

Friends, enemies and the Eisteddfod: 'suffragette' incidents in Abergavenny, 1913

'The Press reports that Suffragettes have thrown the residents of Abergavenny, particularly the promoters of the National Eisteddfod, into a state of considerable excitement'¹

The National Eisteddfod of Wales was held in Abergavenny in August 1913.² Leading up to it, there seemed to be reasons to suspect trouble. The arson campaign by 'militant suffragettes' was at its height. Wales and Abergavenny had been targeted by suffragettes in the past, and the National Eisteddfod had been the scene of trouble both in 1909 and 1912.³ Reginald McKenna, the Home Secretary, north Monmouthshire MP and a particular suffragette hate-figure, was expected to speak at the Eisteddfod, and Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer and regarded by many suffragettes as both treacherous to 'the cause' and responsible for inciting violence against individual women, was thought likely to attend.⁴ Thus the 'excitement' in the town. To combat the perceived suffragette threat, extra police were hired and other security precautions taken,⁵ and, in a less orthodox response, an 'anonymous Welshman' threatened, in a letter to the press, to shoot any suffragette attempting to disrupt the Eisteddfod.⁶

The ensuing days did indeed bring incidents relating to the campaign for votes for women, though not those which had been feared. McKenna switched speaking slots, to thwart any suffragette attack.⁷ Lloyd George stayed away, claiming 'urgent business'.⁸ There was no direct 'militant' attack on the Eisteddfod, but suffragettes were present - in person and in the

¹ *The Suffragette*, 15th August, 1913, p. 11.

² On the Eisteddfod: see, e.g., K.B. Stacey, 'Heritage versus modernity: the National Eisteddfod as an example of Welsh leisure customs in the twentieth century', in R. Snape and H. Pussard (eds), *Recording Leisure Lives: history archives and memories in Twentieth Century Britain* (Eastbourne 2009). 181-95; A. Llwyd, Prifysgol y Werin: hanes Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru 1900-1918 (Abertaweek 1908); C. Loether, 'Creating traditions through the suspension of memory: the Welsh eisteddfod', *Rendez-vous* 33:2 (1999) 33-45; K. Bernard, 'The National Eisteddfod and the evolution of the all-Welsh rule', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies* 3 (2003) 33-47.

³ See, e.g., *Nottingham Evening Post*, 28th August 1912, p. 3; *Votes for Women (VFW)*, 30th August 1912, p. 3; *Hereford Times*, 24th August, 1912, p. 6; R. Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009) (WSM) 81; *Abergavenny Chronicle*, (AC) 23rd August, 1912; *VFW* 18th June, 1909, pp. 4, 11, 25, 26; Wallace, *WSM*, 96 ff.

⁴ *AC*, 30th May, 1913; *VFW* 13th September, 1912, p. 8; *Yorkshire Post*, 25th September, 1912, p. 3.

⁵ See, e.g., *Western Times*, 7th August 1913, p. 4; 'Mr McKenna's Fear of Suffragettes'; *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 8th August, 1913, p. 3; *Times*, 7th August 1913, p. 13, 'Mr McKenna and the Eisteddfod'; *AC*, 8th August, 1913.

⁶ I have yet to find the original letter, though there are references to its having been received by 'a Cardiff newspaper' in, e.g., the *Dundee Courier*, 4th August, 1913, p. 5 'A threat against the suffragettes'. Elsewhere, this story ballooned into a threat by '400 idle Welshmen' to shoot suffragettes disturbing the Eisteddfod': special report of the Sydney Sun Special Cable - *Press* vol. XLIX 6th August, 1913, p. 9.

⁷ *Western Times*, 7th August, 1913, p. 4; *Times* 7th August, 1913, p. 13.

⁸ *Times*, 8th August, 1913, p. 8.

imagination - in Abergavenny and its environs, and the evidence about this presence, and reactions to it, show the many cultural and political layers, the contested and finely detailed identities and the crude tropes and stereotypes of the campaign for votes for women, as experienced in this corner of south-eastern Wales.

1. The incidents

Suffragettes (or those so labelled) were reportedly present in large numbers around the Eisteddfod space - the *maes* - in Bailey Park, leafleting, and attempting to get to McKenna in his car.⁹ In addition, there was some apparently genuine destruction by ‘militant suffragettes’ in Abergavenny during the Eisteddfod period, and also two fires shortly afterwards in nearby Llangattock, which were initially blamed on suffragettes.

