

Mapping Suffrage Women Artists

By Tara Morton

The aim of the Mapping Women's Suffrage (MWS) project is to challenge popular perceptions about who, how, and where votes for women campaigning took place in Britain by recovering, recording, and displaying the locations, lives, and materials of suffrage campaigners across the country in 1911.¹ In this condensed transcript of a British Women Artists 1750-1950 Research Group (BWA) talk I gave about the project in March 2021, I'll discuss some of its key aims and functions through the prism of votes for women campaigners and artists Hilda Dallas, Mary Howey, and Mary Postlethwaite who were on the project map prior to my collaboration with BWA. In the light of BWA's own project [Mapping Women Artists 1750-1950](#), many of whom were involved in votes for women campaigning, myself and the BWA organisers hope this represents the first of many ongoing conversations between our respective projects.

For those unfamiliar with the history of the votes for women campaign, suffice to say that while academic understandings of the movement are now incredibly nuanced (exploring the diverse women, societies, places, spaces, and strategies used to gain the parliamentary vote) this is seldom reflected in popular representations. Bestselling books, TV programmes, and films, still focus chiefly upon the dramatic 'deeds' of Mrs Pankhurst's suffragettes in London, reinforcing public perceptions 'that votes for women happened down there' and not here as someone recently put it to me at a 'drop-in' event in Warwickshire.

Numerous local and national projects around the 2018 suffrage centenary celebrations pushed back against this popular narrative, but there is still much work to do. Accordingly, the aim of the MWS project is to facilitate further public engagement with the broader geographies of Votes for Women campaigning by encouraging local people to populate their area of the suffrage map, together creating

a national mapping picture. Also, by using the map for their own cascade events such as organising talks and suffrage walks. Local contributions for the map so far have been made by individual researchers, history groups, and archivists in areas including Sussex, Nottingham, Wolverhampton, and Liverpool.² Public, as well as scholarly contributions, represent fresh opportunities to identify and share 'ordinary' suffrage campaigner stories often hidden from history and from public view - whether 'squirreled away' in grandma's attic or buried in regional archives.

Once populated, the project map will provide an unprecedented 'snapshot' of the macro shape, geographies, and diversities of suffrage campaigning across the country in 1911, at the same time telling the micro stories of campaigner lives ready for the suffrage centenary in 2028. The data gathered, recorded, and displayed on the map can be used in simple or more complex ways via the ongoing development of customized tools that enable greater interplay between local and national narratives. These tools currently allow campaigners to be selected and deselected from the map according to suffrage society support and/or their participation in the boycott of the government's 1911 census survey organised to protest women's disenfranchisement.³ This tooling creates a suffrage 'heat' map encouraging fresh scholarly interpretations of the geographies and shapes of protest at the height of the movement. To briefly illustrate some of these points, and the potential of digital mapping to enhance macro and micro perspectives, I now turn to the selected artists.

Artist **Hilda Dallas** belonged to the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and produced several designs for the society.⁴ Dallas is represented on the project map by a purple dot at her known address in 1911 - 35 St George's Mansions, London. Clicking her 'dot' on the map (or alternatively her name via the map's drop-down menu) accesses a 'pop up' databox with biographical details including vital data such as her age, occupation, and marital status that year. The data box also displays visual materials from her suffrage work and later life including a wonderful WSPU 'Santa

Claus' Christmas card and a costume design for a stage play from the 1920s. A key ambition of the project map is to bring together and display in one place, digitised campaigner materials currently scattered between different physical and online repositories. For example, the Christmas card and costume design images displayed through Dallas's entry on the map were drawn respectively from collections at The Museum of London and the V&A Museum.⁵

Dallas's 'dot' or location on the map is colour coded purple to denote her belonging to the WSPU. All campaigners on the map are colour coded by suffrage society meaning individual entries collectively create a national 'heat map' of society support when the map is fully populated. This will reveal the broad geographies of more law abiding and more militant societies across the country, facilitating fresh comparisons for example between their popularity in towns and cities, northern and southerly regions, between rural and urban communities. An on/off selection tool enables users to display on the map one, all, or any combination of suffrage societies, enhancing user engagement with map data.

The year 1911 provides a common time frame for recording comparative data for campaigners, vital for the heat map, and was selected for two reasons. Firstly, 1911 represents the height of suffrage campaigning in Britain. Secondly, the government census survey taken that year recorded household and population statistics.⁶ Therefore, the census records enable most suffrage campaigner households to be traced and mapped at a cogent point in time, as well as containing data such as age, occupation, and marital status.

