increasingly drawn out of the home and into the public sphere as their moral and social causes intersected with evangelical values and feminine religious duties. Furthermore, he suggests that through their interaction with the public sphere, women were working in collaborative female communities and developing skills of business and committee procedures to organise their philanthropic works. His analysis is certainly reflected in the work of Caroline Chisholm who established a home for vulnerable women, collected subscriptions to feed and clothe the women, and organised a committee to oversee their care and ultimate securing of a situation. As this chapter shall argue, it was also a defining characteristic of the philanthropic endeavours of Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler. Tyrrell's perception of 'woman's mission' creates quasi-public spaces of

¹⁶ Gerardine Macpherson, *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1878), p.160.

¹⁷ Elizabeth K Helsinger, Robert Lauterbach Sheets, and William Veeder, *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837-1883 Vol.1* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p.5.

¹⁸ Alex Tyrrell, "'Woman's Mission' and Pressure Group Politics in Britain (1825-60)", *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 63:1, Autumn 1980, pp.194-230 (p.206).

philanthropic work that also feature in Twells' missionary philanthropy and Davidoff and Hall's negotiable spheres. These frameworks make it possible to perceive women's political agency in this period and locate it within alternative spaces both public and private.

Separate spheres and new readings of 'woman's mission' are just two approaches to women engaging with the public and political sphere that have emerged out of recent scholarship. Increasingly historians are identifying what Sarah Richardson terms 'ad hoc arenas' of female political activity.¹⁹ Resulting studies consider a plethora of ways in which middle-class women were able to interact with and influence the world of politics. Social reform introduced women to various new political agendas and their feminine duties of care and benevolence legitimised their interventions in public spaces concerned with these causes. The abolitionist campaign, prison reform, the Corn Law Repeal, poor relief, and educational reform were just some of the arenas opened to women through reform politics. In the mid-century, some of the political agenda women developed were more explicitly concerned with women's rights. Caroline Chisholm is an example of a woman campaigning for the rights of vulnerable women in the colonies but causes emerged much closer to home such as married women's rights to property and children, female education, and the female franchise, all concerned with the social, legal, and political position of women.

Conservative philanthropy vs radical interventions

Some important work has already begun to uncover women's engagement with parliamentary spaces in this period. Sarah Richardson illustrates women's contribution to the increasing use of royal commissions, select committees, and petitions during this period of reform, suggesting that 'women were able to utilise these changing dynamics of parliamentary culture in order to gain a public voice'.²⁰ This chapter builds on the work of Richardson by uncovering the experiences of

¹⁹ Richardson, 'Well-Neighbourhood Houses', pp.56-73.

²⁰ Richardson, 'Conversations with Parliament', p.42. See also Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women*.

working-class women who accompanied middle-class women to select committees and exploring the resulting tensions in representation and voicing female narratives at the intersection of class and gender. Furthermore, it hopes to move beyond the mid-nineteenth century to examine links between these early women's use of select committees and the later organised deputations of the suffrage movement. Henry Miller has gone some way towards drawing links to the latter half of the century, arguing that more than just participating in the act of petitioning, women's engagement resulted in an innovative reworking of the practice of petitioning by the time of the Edwardian women's suffrage movement, with performativity in the presentation of petitions reviving and reinvigorating petitions culture.²¹

As both Claire Midgley and Antoinette Burton have suggested, the discourses of injustice and inequality that had emerged from early anti-*sati* and anti-slavery campaigns were reimagined in the mid-century to articulate greater demands for women's rights at home. Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler pioneered two such campaigns that saw both middle-class and working-class women entering the space of the Select Committee to articulate female political agendas. For the purposes of this chapter, 'conservative' women's activism will refer to that which acted within the confines of women's prescribed gender roles. 'Radical' acts will be those which challenged prescribed gender roles and offered resistance or challenge to the status quo. Whilst conservative in their endeavours to manage the care and instruction of criminal and fallen women, both Fry and Butler were paradoxically also behaving radically as they introduced the narratives, and later voices, of deviant women into the patriarchal space of Parliament.

On Friday 27th February 1818, activist and social reformer Elizabeth Fry gave evidence to the Select Committee for the State of Prisons in the City of London and the Borough of Southwark and on Dartmoor Prison.²² Her testimony endured in the

²¹ Henry Miller, 'The British Women's Suffrage Movement and the Practice of Petitioning, 1890-1914', *Historical Journal*, April 2020, pp.1-25.

https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/27EC2A77F4904703F9C5696A5A2C2735/S0018246X20000035a.pdf/british_womens_suffrage_movement_and_the_practice_of_petitioning_18901914.pdf

²² *Select Committee on the State of Prisons in the City of London and the Borough of Southwark, and on Dartmoor Prison*, HC 392 (1818).

resulting Gaols Act of 1823. As a direct result of Fry's philanthropic work and political campaigning, this piece of legislation outlined new regulations specifically directed towards improving the conditions of female prisoners and was heavily influenced by the frameworks Fry had established at Newgate.²³ As a prolific social reformer and philanthropist, Fry's invitation to Westminster may have seemed unsurprising in spite of the patriarchal nature of the building. Wider cultural conversations around Christian duty and moral reform saw many middle-class women engaging with social change, particularly concerning the lives and conduct of the working classes, and so Fry's endeavours spoke to a much broader discourse around good works that would enable one to face their God with a clear conscience, one that occupied Parliament as well as society more widely. Mission work had its roots in the Unitarian and Quaker communities. The influence of Enlightenment's ideas about education and social progress, along with the rising evangelical emphasis on social action as a fundamental component of Christian conduct, saw many prolific philanthropic women engaging more with the world beyond the home.²⁴ Alison Twells explores the confidence of Hannah Kilham who, despite her relatively vulnerable position as a young widow, worked tirelessly and very publicly for numerous causes including the education of the poor and the spreading of God's word in Africa. Operating at a similar time to Fry and working within the nonconformist tradition, Kilham understood that all believers, including women, received God's message in their own hearts and consequently that they had both a right and a duty to preach and share that message and pursue good works in its name.²⁵

Fry's own writings show a similar understanding that her Quakerism resulted in a duty to engage in God's work, one that she seemed to conceive of particularly in feminine terms: 'I rejoice to see the day in which so many women of every rank....are engaged in works of usefulness and charity. Earnestly it is to be desired....that all of us may be made sensible of the infinite importance of redeeming the time, of tuning our talents to account, and of becoming the faithful, humble, devoted followers of a

²³ Ruth Lamont, 'The Gaols Act 1823', *Women's Legal Landmarks: Celebrating the History of Women and the Law in the UK and Ireland*, Erika Rackley and Rosemary Auchmuty Eds. (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2019), pp.41-46.

²⁴ Twells, *The Civilising Mission*, p.5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.124-125.

crucified Lord, who went about doing good.’²⁶ Furthermore, she continued to write that ‘it is a dangerous error to suppose that the duties of females end here [in the home as mothers and wives]. Their gentleness, their natural sympathy with the afflicted, their quickness of discernment, their openness to religious impressions, are points of character....which evidently qualify them, within their own peculiar province, for a far more extensive field of usefulness.’²⁷ Fry not only understood her philanthropic endeavours as God’s work but she also perceived them as a particularly feminine duty and one that necessitated venturing beyond the home. Hannah Kilham ventured as far as Africa, Caroline Chisholm to India and Australia, and Elizabeth Fry to visit those most lost and despairing inhabitants of British prisons. These women may have been engaging in women’s work, but their faith led them not to remain cloistered in the home as Lewis’ model of ‘woman’s work’ suggested, but instead saw them expanding the limits of their feminine sphere to enter the wider world. Their womanly duties were traditionally caring and maternal as they aimed to evangelise and lift up the wretched of society, yet as a result they controversially invited women into the public arena. Consequently, Elizabeth Fry’s Quaker faith and sense of Christian duty served as a legitimising cloak for her paradoxically radical intervention in the space of the Select Committee.

Problems with voicing a ‘female’ political agenda

As a result of her philanthropic endeavours at Newgate Prison and her extensive visits to prisons across the British Isles, Fry was considered an expert on the state of the prison system and was called to give evidence to this effect. Mr Alderman Wood was chairing the committee; a radical MP with unconventional beginnings of his own, he was initially resistant to criticism of the prison system. However, as the debate developed he retracted and supported an investigation into its improvement in Parliament. Wood began Fry’s questioning by asking her about the school she had set up in Newgate to educate female prisoners. However, the

²⁶ Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the visiting, superintendence, and government of female prisoners* (London: John and Arthur Arch, 1827), p.2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

interview swiftly proceeded to consult Fry's expertise on matters of prison food and nutrition, health care and the infirmary, moral instruction and religion, and even on appealing for the acquittal of prisoners upon evidence of their reform.

It was her determination to observe the ensuing debates on prison reform that led to discovery of the ventilator.²⁸ Her diaries held at the British Library lack entries for the period of her appearance before the Select Committee, making it difficult to account for how she felt at the prospect of appearing before the Select Committee. Similar encounters with politicians caused her to lean on the support of her faith. On 8th July 1818 she wrote in her diary of invoking God's help when meeting at Newgate with 'the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and many other persons of consequence', after which she felt 'peaceful and comforted'.²⁹ However, the fact that she entered the Select Committee with the intention of using it as a platform to convince the authorities to buy the College of Physicians behind Newgate and convert it into a woman-only prison overseen by female prison officers suggests that she was armed with great determination and clarity of purpose.³⁰ Her repeated assertion of the first person 'I' conveyed a strong assertion of the viability of her female body in that male space, as well as a confidence in the evidence she had to share based on her own research and expertise.

Fry intended to harness the powers of this patriarchal tool of legislation to affect change according to female ideas and for female needs. Her focus on the emotional needs of the prisoners through repeated references to their 'suffering' and need to 'fortify themselves' emphasised her conventional caring role, asserting a feminine outlook to influence policymaking.³¹ Fry also positioned prison women as vulnerable victims. As Seth Koven has suggested, public work gave middle-class women a sense of self-worth and of their own importance.³² The positioning of prison women as victims in need of saving reinforced the moral superiority of more elite women as they went about their philanthropic works. Hannah Kilham carried out

²⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 2nd December 1893 (see chapter one).

²⁹ EF Gurney, *Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry, with extracts from her journal and letters* (Philadelphia: JW Moore, 1847), p.322.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Select Committee on State of Police of Metropolis*, HC 423 (1818), p.173.

³² Koven, 'Borderlands: Women, Voluntary Action, and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840-1914', p.99.

work amongst working women in Ireland and the resulting reports from the British and Irish Ladies society 'abound with joyful accounts of the 'wretched and disconsolate' becoming 'cheerful smiling faces''.³³ Fry's Select Committee evidence echoed this perception of working-class women as grateful and indebted, describing the prison women as thanking her 'with tears in their eyes'. Fry continued to narrate that 'the poor young prisoners, the young convicts themselves came to entreat that I would also take care of them.'³⁴ In her diary she wrote 'during the last ten years much attention has been successfully bestowed by women on the female inmates of our *prisons*; and many a poor prisoner, under their fostering care, has become completely changed, - rescued from a position of depravity and wretchedness and restored to happiness, as a useful and respectable member of the community.'³⁵ Fry highlighted the significant role of women's work and the importance of women helping women. However, the infantilising and victimisation of working-class and prison women by philanthropists such as Kilham and Fry was not simply a demonstration of female solidarity but served their sense of self-importance and provided an outlet for their political ambitions. It also reinforced their maternal and caring role and legitimised their intervention beyond the home and in the public sphere as those they were helping were depicted as extensions of domestic children, or more grandiosely as the children of the empire who needed saving.

More radically, the needs Fry was addressing were of those women placed at the greatest distance from parliamentary representation. She brought the concerns of social deviants who had no access to Parliament into a space of policymaking with a view to using their perspectives to influence change in legislature. Fry's status as a middle-class woman was a legitimising cloak for the stories of working-class and criminal women that her testimony introduced to the space of the Select Committee. In addition to her class, her religious dedication and philanthropic endeavours served as additional guises to facilitate the introduction of her female body to a traditionally male-only space. Fry navigated the performance of two opposing yet paradoxically

³³ Twells, *The Civilising Mission*, p.131.

³⁴ *Select Committee on the State of Prisons in the City of London and the Borough of Southwark, and on Dartmoor Prison*, HC 392 (1818), p.34.

³⁵ Gurney, *Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry*, p.4.

harmonious roles as she fulfilled the traditional task of 'woman's mission' whilst also radically serving as a mouthpiece for the narratives of working-class women in Parliament. The overlapping of voices in the Select Committee reports make the competing speakers difficult to discern and the overall discourse is complex. Fry's interview was directed by a male questioner from a male committee and was recorded by a male clerk. The report was published by a male printer for the male institution of Parliament. The working-class women were not there themselves but were represented through the words of Elizabeth Fry. Her testimony was sympathetic to them, yet infantilised them as 'poor young prisoners', 'young convicts' in need of her moral guidance and care.³⁶ Her later testimony on Friday 29th May 1818 continued in this vein, referring to the 'girls' in her care and her moral responsibility to safeguard their morality.³⁷ The complexities of such ventriloquism as middle-class women fulfilled their 'solemn obligation to give a voice to disenfranchised labouring poor women' are significant here.³⁸ Ellen Ross has considered not only the problematic filtering of working-class women's experiences through elite women's testimonies, but also the paradox of working-class women's experiences becoming mouthpieces for middle-class women's hidden concerns as they discussed vulgar issues that contradicted ideals of genteel femininity. Representing the oppression of less fortunate women allowed elite women to articulate female political concerns in a socially acceptable manner.

However, in spite of their framing though Fry's testimony and the male regulation of the committee, the voices of working-class women still emerged through the cracks when these methods of mediation occasionally broke down. At the very least these instances conveyed a disjunction suggesting that the voices of the working-class and criminal women being discussed could not be entirely contained or controlled. For example, the dissonance of working-class slang in the mouth of Elizabeth Fry presented a fissure through which the prison women's voices emerged. When narrating their responses to capital punishment she is reported to

³⁶ *Select Committee on the State of Prisons in the City of London and the Borough of Southwark, and on Dartmoor Prison*, HC 392 (1818), p.34.

³⁷ *Select Committee on State of Police of Metropolis*, HC 423 (1818), p.173.

³⁸ Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.20.

have spoken the phrase 'dance for an hour' to refer to hanging, jarring her otherwise more eloquent narrative and bringing a momentarily verbatim account of the prison women's experiences to the Select Committee. In Fry's account of these women there was a lively sense of prison culture as she invoked a detailed and textured picture of their experiences in the space of the Committee Room. Anne Schwan has uncovered codes of female solidarity, exploring how street literature framed female crimes as responses to gender-specific oppression and positing the female prisoner as a 'protofeminist icon'.³⁹ She argues that the voices of female prisoners revealed a sexual double standard in the penal system and that prison women both understood this and articulated it through the outlet of street literature. Schwan's portrayal of female prisoners comprehending of their socio-political position and possessing agency to expose the injustices surrounding it offers a stark contrast to their presentation by women such as Fry and Kilham as passive and childlike victims in need of salvation.

The dissonance between the experiences of the prison women and the views of the philanthropic women representing their interests became clear in Fry's Select Committee testimony. When she returned later in June 1818 to give evidence on capital punishment, a distinct moral code of the imprisoned women emerged that differed from that of Fry and 'the large circle of [her] acquaintance' who felt that capital punishment should be abolished. Fry was perplexed by the opinions of the women in her care; there is a clear sense that the logic of prison life is incomprehensible to her as a middle-class woman. The prison women 'consider the punishment of death as an atonement for all their crimes' and that cases of murder 'should....especially be followed by death' by capital punishment. The prisoners had a distinct prison code and morality that was logical, killing should be punished by killing, as well as a clear understanding of the law and a distinctive view on how it should have been implemented that was clearly delineated for the committee alongside the very different views of Fry. Furthermore, Fry continued to consider what the prisoners also felt should not be punished through means of death as some

³⁹ Anne Schwan, *Convict Voices: Women, Class, and Writing about Prison in Nineteenth Century England* (USA: University of New Hampshire Press, 2014), pp.33-37.

cases 'have been felt very unjust by the unfortunate sufferers themselves, and by the other prisoners....[exciting] a great deal of feeling and a strong sense of injustice throughout the prison.'⁴⁰ The moral code of the prison women and how they believed the law should have been actioned directly influenced the committee's discussion, evoking both a vivid impression of prison life and a clear indication of the morality and legal understanding of the women. Despite their position they still took a view on the law. Interestingly Fry's account in the committee also gave these women a voice in broader cultural debates about the religious and moral implications of capital punishment. Their lives, feelings, and emotional states were brought into the space of Parliament through the vehicle of Fry's testimony, creating further dissonance in a space intended solely for privileged male voices.

Female bodies disrupting 'male' spaces

Despite her elite mediation, Elizabeth Fry managed to share glimpses of the lives of these prison women through her testimony. However, when she returned to give further evidence regarding capital punishment on Friday 29th May 1818, she was accompanied by four other very different women who gave this insight in person. These were working-class women from the prison, called to give their own first-hand testimony to the Select Committee alongside Elizabeth Fry. Among their number were a prison nurse and two yards-women. For these women, the prospect of appearing before a Select Committee would have been more daunting still. Although Fry was a woman in a male space, she was protected in part by the sense of propriety afforded by her class and the legitimising cloaks of her Christian endeavours and philanthropic 'woman's mission' at Newgate. These women had neither class nor religion to shield them. Their very evidently working-class and female bodies would have been a multi-sensory intrusion into a patriarchal and elite space. Their appearance, their accents, and their smell would all have combined with their gender to highlight how different they were from the hundreds of upper-class men in Parliament. Furthermore, their journey to the committee room was a considerable

⁴⁰ *Select Committee on State of Police of Metropolis*, HC 423 (1818), p.174.

one that created a sense of them being paraded to their final destination. In order to access the committee rooms, they were required to navigate what John Wilson Croker MP described as 'a series of dark torturous passages.'⁴¹ In addition to this, the committee rooms at this time were disorganised, often overbooked, and not fit for purpose. Many were out of use or had been commandeered for other purposes, such as the premium on space, and as a result it had become common to use 'the long gallery, where Members were customarily sworn in, the smoking room, the Members' waiting room and the chamber itself for committee purposes.'⁴² Such spaces were overtly masculine and mercilessly public, leaving the women open to both the potential gaze and judgement of a male audience.

On Wednesday 27th May 1818, Mary Smith, a prison nurse, was called before the committee to give evidence on prison infirmaries and the treatment, both medical and moral, of sick prisoners. Her experiences as a medical practitioner in the unique context of a prison meant that her testimony formed an important part of the Select Committee's evidence. Throughout her testimony she repeatedly used the collective pronoun 'we', providing a contrast to the individual and assertive 'I' of Elizabeth Fry and instead suggesting a communal identity among the prison women contingent on their shared experiences of prison life and culture. Smith offered insight into experiences of childbirth in prison as babies were delivered by the doctor in the infirmary where she worked. She also accounted for the limited resources and lack of any medicines other than 'an opening powder' unless a male doctor was present. The prisoners in the infirmary were still required to work 'for the county', mostly through needle-work. Although brief, Smith's testimony suggested a sparse picture of mistreatment and want of those women who were more vulnerable as a result of their ill-health. Before she was dismissed, Smith answered some final questions about a prisoner who died. When asked by the committee if she sent the body to the woman's friends Smith replied, 'she had none to send to', she had no property and no clothing, 'only the county clothing' issued to her by the prison.⁴³

⁴¹ <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/survey/vii-procedure-and-business-house>

⁴² <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/survey/vii-procedure-and-business-house>

⁴³ *Select Committee on State of Police of Metropolis*, HC 423 (1818), pp.157-158.

Mary Smith's evidence brought some of the isolation and tragedy of these women's lives into Parliament. The poignant details of her testimony invoked for the committee the real experiences of the working-class and prison women who were entirely lacking in representation. They were every day and material domestic details that contrasted to the abstraction and high-mindedness of the male political sphere. Furthermore, the very fact that 'male' political processes were dependent upon the testimony of female knowledge by a female body in the patriarchal centre of power challenged the ideology that women had no place in the public sphere, and indeed within Parliament.

On the same day Mary Smith was examined, Sarah Jones and Kezia King, two yards-women from Newgate prison, were also called to give evidence before the committee regarding the treatment, conduct, work, and religious instruction of the prisoners. What is particularly interesting about their being called to give evidence is the fact that they were both convicted criminals who were imprisoned at Newgate. At the time of her interview Sarah Jones was serving a seven-year sentence for 'offering to take a dollar from a gentleman in the street'; she had been caught soliciting. Kezia King was nine months into her sentence for 'uttering base money'.⁴⁴ Their testimonies offered details of weekly visits by the surgeon to the prison and thrice-weekly visits from the chaplain, as well as the employment of needle-work and oakum picking that prison women were expected to undertake.⁴⁵ Kezia King also gave a detailed account of how 'girls of the town' were washed, clothed, and examined by the surgeon when brought into the prison.⁴⁶ The invocation of prostitutes as well as the physical presence of other criminal women was a stark disruption to the ordered male space of the Select Committee. Their desire to offer accounts of their unique experiences in order to inform changes in policy that might better their personal lots in prison suggested the use of formal political channels to affect political change. Furthermore, the paradox of these two women being denigrated according to one set of social principles, sexual politics and patriarchal laws, whilst they were consulted in an official capacity by another in the form of the Select Committee,

⁴⁴ *Select Committee on State of Police of Metropolis*, HC 423 (1818), p.160.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.160 and p.165.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, HC 423 (1818), p.165.

ironically highlighted the hypocrisy of cultural ideologies that delegitimised women's right to a place in Parliament. Their status as fallen women precluded their participation in society as they were physically removed from it to a space of imprisonment, yet they were again moved physically into Parliament in order to inform the very policy makers who defined their state of exclusion.

Select Committees as a platform for female political agency

As women's rights took on more prominence in the mid-nineteenth century and women were more consciously seeking physical access to the space of Parliament, the act of giving evidence to a Select Committee was increasingly employed as a means of exerting a female presence in Westminster and of asserting a female voice in the discussions of politics and policy. Women were able to harness the political process of the Select Committee to establish access to the space of Parliament in a legitimate and official capacity that had a direct influence upon the public sphere in increasingly diverse ways. They offered their testimonies on a broad range of subjects and served as witnesses to Select Committees for both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. In May 1852 Mary Carpenter was called on two separate occasions to offer evidence based on her expertise to the Select Committee on Criminal and Destitute Juveniles.⁴⁷ The committee referenced her published work on reformatory schools, consulting her as an expert, and she also wrote a memorandum afterwards which further influenced and informed the committee's process. On Tuesday 14th July 1868, social reformer and campaigner Isabella Tod gave evidence to a Select Committee on the Married Women's Property Bill.⁴⁸ Her evidence attested to the plight of married working women in Belfast and the precariousness of their financial and material situations should their husbands succumb to 'ill-health or bad conduct' as the husband had a legal right to his wife's property and wages.⁴⁹ Her account of the harsh working conditions, low wages, and financial precarity of these women once more brought working-class female needs

⁴⁷ *Select Committee on Criminal and Destitute Juveniles*, HL 47 (1852).