Several newspapers noted fires at Abergavenny Cricket Club’s pavilion and the burning of a hayrick in the area, both being attributed to militant suffragettes (though no arrests of suspected suffragette arsonists were made).¹⁰ A smaller number of papers also reported that an eighteen year old Abergavenny ‘boy’ had started fires at Llangattock-iuxta-Usk,¹¹ and had attempted to blame them on ‘militant suffragettes’.

Treatment of the pavilion and hayrick fires was relatively perfunctory. In this period of frequent suffragette arson, reports frequently followed a standard pattern. The presence of suffragette literature at both sites was emphasised.¹² There was some variation in the amount of damage reported to have been caused to the pavilion, from total destruction, as initially claimed in *Votes for Women*, to just the front of it having been burnt. A number of papers seemed somewhat torn between wanting, on the one hand, to emphasise the extent of the fire, in order to stress the danger to human life, noting the peril and difficult escape of a caretaker on the premises, and on the other hand to suggest failure and incompetence on the part of the presumed WSPU arsonists.¹³

⁹ *AC*, 8th August, 1913.

¹⁰ *VFW*, 15th August, 1913, p. 10.

¹¹ (*Llangatwg Dyffryn Wysg*).

¹² *The Suffragette*, 15th August, 1913.

¹³ The cricket club’s next annual report seems not to have made any mention of the fire: *AC*, 1st May, 1914, p. 5.

A modern commentator has put down the pavilion and haystack arson attack to ‘frustration’ on the part of the suffragettes.¹⁴ Leaving aside the unfortunately loaded description of women as ‘frustrated’,¹⁵ and assuming that the attacks were in fact the work of suffragettes,¹⁶ the contention that these were senseless lashings out by those who had wished to attack McKenna, or the Eisteddfod more directly, should not be allowed to pass without examination. It is entirely possible that, rather than being a ‘Plan B’, or a lashing-out, the targets were carefully selected. Both the cricket pavilion and the hayrick were on land which was part of the Nevill estate.¹⁷ The Nevill Marquess of Abergavenny was a noted Conservative figure, and the Nevill family had links with high-profile anti-suffrage campaigning.¹⁸ Another pavilion in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, linked with the Marquess had also been targeted by (presumed) suffragette arsonists in April 1913.¹⁹ Targeting of the Nevills would indicate both a wider plan, tying this to activity in England and Wales more generally, and also a degree of sensitivity to Welsh, and local, conditions. Targeting Conservative landowners could be seen as a wiser strategy, in Liberal Wales, than going after Liberals.

The fires at Llangattock do not seem to have been started by suffragettes, but they are still informative on some of the more elusive points of the suffrage struggle, and the views on it of those other than the militant suffragettes themselves. Some details come out in accounts of the prosecution of the suspect, Douglas James, in Abergavenny Police Court, and at Monmouthshire Assizes, on 29th August and 3rd September. He was charged with maliciously setting fire to outbuildings at Llangattock Rectory on 12th August (shed), and 27th August (stabling and coach house).²⁰ When the police came to investigate the second fire, James was questioned and described and pointed out a woman he said he had seen lurking around, and ‘produced a large piece of paper on which were the words “Votes for Women”’, which he

¹⁴ C. Bearman, ‘An examination of suffragette violence’, *EHR* 120 (2005) 365-97, 376.

¹⁵ See, e.g., H. Mulholland, ‘Nadine Dorries storms out of PMQs after David Cameron quip’, *Guardian*, 7th September, 2011; T. Shipman, ‘I’m not one of the lads: David Cameron apologises in sexism row in a bid not to alienate female voters’, *Daily Mail*, 3rd October, 2011.

¹⁶ Note that the report in the *Suffragette* did not mention the hay rick fire but only the pavilion.

¹⁷ The farm on which the hayrick was burned was on the Nevill estate, though occupied by a Mr Holly, tenant farmer. The Pen-y-pound Pavilion was also on Nevill land: A.K. Hignell, ‘A brief history of Avenue Road, Abergavenny’: <http://cricketarchive.com/Archive/Articles/0/805.html> (now paywalled).