Yet, there are complications due to the organised boycott of the 1911 census by more militant societies like the WSPU to protest women's exclusion from the franchise.⁷ Women who participated, either resisted or evaded the census altogether. Hilda Dallas, as a WSPU member, was among those women that evaded meaning she was deliberately absent from her home when the census was taken, and so is absent from the census record. In this instance, the project uses alternative historical sources to locate campaigner whereabouts in 1911 for inclusion on the map.⁸

Census resisters (unlike absent evaders) were often recorded at home but refused to give their details, sometimes graffitiing protest slogans across their census forms. For example, artist **Mary Howey** (WSPU) is recorded at home in Worcestershire (see MWS map) giving her occupation as 'artist and suffragette' but also writes 'Votes for Women' in large letters defacing her census form and making plain her suffrage politics.⁹ The project partnership with The National Archives means digitised census forms are included for many campaigners on the map providing fascinating, handwritten glimpses into their daily lives and feminist politics.¹⁰ By disseminating 1911 census records across the map, to be viewed at the address and in the hands of the campaigner where each was generated, the project allows the digitised suffrage archive to be geographically and historically re-grounded.

The project map also records and stratifies every individual campaigner's compliance, evasion, or resistance to the 1911 census survey. The on/off filter tool then allows campaigners to be displayed or removed from the map according to that data, creating a heat map of the pattern of census protest across the country. This can be interwoven with suffrage society filtering (as above) revealing the shape of census boycott uptake and stratification depending upon society affiliation at micro and macro scales. This enables the project to build upon existing scholarly work determining the scale and patterns of boycott participation.¹¹

Artist **Mary Postlethwaite** was also a WSPU member and census resistor. By 1911 she was living at 27, Warwick Chambers, Pater Street, Kensington. She belonged to the WSPU Kensington branch and was arrested with 29 other women in 1908 for taking a deputation to the House of Commons demanding an immediate measure to grant votes for women where a scuffle ensued. She was charged with obstruction and sentenced to four weeks imprisonment. Postlethwaite wrote across her Pater Street census form in 1911: 'Didn't count at the general election, so won't be counted now'.¹²

Postlethwaite is quite an elusive figure as an artist. She was one of at least 6 children of Thomas Postlethwaite, a farmer and later slate merchant. In 1890, she attended the Royal Academy Schools though her work is hard to find.¹³ In Kensington, Postlethwaite was living in one of the most popular London locations for women artists, and women suffragists. Its dense studio landscape (perhaps second only to Chelsea) can be viewed via the project map's historical layer which enables users to flick between streets from present to past. The modern map layer is useful for identifying and visiting campaigners surviving houses and locations, while the historic layer enables users to navigate the material landscape within which suffrage campaigners (and in this case artists too) operated. How dense were the buildings then? What type of housing dominated? What was the nature of the infrastructure? Who was likely to have become neighbours and to have interacted regularly? And how might this have interplayed with their participation in the suffrage campaign? Mapping (in the cartographical sense) can reveal the material and social context of neighbourhoods allowing some of these questions to be addressed and is why mapping matters in the exploration of women's lives, agencies, and interconnections whether as suffrage or artistic communities or both.¹⁴

For example, Postlethwaite's home in Kensington was nestled among other artists involved in suffrage campaigning for the WSPU: portrait and landscape painters Georgina and Marie Brackenbury's family home nearby in Campden Hill was used to harbour suffragettes evading the police; painter Myra Luxmore's studio to host suffrage meetings; while artist and suffragette Olive Hockin rented a studio flat to the south on Edwardes Square which police described as containing 'a suffragette arsenal' of weapons when raided.¹⁵ Just off Edwardes Square was the home and studio of artistic siblings Laurence and Clemence Housman who would go on to play a central role in organised suffrage art group the Suffrage Atelier.¹⁶ Postlethwaite is only known to have used her creative skills directly for the campaign on one occasion in 1913 when she chalked pictures on pavements to raise funds for the WSPU qualifying her as a 'suffrage artist'.¹⁷ Yet, re grounding her at home in Pater Street,

close to the Housman studio where collective banner making took place for the WSPU Women's Sunday Procession to Hyde Park in 1908, raises the possibility, even the probability, Postlethwaite was among those unidentified women who reportedly 'lent a hand' with sewing and painting there, supplementing her contribution to suffrage artistry.¹⁸

In conclusion, the MWS project map tells the micro and macro stories of suffrage campaigning across the country in 1911 using multiple digital tools to display suffrage data, images, and materials for use at simple or more complex levels. As both a public facing or 'citizens project' and an academic project, it seeks to promote, challenge, and offer new opportunities for learning and for fresh interpretations of the women's suffrage movement in an evolving way. And, as active suffragists were also active artists, I hope this talk represents the beginning of further, future conversations between our respective mapping projects.