⁴⁸ *Select Committee on the Married Women's Property Bill*, HC 210 (1868).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.75.

into the space of Parliament. Furthermore, at this point in the mid-century the committee's questions had moved from asking about experiences and observations as with those concerned with prison reform in 1818, to consult the opinions and recommendations of Isabella Tod as she is repeatedly asked 'do you think...?' The changing language used to elicit women's expertise reflected a shift in the attitude to their physical presence in the spaces of policymaking such that it became intrinsic and embedded, even as women remained officially excluded. By 1896, of the twenty-one witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Infant Life Protection Bill and the Safety of Nurse Children Bill, nine of them were women.⁵⁰

Perhaps one of the most famous campaigns of the late-nineteenth century was that spearheaded by Josephine Butler to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts. These acts of Parliament made it possible for women suspected of prostitution to be detained by police, questioned, and physically examined without proof of illegal behaviour. Understanding this to be a violation of both women's rights and bodies, Butler, along with Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, responded by forming the Ladies' National Association and organising a campaign that would result in placing her own body inside Parliament to contest the injustice of the treatment of these women by the law. Isabella Tod and Mary Carpenter were also actively involved in this campaign, demonstrating how their appearances at Select Committees had developed their political education. One of the means through which Butler sought the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was by giving evidence to a Select Committee. In reality, Butler was one of many within the wider repeal campaign who felt that parliamentary channels such as the Select Committee enveloped the movement within conventional political reform and frustrated its more radical and feminist origins.⁵¹ However, her testimony of Friday 5th May 1882 showed clearly that she was harnessing the forum of the committee to influence policymakers in an

⁵⁰ *Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Infant Life Protection Bill and the Safety of Nurse Children Bill*, HL 186 (1896). Miss Isobel G Smith, Deaconess Gilmore, Miss Mason, Mrs Crowder, Mrs Hardie, Mrs Bostock, Mrs Wethered, Miss Steer, and Mrs Abrahams all gave their testimonies.

⁵¹ Judith K Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.112.

active, conscious, and politicised way.⁵² Furthermore, as she challenged the injustice of the Contagious Diseases Acts, she also contested the separation of the public and private spheres and the ideology that excluded women's presence from Parliament.

Josephine Butler's testimony worked twofold in its challenge to bodies' ownership of space and place. Her campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts made the bodies of women accused of prostitution a battleground for sexual politics; in asserting women's rights over their own bodies, Butler was refuting the culturally unchallenged male gaze and its assumed right to the female body. For those fighting for repeal, the Contagious Diseases Acts reinforced a double sexual standard, penalising women for engaging in sinful activities as they reaffirmed men's entitlement to the bodies of 'fallen' women. They made assumptions about the female body as corrupt conduits of vice.⁵³ At the same time Butler was bringing these 'fallen' bodies and her assertion of their rights into Parliament, disrupting patriarchal autonomy to the spaces of policymaking as corrupt bodies and narratives of prostitution were brought into them. Concurrently, Butler presented her own female body to the Select Committee as a vessel of knowledge and expertise with both the ability and the right to inform law-making, but also simultaneously as a vulnerable female body in a male space. She was no stranger to physical jeopardy, having been chased, bruised, had her clothes torn, and been covered in flour and excrement at public speaking events throughout the campaign. Walkowitz suggests that middle-class activists acted out the roles of the outcast women they represented 'to give some reality to their spiritual identification with the fallen sisterhood.'⁵⁴ Her reading of Butler's actions shares parallels with some historians' interpretations of the performative demonstrations of the later suffragette campaigns and the symbolism of a female body defiled by aggressive responses to female political protest.⁵⁵

An astute political strategist, Butler was aware of the importance of spectacle; a significant reason for her resistance of parliamentary process was that it

⁵² *Select Committee on Administration and Operation of Contagious Diseases Acts*, HC 340 (1882).

⁵³ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p.3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.130.

⁵⁵ See Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985) and Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987).

took the campaign too far from public view. However, in spite of her willingness to jeopardise her bodily safety for her cause, her personal writing reveals her trepidation at entering 'the lion's den' of the Select Committee.⁵⁶ Butler's choice of metaphor can imply feelings of both intruder and prey. Her letter to her husband the night before she gave evidence reveals her difficulty in remembering 'all the details I have to answer tomorrow' as 'they say it looks bad to read from a paper'.⁵⁷ Her preoccupation with the rules and expectations of the patriarchal space she was to enter conveys the obligation for women in Parliament to conform. Butler worried that, if she were unable to perform as required, her evidence may not be heard with the gravity she desired. Her letter also details the physical demands of what she repeatedly refers to as an 'exam', suggesting an uncomfortable feeling of being tested or interrogated. That it would last for six hours 'from about 12 to 6pm' conveys both the physical and mental pressure of the interview as Butler was expected to withstand male questioning in an uncomfortable space for a long duration. Although she was willing to engage in a political fight that she regarded as 'battle' and 'warfare', Butler was not immune to its risks.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Josephine Butler persisted to support a campaign that, for her, was inherently tied to ideas of woman's mission and her Christian duty. As she described it as a battle of which 'women must continue to stand in the forefront', she also defined it as 'a spiritual warfare', the victory of which needed to be won 'by the deepening of our own convictions, by increased faith in the permanence of the eternal principles of justice, and by a more absolute trust in Him in whose cause we are engaged'.⁵⁹ Although paradoxically Butler used conventionally masculine rhetoric to describe what she argued was a female battle, her harnessing of such language symbolises her movement beyond the domestic sphere as her feminine duty paved a way beyond the home and into the world of political change. Furthermore, it highlights the polarisation of the sexes that she perceived around the issue of the

⁵⁶ *Letter from Josephine Butler to Rev George Butler, 4th May 1882*, 3JBL/21/07, The Women's Library LSE.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Josephine Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (London: Horace, Marshall and Son, 1896).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.398-399.

Contagious Diseases Acts as only women could spearhead the fight. Butler invoked the earlier reform efforts of Elizabeth Fry, recalling in her *Personal Reminiscences* that Quaker meeting houses were the first places to host meetings regarding the repeal of the Contagious Acts and allying herself with Christian moral values as they 'gave me the right hand of fellowship, asking for no credentials whatsoever, except my own assertion that they cry of the oppressed and the voice of God within me were calling me to this work.'⁶⁰

Like Elizabeth Fry, Josephine Butler felt that her work was God's calling. However, she led a more radical campaign that fought more explicitly against the injustice of sexual politics, located on the battleground of the female body. The combination of both her Christian duty and political radicalism was evident in her testimony to the Select Committee. When asked whether or not her actions were 'founded upon moral and religious considerations', she replied 'upon moral and religious considerations, and also very strongly upon constitutional and legal considerations'.⁶¹ Butler acknowledged the importance of her moral duty, but refused to have her challenge to the Contagious Diseases Acts categorised solely as such by insisting upon the 'constitutional and legal considerations' that she, and by extension the Ladies' National Association, also represented. In so doing she legitimised her female body in Parliament as one of political and legal value rather than simply of feminine morality. When the committee continued to question the difficulty regarding women's 'dislike to public action in such matters', Butler responded by detailing the formation of the Ladies' National Association, the quick collection of 'about 2000 adherents of our association', the ninety-two local committees and secretaries that were established, and the 'universal sympathy from women' that they had encountered.⁶² Butler demonstrated strategic and disciplined female political organisation, metaphorically invoking the presence of further female bodies in Parliament through her account.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.399.

⁶¹ *Select Committee on Administration and Operation of Contagious Diseases Acts*, HC 340 (1882), p.230.

⁶² Ibid., p.230.

The efforts of women such as Butler and Wolstenholme Elmy in the establishment of the Ladies' National Association were impressive, but the connotations of 'ladies' reveal the same class tensions that problematised Fry's endeavour to represent female prisoners in a Select Committee sixty-four years before. Ellen Ross elucidated the complex process of ventriloquism as middle-class women both spoke for and about working-class women whilst simultaneously representing their own hidden gendered grievances through the narratives of those they claimed to be helping.⁶³ Walkowitz acknowledges this same tension, depicting the further irony of middle-class reformers trying to liberate working-class women from state oppression even as they viewed them through their own restricting class bias and promulgated their ideal of femininity based on purity and virtue.⁶⁴ Nina Atwood has contributed to this discussion, highlighting the problematic presentation of sex workers by Butler as a result of the dissonance between their lived experiences, her radical feminist actions, and her evangelism.⁶⁵ The inextricable links between public campaigns for women's rights, the private lives of middle-class women, and the experiences of working-class women are indicative of the more complex landscape of gender and class politics in the nineteenth-century. This complex landscape translated onto the reform efforts of women. Butler's actions, particularly in her willingness to jeopardise her own bodily safety, were indicative of a genuine sympathy for the women she endeavoured to help, one that Walkowitz argues was 'entirely reciprocated'.⁶⁶ However, as Walkowitz continues to note, Butler perceived that the campaign would be largely led by middle-class women and working-class men, revealing an inherent subjugation of working-class women within the very movement that claimed to serve their emancipation. To this end, Butler's representation of the lives, needs, and experiences of sex workers to the Select Committee was also problematic; the voices and stories of such women were somewhat obscured by larger gender politics at play.

⁶³ Ross, *Love and Toil*, p.20.

⁶⁴ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p.7.

⁶⁵ Nina Atwood, *The Prostitute Body: rewriting prostitution in Victorian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁶⁶ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p102.

This should not, however, be allowed to entirely undermine the efforts of women such as Butler to give a voice to those of her sex even more oppressed than she was. Like Elizabeth Fry, Butler too brought working-class women, this time sex workers, into the Select Committee such that their narratives might be heard. The body of the prostitute in the space of Parliament was even more problematic than the female prisoners who accompanied Fry. As Nina Atwood has suggested, the body of the nineteenth-century prostitute was conceptualised through a 'rhetoric of disease and containment' such that she presented a dual risk through moral corruption and physical infection.⁶⁷ The focus of reform groups on the prostitute as victim further complicated the multiple and conflicting views of sex workers in Victorian society. Walkowitz develops this view, writing that 'literally and figuratively, the prostitute was the conduit of infection to respectable society. She was nonetheless an object of class guilt as well as fear, a powerful symbol of sexual exploitation under industrial capitalism.'⁶⁸ The introduction of the sexual female body into Parliament created dissonance not just through its challenge to the male control of the space and to patriarchal ideals of feminine propriety and morality, but also because their presence forced male politicians to confront the exploitative system that ensured their power as it reinforced sexual double standards and brutalised vulnerable women.

Alongside Butler the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Acts saw four other women give evidence. Of these women, one had been detained under the Contagious Diseases Acts and others were called as witnesses to attest to her character and the authenticity of her testimony. By this time, the fire of 1834 had destroyed the old Houses of Parliament which Fry had visited. Consequently, Butler and the women who accompanied her experienced the different space of the rebuilt palace. However, the journey to the committee rooms was no less dark or daunting for these 'deviant' women whose very bodies were physically and metaphorically policed by the policies of the building they had to navigate. The women would have entered via Westminster Hall. The vibrant noise and public nature of this first space

⁶⁷ Atwood, *The Prostitute Body*, p.44.

⁶⁸ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p.4.

may perhaps have felt more familiar, but they then proceeded to St Stephen's Hall through to Central Lobby, a cloistered space in which women were not usually permitted. The intensely gold decoration, numerous statues of men, and sweeping sense of business would have been, at the very least, alienating. The women would then have continued into the Lower Waiting Hall and up some stairs to the first floor wooden-panelled committee corridor. Upon arriving at their final destination, they would have entered a similarly wooden-panelled and darkly decorated committee room full of men and commanded to stand at its centre and give their testimony. Their feelings of intimidation and isolation must have been disorientating.

On Monday 17th April 1882, Elizabeth Jane Southey, a working-class woman who held positions as domestic help in three separate households, was ordered by two constables to attend a physical 'medical' examination under the authority of the Contagious Diseases Acts. According to the testimony of the constables, she had been seen in the company of different military men and this was the justification for her summons. Southey used the Select Committee as a public forum in which she could answer her accusers and clear her name. She gave her evidence on 23rd May 1882, challenging the charges against her character through her version of events as she concurrently challenged the examination of her 'sinful' body by placing it in Parliament.⁶⁹ Her character was further attested to by the testimonies of Mrs Sarah Ann Ford, her landlady, Mrs Sarah Lawrence, her grandfather's domestic help, and Mrs Hannah Dyer, a neighbour.⁷⁰ Their combined physical presence at the Select Committee and their unified female voices joined to challenge the patriarchal attempt to control and examine Elizabeth Southey's body and instead asserted a female narrative to contest the injustice of both the law's reliance on the testimony of male constables and the Contagious Diseases Acts more broadly. Although they did not share Butler's social status or the claim to expertise that she had from her work as an activist and reformer, these women equally offered influential evidence to a Select Committee and contributed to the eventual repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Their 'sinful' bodies were an even more radical and confrontational

⁶⁹ *Select Committee on Administration and Operation of Contagious Diseases Acts*, HC 340 (1882), pp.318-325.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* Ford's evidence: pp.326-328. Lawrence's evidence: p.328. Dyer's evidence: p.328.

challenge to both Parliament and to women's oppression under patriarchal legislation.

Towards the advent of women's deputations

The process of giving evidence to a Select Committee was initially a channel through which middle-class women could negotiate their physical presence in a space of policymaking, to articulate their political agendas, and carry out their 'woman's mission'. However, by the end of the century it was increasingly becoming a platform for a greater number of women from various walks of life, offering testimonies that influenced legislature and legitimised female political agency. Consequently, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that no select committees were held to investigate the female franchise. Perhaps recognising the increasing influence women were able to gain in a select committee, the House chose not to establish one regarding the question that was generating so much public interest. As a result, women began to look for other ways and other spaces in which they could assert their political agendas in Parliament.

Attempts to introduce female bodies to male spaces were not without risk. As women increasingly acted outside of their prescribed spheres, public perceptions of the female body and attitudes towards its treatment shifted. Perhaps the most vivid example of this shift was the events of Black Friday. On 18th November 1910 a procession of over three hundred women marched to Parliament to campaign for the female franchise. The result was a chaotic suppression of the demonstration, with police violence brutalising women, targeting their breasts and between their legs in a manner that explicitly connoted a defamation of their sexualised bodies. As Vicinus argues, 'Black Friday brought into the open the sexual consequences of women's attempting to enter a male domain. In order to protect their public space, men were willing to permit, even encourage, the violation of woman's most intimate space, her body.'⁷¹ The protection of legitimising veils of class and evangelism weakened as women's interaction with the spaces of Parliament became more

⁷¹ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.265.

overtly politicised. However, women were undeterred, and campaigns of the later-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries experienced a surge in the popularity of deputations to Parliament. No longer content to provide evidence to a Select Committee established, run, and ordered by patriarchal power, women called for deputations in which they could set the agenda and air their political grievances. On Friday 8th August 1913 Millicent Garrett Fawcett led a deputation from the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies to meet with a group of MPs headed by Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.⁷² Fawcett began by commanding 'a few words first of all', asserting her female authority in the 'male' space of political business. Her argument was highly skilled and politicised as she demonstrated her understanding of the workings of both the Liberal and Conservative parties and their respective attitudes to the female franchise, specifically the lack of unity amongst both parties and the impact of this on the suffrage campaign.⁷³ She was accompanied by Miss Roydon, who spoke at length about the militant campaign for the vote and how it ought not to damage the suffrage movement's progress, Miss Robertson who was an industrial worker and spoke in detail about the feeling among working class women, and by Mrs Rackham, the chairperson of the executive committee of the NUWSS. Their carefully structured and knowledgeably articulated deputation conveys a clear progression from earlier women's use of Select Committees as a means of accessing Parliament.

Efforts to represent a spectrum of women's experiences and to strengthen women's political arguments became evident. On Thursday 23rd January 1913, Flora Drummond headed a deputation from working women suffragists to see Lloyd George, comprising of 'a representative deputation, representing various industries that you will think will need a great deal of attention.'⁷⁴ She was accompanied by: Miss Bonwick, a teacher; Sister Townend, a nurse; Mrs Wood and Mrs Bigwood, East End sweat-workers; Mrs Hawkins of the boot and shoe trade; Mrs Ward Brown, a laundress; Miss Bradley, a shop assistant; Mrs King, a fisherwoman from Scotland;

⁷² Parliamentary Archives LG/C/17/3/24, *Deputation from the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies*.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁷⁴ Parliamentary Archives LG/C/17/3/23, *Deputation from Working Women Suffragists*, p.2.

Mrs Ashworth, a Lancashire textile worker; Mrs Norton, a weaver from Bradford; Mrs Cohen, a tailor from Leeds; Miss Sarah Morgan representing the 'pit brow lasses'; and Annie Kenney as a co-organiser. Flora Drummond organised the deputation so that each woman would speak as a representative of her particular profession and geographical region before she herself concluded, saying 'this is a very practical deputation I have brought to you, a deputation that can speak for itself, and knows what it wants, and really knows how it is going to get it.'⁷⁵ Drummond's tone is direct and assertive, attesting clearly that these women are politically aware and politically motivated. Their physical presence was essential to women claiming their right to a place in the public sphere; by harnessing existing formal political channels, women were demonstrating both their political competence and their political drive.

By this point in the early-twentieth century, women from a broader spectrum of class, from more wide-ranging geographical backgrounds, and from more diverse contexts had used formal political channels to be physically present in Parliament, assert their political agendas, and influence policymaking. The organisation of women's movements still resulted in a largely middle-class leadership, but working-class women were engaging in the political sphere on their own terms and increasingly speaking on their own behalf. Deputations offered the opportunity to speak directly to those with the power to push legislative change. The Select Committees of the nineteenth-century were patriarchal, organised and run by men, with women permitted to speak on a topic that those men specified and by invitation only. Although they increasingly adopted the space of the Select Committee as one in which they could assert female voices in parliamentary spaces, the process of giving evidence before a committee was intimidating and, as Butler suggested in her personal letters, required women to conform to the normal practices and behaviours of Parliament. They required that elite women lead the presentation of female evidence, often leaving them speaking for and about working-class women, or selecting and guiding those working-class women who did speak for themselves. The elite women speaking before the committee required legitimising veils of class, philanthropy, and religion to authenticate their claim to speak. These limitations

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.23.

should not undermine the radical nature of how some of these women were using the space of the Select Committee.

Asserting female political agendas and inviting the voices of working-class, criminal, and prostitute women into a space of policymaking were bold statements of harnessing the space to exert female political agency. However, this agency was still limited by patriarchal organisation and regulation. By contrast, the deputations of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century marked distinctly female interventions into the space of Parliament. Women requested the meetings, set the agendas, and voiced their political concerns directly to policymakers. Furthermore, a far greater number and range of women had their voices heard, conveying an increasing confidence in women as they interacted with spaces of Parliament and a growing mobility in female political organisation. The earlier Select Committees were constrained much more by patriarchal politics, but they provided an opportunity for women to develop confidence both with being in parliamentary spaces and in asserting their female political agendas, paving the way for the bolder commands of the deputations.

Chapter Four: Protesters in Petticoats: women's physical resistance in Parliament, 1906-1913.

At 12:20 on 23rd October 1906 a hurried telegram was sent from Inspector SA Neville of A Division Metropolitan Police at Canon Row Police Station to Inspector Scantlebury of the Westminster Palace Police. This telegram warned him of thirty suffragettes at Plaistow Station who were intending to travel to Westminster with a view to entering the Houses of Parliament. In response to this intelligence, one plain clothes officer was sent to meet the train on which these women were travelling. Twenty officers were deployed to Central Hall, twenty-five to St Stephen's Hall, and the remainder were sent to wait in Old Palace Yard. At quarter to two the women began to arrive in small groups of two and three, with each group requesting to see a particular MP. They adhered to all of the rules regarding entering Parliament. At the official time of two o'clock the women were permitted to enter and peacefully waited for their requested MPs to attend them in the space of St Stephen's Hall. As MPs arrived to speak with them, some were taken further into the protected space of Central Hall, but none caused any disruption or disturbance. However, at half past four, in what was clearly a prearranged initiative, the women began to protest in unison, with some mounting seats by the Northcote Statue in Central Hall and shouting 'Votes for Women!', 'Votes for Freedom!', 'We are Slaves!'. Inspector Scantlebury attempted to defuse the situation but the women refused to be silenced, and so they were removed by police to Old Palace Yard and then expelled from the precincts of Parliament. Once outside the women continued to protest and tried to re-enter Parliament, resulting in the arrest of ten women by the Metropolitan Police and their subsequent charges of disorderly conduct in the street.

This incident is the first of fifty documented in the parliamentary police reports of women adopting methods of physical resistance in the Houses of Parliament between 1906 and 1919. These demonstrations of physical resistance in Parliament represented the development of how some women asserted their political agency and marked a shift in their relationship with parliamentary space. In his report, Scantlebury noted the 'principals' that he knew by sight were Mrs

Pankhurst, Mrs Lawrence, Mrs Despard, Mrs Montifiore, and Mrs Sanderson.¹ In addition to this he noted that other women involved in the protest outside of the House had not entered to take part within; they had already been banned from Parliament for the rest of the session by order of the Speaker for causing disruption in the Ladies' Gallery.² The conduct of these women, using their bodies to physically challenge the boundaries and control of parliamentary space, marked a shift in the way that some women were contesting their formal exclusion from politics at the dawn of the twentieth-century. The thousands of petitions that were sent to Parliament in the mid-nineteenth century had already increased the number of women present in the House, either physically to present petitions, or metaphorically as their name bore witness to a petition being presented. However, although they garnered public attention and introduced female political concerns into the House of Commons, they had only been able to effect limited legislative change. As women's political causes gained momentum and women developed increasing means of engaging with parliamentary space, the adoption of more direct and confident claims to Parliament emerged. These parliamentary protests were particularly concerned with the question of the female franchise and were utilised by a number of groups both constitutional and militant.

This final chapter will examine the culmination of women's progress in Parliament at the end of the century as, dissatisfied with the slow rate of legislative development, some women sought alternative means to try and effect change. This development in tactics occurred more broadly within the wider women's movement at the turn of the century as the suffragettes' mantra of 'deeds not words' inspired new ways of communicating female political needs.³ It also marked the move towards developing strategies that garnered publicity for the movement and kept the question of women's political place in the public mind. Many women campaigners felt that, over the course of the nineteenth-century, they had achieved

¹ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/1, 23rd October 1906, Police Report.

² Ibid.

³ June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (eds.), *Votes for Women* (London: Routledge, 2000).

all that they could without having a voice in Parliament and so this further highlighted the importance of Parliament as a stage for women's resistance.⁴

Women's demonstrations took on a plethora of forms, from marches and vigils to burning post boxes and smashing shop windows. There was a spectrum of physical resistance that revolved around placing female bodies in 'non-female' spaces. Constitutional protests such as petitioning, direct protests in the form of damaging buildings, and physical confrontations with figures of authority were all distinct actions that also formed part of the spectrum of resistance that this chapter will uncover. It will show the progression of women's physical resistance in Parliament in the early-twentieth century. Beyond Parliament, Irish campaigners and labour organisations were adopting militant forms of protest and resistance as Parliament failed to answer their causes.⁵ Women's groups were also engaging with these new demonstrations of political resistance. As the woman question was increasingly debated in the Commons, Parliament became a crucial location for female resistance; it held symbolic value as the stronghold of male political power and was a space in which women could directly contest their formal exclusion from politics both by their interactions with space and their access to MPs. Furthermore, reform efforts had granted some women greater freedoms outside of Parliament but they remained physically and culturally barred from the centre of power. The resulting tensions of this paradox culminated in Parliament becoming an important stage for physical demonstrations of female resistance. Although they varied widely, these new forms of protest were all characterised by their intent to challenge male control of political power.

The question of why women adopted these new tactics encourages more careful thought about what it meant for women's bodies to engage with parliamentary space in this way. The context of Irish and labour militancy offers an

⁴ Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.16-17.

⁵ There is a broad historiography covering political protest in this period but some useful starting points for this thesis were: Maurice J Bric and John Coakley (eds), *From Political Violence to Negotiated Settlement: the winding path to peace in twentieth-century Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004); Neville Kirk, *Change, Continuity and Class: Labour in British Society, 1850-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

impression of the broader landscape of political dissent; there was an element of catharsis that physical resistance offered for groups consistently overlooked by political reform. However, women's physical resistance was unique in that the female body introduced the complexities of sexual politics. Laura E Nym Mayhall has explored how suffragette ideology situated their acts of resistance within historical understandings of citizens' rights to resist corrupt and tyrannical rule.⁶ Using female bodies to stage protests that called upon the practise of challenging oppressive government posited them as dissenting symbols of rebellion as it legitimised their actions within a broader tradition of protest. It framed them as acts of active citizenship as women insisted upon their right to a political voice.⁷ This chapter will examine how the process that Mayhall depicts unfurled within Parliament as direct confrontation with both parliamentary power and oppressive sexual politics. Ideas about how women used their bodies, where they should be, and how they should behave were all challenged through the disruption of female physical resistance in Parliament. Furthermore, protesting in Parliament disrupted a space that epitomised regulation and tradition. Most forms of physical protests occurred at political gatherings or in public spaces like the street. Moving protests from open, public spaces to the closed, regulated space of Parliament saw women invoking a further dimension to their physical resistance. Standing on a chair at a political gathering and shouting 'Votes for Women' was a radical act that placed female protesters in physical jeopardy but transferring this act to Parliament intensified its dissidence. Disrupting the dignified and ordered space of Parliament through the physical resistance of dissident female bodies confronted the status quo in a new way and forced policymakers at the heart of power to acknowledge women's political actions. Parliament was the ultimate location for challenging the oppressive cultural values that policed women's bodies.