¹⁸ See, e.g. Lady Dorothy Nevill (ed Ralph Nevill), *The Reminiscences of Lady Dorothy Nevill* (London, 1906), pp. 73-4: my thanks to Margot and Bryn Seabourne for this reference. Lady Dorothy was herself a prominent anti-suffragist: see, e.g., *Spectator*, 6th June, 1908, p.3.

¹⁹ *VFW*, 18th April, 1913, p. 11; T. Dudgeon, *Bats, Baronets and Battle: a Social History of Cricket*, (2013), 87-9.

²⁰ *AC*, 29th August, 1913, 5th September, 1913; *Daily Mail*, 4th September, 1913, p. 3.

said he had found in the stable. The woman was questioned but the police, who evidently did not suspect her, instead arrested James.²¹

While he was in Usk Gaol, James confessed to a rector that he had printed the poster, because he ‘wanted to have a lark with the servants’. He also said that he had started the fire by accident, having dropped a match. Perhaps James had thought of his suffragette-blaming ruse after the investigation of the first fire: on that occasion, the Chief Constable had, in his presence, said that he did not think that the fire was the work of suffragettes, as there were no ‘Votes for Women’ papers about.²²

At Abergavenny Police Court, the prosecution laid out what appears to be a fairly damning case against James, showing that he had lied and changed his story more than once. The case went up to the Monmouthshire Assizes. At the assizes, James’s luck changed. He pleaded ‘not guilty’ and the jury agreed with him. The judge, Lord Coleridge, dismissed him with a light remark: ‘Now, my boy, the third time perhaps you won’t be so fortunate. You can go now.’²³

The acquittal is hard to read. Did Douglas James convince the (all male) jury that there really was a suffragette lurking around,²⁴ or did they just feel amused at his ‘lark’, or convinced that a couple of months in Usk Gaol, waiting for his trial, had been sufficient punishment, and steer things to this conclusion? Whatever may be the correct interpretation of the acquittal, there are instructive aspects to the apparent facts surrounding the fires, and the way in which James defended himself. Various hoaxes, by and against the militant suffragettes, were reported by the press,²⁵ so his story fitted into a ready-made narrative pattern. The story about this being part of a ‘lark’ with the (female) servants at the rectory suggests a rough sort of humour about suffragettes and suffrage, played out amongst ‘the lower orders’, both men and women. Such mockery could be set alongside many other examples of amateur performative response to suffragettes. The penetration of suffragettes into Welsh culture - both English and Welsh language - was very deep. A search of contemporary Welsh newspapers shows, for

²¹ He seems to have described such a woman previously: *AC* 5th September, 1913; *Daily Mail* 4th September, 1913.

²² *AC*, 5th September, 1913.

²³ *AC*, p. 3. Note the view of Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World* (London, 1933), 154 of the hostility of the Chief Constable of Monmouth, and the chaplain in Usk gaol, when she was arrested for suffragette activity.

²⁴ If so, might it have been a mistaken attack meant to be targeting the Rolls/Llangattock family, prominent in Tory politics, though with a title deriving from another of the local Llangattocks: *AC*, 4th April, 1913?

²⁵ See, e.g., *VFW*, April 11th 1913, p.11; 25th April, 1913 p. 13; Wallace, *WSM*, 88. Note the ‘lark’ defence working for a non-suffragette woman: *VFW* 5th June, 1914, p. 9.

example, the ubiquity of fancy dress representations of suffragettes. Very frequently, these are men in suffragette ‘drag’. For example, the *Merthyr Express* of 22nd January 1910, in its account of a fancy dress ball, reports with some glee

‘A tall and muscular Suffragette scorned any man’s arm and vigorously twirled other women around. As nothing political disturbed her serenity, she remained peaceful, leaving her dog whip, chain and poisonous powders behind. The loudest things she wore were striped stockings and elastic boots - and these occasionally caused a little fright when the mere man forgot to dodge the folds and the skirts upset his equilibrium.’²⁶