¹ www.mappingwomenssuffrage.org.uk. The Mapping Women's Suffrage 1911 project is copyrighted to Tara Morton in partnership with Warwick University who provide technical support to record and archive all data gathered with free public access in perpetuity. The website design and development copyright is to Paul Grove & Tim Hollies (2017).

² www.mappingwomenssuffrage.org.uk/suffrage-map

³ The project is seeking digital development funding to further enhance its digital tooling options for users including for example, further map filtering by data such gender, age, and occupation.

⁴ With thanks to Elizabeth Crawford for biographical information on Hilda Dallas (1878-1958). E Crawford, *Art and Suffrage: A Biographical Dictionary of Suffrage Artists* (London: Francis Boutle, 2018).

⁵ Museum of London (50.82/853); Victoria & Albert Museum (s.558-1987).

⁶ Census records are held at The National Archives, Kew.

⁷ Taking part in the census boycott was illegal with women risking potential fines and imprisonment. For a detailed examination of the boycott see J. Liddington, *Vanishing for the Vote: Suffrage, Citizenship, and the Battle for the Census* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

⁸ Sources include various suffrage and local newspapers, post office directories, as well as the excellent body of work by Elizabeth Crawford such as *Women's Suffrage: A Reference Guide, 1866-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000) & *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain & Ireland: A Regional Survey* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁹ Thanks to Herefordshire contributor to the MWS project map, Clare Wichbold, for information about Mary Howey (1882-1967). See www.mappingwomenssuffrage.org.uk/suffrage-map and C. Wichbold, *Hard Work – but Glorious: Stories from the Herefordshire Suffrage Campaign* (Herefordshire: Orphans Press, 2021).

¹⁰ With grateful thanks to The National Archives.

¹¹ See, Liddington, *Vanishing*.

¹² For information on Postlethwaite (1856-1933) see, Crawford, *Art and Suffrage*. For census record see, Mary Emily Postlethwaite, 1911 census record, The National Archives (RG14PN137 RG78PN4 RD2 SD1 ED50 SN88) or view on map at www.mappingwomenssuffrage.org.uk.

¹³ Many thanks to Katy Owen who contacted me following this talk with details of Mary Postlethwaite's exhibitions with the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists.

¹⁴ This represents a strand of my doctoral research on suffrage artists, space, gender, and power. See

¹⁵ See www.mappingwomenssuffrage.org.uk/suffrage-map Georgina (1865-1946) & Marie Brackenbury (1866-1945) 2 Campden Hill Square, Kensington; Myra Luxmore (1860-1918) Studio 1, 57 Bedford Gardens, Kensington; Olive Hockin (1880-1936) 5 Edwardes Square Studios, Kensington. In 1911, the Brackenbury's also rented a studio at 2 Hillsleigh Road, Kensington. See, 1911 census records (The National Archives); *Votes for Women* (various); Crawford, *Art and Suffrage & Women's Suffrage: A Reference Guide*.

¹⁶ The Suffrage Atelier was founded in 1909 following on from the Artists Suffrage League founded in 1907. Both suffrage art groups produced work promoting the suffrage cause though they differed in many other respects. To read more about the Suffrage Atelier see my articles: Tara Morton, 'Changing Spaces: Art, politics and identity in the home studios of the Suffrage Atelier' *Women's History Review* Special Issue Space, *Place and Gendered Identities: Feminist history and the spatial turn* (Eds. Angela Davis & Kathryn Gleadle) pp. 605-623 & Tara Morton, chapter 2, 'An Arts and Crafts Society working for the Enfranchisement of Women': Unpicking the political threads of the Suffrage Atelier, 1909-1914' in M. Garrett & Z. Thomas (eds.) *Suffrage and the Arts: Visual Culture, Politics and Enterprise* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019) pp. 65-89. See also, Crawford, *Art & Suffrage*; and Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the suffrage campaign, 1907-1914* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988). The Housman siblings address 1 Pembroke Cottages, Edwardes Square, is not yet featured on the project map.

¹⁷ This is an important distinction. Suffrage artist is defined here as an artist who directly applied their creative skills to making art promoting the suffrage cause, rather than simply women artists who were also suffragists.

¹⁸ This point is made by Elizabeth Crawford in *Art & Suffrage*.