The change in women's behaviour appeared across women's political organisations, demonstrating their increasing confidence and determination. Physical resistance was also indicative of a change in attitude towards the space of

⁶ Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, p.79.

⁷ Ibid., p.80.

Parliament. For increasing number of women, it became a site of female challenge and protest rather than an exclusive space of patriarchal power. The story of this challenge in Parliament is at the centre of the wider history of suffrage and women's rights, yet it is surprisingly lacking as a focus in current scholarship. This chapter will address this gap by mapping the sites of female resistance in Parliament and reclaiming the narratives of female protesters who contested its boundaries. This chapter will interpret incidents of female resistance recorded in the parliamentary police reports through several themes. The chapter uncovers female narratives through a re-reading or reinterpreting of parliamentary spaces. Revealing female narratives in this way will offer new understandings of women's experiences of Parliament in this period and, by considering their interaction with agents at the centre of political power, will suggest more about women's position within the broader political arena.

The chapter will analyse the incidents of female resistance recorded in the parliamentary police reports through four themes. Firstly, the chapter will consider the demographic of women engaging in acts of physical resistance, exploring themes of class, regional localities, and political affiliation. In some cases, it is also possible to explore familial links to question whether some protesters claimed authority of experience of political circles to legitimise their actions, or indeed whether others were motivated by familial loyalty as well as political ideology. In this way it is possible to conceive of how women's individual experiences contributed to an overarching narrative of female protest in Parliament. Discovering more about lesser known women, who they were, where they were from, and what they did in Parliament will give a clearer idea of who amongst suffrage campaigners saw Parliament as a significant space for their fight and why it was such an important place to them. Secondly, the chapter will explore the theme of female bodies throughout the police reports. Bodies are both forms and sites of protest and female protesters used their significance to demonstrate the physical jeopardy they were prepared to endure. This physical jeopardy also symbolised their political vulnerability in a system that denied them representation. However, travelling to Westminster and placing female bodies in Parliament was of equal symbolic value,

confronting parliamentarians with women's presence in a 'male' space. Therefore, bodily contesting parliamentary space worked on multiple levels to articulate women's political claims. Thirdly, borderline spaces and how they were policed and controlled to permit or prevent access to spaces of power was a central theme of women's protests. This chapter understands borderline spaces as liminal 'buffer-zones' that bridged the gap between the centre of Parliament and the public space outside of it. Women's selection of peripheral spaces that they could contest and redefine to challenge male control of Parliament was strategic and symbolic. Finally, the chapter will examine how female protesters used spectacle and performance to augment the impact of their acts of resistance and how this shaped their developing female political identities in the public arena.

The historiography of female protest

Diversity of female protesters, female bodies, borderline spaces, and the significance of spectacle and performance will frame the analysis of this chapter and, as such, their relative historiographies will be explored concurrently. However, it is also useful to consider the broader historiography of female protest and to contextualise the spectrum of physical resistance emerging in Parliament. Thinking specifically about the WSPU, Andrew Rosen outlined the dual advantages of militant protests as they both generated publicity and support for the suffragettes and inspired new members to join the cause.⁸ Through analysing incidents of militant protests in Parliament, this chapter will explore parallel ideas but will go further to look at how other women employed such publicity strategies in addition to the WSPU. It will also explore the complexities of the relationship between militancy and the press, considering how harnessing media coverage not only widened the audience of militant protests but also allowed female protesters to undermine governmental authority in the public eye and apply pressure in support of reform.

⁸ Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1914* (London: Routledge, 1974), p.53.

Laura E Nym Mayhall's work on the militant suffrage movement illustrates how suffragette militancy was located in a specific narrative of challenging autocratic and corrupt government that came from a historic tradition of radicalism.⁹ Exploring what happened when such acts of resistance were performed within spaces of government and in direct confrontation with governmental authority will offer a new perspective on how the tradition that Mayhall highlights was employed by female protesters. Liz Stanley and Ann Morley posit a reactive form of militancy whereby female protesters framed their acts of resistance in direct response to female oppression.¹⁰ Indeed, some women's protests offered justification for this thesis, such as when Isabella Irvine smashed a window in Parliament to contest the imprisonment of Emily Wilding Davison.¹¹ However, this definition oversimplifies how militant tactics emerged and changed. Krista Cowman argues for a more nuanced appreciation of militancy that allows for the complexities of acts of resistance that occurred in different locations, at different times, and organised by different women with their respective political aims.¹² Her interpretation reflects the spectrum of physical resistance that occurred in Parliament across the period in question and from a range of different women's organisations, offering a more useful approach to exploring female resistance within Parliament.

Contextualising women's resistance in Parliament conveys how the concept of a spectrum of physical resistance is an appropriate analytical framework. Within Parliament women's acts of physical resistance ranged from the constitutional to the militant and were organised by groups such as the WSPU, the WFL, and the NUWSS as well as by individual women. As incidents increased in frequency, the Westminster police developed means of anticipating and controlling protests. In response, women adopted tactics of subterfuge, such as 'Catherine Wilson' dressing as a man on 16th March 1914 to hoodwink police officers and access Parliament.¹³ As they challenged

⁹ Mayhall, *The Militant Suffragette Movement*, pp.83-86.

¹⁰ Ann Morley with Liz Stanley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1988), p.153.

¹¹ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/38.

¹² Cowman, *Women in British Politics*, pp.66-69.

¹³ Catherine Wilson was an alias. <http://dangerouswomenproject.org/2016/03/19/suffragette-dressed-as-man/>

the space of Parliament, women also developed their political identity and increasingly engaged with the political life of the space. On 29th June 1914 Sylvia Pankhurst and representatives of the East End Federation met with Mr Duncan MP and other Labour MPs in the Grand Committee Room to discuss their political concerns, a meeting that was organised and facilitated by Keir Hardie. This exemplifies some of the outcomes of female protests in Parliament towards the end of this period, as women were brought to the table to engage in political discussion. Concurrent with this development, women's protests also diversified and engaged with issues beyond those of suffrage. On 3rd July 1919 Lydia Shiel stood up in the Members' Gallery and shouted 'Mr Speaker I protest against the troops being sent to Russia', demonstrating how women were openly challenging ideologies and political strategies as a result of their rapidly developing political awareness and confidence in their right to a space in Parliament.¹⁴ This developing confidence and broadening of political issues was occurring throughout the women's suffrage movement on a national scale, but within Parliament female protests had a unique influence in the centre of power.

These examples also reveal how attitudes of male agents towards women were also changing as female protests increased and developed at Westminster. Earlier figures such as Jacob Bright and John Stuart Mill had supported the women's campaign from the mid-nineteenth century and the number of male supporters steadily augmented over the second half of the nineteenth-century. At the beginning of the twentieth-century, in addition to continually increasing support, MPs' responses to female political demands developed in several ways. The frequency with which the question of the female franchise occupied the House meant that many MPs who had not previously considered the debate were inescapably confronted with it in the Commons. Furthermore, the increased debating of the woman question meant that it became increasingly divisive amongst MPs and across political parties, generating further interest in the cause. The very fact that MPs such as Mr Duncan and his fellow Labour ministers met with the East End Federation in an official capacity, inviting them into the 'male' space of Parliament and engaging in

¹⁴ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/65, Westminster Police Report.

political discussion with them, is indicative of a general trend in the attitudes of some MPs. When Lydia Shiel was ejected for her outburst in 1919, male visitors in the galleries objected to the manner in which she was handled and were also ejected, illustrating changes in attitude amongst the public as well as MPs. The number of politicians who sympathised with the cause rose steadily during this period and it became common to hear MPs raise the question of women's suffrage in the House, contest how female protesters were being treated, or challenge the Prime Minister about his refusal to see delegations. These occasions once more brought the question of women's political rights onto the floor of the House, also introducing a metaphorical female presence in that 'male' space. The national picture was experiencing developments that followed these trends, as increasing numbers of both men and women supported the campaign and protesters devised new ways of publicising their message. However, the space of Parliament was a particularly essential one as it was here that women had the power to influence policy makers.

Exploring female resistance through space necessitates an alternative methodology that will allow this chapter to further add to existing scholarship on women's political protests. Gillian Rose and Alison Blunt have argued that traditional understandings of space are essentialist and rely upon mimetic representation, reproducing patriarchal control of new spaces as existing modes of creating and behaving in space are replicated again and again. In this way, Parliament is defined by separate spheres and functions according to traditional conceptions of space that interpret it as fixed and unchanging. However, moving beyond such restrictive notions of space, Rose and Blunt advocate a more fluid reading of spaces that can be both contested and constructed, revealing alternative narratives to those reinforced by the status quo.¹⁵ This chapter will examine how female protesters in Parliament contested equivocal spaces and repurposed them to communicate their own female political narrative. Borderline spaces at the periphery of Parliament staged women's protests within an arena that forced them to replicate their exclusion from the centre

¹⁵ Blunt and Rose (eds.), *Writing Women and Space*, p.20.

of power but also brought them into close proximity with that centre in spaces that they were able to reshape and repurpose for their female political activities.

Sources

The Westminster police reports hold the forgotten narratives of countless women whose stories offer new ways of viewing the relationship between the space of Parliament and female protestors in the early-twentieth century. Although a small record within the Parliamentary Archives, they reveal important details about the reactions to, documenting of, and strategising around female disruption of parliamentary space. By protesting within Parliament rather than outside of it, women were consciously trying to perform a serious and legitimate form of citizenship within a specifically chosen location. The parliamentary police reports reveal a different tone of protest within Parliament to that which occurred outside in the streets. There are often references to confrontations and arrests outside of the palace but inside there seemed to be a dominant principle of expulsion of protestors. The reports uncover unique codes of behaviour amongst the parliamentary police as Parliament needed to epitomise certain ideals whereas the public space of the street and the Metropolitan Police was not governed by such rules. Largely authored by Inspector Scantlebury, the head of the police in Parliament, the reports are addressed to Sir H David Erskine, the Serjeant-at-Arms, to record incidents across the palace. Women were increasingly disrupting and challenging 'male' spaces with greater confidence and greater frequency; the small sample offered by the parliamentary police reports indicates this as it moves from four incidents in 1906 to twelve in 1909 and then eleven in 1913. This chapter will consider a sample of eight reports from across the period 1906-1913. The examples used have been chosen as they fall in the most concentrated period of female resistance in Parliament and illustrate both the diversity of the women engaging in physical resistance and the range and development of their tactics. They also offer insight into how women employed their bodies as weapons of resistance, harnessing the power of spectacle to challenge the male borders of Parliament.

The police reports also make it possible to map the sites within Parliament that women were able to inhabit. The nature of the physical resistance in which women were engaging and their increasingly strategic occupation of spaces in Parliament is indicative of their continually developing female political identity as they immersed themselves in the daily running of the centre of power. The parliamentary police reports reveal how female protestors affected the space of Parliament, the effects of their disruptions, and the way in which the space was obliged to change and adapt in reaction. Female protests began largely as peaceful protests that disrupted the daily life of Parliament, such as on 20th December 1906 when a group of women from the WSPU climbed on seats and shouted 'Votes for Women' in Central Hall, insisting that their female voices were heard. It is also worth noting the numerous peaceful deputations organised by women in this period. As they were often peacefully conducted, they do not feature prominently in the parliamentary police reports. The Prime Minister also famously refused to receive suffrage deputations and so many women involved in them never entered spaces under the jurisdiction of the parliamentary police. For these reasons, they will not feature as significantly in this chapter.¹⁶

The records of the Westminster Police in the Parliamentary Archives show sustained efforts by women to access parliamentary spaces from 26th April 1906. On this date, when some derogatory comments 'denounc[ed the] petticoat domination in no measured language' as Keir Hardie put forward a motion that sex no longer be a barrier to the franchise, 'a chorus of fierce ejaculation came from the ladies who, in some instances, jumped to their feet and seemed about to burst the barriers of the grille and jump down into the House.'¹⁷ They also thrust their fingers through the grille and pushed a banner bedecked with 'Votes for Women' through the ironwork. 1906 marked the first incident preserved in the parliamentary police reports but, as this thesis has shown, it can be argued that women were contesting male control of parliamentary space from the moment of their expulsion in 1776. At this moment in the early-twentieth century, their protests took on a more dynamic and physical

¹⁶ A good place to start for information on deputations is: Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*.

¹⁷ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/1, 26th April 1906, Newspaper clipping, publication unknown.

aspect as political reform in the later-nineteenth century failed to address female political concerns. These same police records continue to show female protest through the breaching of physical spaces until 3rd July 1919, when one woman protested against the sending of troops to Russia. Between these dates there is a clear increase in the number of women engaging in physical resistance, particularly between 1909 and 1912. The outbreak of war in 1914 explains the decrease in women's protests at this point.

Amongst the police records, the locations most commonly cited as sites of female protest were unsurprisingly St Stephen's Entrance and St Stephen's Hall, public spaces that women could access freely provided they were properly escorted. Most women would have entered through St Stephen's Entrance, but nineteen separate incidents are recorded as taking place here by the police records, with a further fifteen taking place in St Stephen's Hall, and two more in St Stephen's porch. Ten incidents occurred in Central Hall, now referred to as Central Lobby. Some of these are examples of male supporters of female suffrage, as men could more easily access the space. There are two examples of incidents in the Ladies' Gallery, one in the Peers' Lobby, two in Westminster Hall, two in the Grand Committee Room, and one in the Speaker's Court. In addition to incidents inside the building, women were also attempting to breach borders around Parliament's perimeter, with further incidents recorded in New Palace Yard, Old Palace Yard, famously, one on the Thames opposite the Terrace, on Speaker's Green and on the Colonnade.

Central Hall is a particularly interesting site of protest. Women were allowed there until they were banned from it on 14 Feb 1907. Consequently, protests that occurred in Central Hall prior to 1907 were militant and significant but not in a space that women were banned from. Any mention of them there after February 1907 therefore has added significance, as they should not have been there in the first place. In terms of space, the banning of women from Central Lobby in February 1907 indicated that Parliament felt threatened by women's bodily actions to the point where they redefined the 'borderline' spaces (as I shall come to later in this chapter) to help protect themselves from future action. This is partly why St Stephen's Hall

became the focus of so much protest, because women had to wait there when previously they would have waited in Central Hall.

Women's bodies were employed to physically and ideologically break down the male borders of Parliament. Their acts of physical resistance targeted peripheral spaces designed to act as buffer zones and prevent women from reaching spaces of political business within. Their physical resistance demonstrated the development of their disregard for governmental authority. In mounting attacks on parliamentary spaces using new militant tactics, female protesters confronted the corrupt policies that subjected them to the feminine sphere in a way that showed their women's bodies acting to challenge such stereotypes. Displays of physical resistance also invited new audiences to engage with the campaign. The shock-factor and novelty of female demonstrations in Parliament meant that such incidents were reported widely in the press, undermining the power of policymakers to appeal to the wider will of the people and encourage them to pressure the Commons to fulfil women's political rights.

The parliamentary police reports illustrate the change over time in women's acts of physical resistance in Parliament. Earlier incidents saw female protesters employing constitutional forms of resistance such as deputations and petitioning. This gradually changed as women adopted more militant physical strategies to stage their protests, moving from shouting out in forbidden parliamentary spaces to employing tactics such as damaging property and engaging in direct confrontation with figures of parliamentary authority. The reports evidence a spectrum of physical resistance that included acts of physical resistance from a diverse range of women. Whilst this chapter aims to highlight this change over time, it will not adopt a chronological approach to the reports. The relatively short time-span of the sample from 1906-1913 indicates this shift but does not encompass the full scope of the parliamentary police reports. In addition to the parliamentary police reports, this chapter will also draw on digitised newspaper reports and census records to recover a more detailed impression of female resistance in Parliament and therefore expand more fully on these ideas.

Contextualising and mapping Parliament

Rather than one homogenous space, the Houses of Parliament are comprised of a collection of buildings and spaces that were, and still are, continually in flux. In the nineteenth-century, as today, a diverse range of people moved within and between these spaces. In addition to politicians, Parliament was occupied by domestic staff, the parliamentary police, labourers, administrators, contractors, and many more people who all moved within designated spaces and at specified times. Women who worked in Parliament had far more freedom to move around the palace. Indeed, some 65 women were resident in Parliament in 1911, a mixture of servants and family members.¹⁸ The space was both controlled and yet transitory. The paradoxically ephemeral make-up of spaces within Parliament juxtaposed the historic status quo that governed its rules and practices and opened them up as subject to potential change. Viewing Parliament through lenses offered by feminist geography makes it possible to draw out the complexities of these multiple and conflicting experiences of the space and draw out a narrative of female protest that conveys how women employed its physical composition and exploited these paradoxes to further their political aims. It is particularly important to revisit the composition of parliamentary space here as physical resistance saw women moving more dynamically and extensively across Parliament. It also emphasises the planning, organisation, and ingenuity required to access such a diverse range of parliamentary spaces. Parliament's nature as a collection of spaces is clearly shown in Figure 11. The map represents each incident of physical resistance by women that is recorded in the surviving parliamentary police reports. The sheer number of incidents and their mapping across the parliamentary estate conveys the frequency and scope of female protests. It also elucidates the significance of the space of Parliament in the narrative of female political protest and the forming of a female political identity. Throughout the nineteenth-century the estate was formally inaccessible to female spectators. Spaces that were available to them necessitated a male chaperone. Without a chaperone they were permitted to be in Westminster Hall and St Stephen's Hall, but could not proceed into Central Hall. They also had access to the Ladies' Gallery and

¹⁸ Takayanagi, *Women and Parliament, c.1900-1945*, Ch 7.

the route by which they accessed it. However, as the map illustrates, women's relationship with parliamentary space shifted dramatically at the turn of the century.

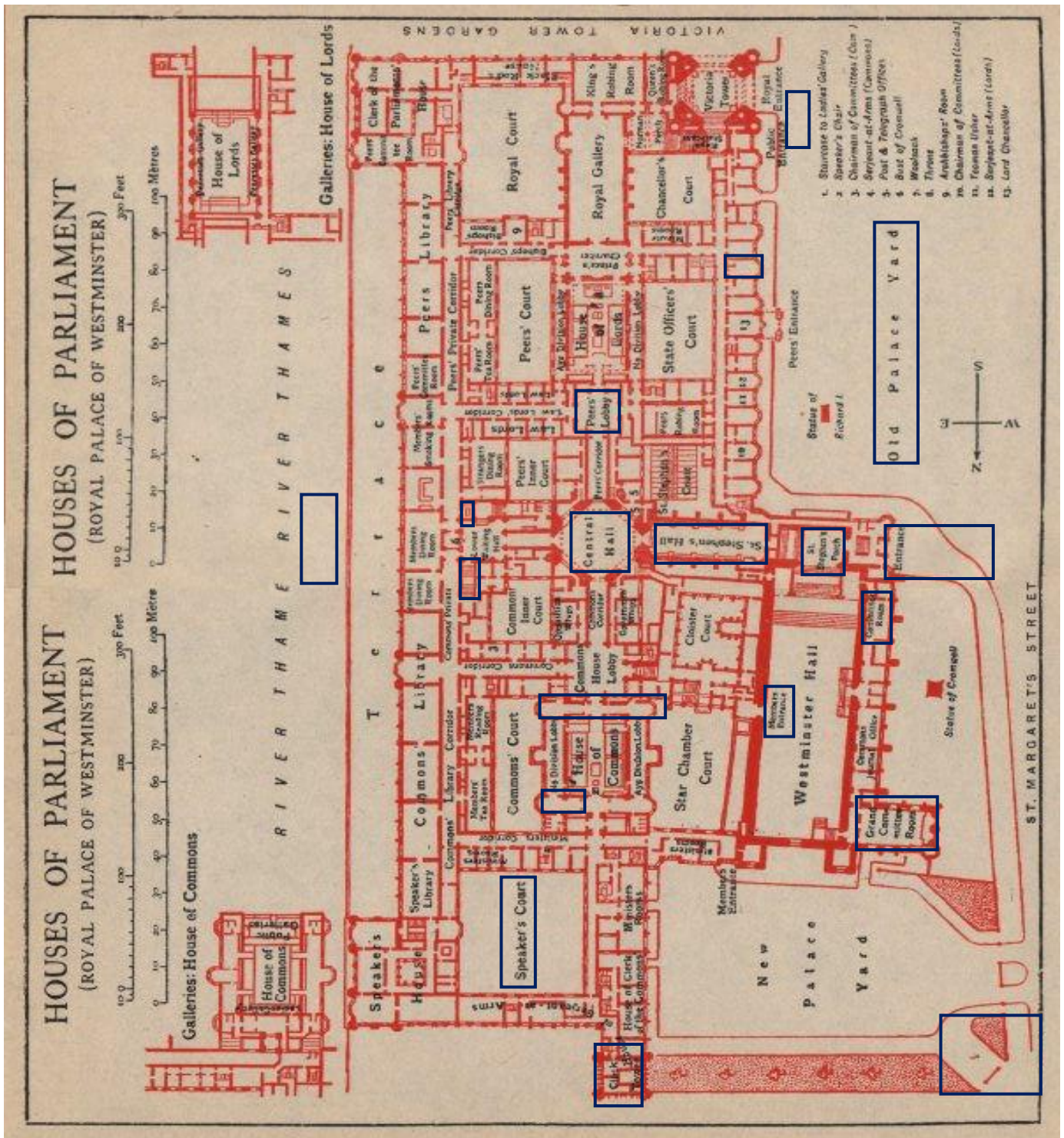


Figure 11: Map of the Houses of Parliament indicating sites where incidents of physical female protest took place in blue. For further details of individual incidents, see Appendix 1.

Despite these limitations, the parliamentary spaces in which women used their bodies to physically challenge 'male' borders were impressively diverse and scattered throughout the Palace. The determination and commitment demonstrated by continual efforts to breach these boundaries conveys the overt political motives of these women. Unlike the women of the ventilator, these women identified with a political movement and as activists; they understood both their potential and their right to be citizens of the state rather than subjects of men. 'Male borders' controlled parliamentary space, policing the 'Other' so that that status quo within could be maintained. This chapter defines 'male borders' as those defined and regulated by patriarchal power. Parliament was a masculine space with clear rules about who could and could not cross its borders; implicit within the institutional organisation of this space was the gendered bias that dictated women should not enter. However, by protesting at these borders, women were in dialogue with the masculinity within and were challenging its authority. They shaped the liminal space of the male border to become one of female political dissent and articulated their own female political identity.

Which women took part?

Women's history has done much to uncover lesser known groups who played active roles in women's political organisation. Jill Liddington and Jill Norris challenged perceptions of both class and regionality as they uncovered a working-class suffrage narrative in Lancashire.¹⁹ Liddington has also published a study of working-class suffrage campaigners from Yorkshire.²⁰ Both studies examine the circumstances under which such women joined the women's campaign and the activities in which they engaged, uncovering a working-class narrative within a movement that has been previously stereotyped as middle-class. They also consider the challenging practicalities for some working-class women who tried to engage in the women's campaign and the several tensions that emerged across class lines within the broader

¹⁹ Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2000).

²⁰ Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: their fight for the vote* (London: Virago, 2006).

movement. This chapter will contribute to this body of work by uncovering the stories of some working women who travelled to Parliament to engage in acts of physical resistance. However, the chapter differentiates between 'working-class women' and 'working women'; some of the women who engaged in physical resistance came from working-class backgrounds whereas others belonged to the class of working women employed in 'respectable' or 'white blouse' professions but were still economically reliant upon employment. This distinction is important because women's different backgrounds resulted in differing experiences of parliamentary space.