It seems to have been seen as obviously and universally funny for a man to dress up as a suffragette. For example, at a carnival in Llandovery in May, 1913, the prize winners in the ‘humorous’ category’ of the fancy dress competition were: (1) D.J. Davis and party, Brynamman, ‘Suffragettes’; (2) W. Thomas and party, Llandovery, ‘Suffragettes’; (3) equal - Willie Davies, Greyhound Hotel, Llandovery and Ewart Harries ‘bear trainer and bear’ and Ewart Gladstone Stone, 72 High Street, Llandovery, ‘Jenny Jones from Wales, first real Welsh Suffragette.’ and there were other suffragettes, WPSU references, and an additional Jenny Jones, Welsh suffragette.²⁷ Further popular cultural influence can be seen in jokes and ‘humorous’ writing,²⁸ amateur poetry, speech and drama,²⁹ songs and courtroom banter,³⁰ and a wide audience would have been reached in 1913 in the cinema and a waxwork tour.³¹ Suffragettes were referred to in advertisements,³² and were the subjects of essay competitions,³³ a (controversial) question on a scholarship exam,³⁴ mock elections and a trials.³⁵ There was even a racehorse named ‘Suffragette’.³⁶

James’s own background was far from privileged. As the *Abergavenny Chronicle* was keen to report, he was ‘the son of a widow’,³⁷ working as assistant to the groom-gardener, previously

²⁶*Merthyr Express* 22nd January 1910, p. 6.

²⁷ *Camarthen Journal* 16th May 1913, p. 7. For drag suffragette football matches, see, e.g., *Glamorgan Gazette* 8th January 1909, p. 6. This was certainly not a Welsh phenomenon alone, much as one might wish to trace connections with the Rebecca rioters or ‘Scotch cattle’: R Jones, ‘Symbol, ritual and popular protest in early nineteenth century Wales: the Scotch cattle rebranded’, *WHR* 26 (2012) 34-57, 49.

²⁸ Jokes often took familiar patterns: fierceness of suffragettes to men, e.g. *AC* 18th September 1914, p.7; suffragette as ‘shrew’ to her husband: *North Wales Chronicle* 17th July 1914, p. 6.

²⁹ See, e.g., *Cambrian*, 26th July 1907, p. 4; *Welsh Coast Pioneer* 2nd May 1907, p. 5.

³⁰ *AC*, 2nd May 1913; *Aberdare Leader* 19th July 1913, p. 6.

³¹ See, e.g. *Camarthen Journal*, 27th June, 1913, p. 4; *Aberdare Leader*, 2nd August, 1913.

³² *Aberdare Leader*, 6th December 1913, p. 4.

³³ *Camarthen Weekly Reporter*, 20th June 1913, p. 6.

³⁴ *Monmouth Guardian*, 9th January 1914, p. 5.

³⁵ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 6th April 1909, p.5; *North Wales Chronicle*, 3rd April 1914, p. 8.

³⁶ See, e.g., *Aberdare Leader*, 9th August 1913, p. 8.

³⁷ 29th August, 1913, 5th September, 1913. See also *Daily Mail*, 4th September 1913, p. 3.

having been a printer and an apprentice carpenter, and the prosecutor showed his dim view of those in a lowlier position in life, when he said: ‘The prisoner, like many of his class, had a certain amount of simplicity with a strong admixture of cunning’. A man who undoubtedly did have a vote, sneering at a young man with no vote, accused of an offence which had occasioned casting aspersions on women seeking a vote (for themselves, though not, immediately, for the young working-class women with whom James said he had been having a ‘lark’) presents quite a tangle of identities. And that is before we factor in ‘the Welsh thing’.

2. *Cymreictod*,³⁸ gender, suffrage

Douglas James, though apparently born in Abergavenny, did not count himself a Welshman, much less a *Cymro Cymraeg*.³⁹ There is, therefore, no obvious ‘nationalist friction angle’ to his activities. Given that no arrests were made in relation to the other fires occurring in proximity to the Eisteddfod, it is not possible to comment on the ‘national’ identity of any suffragette fire-setters. There are, however, still matters worth considering, with regard to the national/cultural politics of the situation and incidents, contributing to the growing literature on the complex relationship between suffragists and *Cymreictod*/Welshness.⁴⁰ The imperfect mapping of Welshness and *Cymraeg*, between Welshness and the Eisteddfod, and the mixed and liminal character of Monmouthshire add extra layers of complexity to this already-involved issue.