Historians have been exploring the relationship between the women's movement and the workers' movement since the 1970s. More recently, Lucy Delap has suggested that feminist and trade unionist activities at the beginning of the twentieth-century offered working women new ways of thinking about their lives.²¹ Ellen Jordan has noted how the women's movement's promotion of work as a means of female independence reframed the way that some working women viewed their labour.²² Often working women were members of both women's groups and workers' groups. However, as Laura Schwartz has most recently highlighted, the relationship between the women's movement and the workers' movement was complex and working women could often find their loyalties and interests divided as the two movements overlapped, sometimes working together and sometimes conflicting.²³ Tensions developed between the interests of working women and privileged women as they protested alongside one another for the same campaign. Unlike previous constitutional forms of protests that required a pre-existing knowledge of parliamentary procedure and often familial links to MPs, physical resistance was more accessible to a wider range of women. Although it necessitated physical risk, it did not require any specific skills and relied more upon mass participation. Consequently, it was accessible to a relatively diverse range of women. A collection of essays edited by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton considers the

²¹ Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²² Ellen Jordan, *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999).

²³ Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem*.

wide-ranging origins of women within the broader suffrage movement.²⁴ Krista Cowman has also produced focused regional studies exploring women's politics both within the suffrage campaign and beyond.²⁵ However, to date there has been limited research into the diversity of women who engaged with the space of Parliament and this chapter hopes to go some way to address this gap. Parliament was a central site to the changing perceptions of women and their place in political life and it continues to be so today.

The parliamentary police reports offer evidence of a diverse range of women identifying Westminster as a significant site of protest and engaging in acts of physical resistance in Parliament. For example, on 20th December 1906, simultaneous demonstrations in Westminster Hall and Central Hall by members of the WSPU resulted in the arrest of five women. One of these women was Flora Drummond, a prominent WSPU member. As Sylvia Pankhurst described, on this occasion she 'succeeded in entering the House unobserved and in making her way by the back passages to within a few yards of the sacred chamber of debate itself.'²⁶ It is important to note the extent to which Flora Drummond managed to infiltrate the House of Commons on this occasion, placing her female body in very close proximity to the 'male' Chamber. Her female body was both the vehicle of her protest and the site of her challenge to male control of the Chamber as she travelled through the palace. Drummond was arrested for her efforts and received a prison sentence of fourteen days in Holloway.²⁷ However, what Sylvia Pankhurst, and indeed many other accounts, fail to elucidate are the stories of the other women who were also arrested for their physical resistance that day. Inspector Scantlebury of the Westminster Police recorded that:

²⁴ Purvis and Stanley Holton (eds.), *Votes for Women*.

²⁵ Cowman, *Women in British Politics*; Krista Cowman, *'Mrs Brown is a man and a brother': women in Merseyside's political organisations 1890-1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004); Krista Cowman, *The Militant Suffragette Movement in York* (York: University of York and Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 2007).

²⁶ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement* (UK: Dover Publications, 2015), p.131.

²⁷ The British Newspaper Archive, *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Saturday 22nd December 1906.

*'I have to report for the information of the Segt at arms that at 8.3pm 2 women (Suffragists) entered by way of St Stephens and asked for Mr Agnew MP. I followed them to the Central Hall, they did not send a card in for a Member so I got very close to them in company with a Segt by the Earl Russell statue when one jumped on to the seat and shouted, Votes for Women. When she was pulled down, immediately the other got up, when she was pulled down and both finally ejected from the Hall into the street. At the time this was happening 2 others had entered by way of the Subway asking for Mr Ainsworth. When in Westminster Hall they said they had an appointment with Mr Ainsworth at the Members Entrance. They were directed there, and there whilst being questioned by PC Elliott they started to run and got into the Cloak Room, when he caught hold of them and held them until further assistance arrived, when they were ejected. The 2 women ejected from Central Hall were very violent on being put out, consequently their names could not be obtained, neither could the other 2 from Cloak Room, but 5 were taken into custody outside the Palace; their names are Annie Miller Frazer, Flora Drummond, Mary Keating Hill, Ivy Keppell, Martha Jones.'*²⁸

Annie Miller Fraser, Mary Keating Hill, Ivy Heppell and Martha Jones succeeded in inhabiting space in both Central Hall and Westminster Hall, two sites which performed as borders to Central Hall and were challenged by the women's actions. Their protests forced others in the space to hear and acknowledge their aural call for 'votes for women', as well as their visual and physical demand for a female presence in Parliament. The 'dual attack' showed tactical planning as women thought strategically about how to overcome male security measures controlling the space and how best to assert their female presence. It also conveyed women from different background collaborating to exert their political agency and unifying in the space of Parliament to demonstrate their protest. The four other women in this group ranged

²⁸ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/2A, Westminster Police Report. NB; This and all subsequent extracts from reports written by Chief Inspector Scantlebury have had some punctuation added for clarity, but there is limited punctuation in the original.

in age from nineteen to forty and came from difference geographical locations across England, Scotland, and Wales.

Mary Keating Hill, from Cardiff, was the first suffragette from Wales to go to prison. Although she was described as a suffragette and associated with members of the WSPU, by 1909 she was chair of the Cardiff branch of the Women's Freedom League.²⁹ Her move from one political organisation to another reflects how these groups were fluid and changeable. Furthermore, a great number of women's political groups were represented by female protesters in Parliament. She was the widow of an insurance broker and, at the age of forty, was the oldest woman involved in this incident by some way. Her age challenged the notion that suffragettes were young and impulsive and conveys the age range of women who engaged in physical resistance, whilst her Welsh heritage represented the regional diversity of the women's movement. Protests were not exclusively metropolitan but involved women from across the United Kingdom. It is also pertinent to consider the relative independence that Hill's widowhood offered. Her bold actions and multiple acts of physical protest in Parliament suggest that she overcame any feelings of intimidation to contest her political exclusion. For her actions on 20th December 1906 she spent three weeks in prison for disorderly conduct and resisting police. In the week before the protest of 20th December Mary Keating Hill had already received another prison sentence for a similar offence, but her brother had paid a fine to avoid her imprisonment. However, she was determined to go to prison for the cause and this time went to Holloway. The *Cheltenham Chronicle* depicted her as 'join[ing] the broil' after Annie Miller Fraser had stepped in.³⁰ She received twenty-one days imprisonment, a week longer than her fellow suffragettes on account of the close proximity of her two arrests.

Twenty years Hill's junior, Ivy Gertrude Heppell was a nineteen-year-old teacher from Bristol.³¹ Her position as a teacher included her in the category of working women who engaged in acts of physical resistance.³² Born in Chippenham in

²⁹ Welsh Newspapers Online, *Evening Express*, 27th January 1909.

³⁰ The British Newspaper Archive, *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Saturday 22nd December 1906.

³¹ The British Newspaper Archive, *London Daily News*, Saturday 22nd December 1906.

³² She was mistakenly recorded as Ivy Keppell by Scantlebury.

Wiltshire in 1887, she was the youngest daughter of Isabella and Lancelot Heppell, and had two older sisters, Edith and Amy Heppell. The 1891 census listed her father as an insurance superintendent. By the time of the 1901 census, Lancelot Heppell had become the district superintendent of a national life assurance society, whilst Edith had become a shop assistant at the age of twenty-three, and Ivy, age fourteen, was still at school. Martha Jones who was twenty-three at the time of this particular protest and had travelled from Pendleton in Manchester to take part. Due to her rather more common name, she has proven harder to track down. Jones also received a fourteen-day sentence for her actions, but saw it 'not as a sacrifice, but as an honour.'³³ On 20th December 1906 Ivy 'had mounted the seat near the Russell Statue and begun a passionate address. The police charged her, while she resisted with might and main, and was assisted by Miss Jones. In unison they screamed 'I'm from Bristol to demand Votes for Women!' 'I'm from Manchester for Votes for Women!''³⁴ These were the two women depicted by Scantlebury in his report taking alternate turns to stand and shout for their cause. Her proclamation localised the call for women's suffrage to her home town. Her call from Bristol in the south-west alongside Martha Jones' call from Manchester in the north-west conveyed the geographic scale of women involved in the campaign and their regional insistence upon a presence in Parliament. Despite their different regional origins, the women's cause and their commitment to contesting their exclusion from Parliament untied these women on a bench within Central Hall. Their relatively young ages alongside Martha Jones' forty years illustrate another way in which women who engaged in acts of physical resistance were diverse as women's political concerns spanned across generations.

Annie Miller Fraser was the sister of suffragette and activist Helen Miller Fraser and consequently perhaps the most well-known of the four women. She is listed as an actress in the *Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* and was 'one of the first two Scottish women imprisoned for the cause in Holloway' for her actions

³³ Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, p.131

³⁴ The British Newspaper Archive, *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Saturday 22nd December 1906.

on 20th December 1906.³⁵ She was only twenty-two at the time of this incident. Her mother was named Christiana Sutherland and her father, a tailor's cutter and clothing manufacturer, was named James Fraser. She was the fourth of ten children, two years younger than Helen, and grew up in Glasgow where her father worked to later open a wholesale clothing firm, Fraser Ross & Co, and became a city councillor.³⁶ Her family were supportive of her and her sister in their actions for the cause. The Cheltenham Chronicle described how 'to their [the other women's] rescue came Miss Annie Fraser all the way from Glasgow and clad in royal purple.'³⁷ The women were subsequently arrested, 'save Miss Annie Fraser, who slipped from the grasp of her captor and sped towards Westminster Bridge.'³⁸ The description of her suggested several things. Firstly, that in spite of her lesser known place in popular historical narratives of the women's suffrage movement, Fraser's name was known in the press of the time. Secondly, the emphasis on the distance she had travelled 'all the way from Glasgow' adds a further dimension to the geographical origins of the women involved in this protest. The positive description of the suffragette colour as 'royal' purple combined with the heroic depiction of Fraser suggested that not only was she successful in asserting her right to a place in Parliament but that she also succeeded in appealing to a wider public audience. The 'captor' figure of the policeman placed her in the role of wronged prisoner, trapped by the oppression of patriarchal power. She presented a twofold challenge to male control as she used her body to both inhabit forbidden 'male' spaces and to evade the attempted male policing of her body through arrest.

Hailing from England, Scotland, and Wales and varying in age, profession, and situation, these four women are a micro-representation of the diversity of women who engaged in acts of physical resistance in Parliament. The other incidents that this chapter explores convey the same varied make-up of the groups of women who protested alongside one another and united through physical resistance. Performing acts of physical resistance in Parliament was perilous and put the women at risk of

³⁵ Elizabeth Ewan, Sue Innes, Sian Reynold and Rose Pipes (eds), *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p.127.

³⁶ Ibid., p.127.

³⁷ The British Newspaper Archive, *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Saturday 22nd December 1906.

³⁸ Ibid.

suffering violent interventions from parliamentary authorities. All of the women were arrested which would have involved physical handling and moving of their bodies by male police officers. Fraser's escape from her captor would have necessitated resistance of her restraint and augmented her physical jeopardy. However, the ways in which they behaved in the space of Parliament revealed that these women understood their right to a place in Parliament as more important than the risks of physical resistance. Heppell and Jones, both young women, refuted the dual oppression of both their age and their sex as they stood on the bench in Central Hall and shouted, 'Votes for Women!' Shouting their demands in Central Hall was a highly symbolic act that forced parliamentarians to confront the reality of a female voice in their 'male' space and its refusal to be silenced. Unhindered by age and relatively liberated by her independent status as a widow, Hill's behaviour in Parliament could be described as more overt as she placed herself in the midst of the disruption and engaged directly with parliamentary authority. Furthermore, her multiple attempts to occupy parliamentary space and engage in acts of physical resistance were indicative of her strong motives and belief in her right as a woman to be there. Although also of a young age, Fraser's actions parallel Hill's as she offered a physical challenge to parliamentary authority and undermined their attempted control of the other women there as she intervened in their arrests. Her family status, their support of her political beliefs, and her sisterly link to a well-known suffragette and activist could have strengthened her conviction and her understanding of her political rights as a woman and supported how she acted in parliamentary space.

Parliament was a significant space for many women as they staged acts of physical resistance to contend their political oppression. It brought women from across the United Kingdom and from all walks of life together as they unified and protested alongside one another. In this way, it played a central role in bringing together female protesters in a way that amplified the impact of their demonstrations as they combined their efforts in a centralised location. Acting within their own towns or as smaller groups defined by their occupations, situations, or other common features would have diluted their numbers and removed their actions from the centre of political life. Parliament was essential in unifying and empowering

women to collaborate from across diverse groups. Writing on local suffrage history, Cowman writes that 'it is with this question of the 'total picture' – correcting it, challenging it, upholding it, or overturning it – that local suffrage history is most concerned.'³⁹ Her use of the term 'local' implies geographical proximity, a space with which a group of people identify or associate themselves. Although Parliament was certainly not a space considered 'local' by the women in the Westminster police reports, their protests centred around it and they were clearly trying to both associate themselves and identify with it. It became a common rather than a local space in which they could locate their combined efforts of resistance. Consequently, this chapter works to contribute towards a 'total picture' of female protest in Parliament in the early-twentieth century. Cowman goes on to argue that 'local studies create fresh narratives which immediately alter the perspectives of national suffrage histories by placing new protagonists at the centre', offering alternative readings of established narratives that are capable of opening up new ways of viewing history.⁴⁰

The diverse combination of women involved in acts of physical resistance that centred around the common space of Parliament contributed to the broad spectrum of forms that women's protests adopted. In addition to disruptive protests that undermined male control of parliamentary space, some groups of women also took on constitutional forms of resistance to exert their political agency. The wide variety of approaches to political resistance stemmed from the meeting of diverse women around one common cause and in a single location. On 18th February 1909, Inspector Scantlebury reported an incident in which the Women's Freedom League arrived en masse to present a petition to the Prime Minister. This group of women had broken with the WSPU in 1907 because of their disagreement with the more autocratic leadership methods of Mrs Pankhurst and did not support 'violent' methods of protest. They were still a militant group but disagreed with some of the tactics of the WSPU. In spite of the differing values and methods of this group, they too were

³⁹ Krista Cowman, 'Crossing the Great Divide: Inter-organisational suffrage relationships on Merseyside, 1895-1914' in Claire Eustance, Joan Ryan and Laura Ugolini (Eds) *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), pp.37-52 (p.38).

⁴⁰ Cowman, 'Crossing the Great Divide', p.38.

equally determined and dedicated in their efforts to challenge their exclusion from politics and their demonstrations also centred around Parliament. Their preference for peaceful methods was clear in their choice of a petition. However, rather than passing the petition to Parliament through a male intermediary, these women demonstrated their evolving relationship with parliamentary space by delivering it en masse and demanding to see the Prime Minister. Their confidence was indicative of a general shift in women's attitudes to parliamentary space as they increasingly met, networked, and protested there and more dynamically asserted their right to enter. Scantlebury's report focused on Charlotte Despard, one of the founding members of the WFL and therefore a prominent figure in suffrage histories. However, as he recorded that the petition was refused, he also noted that seven women and one man were arrested outside:

*'I beg to acquaint the Segt at Arms that at 9.30pm 18th Mrs Despard with several women belonging to the Women's Freedom League arrived at St Stephen's Entrance in a taxi cab. Whilst interviewing her many others belonging to the same league put in an appearance on foot to support her. Mrs Despard demanded to see the Prime Minister, holding a roll in her hand which I offered to receive and pass to his secretary or it could be sent by post. She however, with the others present, demanded to come in and were subsequently dealt with by police outside, 7 women and 1 man being arrested.'*⁴¹

In addition to Charlotte Despard, those arrested were Marguerite Sidley, Maud Fitzherbert, Margaret Farquharson, Lilian Borovikovsky, Carla Bechstein and Mary Gwyther, as well as Joseph Clayton. Marguerite Sidley, a trained typist from Nottingham who joined first the WSPU in 1907 and then the WFL in 1909, is another figure better-known in suffrage histories. She spent one month in prison for this incident, along with at least two other prison stays during her fight for women's suffrage. However, the other women are, again, less known and celebrated, yet were an integral part of this incident and represent the diversity of the women who

⁴¹ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/8, Westminster Police Report.

gathered around Parliament to stage their acts of resistance. Although perhaps at first this incident appears to be less dynamic and disruptive than that of 20th December 1906, what was conveyed was the developing political education of women as they harnessed the political channels of petitioning and deputations to articulate their female political needs.

Researching many of these women has revealed that, whilst they are virtually unknown in suffrage histories today, they were prominent figures in contemporary narratives. Maud Fitzherbert is one such figure and initial searches into newspaper and police reports on suffrage demonstrations were peppered with her name. In February 1907 an article in *The Times* entitled 'The Woman Suffrage Riot' reported that 'Maud Fitzherbert, no occupation, of Cambridge-mansions, Battersea' was seen as she 'got on a sergeant's back and seized the collar of his coat.'⁴² The sergeant was an instrument of the parliamentary power that policed who could and could not enter Old Palace Yard where the incident took place. Maud Fitzherbert refused his right to police both where she placed her body and how it behaved. Her actions also demonstrated a stark reversal of the status quo as the sergeant's body was subjected to female action. Maud was sentenced to fourteen days in prison for this offence, evidencing that she was actively fighting for female suffrage from at least 1907 to 1909 when this incident took place. Furthermore, she was prepared to sacrifice her bodily safety, as she was convicted of offences in both Old Palace Yard and at St Stephen's Entrance. Further searching of her name revealed another interesting detail, as on 12th March 1909, reporting on Maud's imprisonment in Holloway for her involvement in the WFL demonstration on 18th February, the *Irish News* and *Belfast Morning News* reported that 'had Miss Fitzherbert been given a few moments thought [in Parliament], she would probably have asked for Mr Hugh Law, MP for West Donegal, who is her cousin.'⁴³ This interesting family connection to an Irish nationalist politician suggests that Maud came from a family where more liberal politics were embraced and perhaps this influenced her own confidence to demand her right to a place in Parliament at such physical risk. Indeed, Hugh Law was known

⁴² National Archives HO 144/847/149.245, Article from *The Times* dated 15th February 1907.

⁴³ The British Newspaper Archive, *Irish News* and *Belfast Morning News*, 12th March 1909.

on several occasions to support the women's cause in the House during this period, representing the beginnings of change in the ways that women were viewed by parliamentarians.

Female protesters were motivated by a number of different causes beyond the popular question of suffrage. Margaret Farquharson was an educated woman with an MA from the University of Glasgow.⁴⁴ The *Manchester Courier* provided an account of how she was unafraid to use her education to help further the cause of women's suffrage. It reported that 'Margaret Farquharson, who said she came as representing the students of Glasgow University to put a petition before Mr Asquith, [said] she also came to see him at his own request, as when departing from the station two years ago, when he was Lord Rector of the university, he said he would be very pleased to see any of the students in London at the House of Commons.'⁴⁵ Her links to education, that she made so clear in her suffrage demonstration, reveal a further motivation for her protest. She allied herself firmly with the university and with 'students' rather than women exclusively. Her political fight was nuanced by both her identity as a woman and as a student, and both were clearly integral to her political action as she fought for the rights of students within her protest as part of a WFL demonstration. She was one of many women who identified their political role as about something more than just the female franchise. Her words characterise the multi-faceted and complex political identities that women were forming dependent on their regional locality, their societal interactions, and their political experiences. Women's political education was rapidly growing and diversifying and with this came a development of the political role women perceived for themselves and of the political causes with which they engaged.

In the *Evening Express* of 27th January 1909, Nurse Gwyther was mentioned as the first at a meeting of the Women's Freedom League to volunteer, at the request of Mrs Keating Hill, to go to London to present a resolution to Asquith. The article reported that 'Nurse Gwyther, Richmond-road....said she would 'do it regardless of

⁴⁴ The British Newspaper Archive, *Manchester Courier*, Friday 19th February 1909.

⁴⁵ The British Newspaper Archive, *Manchester Courier*, Saturday 20th February 1909.

all consequences', a resolve that was received with loud cheering.⁴⁶ She was described in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* as a thirty-five year old nurse from Cardiff and was the only child of Richard Gwyther and Mary Davies.⁴⁷ Richard Gwyther was listed on the 1881 census as a cabinet maker, in 1891 as a butter cheese dealer, and by 1911 he was a dairyman and listed as deaf. Mary's parents remained in Cardiff throughout her life, and her father's changes in job and trade, as well as his very early deafness perhaps brought on by working conditions, suggest that she came from a working family. She represented a more nuanced collective of women contesting parliamentary spaces and challenged the stereotype of elite suffragettes caricatured in large hats. Her status as a working woman from Wales indicated the diversity of women who identified Parliament as a common space for their political protest.

In addition to class and regional diversity, the police reports reveal some limited details of international elements to female protests in Parliament. Lillian Borovikovsky and Carla Bechstein are interesting because their names indicate foreign familial links and demonstrate that it was not exclusively British women engaging with the cause. Carla Bechstein was simply listed in newspaper reports on the incident as 'Miss Bechstein, a German lady', revealing that she was a native German and did not adopt the name by marriage.⁴⁸ There is nothing else of her story or how she came to be involved in the WFL. Lilian Borovikovsky was born Lilian Bertha Dora Prust on 30th August 1880. She attended Cheltenham Ladies College and then married Sergi Alexandrovitch Borovikovsky, as Russian finance officer, in June 1902. She joined the Women's Freedom League and was elected to the committee in January 1909.⁴⁹ The developing political tactics and diversity of the women involved in physical demonstrations charted a clear progression of female protest in Parliament and a broadening involvement of women from a range of different backgrounds. It is remarkable how the suffrage movement, even in the comparatively small space of Parliament, united such a vast number of women from so many different walks of life. It is also evident that, for women from a wide range

⁴⁶ Welsh Newspapers Online, *Evening Express*, 27th January 1909.

⁴⁷ The British Newspaper Archive, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Saturday 20th February 1909.

⁴⁸ The British Newspaper Archive, *Western Daily Press*, Saturday 20th February 1909.

⁴⁹ <https://www.uncoveryourancestors.org/blog/lilian-borovikovsky-and-others>

of backgrounds, Parliament was a central space in which to stage their protests and contest their political exclusion.

Weaponising female bodies

Female bodies were a significant symbol in the acts of physical resistance women staged in Parliament. Oppressive sexual politics dictated ideas about where women's bodies should be, when they should be seen, and how they should behave. Harnessing the female body as a tool of physical resistance weaponised it to challenge the subjugation of women's bodies. By staging protests in Parliament, women showed their bodies successfully exerting political agency and undermined restrictive codes of femininity that assumed they were incapable of engaging in public life. Martha Vicinus has developed a seminal thesis of bodily sacrifice that offers another way of interpreting physical resistance. She argues that 'Victorian women had been trained for a life of serving others, of sacrificing self', also placing a huge emphasis on their moral and spiritual value and their role and responsibility to safeguard the moral plight of society.⁵⁰ Women's bodies were subservient vessels for the needs and desires of others as dictated by the ideology of sexual politics. However, for Vicinus, what the Pankhursts managed to achieve was the subversion of this ideal, instead creating amongst the women of the WSPU 'an extraordinary idealism that found its fullest expression in the utter sacrifice of self for the cause.'⁵¹ Paradoxically, this training of Victorian women to sacrifice their bodies for others facilitated their militarising to fight for female suffrage. Their spirituality was also harnessed as a means through which women could garner influence in the public sphere, employing their feminine morality as a model of authority.⁵² Jacqueline deVries also considers spirituality and sacrifice to play a central role and looks to the complex and nuanced relationship between religion and feminism from the conception of women's resistance to patriarchal oppression. She acknowledges the paradox of religion as 'both a source of oppressive domestic ideology and a starting

⁵⁰ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.250.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.251.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.252.

point for feminist activism' and argues that within these two polar extremes there is a rich and complex narrative of the relationship between religion and feminism that can be traced from the prescriptive Christianity of the early-nineteenth century to the shifting attitudes towards religion and personal belief systems emerging at its end.⁵³ This situates and traces the religious rhetoric of the women's movement more broadly, moving before and beyond the suffragettes to explore how feminism interacted and exchanged with religion to form new notions of spirituality that reclaimed women as individual subjects and rational beings.

The moral and spiritual impulses of the women's movement in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries evidence a reframing and refocusing of existing social structures to express female ideas and needs. The physical sacrifice expressed by Vicinus and encapsulated in the bodily acts of women epitomised the intense spirituality of women's groups in this period and symbolised their ultimate belief in the importance of the greater good and the betterment of society, regardless of the personal cost. As constitutional forms of protest went unaddressed and reform continued to overlook women's political role, protesters began using the female body as a vehicle to disrupt patriarchal spaces. Spirituality and sacrifice meant that these acts of physical resistance spoke to existing narratives of femininity, subverting them to empower women to perform a political role. Women's bodies became both the site and the vehicle of their resistance; seeing female bodies in 'male' spaces disrupted their essentialist function and introduced women as viable occupiers of the space. Within the specific location of Parliament that was characterised by traditional attitudes towards religious ideals and values, women's invocation of spirituality took on a greater significance and presented a starker challenge to the status quo. However, other studies argue that the intended outcome of these new methods was the disruption of male space and male behaviours. Tickner suggests that 'the public demonstration was founded on a politics of 'seeing as believing''.⁵⁴ This posits male participants as both seers and believers, consequently

⁵³ Jacqueline deVries, 'More than Paradoxes to Offer: Feminism, History and Religious Cultures' chapter nine in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (eds) *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain 1800-1949* (London: Routledge, 2010), p.188.

⁵⁴ Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, p.55.

illustrating the disruption of male sight as men are forced to acknowledge the physical presence of the female in a 'male' space. Female protests also disrupted cultural codes that dictated women's exclusion from political spaces, overtly challenging them through physical resistance. This chapter will consider both approaches by reading the embodied experience of protest and the spatial experience of the setting of Parliament. Located within protesting female bodies were the complex links to religion and spirituality that characterised some women's sacrifices whilst their physical acts of protest disrupted male control of Parliament and allowed women new experiences and understandings of the space.

One form of physical resistance that encapsulated how women were prepared to sacrifice their bodily safety to exercise political agency was that of rushing Parliament. The aggressive and active behaviour of rushing a building showed female bodies acting in unfeminine ways and asserting their claim to access parliamentary space. It disrupted the daily functioning of the space as intruders had to be removed and disrupted conventional notions of feminine conduct. On 31st March 1909, a group of women from the WSPU, attempted to inhabit yet another space within Parliament. At four o'clock a brake, a type of carriage, pulled up to the gates of New Palace Yard and around twenty women tried to rush the gates and enter Parliament. This was not the first time a group of women had attempted to rush Parliament but it was the first to target this particular entrance and in this way. The gates were promptly closed, but the attempt of these women to enter here shows them moving away from St Stephen's Entrance. Instead they were trying to claim a site to the north of the estate. The choice of location offered both the public audience on the street and the parliamentary audience within as the women inhabited a peripheral space between Parliament and the city outside. As *The Times* described, the women were observed both by a 'crowd' that the women in turn attempted to address and by 'a number of Members of Parliament, among them Mr Winston Churchill[and] Lord Middleton.'⁵⁵ Their protest brought them into direct contact with influential politicians and forced parliamentarians to acknowledge female bodies in

⁵⁵ 'Further Disorder', *The Times*, 1st April 1909, issue 38922, p.12, The Times Digital Archive.

male space. Nine arrests were made by police outside and Inspector Scantlebury reported as follows:

*'I beg to acquaint the Segt at Arms that shortly after 4pm this day 31st, a brake containing about 20 women, members of the Women's Social & Political Union, stopped suddenly outside the Gates of New Palace Yard, and they quickly got out and made a dash for the Gates which were promptly closed by police until more strength was received from the shed, and dealt with by the police on duty outside the precincts.'*⁵⁶

Scantlebury's report was brief but the need for 'more strength' indicated a growing resistance and pressure from these women's protests. As they weaponised their bodies to challenge parliamentary authority, their behaviour forced a change in how male actors responded to their female form. Rushing the gates of Parliament was a physical and ideological attempt to disrupt male borders policing the space. Parliament was a symbolic building, the embodiment of patriarchal power and authority, particularly within public life and law-making. Therefore, the increasing frequency and influence of women's protests that insisted upon a physical female presence in Parliament presented these women equally as symbols of resistance and rebellion against political oppression. As Vicinus points out, they are almost martyrs for the cause as 'women felt that they had to make a sacrifice of their bodies for the cause through the public act of attending Parliament, going on delegations, speaking on soapboxes and selling literature.'⁵⁷ The women involved in this incident went beyond the parameters that Vicinus illustrates; rather than attending they staged an act of physical resistance that attempted to infiltrate parliamentary space in a direct and public challenge to governmental authority. On 31st March 1909 the women in the brake made a bold and public statement that escalated previous petitions presented at St Stephen's Entrance and conveyed a growing determination to claim their space in Parliament. The logistical and tactical preparation as well as the scale of the protest elucidated further developments in female protest at Westminster. Women were behaving and using their bodies in new ways to escalate their

⁵⁶ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/17, Westminster Police Report.

⁵⁷ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.243.

resistance of the status quo. Scantlebury's description that 'more strength' was needed to prevent the women from entering and that these women were 'dealt with' by police outside of Parliament was a testament to the increased vigour with which women tried to breach the palace. However, these terms are also a sinister reminder of the way these women were seen by patriarchal power and consequently of the manner in which they were treated. They underline the physical jeopardy of their situation and therefore the 'sacrifice of their bodies for the cause'.

The women involved in this incident are once again less commonly known. Selina Martin, daughter of a picture framer and book seller from Ulverston, was very active in the suffrage movement. The record of her participation in suffrage demonstrations is expansive, including a particularly famous incident of her throwing a bottle of ginger beer into Asquith's car. Winifred Reinold was born in London in 1877 and remained in London all her life. She trained as a midwife and passed her exams in June 1912. She enrolled annually to vote in local elections, suggesting an active engagement with politics. Mary Wiseman was from Manchester, but the common nature of her name makes it difficult to discover more about her. Cecelia Hilton is still more obscure. Cowman lists her as one of the women who 'formed the Liverpool contingent', but this appears to be the only reference to her other than Scantlebury's report.⁵⁸ Kathleen Streatfield from Sydenham was an artist.⁵⁹ In contrast to some of the working women she protested alongside, Nora Binnie came from a uniquely privileged background. Born in Yorkshire, she was the daughter of Sir Alexander Binnie and Mary Binnie. The 31st March 1909 is the only known record of Nora's political activity. She was arrested for obstruction and was sentenced to one month in prison for this incident. Louise Mary Eates was encouraged to join the cause through her marriage to her husband; he was a GP and encouraged her to engage in the fight for women's suffrage.⁶⁰ Her education at Edinburgh Ladies' College suggest that she too came from a life with a certain degree of privilege. She first spoke for the London Society for Women's Suffrage before joining the WSPU and

⁵⁸ Cowman, 'Crossing the Great Divide', p.39.

⁵⁹ June Purvis, 'Prison Experiences of Suffragettes in Edwardian Prisons' in *Women's History Review*, 1995, 4:1, pp.103-133 (p.114).

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866-1928* (London: UCL Press, 1999), pp.185-186.

helping to form the Kensington branch.⁶¹ The privilege of these two women allowed them the freedom of education. Their decision to apply their education and privilege to supporting the women's campaign uncovers another dimension to the groupings of female protesters.

Another influencing factor for many female protesters was religion. Florence Feek was the daughter of Baptist minister Julius Feek and Mary Ann Feek in Pershore and had three older brothers. The 1881 census also listed a Caroline Hunt as the servant and nursemaid to the household. In 1891 she was listed on the census as a pupil but by 1901 she had moved out of the family home to become a boarder in Islington and was working as a clerk in the Post Office. During this time, she was also working with vulnerable women and girls and this work led to her joining the WSPU in 1907. Living independently and working to support vulnerable women in her local society, she embodied an ideal of independence for other women and challenged the way that female bodies were expected to function in society. Her religious background also allowed for her to align her political activism with her feminine responsibility to safeguard morality and justice. Ada Broughton also had ties to Christianity and was recruited to the WSPU from Pembroke Chapel.⁶² She, alongside Emma Hillier and Hattie Mahood, organised suffrage meetings in the chapel and there were close ties to the Church League for Women's Suffrage.⁶³ This link between her faith and her fight for women's suffrage continued throughout her life. Both Florence Feek and Ada Broughton refuted the common narrative of their time that women committing political acts were deviant and immoral; what they represented was that their morality and Christian feeling allowed for them to see the injustice in the political situation of women. The close relationship between their faith and their activism fed the narrative of spiritualism and sacrifice that fuelled women's physical protest. It also served to legitimise women's interventions in the political sphere as their new behaviours were rooted in Christian morality. In this way, although the bodies of female protesters opposed conventional codes of femininity and were

⁶¹ Ibid., pp.185-186.

⁶² Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother*, p.79.

⁶³ Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother*, p.108.

condemned as deviant, they were also using their bodies to respond to a higher spiritual cause.

Normalising or legitimising female bodies in male spaces was an important function of physical resistance. The physical placing of female bodies in male political spaces formed an argument for their viability to be there and to take part in their business. Nirmal Puwar also notes the disruption of male space as an inevitable outcome of physical female presence, broadening the scope of the debate to consider ethnic minorities in the more modern context of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and arguing that the arrival of marginalised groups in exclusive spaces both reveals how those spaces are constructed in terms of the status quo and marks a moment of change.⁶⁴ In addition to disruption of established systems, Puwar also notes the resulting disorientation that occurs amongst the white male when the 'Other' is introduced into previously forbidden spaces. When considering the movement of female bodies she posits that 'the presence of the feminine as a bodily entity disrupts the partition between the private and the public....a female body in a male space....brings on a state of disorientation.'⁶⁵ By disrupting the boundaries of separate spheres through physical resistance in Parliament, female protesters were challenging the ideology that had dictated their formal exclusion. Furthermore, this study is interested in what happens when the presence of the feminine as a bodily entity is introduced into the central space of power behaving in new and assertive ways to contend with governmental authority and gendered codes of how bodies should be seen and used.

Figure 12, presented at St Stephen's Entrance on 7th July 1909, conveys a female presence at the same space of St Stephen's Entrance but, like the women in the brake at New Palace Yard, also marks an escalation in the manner in which women were interacting with Parliament. This escalation was indicative of the changing tactics and developing approaches of protesters as the century continued. The deputation in question remained outside of Parliament for three days and the relentless presence of female bodies over an extended period of time had a

⁶⁴ Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p.1.

⁶⁵ Puwar, *Space Invaders*, p.14.

significant impact on those within Parliament as they were confronted with the reality of women refusing to be excluded.

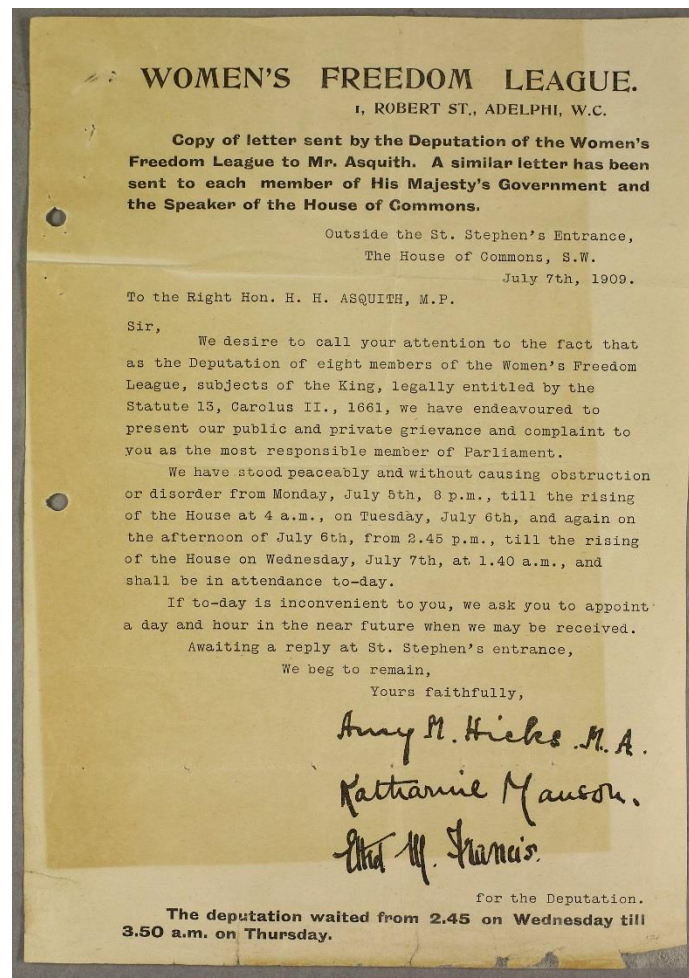


Figure 12: Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/25.10 – Letter from WFL to Mr Asquith.

The letter is to the Prime Minister from the WFL, bringing to his attention a deputation that had waited outside of Parliament on 5th, 6th and 7th July in order to try and appoint a time to speak with him. Asquith famously refused to receive many female petitions and deputations, and here marks one such example, yet the female signatories refused to be ignored. They insisted upon their rights as subjects to express their grievances to their Prime Minister. Furthermore, their peaceful vigil outside of Parliament was perfectly legal and fair, yet insistent and clear enough to oblige MPs moving in and out of Parliament to acknowledge their continued presence and to feel uncomfortable about women standing outside for so long. The cultural rhetoric of the weakness of women and the chivalric honour of men was

affronted by this demonstration in which women were exposed to great discomfort because men refused to grant them access to Parliament. These women subverted conventional gender codes to use patriarchal expectations of male and female conduct to oblige them to acknowledge a female presence in Parliament. It also symbolically paralleled the dishonour of men shutting women out of the political sphere. The failing of men in this instance was epitomised by the Prime Minister; his refusal to grant the women an audience, as was their political right, was what kept them outside. The polite nature of the note outlined their great efforts to peaceably and legally discuss women's suffrage with him, thus his continued refusal to see them appeared even more oppressive and unjust in comparison to their reasonable tone.

Refusing to be ignored, the deputation stood outside of Parliament for three entire days. The women involved endured physical discomfort and physical jeopardy for the duration; they would have been vulnerable to the reactions of the public with no shelter from any potential confrontations. The letter was signed by Amy M Hicks, Katharine Manson, and Ethel M Francis. Amy Hicks was the daughter of well-known suffragette Lilian Hicks, but virtually nothing is known of Katharine Manson and Ethel Francis, whose names accompany that of Amy Hicks' at the bottom of the letter. The writing and signing of the letter and the logistical organisation of the deputation conveyed the women's determination to express their political concerns. As a space somewhere between the inside of the palace and the outside of the street, St Stephen's Entrance gave the women of the vigil both a parliamentary and a public audience and would have meant that a much larger number of people would have witnessed their protest. The peripheral location of their demonstration symbolised their female bodies on the edge of a male space that they were waiting to be invited into. Although constitutional and peaceful, their female bodies were also behaving with agency to challenge patriarchal control. The refusal of the Prime Minister to receive this deputation was raised in the House on 26th July 1909 by Keir Hardie and Charles Duncan, marking yet further change in the attitudes of MPs to the women's cause as it was brought onto the floor of the House.

Perhaps the suffragette most famous for infiltrating parliamentary spaces was Emily Wilding Davison. Of all the women who invaded its precincts, Emily Wilding

Davison was by far the most adventurous and successful, managing to access spaces deep within the heart of the palace. On Sunday 3rd April 1910 she was found in a ventilation shaft in the Smoking Room Corridor near to the Strangers' Dining Room, where she had been hiding since the afternoon of the previous day. When she was finally caught by a policeman as she tried to get a drink of water, it was discovered that she had written in pencil on the inside of the window pane recording, along with her name and the date, that she had been there for 36 hours and had gone without water for 26 hours. She endured thirst and bodily discomfort in sacrifice to her act of physical resistance. Not only had Emily Wilding Davison invaded a male space for an extended period, she had also physically inscribed her own presence on its make up with her pencil markings. The building of Parliament functioned as the physical body of patriarchal power and Davison inscribed her own female presence on that body through her actions. Furthermore, she endured thirst and discomfort to do so, giving up her body as a sacrifice for the cause as Vicinus suggests. Davison was placing her body at the heart of the male institution of Parliament as a heavily symbolic act, defying patriarchal control of women's lives and bodies and asserting her right to a place within the palace. That she was such a notorious figure meant that other women had a model of female protest to admire.

On 26th June 1910, Davison featured in a note from Chief Inspector Scantlebury, writing 'Sir, that suffragette found in the air shaft some time ago has broken some windows in the Crown Office Old Palace Yard, has been taken to Cannon Row to be charged.'⁶⁶ Through the broken window she threw three pieces of chalk with messages attached addressed to the Prime Minister as follows:

'To Mr Asquith, Give full facilities to the New Bill for woman's suffrage. EW Davison.'

'To Mr Asquith, Indignant women will take this insult. Be wise. EW Davison.'

'To Mr Asquith, Be wise in time, women will not be trifled with. EW Davison.'⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/27, 23rd June 1910, Handwritten note from Scantlebury.

⁶⁷ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/27, 23rd June 1910, Police Report.

Once more she succeeded in making a physical change to the visage of Westminster, the metaphorical body of patriarchy, through the smashed glass, making a physical hole in Parliament. The smashed glass was also a symbolic opening for women to force their way through, as well as a potential symbol for a hole in patriarchy's armour. She also succeeded in having her voice and words, extensions of her female body, enter a 'male' space and they are recorded within the police records, directly addressing the Prime Minister who continually refused to see deputations of women to discuss the vote. For this second offence she was officially banned from the House of Commons but remained undeterred.

On 19th November 1910 she was arrested for throwing a hammer through a window between the Chamber and the Division Lobby, to which were attached two further messages for Asquith. She was fined for this incident but refused to pay and went to prison for a month, enduring further physical jeopardy as her body was subjected to imprisonment and force-feeding. She returned on 2nd April 1911 for the census protest, remaining overnight in Parliament to place her body at the centre of the building to both assert a woman's right to be there and to alter an official record. However, as the police were not involved, there is no police record of this. The next record in the parliamentary police reports is from 26th June 1911 when Davison was found climbing over railings of three feet at the Members' Stairs by Commons Corridor leading to the Commons North Committee Corridor. Martha Vicinus explores the public acts of Christabel Pankhurst, writing that 'she exploited the free publicity created by committing acts that would lead to imprisonment and martyrdom.'⁶⁸ Her words here might equally describe the acts of Davison, whose deeds, along with her name, were widely known among the public and generated great publicity for the suffrage cause. Davison was aware of the media attention that her acts attracted and, as well as physically challenging male borders, she would have been aware of the wider audience of the press-reading public and how they might engage with the women's cause in response to her behaviours.

⁶⁸ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.250.

Ultimately, Davison became the movement's martyr, not within Parliament, but at the Derby. Having already sacrificed her physical body to deprivation in her attempts to enter Parliament and to torture through force feeding in prison, she was killed trying to place a suffrage banner on the King's horse. The 'martyrdom' Vicinus describes illustrates the symbolism of Davison's acts, as she continued to breach parliamentary spaces, both during her imprisonments and after her death, through the significance of her memory. Inspired by her actions, others broke parliamentary boundaries to protest her forcible feeding in prison. On 25th June 1912, Isabella Irvine smashed a window on the right side of St Stephen's Hall leading to the Central Hall in protest against the imprisonment and forcible feeding of Emily Wilding Davison. Not only women contested her treatment in Parliament, as on 11th June 1913, Lawrence Marvin threw a newspaper parcel containing flour at the Prime Minister from the Strangers' Gallery before shouting 'Remember Miss Davison'.⁶⁹ She became a symbol of the movement, epitomising the feeling of sacrificing oneself to a cause greater than one's own being.

Borderline spaces

Paula Banerjee offers a useful way of rethinking borders that chimes with Rose and Blunt's assertion that space needs to be viewed beyond essentialist norms to reveal marginalised narratives. Banerjee argues that women located at borders are able to define both the borders and themselves.⁷⁰ In this way, the female protesters contesting male borders in Parliament were able to reconceptualise them as sites of protest and assert themselves as political agents. Parliament was both a physical and metaphorical border between those with legislative power and those subjected to that power. Furthermore, the construction of the space placed visitors to Parliament in liminal spaces that also performed as borders between them and the centre of power. This chapter will interpret parliamentary borders as spaces peripheral to the central space of power, deigned to control and limit access to political business. For

⁶⁹ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/46.

⁷⁰ Paula Banerjee, *Borders, Histories, Existences: Gender and Beyond* (London: Sage Publications, 2010).

example, St Stephen's Hall was a ceremonial space to which the public had access but was used as a border or buffer-zone to police who could access Central Hall and the entrance to the Chamber beyond it. It is no coincidence that it is the parliamentary space in which the highest number of female protests occurred. This chapter uncovers how appropriating male-defined parliamentary borders for their own needs allowed female protesters in Parliament to articulate and develop their female political identity.

In addition to large groups of women who organised protests and took part in group demonstrations, there were also women who staged individual protests in or attacks on Parliament. The women in the following two incidents both exemplify individual narratives of women in Parliament. Fanny Streatfeild and Isabella Irvine both adopted similar strategies as their protests created physical breaks in the male borders of Parliament through the smashing of windows, also highlighting a metaphorical point of weakness in male control. Neither woman is well-known in existing suffrage narratives. Nevertheless, their demonstrations are amongst the most impressive in the parliamentary police reports. On 22nd November 1910, Fanny Streatfeild broke a pane of glass over St Stephen's Entrance. The peripheral space of St Stephen's served to house visitors to the Commons and prevent them from accessing Central Hall beyond it. Streatfeild was able to reshape the entrance, both physically as she smashed the pane of glass and metaphorically as she repurposed it as a space of female protest. Scantlebury reported as follows:

*'I beg to acquaint the Segt at Arms that at 8:30pm 22nd Fanny Streatfield of 'Winthorpe', Songton Avenue, Sydenham was arrested by PC Pyke 552/a for breaking a pane of glass with her fist over door at St Stephen's Entrance leading to residence of the Deputy Segt at Arms.'*⁷¹

Mrs Fanny Streatfeild was born in Belgaum, India in around 1852 and was married to William Streatfeild, a clerk at the Bank of England, with whom she had three children, Eric, Maud, and Mabel. The 1891 census also listed the family as having three servants. It has not been possible to prove a link between Fanny Streatfeild and

⁷¹ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/34, Westminster Police Report.

Kathleen Streatfield, but Fanny's daughter Maud had the middle name of Kathleen, and both women were from Sydenham, so perhaps there was some familial connection. She was a member of the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, involved herself in temperance work and was a vegetarian.⁷² Her multiple political interests present her protests as influenced by numerous motivations, as was typical of many of the women who took part in demonstrations. She was sentenced to one month in prison for this act. Interestingly, her daughter Maud broke three panes of glass in the House of Lords a few days later on 25th November 1910 and was sentenced to two months in prison.⁷³ What motivated Fanny Streatfeild's physical resistance in Parliament is difficult to say. However, what can be inferred from her birth in India is that she was aware of a wider world beyond that which was presented to her by her quotidian existence as a woman in London. Furthermore, her involvement across a wide range of social interests, her vegetarian household, and the similar actions of her daughter, all combine to imply that she lived her life according to more liberal principles, and that this was supported by her family dynamic. She is another example of a woman with broadening political interests and principles, as well as an example of the escalation of physical resistance to patriarchal control in borderline spaces that allowed women to exert their influence in reshaping and repurposing parliamentary space.

On 25th June 1912, like Fanny and Maud Streatfeild, Isabella Irvine chose the symbolic act of window smashing to contest her exclusion from Parliament. She smashed a window on the right-hand side on the way in to Central Hall. Scantlebury reported:

'I beg to acquaint the Segt at Arms that at 5:45pm 25th Isabella Irvine (apparently a suffragette) of 13 Victoria Road Brighton entered St Stephen's Hall and enquired for Sir Frederick Banbury MP. She was accompanied by 2 other women. PC 191/a Cooper gave her a card (attached) which she handed back to him. The other two engaged him. Irvine was carrying a cloak over her

⁷² Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Survey* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p.207.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.207.