Until comparatively recently, there was an accepted narrative that suffrage campaigning, and particularly militant violence, was largely not acceptable to liberal, nonconformist Wales.⁴¹ That Wales was not interested, or was actively hostile, was a view put forward by some influential Welsh voices at the time. There was contemporary ‘othering’ of suffrage or militancy, which might take a ‘nationalist’ form. ‘Suffragette’ activity was associated with the English.⁴² A North Wales newspaper was pleased to report that a woman who had called

³⁸ ‘Welshness’.

³⁹ Census, 1911. *Cymro Cymraeg* = Welsh-speaking Welshman.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., U. Masson, ‘Political conditions in Wales are quite different: party politics and votes for women in Wales, 1912-15’ *WHR* 9 (2000) 369-88.

⁴¹ John, *RLB*, 30; Wallace, 48. A. Rosen, *Rise Up Women: the militant campaign of the WSPU* (1974). 202 tables do not mention any Welsh examples. Wales is played down in Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragettes: a history of the militant suffrage movement 1905-1910*.

⁴² A.V. John, ‘Run like blazes: the suffragettes and Welshness’, 29.

herself Georgina Lloyd, on arrest for window smashing, turned out to be the rather less Cymric Emily Fussell, from Bristol (or, to be precise, Kingswood).⁴³ Another newspaper claimed that Wales had ‘no outstanding suffragette’,⁴⁴ and there were a number of enquiries in Welsh newspapers as to how to translate ‘suffragette’, and (rather proud) assertions that there was no such word in the old language.⁴⁵ Suffragette noise, or, perhaps, ‘shrillness’, was contrasted to the call for peace which was a key part of Eisteddfod ceremonial.⁴⁶

The idea that suffragettes represented ‘the un-Welsh’ was certainly present, and encouraged, by politicians, and by those connected to the Eisteddfod movement. When suffragettes interrupted proceedings at the 1909 Eisteddfod, the response of the Archdruid Dyfed at the was very negative, setting English women against Welsh people in general, (and perhaps Welsh men in particular).⁴⁷ Lloyd George played up the insult to the nation angle in dealing with suffragette interruptions to his Eisteddfod speech in 1912, saying

‘I fail to see what [these foolish people] think they gain by insulting a whole nation in the national festival of its democracy’.⁴⁸

Given the male dominance in the Eisteddfod and Gorsedd, this, of course, says something about Lloyd George’s idea of ‘democracy’,⁴⁹ as well as his language-and-Eisteddfod-led idea of the Welsh ‘nation’. The response of Dyfed (and, perhaps to some extent, Lloyd George) may be seen as partly defensive of Welsh language culture of the ‘Eisteddfod Nationalism’ type. Contempt of Wales and Welsh was frequently expressed by the English establishment.⁵⁰

Another interpretation has been that Wales was particularly hostile. Certainly, extremely rough treatment was dealt out to suffragettes in Wales on more than one occasion, including, in particular, at an opening by Lloyd George of an institute in Llanystumdwy, in 1912.⁵¹

⁴³*North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser*, 10th July 1914, p. 10; *Denbighshire Free Press* 11th July 1914, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Camarthen Weekly Reporter*, 26th November, 1915, p. 4.

⁴⁵ *Pleidleiswraig* was the coining preferred in the *Weekly News and Visitors’ Chronicle for Colwyn Bay*, 28th December, 1906; *The Cambrian* 27 (1907) 38, but thereafter, the ‘Wenglish’ term, ‘y suffragette’ finds favour. For ‘no Welsh word for suffragette’ view, see, e.g., *The Cambrian*, 3rd May 1907, p. 4.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., the ‘Welsh News’ section of the *Liverpool Daily Post* 7th August 1913, p. 8: ‘Heddwch unbroken by suffragettes’.

⁴⁷ *Glamorgan Gazette* 18th June, 1909, p. 8; Archdruid Dyfed’s ‘improvised’ englyn belittled the suffragettes in the hall and threatened them, or taunted them with jail. See also Wallace, 210, on cartoons.

⁴⁸ *Yorkshire Post* 6th September 1912, p. 7.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., ‘What the Eisteddfod has meant to Wales: an inspiration of true manhood and a developer of knowledge’ by James Winstone CC JP, *Merthyr Pioneer*, 18th December 1915, p. 3.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., HC Deb 10th July 1913 col. 661; *Musical Times*, 1st December, 1912.