*arm and passed behind him. Going up the steps she pulled out a new hammer and smashed the right side of window leading to Central Hall, exclaiming that it was a protest against forcible feeding and the imprisonment of Emily Davison....From enquiry she appears to have been charged previously outside.*⁷⁴

Isabella Irvine was also repurposing a borderline space to challenging male control of Parliament. She also contested patriarchal control of women's bodies as she protested verbally about the treatment of female political prisoners and force feeding whilst physically breaking the window to Central Hall. Scantlebury also implied that this was not her first arrest for the cause, so she was persistent in her attempts to challenge the status quo. She served two months for this incident. However, other than the fact that she used the alias Inglis and was from Brighton, little more can be found about Isabella Irvine.⁷⁵ The spectacle of breaking glass windows shared parallels in terms of broadening audience with that of the vigil kept by the WFL outside of St Stephen's Entrance as they waited for Asquith to agree to see their deputation. Although the immediate act of breaking a window was only witnessed by the contemporary audience within Parliament, the mark it left on the building was semi-permanent, until the window could be replaced, and thus invited a much larger audience to observe the symbol of a vulnerability in male control. The broken window pane was a physical and metaphorical chink in patriarchy's armour than could be seen by a much wider audience.

Perhaps the most creative use of a borderline space in the parliamentary police reports occurred on 22nd July 1913 when the WFL attempted to breach Parliament from the Thames on a launch named *La Reine*. This incident conveys the ingenuity of female protesters as they sought new ways to access parliamentary space. There are sadly no names in the parliamentary police report and an equivalent report from the metropolitan police has proven elusive. However, the women's attempt to gain access to Parliament from the borderline space of the Thames is indicative of the ways in which women reshaped peripheral spaces to make them the

⁷⁴ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/38, Westminster Police Report.

⁷⁵ The British Newspaper Archive, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26th June 1912.

stage of female acts of resistance. This time it was Inspector Rogers who reported as follows:

*'I beg to state that at 5:10 pm 22nd inst., an electric launch named 'La Reine' containing five members of the Women's Freedom League and two men, drew up alongside the wall leading to the Speaker's Green and endeavoured to effect a landing. They were prevented by police and proceeded towards the Terrace, opposite which one of the women addressed the members and their friends on the subject of 'Women's Suffrage'.....Just before their departure the women threw several invitation cards, similar to the one attached, on the Terrace.'*⁷⁶

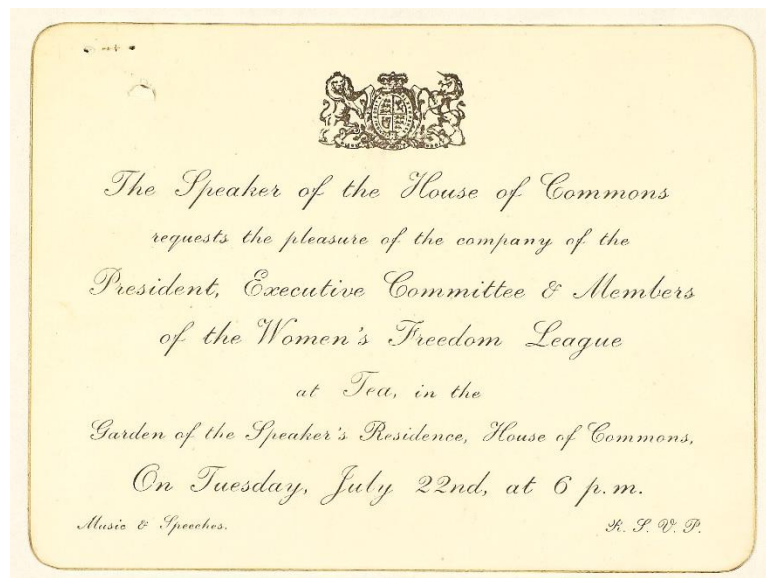


Figure 13: Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/48.4 – Mock invitation thrown from 'La Reine' launch by WFL members.

Approaching Parliament from the Thames via first Speaker's Green and then the Terrace introduced two new borderline spaces which women had not previously accessed in their campaign. Furthermore, the act of approaching Parliament from the water invited a new audience to witness the spectacle of the suffrage campaign at Westminster; in addition to the Members and their friends mentioned in Rogers' report, the river would also have allowed a much wider public audience to witness

⁷⁶ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/48, Westminster Police Report.

the attempt and the subsequent treatment of the women who took part. The spectacle of this incident represented an innovative harnessing of audiences both public and parliamentary to the WFL's challenge of male control of parliamentary spaces. It symbolised the progression of female protest in Parliament and this progression began to effect change not only in the behaviour of women in and towards Parliament, but also of others within Parliament towards women.

Spectacle and performance

Public demonstrations of physical resistance offered female protesters the advantage of wider audiences to whom they could communicate their political demands. Demonstrations were carefully planned, staged, and executed for maximum impact. The famous purple, green, and white of the WSPU is one iconic example of how women crafted their public image when protesting their political subjugation; all the incidents of physical resistance in Parliament were underpinned by the same conscious appeal to a parliamentary audience with the power to effect legislative change. The power of spectacle and performance was carefully harnessed by female protesters to further their cause. Lisa Tickner argues that embracing spectacle allowed women fighting for the vote to both create a public narrative for their cause and create an identity of their own. She writes that 'embodying their political commitment in this way helped women to underline it', suggesting that women needed to further emphasise their claim to politicisation through physical acts.⁷⁷ Their embodiment of political commitment epitomises the acts of using bodies as ways to assert female access to Parliament and the spectacle of the female body formed a central part of the women's campaign. Considering the American suffrage movement, Susan A Glenn argues that spectacle was a central means of diversifying and broadening the movement in New York, suggesting that spectacle provided a basis for new conceptions of politicised women across much larger geographical locations.⁷⁸ By inhabiting male spaces, women were forcing spectators

⁷⁷ Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, p.55.

⁷⁸ Susan A Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

to believe in their presence there, and the physical prop of the body was the conduit for transmitting this message. When translated to Parliament, women were not only generating public interest in their political protests but also obliging a parliamentary audience to engage with the spectacle of their resistance.

Reading female protest in Parliament in this way also invites an important consideration of audience. In the public space of the street, which has always traditionally been a popular site of protest, suffrage demonstrations showed the strength and perseverance of the women involved in the cause and aimed to raise public awareness of the campaign and to win the hearts and minds of spectators. The reporting of such protests in the press further broadened and diversified this audience, facilitating a nationwide promulgation of women's political arguments and ambitions. However, the uniquely political dynamic of Parliament presented an altogether different audience. Parliament was a semi-public space that housed politicians who represented national interests but that was also heavily policed to monitor who, how, and when people could access it. Female presence there was a symbolic act asserting women's right to a place within the political centre of the country. The spectacle of their protests was intended to persuade the mechanisms of power of their viability as politicised subjects. The multi-faceted scope of the spectacle of women within Parliament highlights the intelligence and thought with which women's campaigns were executed. That this execution was so innovatively designed marked a clear distinction between women's understanding of the representational advantages of spectacle as well as the bold political statement of physical resistance. Female protesters showed that they both understood and harnessed the public power of spectacle and showed that they were prepared to endure physical jeopardy to embody their protest.

Interestingly, militant groups also adopted constitutional tactics as part of their parliamentary protests. The spectacle and publicity of the mass presentation of a petition to Parliament was recognised and utilised across political organisations as it demonstrated female bodies as capable of and willing to engage in legitimate parliamentary procedures. On 30th March 1909, another deputation was refused at St Stephen's entrance, this time of the WSPU. Mrs Georgiana Solomon led the group

and proceeded into Parliament with a petition. Georgiana Solomon grew up in Scotland and trained as a teacher, working for a time in Liverpool before she travelled to South Africa as part of a committee with the task of establishing the first school for young women in the Cape Colony. Whilst in South Africa she also engaged in temperance work and battled against the reintroduction of the Contagious Diseases Acts there. Her diverse interests reflect the multiple motivations of many female protesters. It was in South Africa that she met her husband, liberal politician Saul Solomon. Raised in a Jewish community, he advocated equality in all things and his outlook was secular. When their petition was refused, the women demonstrated in objection. Scantlebury described the incident as follows:

'I have to acquaint the Segt at Arms that at 4pm 30th a deputation of women from Caxton Hall, belonging to the Women's Social & Political Union came to St Stephen's Entrance headed by Mrs Saul Solomon and Mr Albert Dawson. The latter entered first with a card addressed to Mr Snowden MP, (written thereon) to introduce Mrs Saul Solomon. The latter held up a roll in her hand (apparently a petition)....'⁷⁹ She entered the House and, having had her petition refused, left with Keir Hardie. At this point 'a number of women in colours and sashes dashed at the entrance without even asking for a Member and made a determined effort to get past police at the entrance. They were kept off and finally driven across the road by police outside. List of those in custody attached.'⁸⁰

This incident illustrated the progression of women's protests in Parliament. Deputations and women's petitions demonstrated that women could perform as legitimate political agents. However, frustrated at the resistance of legitimate political channels to women's claims, female protestors escalated their demonstrations and, in this instance, rushed Parliament, harnessing the spectacle of physical resistance to express the injustice of the system failing them. This progression of female physical resistance illustrated a more direct challenge to male policing of parliamentary space. Engaging in acts of physical resistance did not

⁷⁹ Parliamentary Archives HC/SA/SJ/10/12/15, Westminster Police Report.

⁸⁰ Ibid..

require political connections or pre-existing knowledge of parliamentary procedures as with other methods of political protest and so a larger number of women could engaging in building and shaping the spectacle of female protest. Scantlebury's report details the 'colours and sashes' of the women as they crafted the spectacle of their protest and shaped their political identities in the public gaze. The list Scantlebury referred to gave the names of Emily Wilding Davison, Patricia Woodlock, Florence Harmer, Ellen Tolson, Emily A Smith, Dora Marsden, Kate Noblett, Alice Burton, Julia Scott, Bessie Morris, Rona Robinson, and William Hutcheon. It is worth noting here that a number of men supported, encouraged, and even participated in acts of protest in Parliament that contested the unequal treatment of women. As this thesis is concerned with the narratives of women in Parliament, it will not look in further detail at men's contributions. However, as there were male politicians sympathetic to the women's cause, so there were men who aligned themselves with the campaign for female emancipation, with some going so far as to protest alongside women.

Once again, Scantlebury's report lists well-known names such as Patricia Woodlock, Dora Marsden, Emily Wilding Davison, and Rona Robinson. Although this chapter intends to uncover the experiences of lesser known women, it is important to consider the role of these more prominent figures in cultivating a narrative of female protests in the press. This particular incident offers an interesting example of its description in the suffrage press. Patricia Woodlock from Liverpool was the daughter of Irish artist David Woodlock; his own socialist politics meant that he supported his daughter's political activities.⁸¹ She was imprisoned for three months as a result of this incident and was rewarded for her trials with a cartoon on the cover of *Votes for Women* to celebrate her release on 18th June 1909 (Figure 14). The cartoon depicted her as the masthead of a dreadnought battleship triumphantly escaping from the gates of Holloway Prison. Banners representing 'victory' and the 'WSPU' took the place of sails, with another welcoming her back to the society of her fellow suffragettes. Rather than a convicted criminal, Patricia Woodlock was recast by *Votes for Women* as a victorious heroine prevailing over the state that was

⁸¹ Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, p.758.

represented in the restrictive space behind the gates of Holloway. The narrative presented by *Votes for Women* of both her physical resistance and her bodily suffering in prison drew on the public appeal of spectacle and romanticised her as a warrior in battle. The masculine motif of the military presented her as equal to the men that had oppressed and imprisoned her. It challenged the state's judgement of her as a criminal deviant and reframed her as valiant and self-sacrificing, inviting sympathy from the readership and a wider public audience.

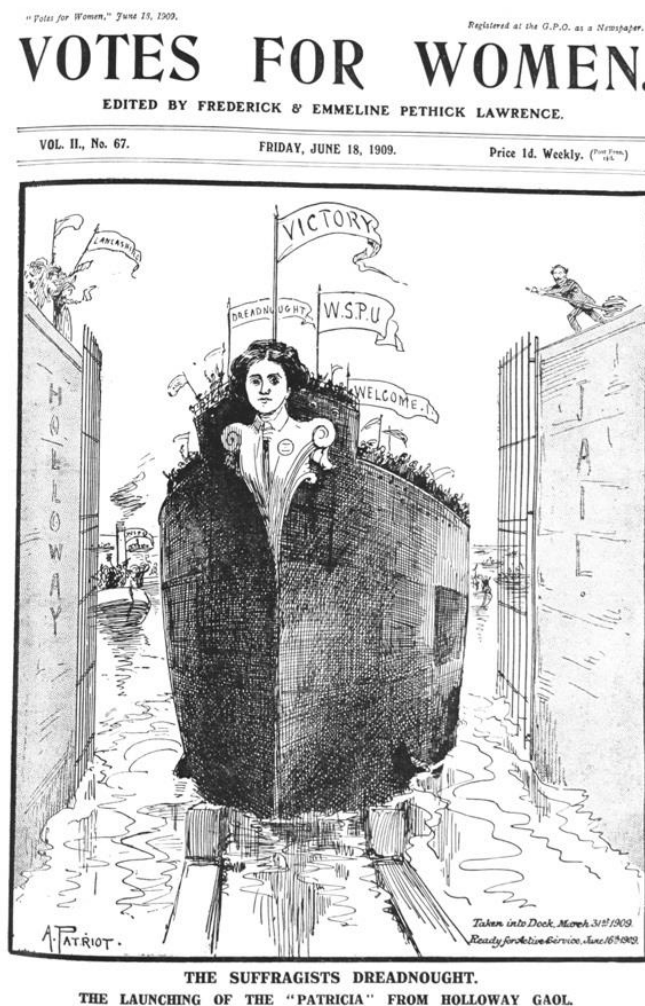


Figure 14: Google News Archive, 'The Launching of the 'Patricia' from Holloway Gaol' as the covering illustration of 'Votes for Women', 18th June 1909.

Whilst *Votes for Women* was a suffrage publication and therefore could be expected to champion women's sacrifices, the same sympathy for women's physical jeopardy was sometimes present in the mainstream press. For example, on 1st April

1909, *The Times* published details of how during this particular protest ‘certain members of Parliament jeered at the women’ and of how ‘Police Constable 275 A struck [a] woman brutally on the breast, causing her to fall.’⁸² Whilst the report also informed of the women’s trials and sentences, these details clearly conveyed the violent attitudes and behaviours of men in positions of power and highlighted the physical jeopardy of the female protesters in a manner that encouraged sympathy for their cause. Depictions of women campaigners in the mainstream press were divided and were often as scathing as they could be sympathetic. However, they offered a further outlet for women to publicise their campaign. Sarah Pederson has examined how Scottish suffragettes engaged with the press to extend their campaign into the public domain. She also notes the increased press activity around female demonstrations with the advent of militancy as rebellious female bodies provided scandalous and stimulating subject matter.⁸³ A parallel increase occurred in the English and national press and female protesters exploited the fascination with their acts of resistance to their own ends. The relationship between female protesters and the press was integral to challenging patriarchal judgements of ‘deviant’ women and was often constructed around leading figures of the women’s movement. However, the parliamentary police reports offer the names of numerous other women who protested alongside Woodlock. These women were equally prepared to place themselves in physical jeopardy to contest the unfair treatment of their petition. They were not only resisting their expulsion from St Stephen’s Entrance but also the denial of their use of sanctioned political systems and their right to have their voices heard in the Chamber through petitioning.

Florence Harmer was thirty-eight at the time of this incident and gave her address as 4 Clements Inn, the WSPU headquarters.⁸⁴ Very little is known about her life, but she is referred to in Elizabeth Crawford’s *Women’s Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland* for being appointed as one of two local secretaries to the new Norwich branch of the WSPU set up at 52 London Street.⁸⁵ Emily Margaret Anne

⁸² ‘Woman Suffrage’, *The Times*, 1st April 1909, issue 38922, p.12, The Times Digital Archive.

⁸³ Sarah Pederson, *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁸⁴ The British Newspaper Archive, *Manchester Courier*, Wednesday 31st March 1909.

⁸⁵ Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland*, p.83.

Smith, thirty-one years old of 11 Colemore is even more elusive.⁸⁶ The common nature of her names make it difficult to discern from public records which Emily Smith she was. Likewise, Julia Scott, who was twenty-eight at the time of the incident and also listed with her address as 4 Clements Inn has been difficult to find.⁸⁷ Bessie Morris, thirty-two of Liverpool is referred to in Krista Cowman's account of this event, but little else is known about her.⁸⁸ In the 1901 census Kate Noblett was listed as born in Ireland but then residing in Edgbaston, Birmingham. She was also recorded as the head of her household, which she ran as a boarding house. She was forty-six at the time of the incident in 1909. Although these women do not feature prominently in current histories of the women's movement, they were very much celebrated by their contemporaries and their actions were celebrated and commemorated. This is exemplified in Figure 15, a certificate that Kate Noblett received from the WSPU on her release from prison. The celebration of women who engaged in acts of physical resistance and sacrificed their bodies for the cause extended the spectacle of their original protest as they were acknowledged and awarded in a public manner.

⁸⁶ The British Newspaper Archive, *Manchester Courier*, Wednesday 31st March 1909.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Cowman, 'Crossing the Great Divide', p.39.



Figure 15: Certificate awarded to Kate Noblett by the WSPU on her release from prison.

Fortunately, it has been possible to uncover more details about other women involved in this protest. Alice Burton of Liverpool was fifty at the time of this incident. She had joined the WSPU in 1908. A comic-actress committed to refuting female intellectual inferiority and struggling on the low pay afforded to a working woman as a teacher of shorthand and elocution, Alice Burton was drawn to the militancy of the group.⁸⁹ This was her first imprisonment for the cause and she was sentenced to one month. Helen Tolson, or Ellen Tolson as Scantlebury mistakenly names her, was twenty-one at the time of this incident. Born in Altrincham, Cheshire in September 1888 to Charles Tolson and Anna Dymond, Helen was supported by her family in her

⁸⁹ Cowman, 'Crossing the Great Divide', pp.38-39.

work for the suffrage cause as both her mother and her sister Catherine were also members of the WSPU. In the 1881 census, Charles Tolson was listed as a fluff manufacturer and in 1891 a Scandinavian merchant. Helen was one of four children and was the only child to outlive her parents. In rushing Parliament as an organised response to the refusal of their petition, these women harnessed the power of spectacle to publicise the injustice of a patriarchal system and to share the political aims of their cause. In this way, they created a public narrative of female resistance that was characterised by their physical actions and their carefully crafted and public political identities. They physically embodied their political commitment through rushing Parliament. The spectacle of their politicised female bodies resonated throughout public conceptions of the campaign and contributed to the normalisation of women exerting political agency in the public imagination.

Claiming parliamentary space through female protest and resistance

The increasingly frequent and diverse protests of women from a wide range of social and regional backgrounds prompted a shift in public attitudes towards women and their role in the political sphere. Within Parliament, female acts of resistance brought MPs into direct contact with women's political concerns and contributed to changes in the way some male politicians perceived and behaved towards a female presence in the Houses of Parliament. Incidents of MPs inviting women into parliamentary spaces to discuss their political demands have already been noted and the way these men began to adopt political tactics of negotiation to communicate with these women conveyed the shift in their thinking towards their viability as political subjects. In addition to this, MPs were increasingly raising the issue of women's political rights in the Chamber of the House of Commons. As early as 8th March 1909 politicians were engaging with Parliament's response to female protesters. Mr Hugh Law challenged the House as to why a female deputation on 18th February had been treated so harshly in being thrown out of Parliament in spite of their following the rules of the palace and presenting cards to request to speak to MPs. On 26th July 1909 Keir Hardie and Charles Duncan questioned Gladstone as to whether or not he was aware of the vigil being held by the WFL outside of Parliament and consequently

whether or not he would receive their deputation. On 10th August 1909 Mr Thorne challenged the expulsion of the WFL from the House and sought reform. These were just a few examples that show male MPs not only bringing the campaign for women's rights and consequently a female presence onto the floor of the House but also voicing a direct challenge to patriarchal treatment of female protesters that called for a change in attitude at the centre of political power. By protesting in parliamentary spaces, women brought their fight to the attention of MPs and effected change in the building that controlled political life, conveying the essential nature of the space of Parliament to their campaign.

This small snapshot of women protesting in Parliament between 1906 and 1913 illustrates the ingenuity and persistence of women as they infiltrated a whole host of parliamentary spaces across the estate. These incidents illustrate a female presence in Central Hall, Westminster Hall, St Stephens Entrance, St Stephen's Hall, New Palace Yard, Old Palace Yard, and the Terrace. However, the map demonstrates that, beyond the glimpses of female activity that these examples show, women were in fact capable of finding their way into a much more impressively broad range of sites within Parliament and were challenging their exclusion from Westminster in a physical, symbolic, and dynamic way. Some of them engaged in the violent activity encouraged by the WSPU, others in the peaceful protests favoured by organisations such as the WFL, but all these women willingly subjected their bodies to physical jeopardy in order to further women's political rights. Furthermore, there was a clear development of confidence and tactics throughout the period as women moved from peaceful protests to damaging buildings, conveying increasingly politicised actions and behaviours in Parliament. Their actions invited audiences to witness the spectacle of the suffrage campaign inside the centre of power, but more than that, they insisted upon the need for a female presence throughout that patriarchal stronghold. This chapter has mapped these sites of female protest in Parliament and reclaimed the narratives of some of the women who do not feature in other accounts of women and politics in this period. It has unveiled new meanings of seemingly liminal sites as women challenged male borders and reimagined marginal spaces as ones of female protest and female political agency. Finally, it has shown how women

adopted the strategies of spectacle and performance to further the reach of their demonstrations and bring women's rights firmly into the national political arena.

Women's harsh treatment by the police and condemning and increasingly lengthening prison sentences suggested that patriarchal power structures were attempting a quick oppression of these protests. Female prisoners were subjected to unspeakable prison conditions and many were the victims of force feeding. However, the despotic reaction of authorities to female protests in Parliament cannot be categorised as indicative of a solely worsening situation for women. The insistent protests from a diverse range of women from across society, increasing in both number and frequency during this period, suggest that in spite of patriarchal oppression, women were gaining in confidence and were continually insisting upon their right to both access parliamentary spaces and to have a stake in the political system of Britain. The public acknowledgement of this insistence increased through their public demonstrations both within and outside of Parliament and women's rights became a national issue. Furthermore, male MPs were engaging with female protestors and the women's cause, more firmly making it a political issue that needed to be addressed. Starting the century in the liminal attic space of the ventilator where they were forced to perform their formal exclusion from electoral politics, women then moved into the Ladies' Gallery that they transformed over time from a cage to a site of protest. As a new century began, female sites of protest spread across the parliamentary estate and involved women from across the nation, developing as political strategists and protesters to claim their right to parliamentary space.

Conclusion

Female Franchise and the First World War

The First World War irreversibly changed the lives of millions across the globe. As one of the countries whose military forces were at the centre of the conflict, Britain felt the consequences across society. Suffrage campaigners were not exempt from this. The detailed history of women in the war is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is worth reflecting on the changes it prompted in how women interacted with parliamentary space. Despite the necessary change in their strategies, women were still very much present and active in Parliament. Before the outbreak of war, the early twentieth-century saw militant suffrage tactics gaining increasing traction in the public sphere through the press, the police and the judiciary, political discussion, and through the public nature of demonstrations themselves. Tension around the suffrage campaign was augmenting as Parliament was under pressure to take action to solve the 'woman question', a topic that had become increasingly prolific over the course of the nineteenth-century. After over one hundred years of resistance, activism, and protest, the fight for the female franchise felt as though it was reaching a climax. However, in July 1914 the Great War dominated the headlines and suffrage campaigners, alongside the rest of society, reconsidered their priorities and approaches. Emmeline Pankhurst called a ceasefire, bringing an end to the militant activism of the suffragettes during wartime. Her decision was a contentious one in the context of an increasingly nationally significant campaign for female suffrage. Furthermore, as Barbara Caine has highlighted, her decision and subsequent actions to support the war effort raised complex questions about 'the relationship of feminism to nationalism and militarism on the one hand, and to internationalism and pacifism on the other.'¹

Perhaps inevitably, the question of the impact of the First World War on the suffrage campaign is also one that divides historians. Martin Pugh examines the fractured nature of the movement at the beginning of the twentieth-century and suggests that, in its fragmented state, the war led to 'the virtual disappearance of the

¹ Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.133.

campaign'.² Within the broad split of the movement into militant suffragettes and constitutional suffragists, there was a plethora of women's groups that comprised the movement, all with different ideas about how the vote should be won. Furthermore, working-class and socialist suffrage groups further diversified the broader women's movement as new agendas and priorities emerged. Pugh interprets this diversity as disruptive. Whilst his characterisation of a divided movement was certainly true, it is reductive to categorise it as diminishing. Rather than culminating in its 'disappearance', the diversity of the women's movement was enriching, allowing it to speak to a wider number of women from across society. Consequently, this then increased the womanpower that could be harnessed to further the cause as it adapted to the context of the First World War. There were no significant mass, national campaigns for the female franchise between 1914 and 1918, so Pugh's argument is reflected in the change the movement experienced during this period. However, although working for different ends, the political development of women throughout the nineteenth-century was manifest in the absolute and definitive political choices they made during the war and their application to nationalist and pacifist causes. Rather than disappearing, the women's movement transformed and moved beyond the symbol of the franchise as women worked to define their feminist identity in the context of a global war. Furthermore, these new ideas and motives saw women continue to engage with Parliament through lobbying and campaigning.

Directly contesting Pugh's assertion that the suffrage campaign 'virtually disappeared' during the First World War, Sandra Stanley Holton suggests that it 'to a notable extent, remained intact under the impact of war'.³ Stanley Holton suggests that suffrage campaigners continued to exert pressure on government to ensure the inclusion of women in post-war electoral reform. Rather than continuing to protest en masse in the public space of Parliament, women adopted new tactics in private spaces to continue their campaign. Furthermore, they continued to negotiate constitutionally with MPs and through parliamentary channels to further their cause.

² Martin Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace, 1906-1918* (London: Routledge, 1978), p.137.

³ Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, p.151.

Emmeline Pankhurst and Millicent Garrett Fawcett both stopped militancy and marches respectively in favour of letter-writing and lobbying. For example, in December 1916 Emmeline Pankhurst wrote to Lloyd George regarding the need for him to consult women before forming his cabinet.⁴ Furthermore, women were active in the efforts to alter legislation concerning the franchise and continued to campaign and lobby MPs in the two years preceding the passing of the 1918 Representation of the People Act to ensure that women's needs were considered. The first Speaker's Conference was established to examine how political representation would be reformed. Under Millicent Garrett Fawcett's leadership, the NUWSS endeavoured to give evidence at the conference. When this was not permitted, they produced a memorandum detailing their concerns and sent it to every member of the conference.⁵ Interestingly, there was also some cross-faction collaboration. In March 1917, Millicent Garrett Fawcett led a suffrage deputation to Lloyd George in response to a cross-party conference in January of the same year which suggested that the number of women enfranchised was limited by an age qualification of thirty. She was joined by Emmeline Pankhurst and Louisa Garrett Anderson of the WSPU and Charlotte Despard of the WFL.⁶

The 1918 Representation of the People Act was passed when the First World War ended. As a result of the continued efforts of women engaging with the political process and campaigning on behalf of women's interests, it enfranchised the first women of Britain. The Act was not entirely satisfactory; women could not vote on equal terms with men. In order to vote, women had to be at least thirty years of age and additionally had to be householders or the wives of householders, had to live in rented property with an annual cost of five pounds, or had to be a university graduate. In reality, this Act enfranchised a minimal number of women at a time when the franchise was being further opened to greater numbers of men. Furthermore, the requirements dictated by property ownership, financial wealth, or education guarded the franchise for women from the upper echelons of society.

⁴ Parliamentary Archives, LG/F/94/1/27, Letter to Lloyd George from Emmeline Pankhurst.

⁵ Takayanagi, 'Women and the Vote: The Parliamentary Path to Equal Franchise, 1918-1928', *Parliamentary History*, 37:1, 2018, pp.168-185 (pp.170-171).

⁶ Parliamentary Archives, LG/F/229/3, Women's suffrage deputation to Lloyd George.

Nevertheless, despite its limitations, the 1918 Representation of the People Act was a symbolic success for women who had been fighting for the vote since the early decades of the previous century. Mary Smith's 1832 petition calling for the female franchise was quickly dismissed by government, yet in 1918 her conviction became a reality. Granting the vote to some women, regardless of the number, began the process of challenging hundreds of years of sexual politics that had deemed women to be incapable of the qualities required to engage with the electoral process. Furthermore, this shift occurred from within Parliament, initiating political change from within the centre of power. The unequal voting terms did not endure as, ten years later, after continued pressure from female campaigners, the 1928 Equal Franchise Act granted the vote on equal terms to all men and women from the age of twenty-one.

How did the face of electoral politics change?

Immediately after the First World War ended, a General Election was called, giving women the opportunity to exercise their voting rights for the first time. Once again, the focus of women's rights and emancipation was centred on the space of Parliament. What ensued over the short space of a few weeks was remarkable; women rallied to canvass, campaign, and organise voting practice, resulting in a feminisation of the experience of voting. Women could also stand for election and many harnessed the skills of public speaking and campaigning they had developed through the suffrage movement to declare their candidature. Reactions to women voters and candidates were mixed and there emerged the subject of the 'mystery vote' as many still questioned whether women had the aptitude to exercise their vote. However, amongst suffrage supporters there was an atmosphere of hopeful change. Information, advice, and support for voters and candidates alike dominated the women's press. On 13th December 1918 *The Common Cause* published the following:

'We have already in these columns urged the desirability of returning women to Parliament: we urge it again, and we also urge with even more vigour the

duty of returning good feminists. We believe that the establishment of real equality between the sexes is one of the reforms which is most important to this country and to the world. We do not therefore make any apology for urging our readers to support the men and women who stand for it.’⁷

What *The Common Cause* encapsulated here was a feminist identity emerging in electoral politics. Unlike the tentative explorations of women engaging with the public sphere in the early-nineteenth century, this new feminist politics appeared substantively formed, shaped by a century of women pursuing their engagement with the political sphere.

Not only was a new feminist political ideology emerging but women were also adopting new voting practices and organising themselves to facilitate female voters. This feminisation of the electoral process saw women sharing childcare duties to enable visits to polling stations. After the December 1918 election, in a page-long article dedicated to the topic of babies and politics, *The Common Cause* reflected on how:

‘Many mothers managed to carry their babies with them to the polling station. One polling station we visited seemed at the moment to be full of babies....Sometimes, however, the babies had to be left at home, and women canvassers did their best to convince the mothers that they were to be trusted to look after these precious charges.’⁸

Female and infant bodies in the previously patriarchal space of the polling station marked a definitive change in the status quo. Furthermore, the female bodies were there exercising their political agency alongside men and were having a direct influence upon the decisions about who would be elected to Parliament. Women’s attention to the practicalities of voting not only prompted a shift in how functionally voters engaged with the electoral process but it also encouraged a wider consideration of political spaces, who could access them, and how they accessed them. Rather than a blurring of the public and private spheres, the December 1918

⁷ *The Common Cause*, 13th December 1918, p.410,

⁸ *The Common Cause*, 20th December 1918, p.426.

election saw an opening and widening of political space, admitting voters with desires and priorities that would now need to be considered by political candidates campaigning for votes. Babies in polling stations were a clear physical symbol of that need for change.

In addition to campaigning for the female franchise, women also fought for female representation in Parliament. The Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 granted women over twenty-one the right to stand for election. Consequently, the December 1918 election also saw the advent of the first female parliamentary candidates. Seventeen women announced their candidature and stood for election, including Christabel Pankhurst. Interestingly, no former suffrage leaders were elected that year. Nevertheless, the emergence of female candidates further indicated the female political identity developing in the context of the election. Not only were women eligible to vote, they were also capable of sitting in the House of Commons and effecting change from within Parliament. *The Common Cause* suggested that 'the entrance of women into the House of Commons will....humanise the social atmosphere of political life and rid it, let us hope, of much of its former snobbery and unreality.'⁹ It was hoped that the introduction of women to Parliament would create change in a system that was unfit to serve the populous. Echoes of women's role as the moral safeguard of society resonate in the description of the hope that they would 'humanise' politics. A feminist political identity emerged that hoped to change the ethos of politics in Britain.

The female candidates who stood for election in December 1918 hailed from across the political spectrum, standing as Liberal Coalition candidates, Labour candidates, and as Independents. The women's press published extracts from their election addresses and messages to the electorate to support their campaigns. On 6th December 1918 *The Common Cause* published 'Extracts from the Election Addresses of Women Candidates' from Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Emily Phipps, Mrs How Martin, Mrs Despard, and Miss Mary MacArthur. The next edition on 13th December included further 'messages' from Mrs Corbett Ashby, Mrs Dacre Fox, Mrs

⁹ *The Common Cause*, 29th November 1918, p.382.

Millicent MacKenzie, Miss Violet Markham, Mrs Janet McEwan, Miss Eunice Murray, and Mrs Strachey. Readers were encouraged to support female candidates or candidates who had proven themselves to be friends of the women's movement in the past. Of the seventeen women who stood for election, only one was successful in obtaining her seat. Constance Markiewicz was elected as MP for the constituency of Dublin St Patricks. Ironically, as a Sinn Féin candidate, she refused to take her seat. Thus, although she was the first women elected to Parliament, she was not the first to enter the House of Commons. The following year in 1919, Nancy Astor successfully campaigned to win a by-election in Plymouth Sutton after her husband had to give up his seat to fill that of his deceased father in the House of Lords. After a successful campaign as a Conservative candidate, Nancy Astor was the first woman to take her seat as an MP in the House of Commons on 1st December 1919.

First women in Westminster

'I know that it was very difficult for some hon. Members to receive the first lady M.P. into the House. It was almost as difficult for some of them as it was for the lady M.P. herself to come in. Hon. Members, however, should not be frightened of what Plymouth sends out into the world. After all, I suppose when Drake and Raleigh wanted to set out on their venturesome careers, some cautious person said, 'Do not do it; it has never been tried before. You stay at home, my sons, cruising around in home waters.' I have no doubt that the same thing occurred when the Pilgrim Fathers set out. I have no doubt that there were cautious Christian brethren who did not understand their going into the wide seas to worship God in their own way. But, on the whole, the world is all the better for those venturesome and courageous west country people, and I would like to say that I am quite certain that the women of the whole world will not forget that it was the fighting men of Devon who dared to send the first woman to represent women in the Mother of

Parliaments. Now, as the west country people are a courageous lot, it is only right that one of their representatives should show some courage.’¹⁰

On 1st December 1919, Nancy Astor became the first elected female MP to take her seat in the House of Commons.¹¹ On 24th February 1920, she gave her maiden speech. She began by addressing her experience as the first woman to do so. Her words resonated with the challenges of her endeavour but also echoed something of the journey women had undertaken over the course of the long-nineteenth century that made it possible for her to be there. It is that journey that this thesis has uncovered. However, Astor did not only invoke the difficulty and challenge of her journey to Parliament. Likening herself to iconic male explorers, Astor framed herself as an adventurer at the start of an expedition. She also employed the image of the Pilgrim Fathers in a manner that paralleled her endeavour to a Christian mission and posited Astor as a moral figure with a mission to effect change. These comparisons positioned Astor alongside revered historical figures and legitimised her entrance to the Commons. Furthermore, they also suggested her to be equally ‘venturesome and courageous’ and therefore equally capable. The first paragraph of Astor’s speech closed by naming Westminster the ‘Mother of Parliaments’, feminising the space in a way that firmly established it as one characterised by female influence. As she moved on to discuss alcohol reform, she continued to assert ‘you must remember that women have got a vote now and we mean to use it, and use it wisely, not for the benefit of any section of society, but for the benefit of the whole.’ Although she established the challenges of her position early on, Astor made it clear that Parliament was a space that both she and the women who had been granted the franchise through the Representation of the People Act in 1918 intended to shape and influence.¹²

¹⁰ <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/lady-astor-maiden-speech-in-the-house-of-commons2.pdf>

¹¹ Nancy Astor was not the first female MP elected. Constance Markiewicz was elected as the MP for Dublin St Patricks in the General Election of 1918 but, in line with Sinn Féin abstentionist policy, did not take her seat in the House of Commons.

¹² Not all women were granted the vote in 1918. A small number of women who were over the age of thirty and fulfilled the property requirements were enfranchised. Women did not get the vote on equal terms with men until 1928.

Although she was the first woman to take her seat in the House of Commons, Nancy Astor was initially a controversial choice for the women's campaign. Standing for election to maintain the Tory seat until her husband could relinquish his position in the Lords and return to the Commons, she was not the feminist figure that many had anticipated. Astor was a political hostess, well-connected, privileged, and moving in circles that meant that many of her friends and acquaintances were already Members of Parliament. Furthermore, whilst she had always been politically active, this was through support of her husband and the Tory party; Astor never engaged with the women's suffrage campaign. Nevertheless, British women celebrated the arrival of the first female MP and her office was inundated with correspondence from women from across Britain writing with sentiments of support and encouragement. This continued as women came to see her as the 'women's MP', writing to her with their concerns or questions regardless of whether she was their MP.

Nancy Astor went on to become a successful politician, holding her seat until 1945. Navigating the space of Parliament was no easy task. Indeed, the experience of early women MPs is an important topic that is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis to fully explore. When Astor took her seat for the first time, male MPs deliberately blocked the way, filling the aisles of the Chamber so that it was difficult for her to pass. As her seat was in the middle of a row, she was obliged to manoeuvre past several men who had already taken their seats to reach her own and they did little to accommodate her entrance.¹³ Although legislative change had included women formally in the electorate and given them the right to sit in the Commons, there was strong resistance to a female presence in the Chamber. The men that had dominated the patriarchal space of the Commons were reluctant to surrender it to a woman. Astor endured mockery, resistance, and overt hostility to her presence in Parliament. Furthermore, as the only female MP, she had to do so alone. Nevertheless, she persisted, and soon established her voice in the Chamber.

Beyond the Chamber itself, there was further resistance to furnishing space to accommodate female MPs within Parliament. Traditionally, MPs had the Library,

¹³ Rachel Reeves, *Women of Westminster: the MPs who changed politics* (London: IB Tauris, 2019), p.15.

Smoking Room, Dining Rooms which either explicitly or implicitly excluded Astor and her fellow early women MPs. Consequently, women MPs were not party to much of the informal political discussion and strategising that took place there. It was another method of disadvantaging them and undermining the legitimacy of their place in Parliament. Rather than permitting Astor to enter the existing Members Room for Tory MPs, provision was made for a Lady Members' Room. This thesis began exploring early-nineteenth century women's experiences in the liminal attic space of the ventilator. Consigned to a storage space above the Chamber, they were excluded from the business of the patriarchal space below. As Astor entered Parliament as the first female MP in the early-twentieth century, she was allocated an office space in the equally marginal basement. Dark, poorly furnished, and ill-equipped, the Lady Members' Room was soon referred to as 'The Dungeon' or 'The Tomb'. Furthermore, as more female MPs arrived from across different political parties, they were allocated the same room as their working space. Women MPs were not afforded the partisan working spaces that male MPs enjoyed. Increasingly, the space became over-crowded, requiring many women MPs to complete their constituency work sitting on the floor. Nevertheless, that the Lady Members' Room quickly became so crowded is testament to the fact that resistance to women in Parliament was not able to deter them from entering. Rather than perceiving their shared space as restrictive, women MPs adopted methods of working collaboratively across-parties, reshaping cultures of parliamentary practice to suit their context. Their response echoed the collaboration of suffrage campaigners from across the women's movement as they campaigned for the franchise at the end of the previous century.

Women, Parliament, and politics today

When Nancy Astor entered the Houses of Parliament for the first time in December 1919, the atmosphere that greeted her was one of resistance and hostility. Despite over one hundred years of women campaigning and legislative change formally legitimising women's right to a place in Parliament, it was a space characterised by male power and authority, resistant to change and the opening up of the political sphere to women. When Laura Pidcock MP gave her maiden speech

to the Commons on 27th June 2017, she described her feeling of entering the Houses of Parliament as follows:

‘This building is intimidating. It reeks of establishment and power; its systems are confusing - some may say archaic - and it was built at a time when my class and my sex would have been denied a place within it because we were deemed unworthy.’¹⁴

The architecture, attitudes, and atmosphere that alienated Nancy Astor are still felt by female MPs entering Parliament today. Pidcock’s analysis of the Houses of Parliament echoes the sentiments of early-nineteenth century women who had tried to occupy space within Parliament two hundred years before her. For a young, female, newly-elected Member of Parliament in the twenty-first century, with an ambition to represent the interests of working-class people, the architecture, structures and organisation of Westminster were characterised by obstacles. These obstacles highlight the fact that there is still much work to be done before British society espouses equality. Nevertheless, in spite of social, cultural, and political oppression of their sex, the number of women elected to Parliament continues to grow. In the election of December 2019, one hundred years after Astor’s own election to Parliament, 220 women took their seats in the House of Commons. The highest number of female MPs ever elected, women made up 34% of the total 650 MPs. Stating their claim to parliamentary space in such numbers conveys that women’s work towards equalising the political sphere is still very much in progress.

Within Parliament, women are continuing to claim their right to political space and contest historic narratives of the political sphere as inherently and exclusively male. An increasing number of female MPs is not the only indicator of women politicising and resisting a patriarchal status quo. Despite hundreds of years of female political activism, contemporary society and politics remain characterised by discrimination on the basis of gender. Nevertheless, women continue to challenge and resist the oppression of sexual politics across the globe. In Britain, the Women’s

¹⁴ Laura Pidcock in her Maiden Speech to the House of Commons, 27th June 2017. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-06-27/debates/ACC3BDDE-6E2A-444B-9C6A-EA71C0530F77/EducationAndLocalServices>

Equality Party met for the first time on 28th March 2015. Frustrated with a society in which ‘women face[d] inequality at home, in the workplace, in politics, and in public life’, the WEP aims to challenge the status quo and improve society by unleashing women’s full potential.¹⁵ The WEP identified that women are: underrepresented in politics, business, and the law; occupy the majority of the lowest-paid jobs, earning 81p for every pound a man earns; suffer domestic abuse and rape every day whilst conviction rates remain low; and are represented across society as sex objects and victims.¹⁶ They are working to bring about equality in British politics and across British society. Their organisation and female collaboration resonate with the campaigning of suffrage activists over one hundred years ago. The actions and methods of protest adopted by suffrage campaigners are reflected in the advent of the Women’s March. An inaugural march in March 2017 contested the election of Trump as President of America and the implications it would have for women. However, the Women’s March has now become an annual event encapsulating a broad range of women’s concerns, with marches taking place in cities across the globe as women continue to fight for equality. Although this thesis examines the experiences of women from two centuries ago, the oppression and jeopardy that female bodies faced then is equally relevant now. It is not coincidental that there are clear parallels between the sentiments, aims, and methods of women from the nineteenth-century and those of women today and there is much that can be learnt from the visionary female political manoeuvring of that period.

Concluding comments

Parliament has historically been an important space for female political activity and both its physical and symbolic significance continue to hold relevance for contemporary women’s political acts. Clear links can be traced between the desires, ideas, and actions of women in 1818 to those of women today. Although they manifest themselves in very different ways, there is a clear herstory of women

¹⁵ <https://www.womensequality.org.uk/why-we>

¹⁶ Ibid.

resisting the patriarchal status quo to access, reconceptualise, and repurpose parliamentary space for their own political ends. The herstory of this thesis began with the women of the ventilator. Privileged, well-connected, and with differing motivations for wanting to access Parliament, they were not overtly political in their claim for parliamentary space. Nevertheless, the cramped, uncomfortable, and oppressive nature of the liminal and marginalised ventilator was a stark contrast to the environs with which those women would have been familiar; their willingness to endure such conditions in spite of this reflects the significance they placed upon having access to Parliament. From this key turning point in the early-nineteenth century, when women resisted their formal exclusion from Parliament, this thesis has traced a continuing and developing female political identity within Parliament that formed in direct relation to the parliamentary spaces that women uncovered, inhabited, or were confined to. The Women's Equality Party and the Women's March are worlds away from the women of the ventilator. However, their common principles of female emancipation and equality resonate across time periods and all of the women examined in this thesis exhibit a mutual effort to engage with parliamentary space in order to understand, develop, and articulate their female political identities.

This thesis has mapped women's experience of parliamentary spaces from 1818-1918 to uncover how women went from being disenfranchised subjects excluded from Parliament to become enfranchised and elected citizens within it. Across four chapters it explored a range of spaces and the different and evolving ways in which women acted in and experienced these spaces in order to trace something of their journey within Parliament to Astor's election in 1918, shedding light on female narratives in alternative spaces of political agency. To date, there has not been a comprehensive study of women and Parliament in this period. *Suffragette to Citizen* uncovers a detailed narrative of women's experiences of parliamentary space and writes a herstory of women in Parliament that reveals the numerous ways in which women were able to engage with the space throughout the long-nineteenth century. Adopting lenses from feminist geography and spatial theory allowed the thesis to uncover alternative readings of Parliament to articulate female experiences

of a place from which women have been virtually written out. Furthermore, it contributes to a broader history of women and politics in this period. Consequently, it functions as a feminist history of women and Parliament but also offers important context for the wider study of women and the political sphere.

Tracing the evolving relationship between women and parliamentary space chronologically made it possible for the thesis to suggest a model of social change comprised of small subversive acts building up to influence later more prominent acts of resistance. In the case of women in Parliament during this period, this meant moving from observing Parliament in a hidden attic space at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, as is shown in Chapter One, to orchestrating public and dangerous acts of physical resistance across the parliamentary estate by the beginning of the twentieth-century, discussed in Chapter Four. The nineteenth-century is a significant period for this study; when women were formally expelled from the public galleries in 1778 it marked a clear shift in attitudes towards women and Parliament. From this point onwards, women independently sought out and discovered ways of interacting with parliamentary space beyond the scope of the status quo that had heretofore defined the rules. In Chapter One, the ventilator is depicted as the site of an emerging, nascent, female political identity. The elite women in that space were not political activists in any conventional sense of the term and their motives were often familial and social, yet their insistence upon their right to access Parliament in spite of women's formal exclusion was political. It articulated a female right to inhabit and engage with parliamentary space and directly contested the patriarchal authority that had barred their entry. Whilst it was a liminal site that forced women to physically enact their exclusion from Parliament, the attic space of the ventilator was also characterised by its subversive potential. Female inhabitants reconceptualised the space as one of female political education and female networking which in turn shaped the female political identity emerging there. Although it was a space of marginalisation, the ventilator was the first parliamentary space in which, within a context of limitation and oppression, women negotiated their interaction with Parliament on their own terms.

When the medieval Houses of Parliament burnt down in 1834, the legacy of the ventilator was clear in the discussions of the building of a Ladies' Gallery in the new palace. Chapter Two explores the equally contentious space of the Ladies' Gallery, illustrating the impact of women's experiences in the ventilator as they articulated their right to a space on Parliament through more formal channels. Whilst it was an officially sanctioned space designed specifically for the inclusion of women in the new House of Commons, its architecture echoed the patriarchal prejudices women had endured in the early-nineteenth century. Limited in space and placed at the furthest point from the Chamber, it was enclosed by a metal grille and became known as the 'Ladies' Cage'. Nevertheless, echoing the behaviours of women in the ventilator, the occupants of the Ladies' Gallery extended their female political networks and furthered their political education in an all-female space. Furthermore, some women managed to reconceptualise the imprisoning grille as a means of protecting themselves from the male gaze such that they could perform behaviours usually forbidden in the Commons. Once again, women reclaimed and reinterpreted seemingly oppressive parliamentary spaces for their own needs. This interaction both reshaped the space of Parliament and shaped the female political identity that emerged in the ventilator and developed in the Ladies' Gallery. This female political identity was most firmly expressed when the Ladies' Gallery was entirely reclaimed as a site of female political protest at the beginning of the twentieth-century.