⁵¹ See, e.g., John, *RLB*, 33; Dylan Morris, ‘Merched y screch a’r twrw’ yr WSPU yn Llanystumdwy 1912’ *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions* no 46, 1985; Ann Holt, ‘The battle of Llanystumdwy’ *New*

In favour of the view that Wales was not particularly interested in women's suffrage campaigning is the fact that Wales was slower than England to organise for women's suffrage.⁵² Although Wales had comparatively few WSPU branches,⁵³ recent writers have shown that there was a network of organised suffragists of various hues, and that there were Welsh 'militants'.⁵⁴ A small dent has been made in the idea that the WSPU active in Wales were all middle class and all alien to Welsh culture, and that 'colonisation' was all in one direction.⁵⁵ It should also be noted that it would hardly be surprising if political campaigns were dominated by those with the time and the clout to push them forward: there was English influence in anti-suffrage beyond the borders of England too.⁵⁶

While there was certainly some culturally insensitive material about the Welsh in suffragette newspapers,⁵⁷ the apparent leaving of Welsh as well as English language literature at the sites of (alleged) WSPU arson attacks in Wales in 1913 might indicate either a local link or else the capacity of the WSPU to be slightly more sensitive to the Welsh issue. Some suffragist groups had emphasised their Welshness, though language and symbol,⁵⁸ and even the WSPU were not (always) as clumsy and 'imperial' as they have often been portrayed in this respect. The interruptions at the Eisteddfods, and at Llanystumdwy, however much they might have seemed legitimate targets, were construed as and/or felt as an insult and were very alienating in Wales. A direct link between the 1909 Eisteddfod interruption and violence in Wales against suffragettes was made.⁵⁹ Far from there having been a necessary and obvious opposition between the suffrage campaign and 'Eisteddfod Nationalism', however, in 1908, the Cardiff WSPU had marched under a banner which had the motto 'Ein Hachos yn Erbyn y Byd' (our cause against the world), echoing the wording of an eisteddfodic slogan 'Y gwir yn erbyn y byd' (The truth against the world).⁶⁰ By 1913, perhaps they had begun to be more accommodating to Welsh-speaking Wales: it was noted in newspaper reports that some of the

Society, 18 Sept 1987. For a dim view of the violence against and bullying of suffragettes, from Wales, see, e.g., *Weekly Mail*, 1908. See also a man's defence to a charge of assaulting a woman, that she had attacked him, and had been jumping around 'just like a Llangennech suffragette', which goes some way to suggesting that violence against a suffragette was understandable: *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 4th March, 1915, 3. The English press found this something of a conundrum, and it was at least sometimes the case that contempt for the Welsh trumped scorn for the suffragettes. *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 7th September 1912, p. 4; John, *RLB*, 34.

⁵² Wallace, *WSM*, 57.

⁵³ John, *RLB*, 29.

⁵⁴ John *RLB* 31; Masson, 'Political conditions' See, generally, John, *RLB*; Wallace, *WSM*.

⁵⁵ See examples in John, *RLB*, 31-2, 36.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Fred Maddison, 'The Labour Movement,' 14th, 21st, 28th March, 1913.

⁵⁷ *VFW*, 4th October, 1912, pp.1, 4, 10.

⁵⁸ John, *RLB*, 29; *VFW* 3/7/1914.

⁵⁹ *Evening Telegraph*, 30th June 1909, p. 2; *Dundee Courier* 30th June 1909, p. 5

⁶⁰ Wallace, *WSM*, 60. See also 61, 68, 78; John, *RLB*, 32. *VFW* 9th July, 1908.

suffrage literature left at the scene of the Abergavenny fires was in Welsh.⁶¹ Overtures were also being made to a different, but equally difficult, Welsh constituency: the WPSU was undertaking an effort to speak to working class audiences in South Wales in August, 1913.⁶²