As women's understanding of their political rights and abilities unfurled within Parliament, they began exploring spaces beyond those that merely afforded observation. Women sought ways in which they could influence the political process and directly inform legislature. Chapter Three illustrates one such example of this, showing how some women used the formal channel of Select Committees to voice their political ideas and exert their political agency. Unlike other studies that examine women's contribution to evidence at Select Committees, this thesis centres the female experience. Furthermore, it uncovers how Select Committees were used as a means of bringing the bodies and voices of deviant, sexualised, criminal, and working-class women into Parliament. Whilst sometimes problematised by middle-class 'ventriloquism' or moralising philanthropic endeavour that introduced conflicts

of class, this was nevertheless unprecedented and this thesis highlights how the space of the Select Committee was used as a conduit to challenge the types of women who should influence the political process and the range of issues that should be brought before government.

The final chapter of this thesis covers the period of the women's suffrage movement with which popular histories are most familiar. However, for the first time it examines the significance of the central space of Parliament to the broad, differing, and shifting groups of women that comprised the suffrage campaign. In this chapter, the female political identity that emerged and developed within Parliament during Chapters One, Two, and Three collides with female political activism beyond Parliament, resulting in women claiming sites across the palace as spaces of female physical resistance. These protests and demonstrations directly and publicly challenged patriarchal control of parliamentary space. The chapter maps female resistance across the estate, revealing the previously unknown extent to which women were able to infiltrate and influence Parliament. The risk to female bodies that many women endured for their activism during this period is well-documented; examining how female bodies were responded to in Parliament further nuances scholarly understanding of this jeopardy. As they reclaimed parliamentary space for female physical resistance, so the female body itself became a site of protest, one that was subjected to the regulation and intervention of parliamentary rule. Furthermore, looking beyond the well-documented exploits of the WSPU, the chapter also uncovers the narratives of other women's groups as well as those of individual women. Within the source material, the chapter illustrates the variety of women engaging with protests in Parliament, conveying the actions of women from different classes, countries, ages, and backgrounds. It contributes to scholarly understandings of the women's movement in the early-twentieth century by offering a reading that puts the space of Parliament at its centre. Furthermore, it focuses on how women's efforts to enter and repurpose parliamentary spaces as sites of female physical resistance brought a female political identity closely identified with the physical and symbolic space of Parliament into the public eye.

This thesis is particularly timely as the 2018 centenary of the Representation of the People Act invited a renewed scholarly interest in women's and feminist histories. Furthermore, the centenary also encouraged the reintroduction of the women's and feminist histories into public awareness. Popular outputs such as the film *Suffragette* or the newly erected statue of Millicent Garrett Fawcett in Parliament Square brought women's history into the public eye.¹⁷ The 2015 film *Suffragette* recreates scenes of women storming Parliament and Gillian Wearing's statue is the first statue of a woman by a female sculptor in Parliament Square, placed in close proximity to Parliament. Both reiterate the significance of parliamentary space to the history of female emancipation. However, whilst hugely important, these outputs still centre the narrative on the suffrage campaign of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and focus particularly on activism and protest. This thesis has extended and developed that narrative to uncover a longer herstory of women and parliamentary space that changed and developed over time, exploring how women used parliamentary spaces as sites of both female political education and female political networking as well as employing them to stage female political protests. This herstory contributed to the shaping of women's relationship with Parliament in the more commonly explored period of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and continues to influence women's experiences of Parliament today.

¹⁷ Remembrance and memorialisation of suffrage are complex issues with their own scholarship. Exploring this in detail is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, some useful places to begin further reading would be as follows: Red Chidgey, *Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Vera Mackie, *Remembering Women's Activism* (Abingdon, New York; Routledge, 2019).

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Appendix 1:

Incidents of female protests recorded in the parliamentary police reports held at the Parliamentary Archives under HC/SA/SJ/10/12:

Date of incident and catalogue number	Details of Incident
26th April 1906 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/1	Keir Hardie put forward a motion that sex should 'no longer be considered a bar to the franchise'. Other politicians 'denounced petticoat domination in no measured language' and thus 'there were hisses and a fierce outburst of anger from the ladies' in the Ladies' Gallery. As the debate continued, ladies stuck their fingers through the grille, called out 'Justice for Women' and a banner was put through the grille with 'Votes for Women' written on it. Ladies' Gallery was cleared by Scantlebury and the police. Ladies were ejected to outside of the palace grounds.
23rd October 1906 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/1	A report was received that 30 suffragettes were leaving Plaistow Station for Westminster Bridge Station. A plain clothes police officer was sent to meet them and, in the meantime, 20 policemen were sent to Central Hall, 25 to St Stephen's Hall and the 'remainder' to Old Palace Yard in anticipation. The women arrived at 13:45 and asked for various MPs. At 16:20, in 'what appeared to be a prearranged matter', a demonstration broke out where some 'mounted the seats by the Northcote Statue' in Central Hall and began calling 'Votes for Women' and 'Votes for Freedom'. They refused to desist and were escorted to Old Palace Yard, where they further demonstrated and tried to re-enter the building. Ten women were taken into custody and charged with disorderly conduct in the street.
20th December 1906 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/2	Two women entered by St Stephen's and asked for Mr Agnew. They proceeded in but did not send a card, and instead when they were near the Earl Russell statue in Central Hall were alternately jumping on the seats and shouting 'Votes for Women'. Both were ejected into the street. As this was happening two other women entered by way of the subway and asked for Mr Ainsworth as they had an appointment with him. They were being questioned further about this by PC Elliott when they ran into the Cloak Room. The aforementioned PC got hold of them and kept them until further assistance arrived. These women were also ejected. All four women were reported as being very violent when ejected and so their names could not be taken, but five women were taken into custody outside of the palace; Annie Miller Frazer, Flora Drummond, Mary Keating Hill, Ivy Keppell, and Martha Jones. The whole incident lasted less than 5 minutes.
13th February 1907 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/2	Scantlebury had received a tip-off about a planned WSPU demonstration that day. At 16:55 about 20 women arrived arm-in-arm followed by other smaller groups (they had apparently been broken up previously by police on their way to Parliament). They were refused entry to Parliament and were removed. Shortly after 17:45 there was a disturbance in Central Hall during which roughly ten women were shouting 'Votes for Women' and attempting to make speeches about women's rights. They were expelled by St Stephen's Entrance and dealt with by police outside. At 18:30, a woman who had been in Central Hall for two hours made a rush for the lobby, pursued by police, but was headed off by Mr Lowry Cole who saw her coming and shut the doors. There was no further disturbance in the precinct but the disturbance outside continued until around 22:30.
20th March 1907 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/2	40 women were dropped off at Poet's Corner of the Abbey in two brakes and proceeded to walk towards Abingdon Street and the House of Lords before coming back to the St Stephen's entrance, where their demands for entry were refused. They then tried to enter by 'running against police and butting them', resulting in several being taken into custody. They made several other attempts to enter the building but were not successful. Both men and women were taken into custody outside of the

	building over the course of the day but nothing 'transpired inside the building to call for comment'. A resolution passed at the Town Hall on Caxton Street and was presented at the entrance by Viscountess Harberton and 'several well-known suffragettes' and they asked to see Sir C McLaren MP with a view to having it presented to the Prime Minister. The suffragettes were refused entry but Mr P Snowden attended to Viscountess Harberton as McLaren was not in the House.
11th February 1908 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/2	Two Pantechnicon vans pulled up to St Stephen's entrance and around 40 women jumped out of the back and tried to run at into the building but the doors were closed before they could get there. Mrs Diarmid and Mrs Singer were allowed in to present a petition to Sir H Campbell Bannerman and were seen by Mr Cass Gomes who refused to entertain it. Mrs Singer was also seen by Mr R McDonald.
18th June 1908 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/2	Scantlebury was informed by someone in the press that suffragettes would attempt to land on the River Terrace at high water. They did attempt to land but were unable to do so. The women were on a steam launch named the Lottie and sailed past with flags advertising a meeting. Mrs Drummond addressed the Members on the terrace and, referring to the waitresses serving them teas, asked, 'aren't you frightened of them?'
30th June 1908 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/3	At 17:50 Mr Hildyard is reported to have 'mounted the seat' by the Russell statue in Central Hall and commenced shouting 'Down with Asquith' and 'Votes for Women'. He was removed immediately by the PC on duty and the men at the entrance were instructed not to readmit him.
30th June 1908 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/4	Jessie Stephens entered asking to see Lord Willoughby De Eresby. She waited until 22:00 but her card was returned. She proceeded to shout, 'Votes for Women' and was ejected with orders not to readmit her. Another woman accompanied her but 'took no part in the disorder'.
29th October 1908 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/6	Grille Incident - Helen Fox and Muriel Matters chained themselves to the grille in the Ladies' Gallery and it was necessary to remove the grille from the gallery with the women still chained to it and then file off their chains in a committee room. Simultaneously in St Stephen's Hall a group of women were behaving 'in a disorderly manner' and were ejected. There were also two men ejected from the Members Gallery.
2nd December 1908 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/7	Simmonds entered Parliament to see Clynes but was recognised by a plain clothes officer and ejected. Upon his removal from the building he said that he had not been notified that his ejection from Parliament on 28th October was a permanent one. Scantlebury suggests that Clynes is advised of Simmonds' exclusion.
18th February 1909 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/8	Mrs Despard arrived at St Stephen's Entrance in a taxi cab with other women from the WFL, some who arrived in the taxi with her and others who arrived on foot. She carried a roll which she wanted to present to the Prime Minister but was refused. She demanded entrance but this was denied and they were dealt with by the metropolitan police outside. Seven women and one man were arrested.
24th February 1909 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/12	Deputation under Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence arrived and asked to see PM carrying petitions but were refused. They tried to gain entry and also rushed the carriage gates at New Palace Yard but were unsuccessful.
30th March 1909 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/15	Deputation from WSPU came to St Stephen's Entrance, headed by Mrs Solomon and Mr Albert Dawson. Dawson came with a card addressed to Snowden MP and Mrs Solomon held a roll that was claimed to be a petition for the PM. She also wanted to see Colonel Seely. Seely refused and so she saw Keir Hardie and they left the House together at 17:00. As Mrs Solomon left a group of women in sashes dashed the entrance but were driven off by police and held in custody by police outside.
31st March 1909 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/17	A brake arrived at the gates of New Palace Yard from which about 20 women tried to rush the gates but these were closed before they could reach them. No other disturbance in the precinct. Nine arrests made by police outside.
27th April 1909 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/18	Some women were escorted into St Stephen's Hall by two men and left there as the men went to seek acquaintances. Three women slipped chains round the statues of Walpole, Seldon and Falkland and handcuffed themselves to them whilst Miss Quinn chained an advertisement for a WSPU meeting and then proceeded to blow a

	whistle. Clippers were sought and the women were cut away and taken to the Police room; it was all dealt with in under 8 minutes. Miss Humes had been attached to the Falkland statue, and in the events his spur had been broken off, so directions were sought from the First Commissioner of Works who 'declined to charge her'. Chains and handcuffs remained in the possession of Scantlebury.
22nd June 1909 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/19	Marion Wallace Dunlop and an unnamed man presented themselves at St Stephen's Entrance and were shown to St Stephen's Hall where Wallace Dunlop waited whilst her male companion went forward into Central Hall to present his card to Mr Clynes MP. The lady was carrying a large cloak and PC Boyce saw her remove something from underneath it and try to do something to the wall above her seat. Close inspection revealed that she had a rubber stamp of about 12x6 with which she had attempted to deface the stonework, but Boyce's actions prevented her from marking anything legible. The First Commissioner of Works was seen and then she was released by order of the Sergeant-at-Arms.
24th June 1909 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/20	Marion Wallace Dunlop, in a heavy disguise after the incident on 22/06, arrived at St Stephen's accompanied by Victor Duval and took a seat in St Stephen's Hall whilst he went to Central Hall to present his card. PC Parsons saw Duval come back through towards New Palace Yard and the lady left at the same point. It was now that PC Parsons noticed that the stonework had been vandalised in the same way as on 22/06 and signalled PC Smith in Westminster Hall to detain the man. He accused the lady who still had the pad in her hand and admitted defacing the stonework. They were charged by the First Commissioner HM Office of Works.
29th June 1909 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/22	Around 10 women, led by Mrs Pankhurst, arrived at St Stephen's Entrance wearing sashes and the colours of the WSPU asking to see the PM. They were shown the letter from his secretary (HC/SA/SJ/10/12/21) which Mrs Pankhurst threw to the ground. She demanded to enter St Stephen's Hall, but was refused, and so made a dash with the others to enter. They were stopped by police and 'passed beyond the line or arrested'. At 20:30 in Central Hall Lawrence Houseman shouted 'Women are not treated properly outside the House' before being ejected. At 19:45 a lady giving the name of Mrs Frecknall asked for admittance to dine with Mr Marks MP but there was no record. Further investigations were made until the MP was found and walked her outside, before informing the police that she was a prominent suffragette.
5th-7th July 1909 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/25	Letter from the WFL to the PM detailing that the deputation had waited on 5th, 6th and 7th July and asking him to appoint a convenient time at which they might speak with him. To wait at St Stephen's Entrance for a reply.
3rd April 1910 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/26	Emily Wilding Davison was discovered in a ventilation shaft at 18:30 on Sunday in which she had been hiding since the afternoon of the previous day. The shaft was in the Smoking Room Corridor near to the Strangers' Dining Room. PC Thorndike removed her and she was detained at Canon Row Police Station until 21:30 when she was released. She had written in pencil on the inside of the window pane recording how long she had been there (36 hours) and how long without water (26 hours), along with her name and the date.
23rd June 1910 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/27	Report of Emily Wilding Davison's arrest for smashing windows of the Crown Office and throwing through three pieces of chalk with messages attached for Asquith. Attached is also a list of her previous convictions
18th November 1910 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/31	Black Friday - 25 women formed a deputation wearing the colours of the WSPU and arrived at St Stephen's entrance, followed by 'a large number of disorderly men and women from Caxton Hall Westminster'. They were shown Mr Nash's letter by Supt Wells saying that the PM would not receive a deputation. They stood outside for some time before Mrs Pankhurst asked for them to be allowed to wait in St Stephen's Hall for the PM's answer to 'a question [that] has been asked in the House'. They were refused and waited on the pavement outside. At 14:55 Mrs Pankhurst sent a message to PM saying that he had not replied to the question of Mr Keir Hardie and asking him to see a portion of the deputation. Three were permitted to go to the PMs rooms; Mrs Pankhurst, Mrs Ayrtown and Mrs Garrett Anderson. They were in consultation with the PM for about 10 minutes before they were

	escorted back to St Stephen's Entrance via the Ladies' gallery staircase, where they remained until the House rose at 18:00. Scantlebury reports that he understands they will picket the sittings the following week. Although the deputation remained peaceful and waited without trying to enter the building, Scantlebury reports that there was a 'disorder caused by both women and men belonging to their union' which was dealt with by police outside. He reports disorderly conduct, obstruction of and assault on police and 'some cases of window smashing by females'. 117 arrests made.
19th November 1910 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/32	Emily Wilding Davison threw a hammer through a window between the Chamber and Division Lobby. She was arrested and taken to Canon Row. The Clerk of Works refused to charge her and the Officer of Works 'declined to give any instruction or attend to sign the charge sheet'. Consequently, Davison was not charged. Two labels were attached to the hammer and read as follows: 'To Mr Asquith, Be wise and promise the further facilities at once the women are demanding.' 'To Mr Asquith, Do justice before the General Election or Judgement will surely fall.'
23rd November 1910 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/33	A simultaneous assault was made on the House as two groups of suffragettes tried to enter concurrently through St Stephen's Carriage Gates and the Subway Entrance. All were repelled by police apart from one woman, unnamed, who ran through Westminster Hall as far as the Members' Entrance. Although turned out, the women persisted and 18 were arrested by outside police and charged principally with obstructing police in the execution of their duty.
23rd November 1910 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/34	Fanny Streatfield broke a pane of glass with her fist over the door at St Stephen's Entrance which led to the residence of the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms.
26th June 1911 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/36	Emily Wilding Davison seen climbing over railings (3 feet high) with her boots off at Members' Stairs by Commons Corridor which leads to Commons North Committee Corridor. PC questioned her but she refused to respond and was taken to Canon Row and detained.
21st November 1911 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/37	A demonstration from WSPU was outside the House with a view to sending deputations inside to ministers, but they were stopped by outside police when they reached Parliament Square and diverted so that they could not reach St Stephen's Entrance. Central Hall was visited by male sympathisers. Mrs Solomon called on Mr McLaren at 21:00 who did not come out and she remained until the rising of the House. At 21:30 Alban Gordon and Lillian Bradburn called for Mr Lansbury who also did not come out. They shouted, 'Votes for Women' and were ejected from the House. A lamp was broken by the Clock Tower and the female culprit was detained by outside police. Nothing else occurred in the building but 184 arrests made outside for stone throwing and obstruction.
25th June 1912 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/38	Isabelle Irvine appeared at St Stephen's with two other women and was given a card to fill out for Sir Frederick Banbury. She returned this to PC Cooper and then the other two women engaged the policeman whilst Irvine removed a hammer that had been concealed under her cloak, moved past him and smashed a window on the right side leading to Central Hall, saying it was against the forcible feeding and imprisonment of Emily Wilding Davison. She was taken into custody and charged at Canon Row. Scantlebury does not believe WSPU were aware of her actions as they seemed surprised and Mrs Despard of the WFL repudiated her act.
23rd January 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/39	Keir Hardie writing to request use of a large committee room in Westminster Hall for a deputation conference with a large number of representative working women on Thursday 23/01. Makes request on behalf of himself and ten other members of Labour party.
27th January 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/40	Sylvia Pankhurst threw a stone at a painting in St Stephen's Hall. The glass did not break and she was stopped by police before she could throw another. She was escorted beyond the precincts of the House.
28th January 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/41	Deputation of 20 women arrived to see Lloyd George but he declined to receive a deputation, instead saying that he would see Mrs Drummond, the leader, and one or two others the following day at the Treasury. This was not a satisfactory response

	and the women proceeded to force their way into Parliament. They were arrested and taken to Canon Row and charged.
6th February 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/42	Henry Devenish Harben was admitted to the Members' Gallery and as he reached the gangway shouted 'Why don't you drop this rot and get on with the Franchise Bill. I protest against your treatment to women in prison.' He was removed from the House. Charles Gray was also seen sitting on the back seat near the gangway and was ejected when he refused to leave. Shaw and Young were also about to enter when Shaw was recognised as a suffragist and both were refused admission.
13th February 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/43	Maycock was admitted to the Members' Gallery and on the gangway began to shout 'I protest' before being removed to the police office where he was detained before being escorted from site.
31st March 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/44	Another male protest - men shouting support for women and criticism of Lloyd George after he gave evidence to the Marconi Committee. All ejected from the house.
11th June 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/46	Lawrence Marvin threw a newspaper parcel containing flour at the PM (narrowly missed) along with handbills on forcible feeding before shouting 'Remember Miss Davison'. He was removed to the Police Telegraph Room. He was released at 23:15 and followed by plain clothes officers who prevented his first attempt to return to Parliament and then lost track of him.
11th July 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/47	Ivan Shaw fired a toy pistol loaded with a piece of cork into the Chamber and shouted 'Do justice to women' before being removed by a plain clothes constable assisted by attendant Linington. Whilst Shaw was being dealt with Henry George Bennett threw toy mice attached to cardboard into the Chamber and shouted, 'Votes for Women'. He also had a toy pistol but did not fire it. Both were removed and taken to the Police Room until the House rose, at which point they were taken to Canon Row where their names and addresses were taken before they were released.
22nd July 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/48	An electric launch named 'La Reine', with five members of WFL and two men aboard, tried to land at Speaker's Green. When this was prevented by the police they drew up alongside the terrace and addressed Members and their friends on votes for women before throwing invitations onto the terrace and departing.
23rd July 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/49	Ernest Washington stood in the second row of the Members' Gallery and fired a toy pistol at the ceiling of the House. He was seized at once by plain clothes officers. He gave his reason as reaction to the Home Secretary nearly killing suffragettes. He was deemed a lunatic and taken to Canon Row before then being taken to St George's workhouse. Later discovered that he gave a false name of Ernest Best.
24th July 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/50	After a conference at Caxton Hall the members of several suffrage unions arrived at St Stephen's Hall saying they were a deputation for the PM. Leaders were permitted to enter but the remainder then tried to force their way in and attained St Stephen's Porch before the doors to St Stephen's Hall were locked. They were removed by police before external police from Canon Row escorted them away. Inside the leaders had spoken with several members before Mrs Pethick Lawrence made a speech, refusing to desist. They were removed. Three arrests were made outside: Mrs Pethick Lawrence, Lady Sybil Smith and Evelyn Sharp.
7th August 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/51	A deputation of clergy arrived at Downing Street to protest about the 'Cat and Mouse Act' and three were admitted whilst the rest came to St Stephen's Entrance and asked to see Ramsay. They were admitted and escorted to Central Hall where they were invited to tea by several MPs. They left by six o'clock.
10th February 1914 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/52	Miss Sidley found in St Stephen's Hall with a group of seven members of the WFL. As she was banned from the Houses of Parliament in 1908, she was requested to leave. She refused and was then 'removed with very little trouble' by a sergeant on duty. Two of her companions went with her.
16th March 1914 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/53	Rogers had report from Special Branch that a woman may attempt to enter Central Hall disguised as a man. Catherine Wilson entered St Stephen's accompanied by Clement H Whatley and proceeded through St Stephen's Hall to Central Hall. Here she was discovered and arrested and was found to have a riding whip in her sleeve.

8th April 1914 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/54	Rogers had report from Special Branch that a demonstration from the Men's League for Women's Suffrage would happen throughout various sites in Parliament. The named individuals were refused entry and ejected and no further disturbance occurred.
10th June 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/55	Procession of East End Federation of Suffragettes accompanied by Sylvia Pankhurst was en route to Parliament by Pankhurst was arrested and the procession broken up as they reached the Strand. At 22:10 a deputation of ten women arrived at Stephen's Hall but were told the PM would not see them. Sir William Byles requested that they be admitted to St Stephen's Hall and said he would be responsible for their conduct. They left at 22:30.
11th June 1914 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/56	Suffragettes from Belfast travelled to speak with PM and Redmond but would not be seen. Sent cards to MPs and complained loudly about Asquith and Redmond before being asked to leave.
18th June 1914 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/57	Having been released from Holloway Prison earlier that day, Sylvia Pankhurst arrived at Parliament with a view to continuing her hunger strike from the steps leading to the House. She arrived in a car that stopped for some time at Old Palace Yard before coming to St Stephen's Entrance where she was helped out and placed in the doorway of the residence of the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms before being asked to leave and consenting to be taken away by her friends.
29th June 1913 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/58	Sylvia Pankhurst and six other members of the East End Federations permitted to enter the Westminster Hall Committee Room for a meeting with Mr Duncan and other Labour Members.
20th July 1915 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/59	Deputation led by Sylvia Pankhurst admitted to St Stephen's Hall where they spoke with Mr Gulland, Mr Jowett, Mr King, Mr Outhwaite about the sweating of women workers in munitions factories. Left at 23:10.
7th November 1916 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/61	Mrs Pankhurst and nine women from WSPU came to Parliament to interview Viscount Grey but he was not available. Admitted to St Stephen's Hall where they lobbied MPs until Hunt took them through to Central Hall and Peers' Lobby. Challenged by Insp Palmer and Mrs Pankhurst reacted by shouting about Venizelos's Army and was asked to leave.
3rd July 1919 HC/SA/SJ/10/12/65	Lydia Shiel stood up in the Members' Gallery and shouted, 'Mr Speaker I protest against the troops being sent to Russia'. She was ejected and Jewson and Jones objected to the manner in which she was handled so all three were detained in the police room until the rising of the house.