We should not, in any case, suppose that ‘Welshness’ was an unproblematic thing, that it was possible for there to be a single Welsh response to, or view of, suffragettes. From the point of view of Abergavenny and Monmouth, the whole question of nations and borders was rather complicated.⁶³ Monmouthshire had a liminal position at this time: certainly historically part of Wales, but, from the Early Modern period, linked to England for some administrative purposes. As if to emphasise its liminality, Abergavenny was often described in terms of a ‘gateway to Wales’. It was not a predominantly Welsh-speaking area, and there were some indications of hostility to, or ridicule of Welsh language revival attempts.⁶⁴ Although Abergavenny and Monmouthshire had, in fact, been important in the nineteenth century revival of interest in Welsh culture and the Eisteddfod,⁶⁵ now there were, arguments about how ‘Welsh’ the Eisteddfod would be,⁶⁶ and, while there was support for the strengthening of Welsh culture,⁶⁷ there were also some objections to it.⁶⁸

Concluding (for now) thoughts

The Abergavenny cases are good correctives to a too simple view of Wales as not interested in, or hostile to the suffrage campaign, or militancy, and an assumption that the WSPU were all middle class English imperialists trampling all over cherished Welsh cultural institutions, and may prompt consideration of why setting up this opposition was and has remained attractive. They emphasise the fact that anti-militant voices in Wales did not all speak in Welsh, or have any link to the cause of Welsh language nationalism, and, even as far as the 1913 Eisteddfod itself was concerned, the suffragette ‘excitement’ was not the only matter for

⁶¹ *The Suffragette*, 15th August 1913.

⁶² Wallace, *WSM*, 75; *South Wales Worker* 30th August 1913, *The Suffragette*, 15, 22, 29 Aug, and 5, 12 Sep 1913.

⁶³ *School Music Review* 1st September, 1913 p. 74; *AC* 27th June, 1913.

⁶⁴ See, in particular, *ACe*, 10th January, 1913, ‘The curse of Babel’; Rhondda, *This Was My World* pp. 8, 183.

⁶⁵ Abergavenny had been a centre for smaller scale eisteddfodau in the 19th C: [The Abergavenny Eisteddfod | Museum Wales](#); *Cardiff Times*, 20th April 1895, p. 6

⁶⁶ See, e.g., *AC*, 24th January 1913; 13th June 1913; 1st August 1913; 8th August, 1913; 11th July, 1913.

⁶⁷ *AC*, 28th March 1913, ‘Abergavenny Easter Eisteddfod’; Mrs Gruffydd-Richards of Llanover. ‘Insult to Wales’, *AC*, 14th February 1913.

⁶⁸ The local AAAA was annoyed at it displacing an athletic event and wanted a percentage of the profits if they gave up their sports: *AC*, 4th July 1913.

concern: there was controversy in the choral competition, and some English speakers causing a scene when things ran late and they had to sit through Welsh drama contests.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it was not a financial success.⁷⁰

In the area, fears of outside-sponsored suffragette violence continued to be raised into 1914. Thereafter, former WPSU members, both outsiders and home-grown, underwent the well-known transformation into super-patriots if not warmongers, and became popular, even with previously hostile Welsh newspapers.⁷¹ In no need of the old enemy within, Welsh papers now enjoyed the story of a suffragette, a soldier and a banjo.⁷² The request of Private Joe Leonard, Pontycymmer, for a banjo was answered by an ‘anonymous suffragette’, leading to humorous correspondence in the *Glamorgan Gazette*.⁷³

Children in Abergavenny, however, were still being warned off suffragette militancy in 1916, with the story of *Nancy the Suffragette*, in which a Dutch doll becomes a suffragette, bites a policeman, and goes to prison, where, in the correct suffragette manner, she goes on hunger strike. Rescued by Teddy, she sees the error of her ways and decides not to be a suffragette again.⁷⁴ At the time of the Eisteddfod of 1913, as now, Abergavenny’s official motto was ‘Hostes nunc amici’: foes now friends. Not quite, perhaps.

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⁶⁹ AC 15th August 1913.

⁷⁰ See, e.g., *Camarthen Weekly Reporter*, 15th August 1913 p. 4; AC, 7th and 14th August 1914, 15th January 1915.

⁷¹ AC 22nd July 1915, p. 6; AC, 6th August 1915, p. 5; AC, 15th October 1915, p. 5.

⁷² *Glamorgan Gazette* 8th August 1915, p.5; 13th August 1915, p. 3; 10th September 1915, p. 5; 22nd October 1915, p.5.

⁷³ We may, of course, be much less inclined to see this as a light matter, when we reflect that a likely use of a banjo in this period would have been in blackface minstrelsy.

⁷⁴ AC, 15th December 1916, p. 3.